futurelab
innovation in education

Developing the home-school relationship using digital technologies

a Futurelab handbook

KEY TO THEMES
OVERLEAF

Key to themes

Futurelab understands that you may have specific areas of interest and so, in order to help you to determine the relevance of each project or publication to you, we have developed a series of themes (illustrated by icons). These themes are not intended to cover every aspect of innovation and education and, as such, you should not base your decision on whether or not to read this publication on the themes alone. The themes that relate to this publication appear on the front cover, overleaf, but a key to all of the current themes that we are using can be found below:

Digital Inclusion – How the design and use of digital technologies can promote educational equality

Teachers and Innovations Innovative practices and resources that enhance learning and teaching

Learning Spaces – Creating transformed physical and virtual environments

Mobile Learning – Learning on the move, with or without handheld technology

Learner Voice – Listening and acting upon the voices of learners

Games and Learning – Using games for learning, with or without gaming technology

Informal Learning – Learning that occurs when, how and where the learner chooses, supported by digital technologies

Learning in Families – Children, parents and the extended family learning with and from one another

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Futurelab 2010

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years there has been a growing understanding of the importance of factors outside the immediate school environment in explaining children's success in school. At the same time, there has been increasing attention paid to the ways in which children's home and family cultures are valuable learning environments in their own right. How children's schools relate to and work together with their home environments is therefore a critical subject for school staff to consider in order to support children's learning in the widest sense.

Parental engagement in children's learning has seen particular attention from policy-makers and practitioners, as part of a wider drive to improve children's achievement and narrow the gap between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers. Schools are also being encouraged and expected to make information and access to learning resources available online for children and their parents. The availability of a home computer and internet access is seen as important enough for learning that the Home Access initiative announced plans to support low income families to acquire these technologies.

The research project on which this handbook is based was situated within the context outlined above. It sought to understand the needs and aspirations of teachers, parents and children for the home-school relationship, and how the use of digital technologies may support as well as raise new issues for home-school relationships.

The emphasis on parental engagement, as well as much work on home-school relationships, has tended to focus on the relationship between parents and children's schools, but children themselves play an active role in mediating between their home and school contexts, making connections between the learning they do at school and home (or not), and actively facilitating or resisting their parents' involvement in their learning. Children therefore need to be considered as at the heart of any strategies to support home-school relationships and parents' engagement in children's learning.

Education should equip people to participate in the world in which they live, to make informed choices and to have some agency over their own lives and the lives of the local and global communities of which they are part. Children's learning is not restricted to the time they spend in school. Through homework, through following their own interests and hobbies, and through participation in activities with their family and peers they are often engaging in personally meaningful learning. Underpinning this research project therefore is the idea that children need to be able to make meaningful connections between their learning in school and the learning and cultures of their home environments. Education aims to broaden young people's horizons, develop their aspirations and make new opportunities available to them – but for these goals to be realistic it first needs to connect with their lived experiences. Schools need to consider ways to bring the knowledges and cultures of home into 'conversation' with the knowledges and cultures of school, supporting children to draw on all the resources available to them to enable them to become resilient and resourceful learners.

The starting point for thinking about home-school relationships needs to adopt a 'wealth' rather than a 'deficit' model. The unique contribution of children's home and family life needs to be valued and validated, and developed and built on to support children's learning at home, rather than attempting to introduce a completely new and alien set of school-based requirements on children and their families.

Negotiating the needs and aspirations of teachers, parents and children for the home-school relationship is likely to reveal tensions between different groups' priorities. Teachers, parents and children are not homogenous groups and each will have different priorities, which need to be acknowledged. A more explicit process of negotiation and consultation could support the development of shared expectations of the respective roles and responsibilities of teachers, parents and children.

Supporting the home-school relationship cannot be seen as an 'added extra' to the core business of schools. It is an essential factor in children's learning and can inform the work of the school on many levels, including how the curriculum is taught, pastoral care, extra-curricular development and behaviour strategies. Given the importance of children's families and out-of-school lives for their success within school, embedding home-school relationships as part of a whole-school strategy with strong leadership from senior staff, is likely to see positive results for children's learning and achievement within school.

This handbook introduces key issues around home-school relationships to provide school staff with a framework in which to consider how schools can support the home-school relationship, and how to navigate the new opportunities and challenges afforded by the use of digital technologies in this field. Drawing on in-depth interviews with teachers, parents and children, illustrated with case studies and examples, it provides a practical reference point through the issues they will need to consider as they develop strategies for supporting the home-school relationship using digital technologies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between home and school is a powerful influence on children's learning and development, which digital technologies have the capacity to support and enhance. This handbook is intended to provide inspiration and guidance that will support education practitioners (including school teachers, school staff with a pastoral responsibility and school leadership who are seeking to develop strategies and practices using digital technologies) to support positive home-school relationships including developing parents' engagement with children's learning.

1.1 WHY IS THE HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN'S LEARNING?

Children's learning is not restricted to the time they spend in school; they learn in different ways in a wide range of different contexts, with friends and family at home and in other settings. Children do not leave the rest of their lives behind when they enter the school gate: they bring with them values, skills, knowledge, passions and interests from their out-of-school lives. Similarly, children take their learning from school home, continuing with school tasks such as homework, and applying the lessons from school into a broad range of contexts they encounter at home and as they engage in the wider world around them. Children's out-of-school lives provide different kinds of opportunities and challenges that support and extend their learning experiences. Taking this more holistic view of children's 'learning lives', it is clear that to support children's learning in the broadest sense, we need to take account of their lives and learning both in and out of school.

Children themselves can and do play an active role in influencing and facilitating the nature and extent of this relationship and mediating between school and home contexts. Children are the key messengers and points of contact between school and parents, often tasked with conveying messages from one setting to another. They are parents' first source of information about school, and their attitudes and behaviour have a strong influence on the way in which parents engage with their school and their learning in general. Children also have opportunities to draw upon their knowledge and experience from outside school while learning within school, and vice versa. Their active role in this three-way relationship therefore needs to be acknowledged and explored.

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1.2 PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

Parental engagement in children's learning at home has been consistently shown to be a significant factor influencing children's achievement at school, and as such has received significant recent attention from educational researchers, policy-makers and school practitioners. However, parental engagement in children's learning at home takes place in the wider context of home-school relationships. Parents' involvement with school may be a first step towards their engagement with children's learning and schools may be able to support this kind of engagement with learning.

A good relationship between home and school may also be able to reveal some of the 'invisible' and sometimes informal engagement with in-school and out-of-school learning that parents have with children at home.

However, the home-school relationship is significant in itself beyond its role in facilitating and revealing parents' engagement in learning. This focus on home-school relationships allows for a broader view of how the connections and interactions between children's experiences at home and at school contribute to a wider picture of their learning. It also provides space to focus on children's roles and experiences in connecting these overlapping spheres of their lives, rather than seeing them simply as the product of their parents' and teachers' educational efforts.

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1.3 WHAT HAVE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES GOT TO DO WITH HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS?

Digital technologies are a familiar and integral part of many home environments. With many families routinely using technologies for both social and formal communication, to engage with commercial and government services and for entertainment. Digital communication therefore provides an obvious way to enhance and facilitate communication with parents and provide access to school information.

Within schools, digital technologies are used to support children's learning by providing access to rich digital media resources, and increasingly, using learning platforms (including virtual or managed learning environments – VLEs and MLEs respectively) to help children and staff to organise and manage learning and to collect and monitor data on measures including progress, attendance and behaviour. Making these resources transparent and accessible outside school may provide further opportunities to connect learning within the school to learning at home.

1.4 ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

The relationship between home and school is important throughout the time children attend school. It changes as children grow older and take a different role in this relationship, and can change quite significantly when children move from primary to secondary school. Secondary schools are very different institutions to primary schools and have a different set of needs and challenges in supporting home-school relationships. Secondary and primary schools can and do learn much from one another's strategies, but because of the differences between the institutional structures and the different needs of the children, parents and teachers, it is not easy to provide a single set of guidance for both primary and secondary age children and their institutions. Traditionally, the home-school relationship has featured as a more prominent focus within primary schools, however secondary schools are now increasingly seeking to address the home-school relationship in order to support children's learning in its widest sense. This handbook, and the research on which it is based, therefore focuses on the home-school relationship within a secondary school context, although there may be lessons that are also relevant for primary schools.

This handbook is not a 'how to' manual that gives a single procedure to follow or a one-stop solution to developing a positive home-school relationship. Every school will have different priorities and serves different populations of children and parents who may have different needs and aspirations from those served by other schools. The different family, school and community contexts will all have a significant bearing on the needs and aspirations of teachers, children, parents and families for the home-school relationship, which means that there is no one strategy or technology that will answer the different needs of all participants. However, there are some common issues and questions that every school will need to consider for themselves as they go through the journey of developing and refining their strategies for supporting positive home-school relationships.

This handbook therefore aims to provide a framework for thinking about the home-school relationship that you can adapt and use in ways that are appropriate for the particular contexts in which you are working. We hope that this handbook will provide some ways to think about some of the key issues you are likely to encounter as you develop strategies to support home-school relationships, and provide ideas, inspiration and advice on the particular issues around using technologies in these strategies.

This introduction briefly describes the field that this handbook covers, provides working definitions of key terms, and describes the research on which it is based.

The background and rationale explores the field of home-school relationships in more depth, drawing on previous research literature, and maps out the current policy context. It discusses the potential for technologies to support home-school relationships and explores some of the issues raised by using technologies in home-school relationships. This section also considers the argument for involving children as active agents within the home-school relationship.

The strategic considerations describe a number of issues that most schools will need to address in some way as they develop their strategies for supporting home-school relationships with technologies. They are not intended to be prescriptive but to raise important issues that should be considered by everyone in the context of their own priorities, aims, family, school and community contexts.
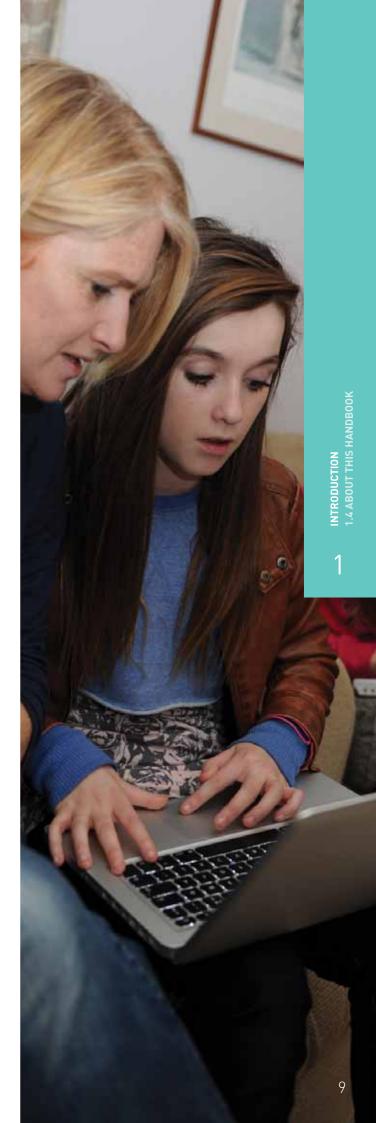
These considerations have been generated from original research with teachers, children and parents at two secondary schools, case study reviews of many other schools' strategies and practices, interviews with experts in the field and an analysis of the available research and practice-based literature.

Case studies of eight secondary schools which have used technologies to support different aspects of the home-school relationship are described within the strategic considerations section, in order to illustrate real world approaches. They include the schools' aims, their use of technologies, any problems or barriers and how they have addressed them, and any indication of the impact of these strategies. They are given in order to show what is currently possible and achievable and to allow other schools to analyse and adapt these examples for their own use.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to using technologies to support home-school relationships. The strategies that schools adopt, and therefore the ways in which technologies will be deployed, will depend upon the priorities, needs and aspirations of the particular school and its community of students and families. The case studies presented here are from forward-thinking schools using technologies in innovative and thoughtful ways. However these examples will not necessarily be appropriate for all schools or be able to be transferred unproblematically to another school. They should therefore be seen as starting points for thinking about what might be possible, and adapted to the particular local contexts in which schools find themselves.

The tools and resources section provides a list of selected useful resources that can help you develop your own strategies for using technologies to support home-school relationships.

Further reading suggestions are provided for those who are interested to follow up in more detail the theories and research underpinning the ideas and guidance presented in this handbook.

1.5 HOW THIS HANDBOOK WAS DEVELOPED

This handbook draws together a range of relevant resources and evidence, synthesising background policy and research with original empirical research findings to produce specific guidance for educators.

Relevant policy initiatives were reviewed and research into home-school relationships, digital technologies and parental engagement was analysed to provide a guiding context for the study, informing the focus and approaches taken. This review of published material was supplemented by interviews with several experts in the field, including a headteacher, researchers and policy-makers to ensure that recent developments in research, practice and policy were also able to inform the study.

Original research was conducted with two secondary schools in Bristol, working with children, parents and teachers during the summer and autumn of 2009. A review of previous research identified that the learner's role was significant in parental engagement and that young people actively navigate their own transitions between home and school. However, the role of young people in home-school relationships has been given relatively little attention in research, so this study aimed to foreground their role and experience in the home-school relationship. Given the increasing use of digital technologies in both education and home life, this study was particularly concerned with exploring the ways in which digital technologies open up new opportunities, but may also provide new challenges, for schools, children and their families in developing home-school relationships.

The study therefore aimed to:

_ explore the role of the learner in mediating home-school relationships, how this could enhance their learning and how digital technologies may support learners in this role,

_ explore and understand children's, parents' and teachers' perceptions about the boundaries and relationships between in-school and out-of-school learning,

_ explore the opportunities and challenges presented by the use of digital technologies to support home-school relationships.

In-depth qualitative focus group interviews and idea development workshops were held with groups of children, parents and teachers both separately and together, identifying what participants wanted to achieve from the home-school relationship and their challenges, needs and ideas for using technologies to support the relationship between home and school. The approach taken was intended to allow teachers, children and parents to all be able to have their voices heard, and to begin to negotiate the different views and opinions that arose between them. Transcripts and outputs from these focus group interviews and workshops were analysed to obtain themes significant in the context of the aims of the research.

Finally, a number of schools engaging in leading practice using technologies to support home-school relationships or parental engagement were identified. Descriptions of these schools' practice, and any benefits they have experienced are included as short case studies in order to detail the current state of practice and provide inspiration on practical measures for using technologies to support the home-school relationship.

The research and policy literature, interviews, case studies and empirical research evidence have been analysed in reference to one another to develop a coherent set of themes that underpin the guidance given in this handbook.

A note on 'parents'
Throughout this handbook the word 'parent' is used to mean anyone in a parenting relationship with a child. This is intended to include non-resident parents, step-parents, adoptive and foster parents, grandparents, other family members who take a parenting role and any other carers.

2. RESEARCH AND POLICY REVIEW

About this review

This section describes and analyses current research evidence pertinent to the issues around home-school relationships and parental engagement. It summarises relevant research in this field and provides an introduction to the central issues and debates. It concludes by making a case for considering the implications of home-school relationships for children's learning in the widest sense, both in and out of school, and for the acknowledgement of children's central and active role in that relationship.

2.1 POLICY CONTEXT

Parental engagement in children's learning is currently a high priority for schools' policy. The "21st century schools" white paper confirms this with the proposal of a 'Parent Guarantee' that cements an expectation that parents will be involved in their children's education through understanding their child's learning priorities and needs, understanding their responsibilities to help their child progress, as well as receiving information from school about their child's progress and any additional needs and special provision.

Digital technologies are heavily implicated in policies that seek to connect home and school and raise parental engagement, seen in the Home Access initiative and Online Reporting expectations.

The Home Access initiative aims to remove the barriers to using computer and internet technologies to support children's learning at home, by providing financial support for those who need it and campaigning to promote the benefits of technologies for learning to families who choose not to buy or use technologies to support learning. Home Access to computers is thought to be able to improve parental engagement and strengthen home-school links by providing opportunities to use technologies to support learning in the home, providing a means of communication between school and home and access to school resources via learning platforms or websites. Low income families in England can apply for grants to buy a computer and internet package from a range of suppliers. Packages include service and support, an e-safety guide and pre-set parental controls to filter content, as well as office and anti-virus software. It is hoped that the Home Access scheme will, amongst other benefits, see improved learning for children and increased involvement of parents in their children's learning.

An evaluation of the Home Access pilot study found that learners used Home Access computers for a wide range of purposes including education, entertainment and finance, appreciated the greater flexibility and independence of using home computers for their schoolwork and having a 'level playing field' with their peers. The majority of parents in the pilot study (81%) also reported that they felt more involved with their child's learning, with parents mainly using the Home Access computer to look at school websites[1].

The Online Reporting expectations will see parents in England given online access to information about children's attainment, attendance, behaviour and special needs by 2010 (for secondary) and 2012 (for primary). Online Reporting is seen as an integral part of wider strategies to support parental engagement and good home-school relationships, not just part of the reporting and accountability frameworks. Providing meaningful and timely information to parents is thought to support parents to have conversations with children about their learning, have information that enables them to support children's learning, be better informed and prepared for face-to-face meetings with school staff, and be able to work more closely in partnership with their children's schools[2].

Taken together, these policies and provision indicate a move towards more extensive and explicit expectations for parents to be involved with children's schools and engaged in their learning. The direction of policy is also one in which parents are seen as playing a significant role in school improvement, through raising parents' expectations of schools, making schools more accountable to parents, with parents influencing schools through greater involvement and by exercising choice about the kind of education they want for their children. The overall aims of this policy direction are to raise educational achievement for all children and to 'narrow the gap' in achievement between children from disadvantaged backgrounds and their peers.

1. See **www.homeaccess.org.uk** for up-to-date information about the scheme including how to apply for grants. See also Parashar, U and Jewitt, C (2009). Technology and learning at home: Findings from the evaluation of the Home Access Programme Pilot **events.becta.org.uk/content_files/corporate/resources/events/2009/november/3extending_learning.ppt** for findings from the Home Access pilot evaluation (it is the third presentation in this package).
2. In January 2008, Jim Knight, Secretary of State for Schools and Learners, sent a letter to school heads and chairs of governors setting out the expectations and intentions behind the online reporting requirements, which can be read online at: **www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/12680/Final online reporting letter online.doc**. For more background on the anticipated benefits and rational behind online reporting see also Becta (2008) Exploiting ICT to improve parental engagement, moving towards online reporting. Coventry: Becta. Available from: **publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=38170**.

2.2 PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING IN THE FAMILY

Research consistently shows parental engagement in children's learning at home is a significant factor in children's achievement at school. Parents' engagement with what children are learning at school both requires and is an expression of a relationship between home and school, and while it is important to understand that parental engagement and home-school relationships are not synonyms for one another, it is a key issue in home-school relationships. This section gives an overview of and discusses some of the key issues pertaining to parental engagement.

Parental engagement in children's learning

Parental engagement in children's learning has been the subject of sustained international research for many years. Here, the core findings from some of the key studies are summarised[3].

_ Parental involvement at home has a significant positive impact on children's achievement and is a more significant factor in predicting children's achievement than social class or school factors.

_ Increasing parental engagement – particularly for parents the school finds 'hard to reach' – is associated with improved attendance and behaviour as well as achievement.

_ Parents' engagement with children's learning at home occurs when parents show an interest in their children's education within the parent-child relationship, talk about learning with their children, model high educational aspirations and successful social and emotional approaches and demonstrate their educational values to children. This may affect their achievement because children's motivation, self-esteem, educational aspirations and perception of themselves as successful learners are influenced by this engagement from their parents in the home.

_ Parental involvement with school activities has little impact on children's achievement where it is not directly connected to learning activities.

_ Schools that are successful in supporting parents' engagement with children's learning consistently demonstrate and reinforce an approach that 'parents matter', developing a two-way relationship with parents based on mutual trust, respect and a commitment to improving learning outcomes.

3. These points are largely drawn from the influential analyses and studies by Desforges, C with Abouchaar, A (2003). The Impact of Parental Involvement, Parental Support and Family Education on Pupil Achievements and Adjustment: A Literature Review. DfES. (Research report no. 433), Harris, A and Goodall, J (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. Educational Research, 50,3: 277-289 and Harris, A and Goodall, J (2009). Do Parents Know They Matter? Raising Achievement Through Parental Engagement. London: Network Continuum Education. For specific discussion of the use of technology in parental engagement see the following: Somekh, B, Lewin, C and Mavers, D (2002). Using ICT to Enhance Home School Links: an Evaluation of Current practice in England. DfES/Becta. Available from: **partners.becta.org.uk/upload-dir/downloads/page_documents/research/ngflseries_hsl1.pdf**, Grant, L (2008). Learning in Families: A review of research evidence and the current landscape of Learning in Families with digital technologies. Bristol: Futurelab. Available at: **www.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/project_reports/becta/Learning_in_ Families_educators_report.pdf**, and Hollingworth, S, Allen, K, Kuyok, AK, Mansaray, A and Page, A (2009). An exploration of parents' engagement with their children's learning involving technologies and the impact of this in their family learning experiences. Becta. Available from: **partners.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=rh&catcode=_re_mr_02&rid=17152**

Parents helping children learn

Parental involvement in school activities, such as on the PTA or volunteering in school trips is distinguished from engagement with children's learning at home, with the latter being a strong predictive factor for children's achievement while the former confers few benefits for the child[4]. However, this distinction should not be over-emphasised: involvement with school activities may lead to engagement with learning, and can also be a way in which parents communicate their educational values and positive attitudes towards learning to their children.

Supporting children's school learning

For many schools and parents, homework is the most obvious occasion in which parents engage with their children's school learning and is the most common way for parents of secondary school aged children. Both children and parents can find parents helping with or 'enforcing' homework difficult as it can be a source of tension in their relationship and can displace other family activities including more informal learning opportunities[5]. Parents generally become less involved with children's schoolwork as they get older, only getting involved where they perceive a problem and otherwise not 'interfering' with the teacher's job[6].

Parents often report that they feel unable to help with children's school learning or homework because they do not know enough about the curriculum or modern teaching methods. Parents who use different methods to those taught in school often find trying to help their children learn a frustrating experience, especially where their personal attitudes or cultures place a strong emphasis on parental authority and expertise. They can feel humiliated when they perceive themselves as lacking the skills or knowledge that children are being taught in school, and parents can feel their own methods are inadequate.

As well as direct help with school work, parents also support children's school learning through helping children make choices about their education, through providing encouragement to persevere and giving emotional support to children to help them believe they can succeed with education[7].

Schools can play a role in supporting parents to engage with their children's learning in the home. The 'Learning at home, learning at school' project found that schools working in partnership with other agencies such as adult and family learning providers were able to help parents develop their skills to support their children's learning through joint parent-child activities within the school, and through giving parents ideas for activities that they were able to adapt within the home environment. One crucial factor for success in helping parents engage in their children's learning was the integration of a parental engagement strategy throughout the whole school – including within the formal curriculum[8].

Technologies to help parents support children's learning

Learning platforms, otherwise known as VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments) or MLEs (Managed Learning Environments), can make it possible for parents to view children's reports, attendance and assessment scores online. Learning platforms can also allow parents to access children's school work and help with school activities, and can be used to provide parents with tools to support children's learning.

4. Harris, A and Goodall, J (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. Educational Research, 50,3: 277-289; Harris, A and Goodall, J (2009). Do Parents Know They Matter? Raising Achievement Through Parental Engagement. London: Network Continuum Education.

5. Opinion Leader (2009). Time to Talk: Parents as Partners. Deliberative Event Research Report. DCSF Research Report 110.

6. Page, A, Das, S, Mangabeira, W and Natale, L (2009). School-Parent Partnerships: Emerging Strategies to Promote Innovation in Schools. Family and Parenting Institute.

7. Page, A, Das, S, Mangabeira, W and Natale, L (2009). School-Parent Partnerships: Emerging Strategies to Promote Innovation in Schools. Family and Parenting Institute.

8. Day, L, Williams, J and Fox, J (2009). Supporting parents with their children's 'at home' learning and development (Research Report DCSF-RR138). DCSF.

Ranvilles Infant School

Some schools are already using their Learning Platforms to engage parents in children's learning. For example Ranvilles Infant School in Hampshire invites parents, many of whom work for the Navy and are often away from home, to track children's progress, answer questions about their trips and ask questions about children's schoolwork, and contribute ideas via school message boards[11].

Cardinal Wiseman Catholic Technology College

Parents do not necessarily automatically know what to make of information provided online; in order to address this issue, Cardinal Wiseman Catholic Technology College in Birmingham gives guidance to parents on how to make sense of and use the data provided to have conversations with children and assist with their education[12].

© Cardinal Wiseman Catholic Technology College

Some schools are beginning to explore ways of using technologies to support parents' engagement with children's school learning, including providing online access to curriculum and revision materials designed for parents, often alongside face-to-face courses to help parents understand how to use the technologies and resources available[9]. The 'Oh, Nothing Much' report emphasises that providing access to online information is not an end in itself, but helps by providing prompts for parents to start conversations with children about learning[10].

9. See Smith, P, Rudd, O, Cohghlan, M (2008). Harnessing Technology: Schools Survey 2008. Report 1: Analysis. Coventry: Becta.
partners.becta.org.uk/upload-dir/downloads/page_documents/research/ht_schools_survey08_analysis.pdf
Harnessing Technologies Schools Survey, commissioned by Becta, assesses the 'state of the nation' in terms of the uptake and impact of educational technologies in maintained schools across England. Overall learning platforms are mostly used for uploading content rather than interactive communication or learning and most schools do not yet offer parents secure access to their 'intranets'. For more examples of schools using technologies to support parents' engagement in children's learning see case studies from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust ICT Register at **www.ict-register.net/pe-schools.php** and from Microsoft at **innovativeschoolsonline.com/casestudies/default.aspx**
10. Byron, T (2009). The "Oh, Nothing Much" Report: The value of after-school conversation. Coventry: Becta.
nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/Global/The%20Oh%20Nothing%20Much%20report%20-%2023.03.09.pdf
11. See **awards.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=34519** and more examples in Becta's 'Parental Engagement Toolkit':
publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=38170
12. **www.becta.org.uk/engaging.php** (click on 'local authorities' tab)

Portable and handheld technologies

Several projects have attempted to use portable, or handheld, technologies to connect children's learning at school with home and involve parents in their learning[13]. The 'Learning2Go' project in Wolverhampton gave students their own PDAs on which they could access multimedia learning materials. Children used their PDAs for homework as well as non-school related activities, and there is some evidence that they were also used by other family members and that some schools used them to communicate with parents[14].

The 'HomeWork' System was a research project that used portable tablet PCs to link learning at home and school[15]. Parents reported that the system allowed them to adopt teaching strategies from school and apply them in daily life. Portable technologies such as the tablet PCs used in this project have been thought to have significant potential for linking learning between home and school as they travel between the two contexts. However, the 'HomeWork' project showed that the way activities were contextualised in home or school was critical in how successful the technology was in linking learning between different environments.

The use of handheld technologies to connect learning at school to the home appears to have been most successful when there was little technology in the home; where technology access was already high, handhelds did not necessarily provide additional opportunities[16].

'Invisible' engagement

Parents may support their children's learning in many ways that are not seen by the school, particularly around using digital technologies. One study found that teachers themselves were often not very good judges of parental engagement with children's learning in the home[17]. Parents from ethnic minority backgrounds are often involved with their children's education through cultural and religious education activities, even when cultural and language differences mean they are not confident or do not feel it is their role to come into the school. It is therefore important not to assume that parents whose involvement is not visible to the school are not engaged in their children's learning[18].

13. For four case studies of using handheld technologies for learning and an overview and analysis of the potential and challenges of using this type of technology for learning see Faux, F, McFarlane, A, Roche, N, Facer, K (2006). Handhelds: learning with handheld technologies. A handbook from Futurelab. Bristol: Futurelab.

14. However, a 2007 study of this project found little evidence of much parental engagement in this project, see McFarlane, A, Roche, N, Triggs, P (2007). Mobile Learning Research Findings: Report to Becta. Available from:

partners.becta.org.uk/upload-dir/downloads/page_documents/research/mobile_learning_july07.pdf

15. Kerawalla, L, O'Connor, J, Underwood, J, duBoulay, B, Holmberg, J, Luckin, R, Smith, H and Tunley, H (2007). Exploring the potential of the HomeWork System and tablet PCs to support continuity of numeracy practices between home and primary school. Educational Media International, 44,4: 289-303

16. Faux, F, McFarlane, A, Roche, N, Facer, K (2006). Handhelds: learning with handheld technologies. A handbook from Futurelab. Bristol: Futurelab.

17. In a study by Laureau and Shumar (Lareau, A, and Shumar, W (1996). "The problem of individualism in family-school policies" Sociology of Education, 69: 24-39), teachers based their understanding of parents' involvement on aspects of parents' behaviour they were unlikely to know about such as the extent to which parents monitored TV watching. For a description of Lareau and Shumar's study see Theodorou, E (2007). Reading between the lines: exploring the assumptions and implications of parental involvement. Journal about Parents in Education, 1,0: 90-96.

18. Alldred, P, David, M and Edwards, R (2002). 'Minding the gap: Children and young people negotiating relations between home and school'. In R Edwards (ed), Children, Home and School: Regulation, Autonomy or Connection? London and New York: Routledge, 106-120; and for a discussion of parents' involvement with supplementary schooling see Bouakaz, L and Persson, S (2007). What hinders and what motivates parents' engagement in school? International Journal about Parents in Education, 1,0: 97-107.

18

A typology of learning in families with digital technologies

This typology includes parents and children learning together and from one another[19].

1. **Supporting children's formal learning**
   For example, parents accessing online information about their child's school and progress, and support to help their child with learning and making educational choices.

2. **Family learning for pleasure**
   For example, going to a museum and using handheld audio guides to interact with characters from the past.

3. **Supporting children's personal, social, emotional and life skills**
   For example, parents talking to children about how to manage risks and opportunities online.

4. **Participation and acculturation in family life**
   For example, through playing computer games together, a family share their values and learn how to manage competitiveness.

5. **Developing adult basic skills**
   For example, parents and children may participate in family learning to develop literacy or numeracy skills, using online resources.

6. **Enhancing family relationships**
   For example, accessing parenting support networks and advice online.

Shoutbox: making informal learning visible

The 'ShoutBox' research project explored the use of technologies to make learning outside school more visible to teachers. While young people were able to use mobile and video technologies to capture their out-of-school learning experiences, they needed significant support to recognise the learning benefits from their experiences and did not expect teachers to be interested. They were also concerned that if they were to share their experiences with teachers and others, that it should be in a safe and constructive space. Schools and teachers would need to actively consult with and prompt children and parents in order to understand the learning they engage in out-of-school[20].

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19. For a poster illustrating learning scenarios using this typology as well as the research on which it is based, see **www.futurelab.org.uk/projects/learning-in-families**

20. Mobile Pie / Futurelab (2008). ShoutBox: A mobile/web tool to support and showcase informal (out-of-school) learning. Available from: **www.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/project_reports/ShoutBox_report.pdf**

2.3 PARENTS' ROLES

Parents' role in directly engaging in their children's learning is only one of a range of roles they take on in relation to children's education and, increasingly, parents are positioned as 'partners' alongside schools in a joint enterprise of educating children. As well as being engaged in children's learning, then, parents may also be involved in making decisions and choices about children's schooling, working within the school, communication about school events and sharing information between school and home[21].

Parents' role construction
All parents have different views about the nature and extent of their personal responsibility for their children's learning. Parents' 'role construction' describes the activities that parents consider to be their responsibility, and is influenced by their own experience of education and their expectations of others' responsibilities[22]. Parents' role construction will influence, for example, the extent to which they become involved with children's homework, or with their children's school life and learning more generally.

Nearly all parents highly value their children's education, and most want some involvement, with 70% wanting to be more involved than they currently are and over 50% believing they have equal responsibility with the school for their children's education[23].

However, there are big differences in parents' role construction. Some parents, particularly parents from lower socio-economic groups, are more likely to trust the school to provide for children's learning needs and do not see the need or feel able to involve themselves[24]. Teachers also have their own expectations of parents, which are not always explicitly communicated. When teachers and parents have different underlying expectations about parents' roles, for example parents and teachers have sometimes been found to have very different expectations for how parents should support children with their homework, it can lead to tension and conflict between home and school[25].

Parents as partners
In seeing parents as partners, schools and policy-makers acknowledge a sharing of responsibility for children's education[26]. However, the terms of the partnership are often defined by schools, with parents' views, needs and concerns given little weight[27]. The Home-School Knowledge Exchange project found that most of the communication between home and school was 'one-way traffic', with few mechanisms to discover parents' concerns[28]. This one-way communication has been shown in Sure Start Children's Centres to have negative effects on parental involvement as it fails to establish a personal and meaningful relationship that respects parents' knowledge and input, and was seen as a barrier by both parents and professionals[29].

21. Parental engagement in children's learning is seen as both supported by and a central part of a 'partnership' between parents and schools, see Page, A, Das, S, Mangabeira, W and Natale, L (2009). School-Parent Partnerships: Emerging Strategies to Promote Innovation in Schools. Family and Parenting Institute.

22. Deslandes, R and Rousseau, N (2007). Congruence between teachers' and parents' role construction and expectations about their involvement in homework. International Journal about Parents in Education, 1,0: 108-116

23. Reynolds, J (2005). Parents' involvement in their children's learning and schools: How should their responsibilities relate to those of the state? London: National Family and Parenting Institute, Peters, M, Seeds, K, Goldstein, A and Coleman, N (2008). Parental involvement in children's education 2007. DCSF Research report DCSF-RR034.
www.dcsf.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/DCSF-RR034.pdf

24. Crozier, G and Davies, J (2007). Hard to reach parents or hard to reach schools? A discussion of home-school relations, with particular reference to Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents. British Educational Research Journal, 33,3: 295-313

25. Deslandes, R and Rousseau, N (2007). Congruence between teachers' and parents' role construction and expectations about their involvement in homework. International Journal about Parents in Education, 1,0: 108-116

26. The reform of Home-School Agreements and implementation of Parent and Pupil Guarantees and a Parent Report Card underlie and plan to give legal power to the parent-school partnership (DCSF (2009). Your child, your schools, our future: building a 21st century schools system. Available from: **publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/21st_Century_Schools.pdf**).

27. Alldred, P, David, M and Edwards, R (2002). Minding the gap: Children and young people negotiating relations between home and school. In R Edwards (ed), Children, Home and School: Regulation, Autonomy or Connection? London and New York: Routledge, 106-120.

28. Hughes, M and Greenhough, P (2006). Boxes, bags and videotape: enhancing home-school communication through knowledge exchange activities. Educational Review - Special Issue, 58,4: 471-487

29. Sure Start (2007). Parents as Partners in Early Learning (PPEL) Project: Parental involvement – a snapshot of policy and practice. PPEL Proejct Phase 1 report. London: Sure Start.

Technologies in parent-school partnerships
Many parents say that they hear very little about their child's experiences at school from children themselves and would welcome the use of text messages and emails to communicate with them more frequently[30].

Some schools are beginning to explore new ways of using digital technologies to communicate and build partnerships with parents, for example, using Learning Platforms to consult with parents and sending text messages about children's attendance and progress[31]. While technologies may play a role in enhancing communication between home and school, it is important to recognise that different technologies may be more suitable for some types of communication than others.

The concepts of 'thick' and 'thin' communication can be used to distinguish between different types of communication. Thick and thin kinds of communication are not necessarily good or bad, but they may be more or less appropriate for particular contexts. Parents appreciate the flexible and less demanding thin communication of text messages where the message is simple and unambiguous, but for more complex matters, thick communication may be more appropriate.

30. Byron, T (2009). The "Oh, Nothing Much" Report: The value of after-school conversation. Coventry: Becta.
nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/Global/The%20Oh%20Nothing%20Much%20report%20-%2023.03.09.pdf; see also Populus –
Geronimo (2008). Poll of parents: Executive summary. Available from:
schools.becta.org.uk/upload-dir/downloads/poll_of_parents_executive_summary.pdf
31. See case studies from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust ICT Register at www.ict-register.net/pe-schools.php and from
Microsoft at innovativeschoolsonline.com/casestudies/default.aspx

Thick and thin communication

There are four key elements in thick and thin communication: synchronicity, personalisation, complexity and directionality[32].

Thick communication requires greater time and resource investment and is:

_ synchronous – real time interaction such as telephone or face to face conversations
_ personal – the content of the message is specific to an individual child or parent
_ complex – there may be several different inter-relating aspects to discuss
_ multi-directional – communication may go back and forth between teachers, parents and students.

Thin communication is flexible, fast and less demanding:

_ asynchronous – there is a delay in interaction, for example emails
_ generic – the message is generic to all children or parents in a group, such as a newsletter
_ simple – the content of the message is easily communicated, for example by text message
_ one-way – communication travels from school to home and does not require or invite a reply.

Parents as providers

One key debate in the parental engagement agenda is around the extent to which parents are seen as educational providers themselves, expected to develop their pedagogical knowledge and take on teaching roles at home. Some research studies have shown that the expectation that parents can take on such teaching roles underestimates the professional skills required in teaching, and parents themselves can feel uneasy about being required to work in 'teacherly' ways with their children[33].

Some digital resources that are provided for parents to use with their children at home appear to have been designed on a pedagogic model more suited to the classroom than the daily routines and practices of family life. The role of the adult suggested by some such resources is a didactic role rather than a more open-ended role that builds on parents' intimate relationships with children[34].

32. This typology was developed from a research study involving parents in discussing digital communication between home and school. For the report of the full study see Hollingworth, S, Allen, K, Kuyok, AK, Mansaray, A and Page, A (2009). An exploration of parents' engagement with their children's learning involving technologies and the impact of this in their family learning experiences. Becta. Available from: **partners.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=rh&catcode=_re_mr_02&rid=17152**.

33. Edwards, A and Warin, J (1999). Parental Involvement in Raising the Achievement of Primary School Pupils: Why Bother? Oxford Review of Education, 25,3: 325-341, see also Alldred, P, David, M and Edwards, R (2002) Minding the gap: Children and young people negotiating relations between home and school. In R Edwards (ed) Children, Home and School: Regulation, Autonomy or Connection? London and New York: Routledge, 106-120

34. For how some digital educational resources for use at home imply a didactic parental role see Eagle, S (2008). How might research on family reading practices inform the design of interactive digital resources for pre-school children? In Eagle, S, Manches, A, O'Malley, C, Plowman, L, Sutherland, R, Perspectives on early years and digital technologies. Bristol: Futurelab. Available at: **www.futurelab.org.uk/resources/publications-reports-articles/opening-education-reports/Opening-Education-Report1141**

'Hard to reach' parents

Parents who do not come into school are often termed 'hard to reach'. However, from the parents' point of view it is often the school that is hard to reach[35]. Those parents deemed 'hard to reach' are not a homogenous group and it is important to remember that different strategies are likely to be needed to meet the needs of diverse groups of parents and a one-size-fits-all model is unlikely to be effective[36].

Some of the discourse around 'uninvolved' parents focuses on the fact they may not have the necessary skills or knowledge to support their children's learning, and so require support themselves. However, starting with such a deficit model of parenting can be disempowering for parents and may alienate parents from engaging with the school[37]. The 'Learning at home, Learning at school' study found that the activities that were most successful in supporting parents to engage with children's learning at home were those which took a 'wealth' rather than a 'deficit' model. This meant validating parents' existing knowledge and skills for supporting their child, building on existing positive interactions between parent and child and giving parents ideas for activities that they could adopt and adapt to suit their family life, rather than asking them to adopt completely new activities that had to be carried out wholesale or not at all[38].

Barriers to parental engagement and parent–school partnerships

There are a number of practical barriers that parents face in engaging with children's learning and communicating with schools, with time to help with homework or meet teachers often cited as a major barrier, with working parents, fathers and lone parents more likely to see this as a problem[39]. Childcare, work commitments and transport arrangements are also described by parents as significant barriers.

Communication difficulties between parents and teachers can present barriers. This can include parents for whom English is not their first language, parents with disabilities, those who feel that they do not have the 'right' vocabulary to speak to teachers, and those parents with literacy difficulties who found it difficult to understand the way that information was communicated to them[40].

35. Crozier, G and Davies, J (2007). Hard to reach parents or hard to reach schools? A discussion of home-school relations, with particular reference to Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents. British Educational Research Journal, 33,3: 295-313

36. Smit, F, Driessen, G, Sluiter, R and Sleegers, P (2007). Types of parents and school strategies aimed at the creation of effective partnerships. International Journal about Parents in Education, 0: 45-52.

37. Edwards, A and Warin, J (1999). Parental Involvement in Raising the Achievement of Primary School Pupils: Why Bother? Oxford Review of Education, 25,3: 325-341

38. Day, L, Williams, J and Fox, J (2009). Supporting parents with their children's 'at home' learning and development (Research Report DCSF-RR138). DCSF.

39. Owen, R, Thomas, A and Joyce, L (2008). Engaging Parents in their Children's Learning. GTCE / BMRB. Available from: **www.gtce.org.uk/shared/contentlibs/126795/93128/120213/parent_engage_learning_jul08.pdf**, see also Grant (2009).

40. Harris, A and Goodall, J (2008). Do parents know they matter? Engaging all parents in learning. Educational Research, 50,3: 277-289, and Harris, A and Goodall, J (2009). Do Parents Know They Matter? Raising Achievement Through Parental Engagement. London: Network Continuum Education.

2.4 CONNECTING HOME AND SCHOOL CULTURES

Parents' involvement in children's school lives and learning is a crucial factor in the relationship between home and school. However to more fully understand the relationship between home and school and the context and constraints on parents' engagement with children's learning, we need to consider how the cultures of home and school relate to one another. Home is not only a physical place, but a social construct that encompasses the family's routines and structures. So home-school relationships are not just about linking one geographic setting with another, but about negotiating the different social and cultural constructs of home and school.

Learning at school can be seen as increasingly disconnected from children's lives, cultures and learning experiences outside school. This can be especially true for children whose home cultures are particularly different to school cultures, including working class families and families from some ethnic minority backgrounds[41]. If education aims to help children develop and take up responsibilities within their community, and to be perceived by children as meaningful, then it needs to have some relevance to children's lives outside school[42]. As well as connecting to children's lives as they experience them, education also needs to connect to children's aspirations for their future lives, and many would argue that education therefore also needs to offer children higher and broader aspirations for their futures then they bring with them to school[43]. However, if these extended aspirations are completely disconnected from children's current lives, they may be seen as distant and unachievable.

This section therefore explores the nature of the connections between children's home and school cultures in order to provide a bigger picture of the relative contributions of, and relationship between home and school.

Transitions between home and school cultures

Children's transitions from home to school involve a change in identity from the child at home to the pupil in the classroom. There may be continuity or discontinuity between these two identities depending on how appropriate children's behaviour from one setting is in another, and the consistency of adults' responses to children's behaviour. When there is discontinuity, children face a task of adapting to the new contexts they are faced with[44].

Particular ways of knowing and learning are embedded in social and cultural practices. When the practices of 'knowing' in home and school are very different, learners' successful experiences of learning at home may not facilitate learning at school. For example, in Australia, Aboriginal practices of knowing are more communal, and children can find themselves told off for 'cheating' when helping each other in the more individualised learning paradigm of the classroom[45]. However, attempts to teach parents to interact with their children in more 'school-like' ways can give rise to conflict and tension that can actually reinforce rather than overcome inequalities[46].

41. Maddock, M (2006). Children's personal learning agendas at home. Cambridge Journal of Education, 36,2: 153-169

42. Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child specifies that children should experience the kind of education which helps them develop and take up responsibilities within the community. See **www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf.**

43. See, for example, Cabinet Office (2008). Aspiration and attainment amongst young people in deprived communities: Analysis and discussion paper. Available from: **www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/social_exclusion_task_force/short_studies/aspirations.aspx**

44. Lam, MS and Pollard, A (2006). A conceptual framework for understanding children as agents in the transition from home to kindergarten. Early Years, 26,2: 123-141

45. Maddock, M (2006). Children's personal learning agendas at home. Cambridge Journal of Education, 36,2: 153-169

46. Alldred, P, David, M and Edwards, R (2002). Minding the gap: Children and young people negotiating relations between home and school. In R Edwards (ed), Children, Home and School: Regulation, Autonomy or Connection? London and New York: Routledge: 106-120.

Third spaces and funds of knowledge

Rather than attempt to integrate home and school cultures or encourage homes to adopt school cultures, third space theories have been applied to attempts to create spaces in which aspects of the two different cultures of school and home can come into 'conversation' with one another[47]. It is hoped that this approach can make school learning experiences more meaningful and accessible to children by connecting them with the cultures and contexts children are familiar with and interested in outside school[48].

Third space theories see children as possessing 'funds of knowledge', acquired through participation in the daily life of their families and communities, and essential for everyday functioning and wellbeing within those communities. Because different communities have different social and cultural practices, they will give rise to different funds of knowledge. Teachers also draw on the funds of knowledge they develop through participation in their own communities and professional practice[49]. Children's funds of knowledge, developed within their families and communities, can be marginalised within a school discourse. The idea of 'third spaces' describes the merging of the informal 'first space' of home, community and peers with the more formal 'second space' of school or work. Integrating the different funds of knowledge from school and home to form a third space that values both discourses can be seen as helping children successfully navigate between and build bridges from the sometimes marginalised knowledge practices of children's homes to the more conventional academic knowledge of school. This perspective sees children as having access to multiple funds of knowledge from home and school that they can draw on in their learning – and that by helping children draw on all the resources at their disposal, they are likely to be more successful learners.

By bringing the different funds of knowledge of home and school into 'conversation' with one another, both home and school knowledges can be challenged and reshaped, potentially giving rise to new knowledges. Children, as they get older and develop more independence, can be seen as carving out their own peer cultural spaces between the more settled spaces of home and school, for example hanging out together outside or online. Digital technologies in fact may offer opportunities for children to create their own virtual third spaces that can travel between home and school and where they can draw on and reshape their funds of knowledge from both home and school[50].

In a recent study, some young children's emerging conceptions of themselves as readers generated at home – as people who enjoy books, can understand and make meaning from a range of texts including pictures, websites and games – were undermined by their perception that being a reader in school was about being able to decode printed words. Some children were able to bring together aspects of both their home and school perceptions of being a reader that reshaped both their school reading practices and the reading practices of their everyday lives, generating the new knowledge and third space described above. However, other children adopted what they perceived to be the school's definition of being a reader, and relinquished the idea that their home reading practices were valid[51]. These same arguments are likely to also apply to children's conceptions of themselves as 'learners', with educators needing to facilitate space in school for children's own ideas of what it is to be a learner to coexist with school discourses.

47. Levy, R (2008). 'Third spaces' are interesting places: applying 'third space theory' to nursery-aged children's constructions of themselves as readers. Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 8,1: 43-66

48. For two examples of projects that attempt to create such third spaces, see the Home School Knowledge Exchange project at www.tlrp.org/proj/phase11/phase2e.html

49. For more discussion of the concept of Funds of Knowledge see Moll, L, and Greenberg, J (1990). Creating zones of possibilities: Combining social contexts for instruction. In L Moll, Vygotsky and Education, 319-348. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For its application in a UK educational context see M Hughes and A Pollard (eds) (2006). Educational Review (Special Issue on the Home-School Knowledge Exchange Project), 58,4: 385-395

50. For more discussion on third spaces, particularly with reference to literacy practices of home and school see Moje, EB, Ciechanowski, KM, Kramer, K, Ellis, L, Carrillo, R, Collazo, T et al (2004). Working toward third space in content area literacy: an examination of everyday funds of knowledge and discourse. Reading Research Quarterly, 39,1: 38-70. Retrieved from www.jstor.org/stable/4151759. In UK Family Learning context, Pahl, K, and Kelly, S (2005). Family literacy as a third space between home and school: some case studies of practice. Literacy, 39,2: 91-6

51. Levy, R (2008). 'Third spaces' are interesting places: applying 'third space theory' to nursery-aged children's constructions of themselves as readers. Journal of Early Childhood Literacy, 8,1: 43-66

Third spaces, then, do not automatically arise, and are not always productive for all children. There can be a role for a teacher to intentionally create these third spaces, helping children to draw selectively and strategically on the funds of knowledge available to them. The Home-School Knowledge Exchange project aimed to support the transfer of knowledge between home and school through explicit activities including making and taking home videos of children's school literacy lessons, and children bringing in to school shoeboxes of meaningful personal possessions and photos. These activities allowed teachers an insight into the diversity of children's home lives, and they were able to integrate aspects of these into the curriculum. However, because funds of knowledge are situated in particular social and cultural contexts, the transfer of 'depersonalised' knowledge is not possible: it is actively interpreted by teachers, parents and children in the context of their own agendas, which necessarily raise issues of power and control. While children had some agency in the home to school knowledge exchange activities, they had very little agency in the school to home direction, and while bringing children's home funds of knowledge into the school curriculum can be seen on the one hand as personalising the curriculum, the flip side to this may be that the school discourses take over and colonise those of the home[52].

Technology connecting cultures of home and school

The pervasive nature of technology may offer opportunities to expand traditional notions of curriculum and pedagogy to include the kinds of learning that children are engaged in at home as well as at school, bringing together learning from a range of different sources. Mobile and portable technologies in particular are seen by some as having potential to link learning across different contexts, and to link formal and informal kinds of learning[53].

Using weblogs to connect home and school

Some schools have used weblogs to connect home and school cultures, with children writing about their experiences at home or school and parents and teachers commenting. In an early years project, children took a teddy bear home and photographed its adventures, then dictated stories that were written up on the blog. Parents and grandparents commented on the children's posts – enabling even distant family members to keep in touch with children's interests and learning[54].

Several schools use blogs to allow parents to keep up to date with school activities, and communicate with teachers and children, which appear to be particularly successful when children are away on residential school trips[55]. Some schools have also begun exploring the use of Twitter to communicate classroom activities to parents, although parental uptake is so far minimal[56]. One primary school uses a digital photo frame in the school reception area to share images of children's activities at school with parents when they come to pick up children from school[57].

However, in a recent review of technology-facilitated home-school communication, the most successful examples were those where there was already "cultural harmony between home and school" rather than bridging the differences between the two[58]. Using technologies to link home and school without considering the socio-cultural differences and unequal power relationships between home and school may potentially reinforce rather than overcome inequalities.

52. Hughes, M, and Pollard, A (2006). Home–school knowledge exchange in context. Educational Review, 58,4: 385-395.

53. Vavoula, G, Sharples, M, Rudman, P, Lonsdale, P and Meek, J (2007). Learning Bridges: a role for mobile technologies in education. Educational Technology Magazine special issue on 'Highly mobile computing', XLVII,3: 33-36; see also Kerawalla et al (2007)

54. Marsh, J and Parveen, A (2009). Learning and development: blogging - 21st century literacy. Article for nursery world provided by the authors.Available from www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/login/910428

55. See, for example, Green Park School's collection of blogs at greenparkschool.org.uk

56. Twitter is a 'micro-blogging' service that enables its users to send and read short messages, see twitter.com, ClassroomTweets

57. Personal communication with Ollie Bray, Learning and Teaching Scotland

58. Lewin, C, Mavers, D and Somekh, B (2003). Broadening access to the curriculum though using technology to link home and school: a critical analysis of reforms intended to improve students' educational attainment. The Curriculum Journal, 14,1: 23-53

Digital technologies are used in very different ways at home and at school. Educational use of digital technologies at school tends to be planned and scaffolded within an organised curriculum, and linked to a broader programme of learning. In contrast, educational home use tends to favour individual use with little collaboration or support from other family members, tends to be restricted to 'discrete' activities unconnected to other aspects of family life, and be more playful and exploratory. Placing educational technologies from the school to the home does not necessarily lead to these technologies being used to support school learning in the home[59].

Children's use of technologies at home may provide them with different learning experiences, yet schools often know little about children's technological competences and practices outside school. Schools may be able to build connections with children's learning at home by exploiting children's skills with technologies developed at home within the school.

Boundaries between home and school
While efforts are made to 'bridge the gaps' between home and school, a completely 'seamless' experience may not, in fact, be desirable.

Children often characterise school as a place of rules and constraint, while home is often seen as a site of relaxation and leisure where there is more scope for negotiation over rules[60]. Children who feel marked out as different to their peers by ethnicity, class, religion or disability may feel that they need to keep those aspects of their family and home life private from both their peers and teachers[61]. Children are also often protective of parents who do not speak English well or who children see are likely to be embarrassed at talking to teachers.

Attempts to extend learning from school to the home and involve parents in their children's learning are in danger of reframing children's lives outside school and family life purely in terms of an educational project, with children leading "a curricularised life within a professional logic"[62]. Many parents, in fact, see part of their role as protecting children from school's incursions into the home and ensuring that children socialise, play and relax as well as learn[63].

59. Kerawalla, L, and Crook, C (2002). Children's computer use at home and at school: context and continuity. British Educational Research Journal, 28,6: 751-771; Kerawalla, L and Crook, C (2005). From promises to practices: the fate of educational software in the home. Technology, Pedagogy and Education, 14,1: 107-125; Blackmore, J, Hardcastle, L, Bamblett, E, Owens, J (2003). Effective Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to Enhance Learning for Disadvantaged School Students. www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/D63F92A3-6931-464F-9970-D599BE3E390E/4520/ICTreport.pdf
60. Edwards, R and Montandon, C (2002). Home and school constraints in children's experience of socialisation in Geneva. In R Edwards (ed), Children, Home and School: Regulation, Autonomy or Connection? London and New York: Routledge, 106-120; Mayall, B (1994). Children in action at home and school. In B Mayall (ed), Children's childhoods observed and experienced. London: Falmer.
61. Alldred, P, David, M and Edwards, R (2002). Minding the gap: Children and young people negotiating relations between home and school. In R Edwards (ed), Children, Home and School: Regulation, Autonomy or Connection? London and New York: Routledge, 106-120.
62. Ericsson, K and Larsen, G (2002). Adults as resources and adults as burdens: the strategies of children in the age of home-school collaboration. In R Edwards (ed), Children, Home and School: Regulation, Autonomy or Connection? London and New York: Routledge, 92-105.
63. Grant, L (2008). Learning in Families: a review of research evidence and the current landscape of Learning in Families with digital technologies. Bristol: Futurelab. Available at: www.futurelab.org.uk/resources/documents/project_reports/becta/Learning_in_Families_educators_report.pdf

2.5 CHILDREN'S ROLE AND AGENCY IN HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

The majority of research into home-school relationships and parental engagement has not considered children's views, choosing to focus instead on the relationship between parents and teachers[64]. However, there are some studies that indicate that children do in fact play a very significant role in parents' engagement in their learning and are active in mediating their own transitions between home and school. This section therefore will focus on children's role in the nature and extent of relationships between home and school.

Children's role in parental involvement
The most frequent way for children to play a role in home-school relationships is as 'messengers' between school and home, however, most parents report that they would like to know more about children's school experiences than they hear from children themselves. In overcoming this "crisis in communication" between children and parents, it is important to acknowledge the agency of children, with guidance emphasising that parents should try to find out what children are enthusiastic about, ask open questions and wait to be 'invited in' by children rather than demanding information in an interrogatory fashion[65].

64. Reynolds, J (2005). Parents' involvement in their children's learning and schools: How should their responsibilities relate to those of the state? London: National Family and Parenting Institute

65. Crozier, G and Davies, J (2007). Hard to reach parents or hard to reach schools? A discussion of home-school relations, with particular reference to Bangladeshi and Pakistani parents. British Educational Research Journal, 33,3: 295-313; Byron, T (2009). The "Oh, Nothing Much" Report: The value of after-school conversation. Coventry: Becta.
nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/Global/The%20Oh%20Nothing%20Much%20report%20-%2023.03.09.pdf

In one of the few studies to explicitly focus on children's role in parental involvement, children were seen to play a major role in the extent of their parents' involvement in their education, with children taking an active or passive attitude to facilitating either their parents' involvement, or 'uninvolvement'. That is, children would either actively seek parents' involvement or uninvolvement, or passively 'go along with' parents' involvement or uninvolvement. Children may involve their parents in some aspects of their learning, while resisting involvement in others.

Children who actively involved their parents were usually motivated by a desire for intimacy with their parent, most often their mother, rather than to improve their educational achievement, emphasising the importance of the parent-child relationship. Children may resent their parents' 'intrusion' into school matters because they feel competent to deal with the situation alone, they think their parents will be unable to help, or because they fear their parents' involvement may make matters worse. However, children's efforts to keep home and school separate does not imply that they value one sphere (home or school) at the expense of the other – some children maintain separation while highly valuing both home and school[66].

Children's personal learning agendas
A study of young children showed how they connected their learning at home and at school to further their own 'personal learning agendas'[67]. Children were able to exploit, appropriate and transform the opportunities for learning presented by school and home to make them personally meaningful. For example, while two children who appear to be learning the same thing, such as how to ride a bike, will learn the same skills, they may also appropriate this experience to their own more personal learning agendas. One child might connect learning to ride a bike with learning about freedom from the home while for another it might connect to competition with siblings.

This deeper level of learning was intimately connected to children's own deep concerns; their own personal agendas informed what they took from the learning experience. Children in this study appropriated their learning experiences to explore personally significant issues, such as death, or how to deal with being seen as different from peers. To understand children's personal learning agendas, teachers and parents need to listen to their voices and perspectives on their learning experiences.

66. The Children 5-16 study sought to find out how children understand and influence their parents' involvement in their education. See: Edwards, R, Alldred, P and David, M (2000). Children's understandings of parental involvement in education. Children 5-16 Research Briefing Number 11, ESRC. **www.hull.ac.uk.chidren5to16programme** Edwards, R and Alldred, P (2002). A typology of parental involvement in education centring on children and young people: negotiating familialisation, institutionalisation and individualisation. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 21,3: 435-455, and Alldred, P, David, M and Edwards, R (2002). Minding the gap: children and young people negotiating relations between home and school. In R Edwards (ed), Children, Home and School: Regulation, Autonomy or Connection? London and New York: Routledge, 106-120
67. Maddock, M (2006). Children's personal learning agendas at home. Cambridge Journal of Education, 36,2: 153-169

2.6 SUMMARY: WHY IS THE HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIP IMPORTANT IN CHILDREN'S EDUCATION?

This review of policy, research evidence and theory points to the importance of fostering good home-school relationships to support children's learning in the widest sense, and to the need to involve children as active mediators of the relationship between their home and school. The key points to take away from this review are summarised below.

Parents' engagement in children's learning at home is a significant factor contributing to children's achievement in school, through showing an interest, encouraging perseverance and resilience, supporting educational decision-making and demonstrating pro-educational values. Parents' involvement with their children's school in itself makes no difference to their children's achievement, although for some parents this can be a first step towards engagement in their learning. Where parents are not involved with the school, schools cannot assume that they are disengaged with learning at home: engagement may be invisible to the school.

There are several **barriers to parents' engagement with children's learning**. Parents often feel they do not have the skills, knowledge or confidence to support children's learning, especially as children get older. Schools can help parents engage with children's learning: this is most successful when it builds on the positive activities parents already do and gives them new ideas they can adapt for themselves rather than transplanting wholesale activities from school that may not fit within the family cultures and contexts.

Parents play many different roles in their children's education, making it important that schools consult with parents to discover their needs and aspirations for the home-school relationship and do not adopt a one-size-fits-

all approach. The use of digital technologies can enhance communication with parents, and is welcomed by many. It is important that there are opportunities for two-way 'thick' communication as well as more light-touch 'thin' forms of communication, and schools need to consider the most appropriate digital medium to fit the content of the message they are communicating.

Bringing school practices of learning and knowing into conversation with home practices can connect children's school learning to their lived experiences and enable them to draw on all the resources at their disposal to support their learning. Digital technologies may also offer the possibility of creating a virtual 'third space' where children themselves are able to bring together and connect aspects of their lives and learning from home and school. Bringing aspects of school and home together is not about making a 'seamless' connection that leaves children with no independence or privacy, or that reframes the home as an educational space, but about drawing selectively from the practices of home and school.

Finally, **children's role in mediating the relationship between home and school** needs to be acknowledged and supported. By recognising children's active role in mediating their own learning experience between home and school and furthering their learning agendas, the focus is shifted from the school's attempts to extend learning to the home to how children can be supported to make the most of the learning opportunities available to them at school and at home.

Through the online reporting and Home Access initiatives, **digital technologies** are being harnessed to support the parental engagement agenda, to facilitate communication between home and school and to connect learning at home and at school. However, schools need to consider how digital technologies will play out in the complex landscape of the home-school relationship, thinking about when 'thick' or 'thin' communication technologies are most appropriate, how children can be involved as central players within any system and how they may create a virtual 'third space' where children are able to connect aspects of their lives and learning from home and school in pursuit of their own learning agendas.

3. STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

In this section, a number of issues that schools and teachers need to consider as they develop their own strategies for using digital technologies to support home-school relationships are discussed. The content of these considerations is not exhaustive, but is informed by and reflects some of the most frequent and important issues identified through analysis of previous research, expert interviews, case studies of schools' use of technologies to support home-school relationships and original research with children, parents and teachers in secondary schools. Quotes from parents, teachers and children and examples are given from this original research. Specific technology-related considerations are distributed throughout this section in boxed-out texts.

The specific strategies and uses of technologies that any school uses will be most successful when they are informed by and developed in consultation with children and their families. There is unlikely to be a single strategy that will work for all schools, so this is not a 'how-to' manual for supporting home-school relationships. However, there are some common issues that most schools are likely to encounter at some point on their journey towards using technologies to support home-school relationships. These considerations are therefore presented to give schools an idea of what to expect, and a framework in which to consider the development of their own strategies.

3.1 DEVELOPING EXPECTATIONS

Explicit and transparent expectations of roles and responsibilities
In negotiating the home-school relationship, children, parents and teachers have a set of expectations about their own roles and responsibilities, and those of each other. However, sometimes parents, teachers and children do not quite know what others expect of them, or feel that the expectations of them are unreasonable, or that they do not know what they should be able to expect from one other. Developing and sharing expectations about children's, teachers' and parents' roles can help them negotiate the relationships between home and school and with each other. Knowing what you can expect of one another can also contribute towards a more trusting relationship where everyone knows where they stand.

"I need to know who and how and when to get in touch with people" (Parent)

While all schools are required to have a Home-School Agreement with parents, the consultation and discussion around its content is often minimal, with parents often feeling that it does not take account of their concerns and in most cases is unlikely to be enforceable. Children are also rarely involved in discussing the content of the Home-School Agreement. It is currently proposed that Home-School Agreements are made legally enforceable, but whether or not this comes to pass, they can provide a good place to start in discussing realistic expectations with parents and children.

The expectations made of children in the home-school relationship are often limited to their role as messengers conveying information from the school to home, however, particularly at secondary school, talking to children is the main way in which parents come to know about the life of the school. Rather than simply seeing children as more or less unreliable messengers, it is worth considering what their roles already are and how they can be given more responsibility within the home-school relationship.

When children start a new school, they have a lot to learn about how that school operates. Their parents also have to discover how the school works and how to engage with it. Virtual 'buddy' systems for parents, as well as children, where parents of Year 6 children can contact parents of children attending the secondary school can work well in inducting them to the life of the school. Parents also learn about the schools' expectations of them and their children, and what they can expect from school, from other parents in the local community.

"When you're told you should be helping your child with homework what does that actually mean?" (Parent)

Expectations of homework
For parents, expectations around homework is a key issue. They are often unsure about what is expected of children for homework, what involvement they should have in their children's homework, and at what point they should let children take responsibility for homework themselves. Some parents are wary of helping for fear of 'cheating' or because they think children should be working independently. Teachers may also not have considered the specific and different ways in which parents, who may not have teaching skills or subject knowledge, can best support children with homework. While expectations need to be clear, they also need to be flexible enough so that parents and children can adapt what they do to fit in to the time they have available and what they feel comfortable doing.

Parents may sometimes feel that the expectations of them to support their children's learning are too high or unsustainable alongside their other commitments. Therefore while clear expectations are helpful, flexibility is key in making sure that parents are able to support their children in a way that they can manage.

"I don't know whether the school really wants us to help ... I don't know whether they want us to let them do it on their own" (Parent)

Expectations of communication

Communication between parents and school is also an area where there may be uncertainty about what is expected. Parents are often unsure when it is appropriate to contact the school, who to contact, and the best ways of making contact. Teachers may well fear being 'flooded' with lots of unfocused or demanding messages, but one of the best ways to address this is to have very clear guidelines and expectations for when, how and who to contact, and what parents can expect in response[68]. Making clear when communication is for 'information only' and when a reply is expected is very helpful for parents.

The ways that schools expect parents to engage with them also needs to be negotiated with parents around their needs and other commitments rather than simply imposed upon them. For example, parents who do not attend parents' evenings may be seen as disengaged with their children's education. However, some schools have found that parents have not attended because they are deaf, do not speak English well, work in the evenings, fear that they themselves will be 'told off', or do not appreciate how attending can help them or their child. Using digital technologies to communicate with parents raises a new sense of expectations around parents' and teachers' availability. Some parents' work commitments mean they cannot be phoned during the day or do not have internet access through work or at home; families who rely on mobile phones may not have the credit necessary to check voice mails and so text messages may be preferable. Expectations for using digital technologies therefore need to take account of parents' existing commitments and patterns of use.

Expectations for how digital technologies should be used are set up by establishing patterns of use. For example, different web forums have very different rules of 'etiquette', developed and maintained by a core group of users, who also tend to 'police' the rules of etiquette when newcomers join. Using digital technologies to communicate between school staff and parents and children, or between parents, can be set up by inviting a group of parents, teachers and children to lead the way and enact the ways in which people are expected to make use of digital communication services.

Access to and use of digital technologies

Using digital technologies to support communication between the home and school supposes that children and their families are able make use of digital technologies outside school, including but not limited to a computer and internet connection. The level of broadband connectivity, mobile phone ownership (including internet-enabled phones) as well as games consoles, printers, scanners, etc, will all affect how it is possible to make use of technologies in the home-school relationship.

Hardware choices also affect the way that technologies can be used in home-school relationships strategies. Lightweight netbooks or ultra-mobile PCs can be carried by children from home to school, giving them ownership of the technology, although contingency plans for breakage, loss and theft will be necessary. Portable devices also mean that children can easily show the screen to parents when appropriate. Handheld or portable devices may also allow for more ad hoc use by staff rather than needing to log on to a static desktop computer.

The Home Access initiative is starting to overcome some of the financial barriers to home computer and internet access for children and their families, but access is only the first step in making use of technologies[69]. But as well as physical access, people also need the skills, confidence and desire to use technologies in order to experience any benefits of digital communication. So as well as discovering the levels of access in children's homes, it is also important to consider how they use the technologies they have access to.

As well as broadband access at home, it is worth considering how children and teachers will access internet services at school. In many schools, there are limited facilities for children to access the internet in between lessons, so wifi available on children's own devices may be a better option.

68. Lent Rise Primary School in Buckinghamshire promises a response to parents' emails within 72 hours, even if this is a 'holding' email acknowledging receipt and explaining what is happening until the matter can be resolved.

69. See the Research and policy review above for more detail on the Home Access policy

Expectations of staff

Schools will need to consider how to manage the changing expectations of teachers, tutors and other members of staff. Digital technologies can open up far greater opportunities for parents to contact school staff directly and schools will need to consider how much time they expect staff to spend on such communication and how they will make this time available. This is also a question of staff roles and school priorities. Seeing building positive home-school relationships as central to the work of the school, communicating with parents and supporting children's home learning should not be seen as a 'distraction' from the work of teaching, but as part and parcel of the business of supporting children's learning. However, teachers and other school staff need to be given the time to do this. It is also important to consider the different expectations of staff with subject teaching roles, pastoral roles (tutors, heads of year and heads of houses), specialists (SEN co-ordinators, etc) front line staff in reception and intermediaries such as parent support advisors or learning mentors and how they work together. Being proactive about setting and communicating what parents can expect from these different staff roles and how best to communicate with them can go a long way to avoiding teachers needing to play a reactive role in responding to lots of direct communication.

Questions

_ What opportunities can be found, such as the Home-School Agreement, to discuss the roles and responsibilities of parents, teachers and children? How can these expectations be flexible enough to take account of their needs and commitments?

_ What can parents and children expect from different members of staff and how can this be made explicit? How should parents and children communicate with different staff members and for different issues?

_ Can current parents and students use digital technologies to communicate the expectations they have of school and the school has of them to new parents and children?

_ What can reasonably be expected of parents in supporting their children's homework?

_ How can parents' role in supporting children's learning build on the unique contribution they can make as parents, rather than trying to replicate the teacher's role?

3.2 OWNERSHIP AND LEADERSHIP

Developing an integrated, whole school strategy

A good home-school relationship that really makes a difference to children's learning does not just happen; it needs to be embedded in a whole-school strategy and reflected in the school ethos. Where home-school relationships are considered only as an 'added extra' to the existing work of the school, efforts are likely to be less successful and have less of an impact on children's learning experiences. In order to make a difference, the implementation of digital technologies including steps to meet the online reporting expectations need to be seen in terms of how they can support the wider aims of developing home-school relationships and parental engagement, and not just as an extension of existing reporting procedures.

Taking seriously an aim to improve home-school relationships as an integral part of school strategy means it is likely to have an effect on what happens in school at many different levels. Rather than making home-school relationships the sole responsibility of just one or two staff members, all staff therefore need to be involved in the process of embedding home-school relationships and given the opportunity for appropriate continuing professional development to support this aim. It is also important to have clear, strong leadership from the senior management team in order to maintain a high profile for this agenda, and to have expertise available within the school for staff to draw upon. The school leadership team need to promote the positive benefits of a good home-school relationship, and the ways in which the school hopes to achieve this, so that staff can engage with the thinking behind strategies, question it and develop it themselves, rather than perceiving it merely as an additional requirement.

Digital technologies for communication

If digital technologies are being used to communicate with the home, how do these channels and the messages conveyed using them fit into the bigger picture of school-home communication? Discrepancies in information received via email or text, and that received verbally from children, other parents or school staff can lead to a breakdown in trust in the reliability of any communication. The way digital channels are to be used need to be understood by all staff so that there is consistency across the school, and parents and children know what to expect.

The use of digital technologies as part of a whole school strategy also raises more technical issues. The digital channels used to communicate with parents, track and report information need to link in with the other systems being used within the school in order to ensure consistency of messages and avoid duplication of effort. When choosing data management and communication tools, consideration of how these integrate with the school's Management Information Systems (MIS) and the interoperability of different digital systems will be important.

Fostering ownership

Setting up any new digital communication channels requires some leadership and 'championing' until the stage at which it achieves a sustainable momentum. In our study, both parents and teachers took a 'reactive' approach to the use of technologies, with one staff member commenting "I logged on once to see if anything was there". If all participants wait for someone else to start using digital communication channels, then clearly the use of technologies will not make any difference to communication between home and school. The value of a system may only be apparent when it is already being used by others, for example online discussion boards are no use when people are not using them, and people will often wait for someone else to take the initiative. Inviting children, parents and teachers to 'champion' such systems and take the initiative can help to demonstrate their value and act as a 'hook' to bring in others to participate.

The development and implementation of a strategy using digital technologies to support home-school relationships needs to be 'owned' by those people who are going to be using it: teachers, parents and children. This means involving these stakeholders in the development of a strategy through some form of consultation. Being involved in a consultation process already confers a sense of ownership when those who take part feel they have been listened to. Parents, children and school practitioners need to be involved in developing the strategy, identifying what the particular aims, values, needs, challenges and aspirations are for their particular school and how they can address them. Included in this consultation should be children's and parents' access to and skills to use digital technologies, in order to consider how strategies can be embedded within existing patterns of use, and any training and support that might be needed. Skipping this consultation process can result in a strategy that is based on an incomplete understanding of children's home lives and is resented as a top-down imposition. The resulting strategy should be a living process embedded within a whole-school ethos, that can change and develop over time, rather than a document that is filed away and reviewed every couple of years.

Sharing the learning agenda
Such shared ownership of a home-school strategy is about more than just involving parents and children as stakeholders in the school; it is about sharing ownership of the learning agenda. Children learn informally outside school as well as within school and through homework; they appropriate the resources available to them from school and home including other people, technologies and cultural resources available to them[70].

Sharing the learning agenda between home and school means considering how children can be supported to get the best from the opportunities they have for learning both within and outside school, not just considering how what children do at home can support what the school is trying to achieve. This changes the focus so that school is seen as one, very significant, learning resource in children's lives alongside their other experiences. This means taking seriously the needs and concerns that children and their parents have about their learning – even when they don't align closely with the school's own agenda. It also means that the value of children's non-school experiences is not automatically dismissed, and instead focuses on what schools can do to equip children with the skills to draw on all the resources they have available.

Questions
_ How will a strategy to support home-school relationships be embedded in the life of the school? Consider the possible impact on curriculum, reporting procedures, extra-curricular activities and involvement with the local community.
_ How will you ensure that children, parents and teachers are involved in developing a strategy that reflects their values and meets their needs? Can you invite some children, parents and teachers to be 'champions' of the strategy and any systems used?
_ How can the school find out about the knowledge and skills that children can draw upon from outside school and build on these within the curriculum?

70. See the discussion about 'funds of knowledge' in the research review

Case Study 1: Saltash.net Community School, Cornwall

Saltash.net Community School in Cornwall is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school with specialist status in science, mathematics and computing.

The school is using private social network sites such as Ning and Edmodo to support links between young people's learning in and out-of-school as well as MSN messenger for one-to-one mentoring. Science teacher and Assistant Head Dan Roberts has been using Ning as a platform for GCSE classes to work together online in the evenings. "Once the platform is set up it runs itself, with students and parents all communicating with one another, commenting on each other's work and answering each other's questions". The network is used socially as well as for communication around the topics being studied in the classroom and being set for homework. Students often post their own discussions and questions either around the current topics being covered in school or on completely new topics. "What happens online then has an impact on what happens in the classroom" says Dan, with lesson plans constantly shifting based on input from both students and parents online.

Ning groups now exist across most subjects in the school and the feedback from both parents and students has been very positive, with parents reporting that their children seem much more engaged and that they feel they are much more able to get involved in their children's learning.

The platform is also used to showcase students' best work and to share practice between subjects in school as well as between home and school.

MSN messenger has enabled teachers at Saltash.net to mentor individual students outside of lessons (having individual conversations with up to 10 students simultaneously). Using messenger as a tool has allowed much more one-to-one time that isn't often possible in a classroom setting. As the conversation is often more relaxed and includes day-to-day as well as targeted conversations around learning points it has enabled teachers to get to know students and understand their interests much better.

In introducing such Web 2.0 applications to support communication and learning between home and school, there were some initial concerns around safeguarding children but these have all proved solvable. All MSN conversations are recorded for reference and permission is sought at the beginning of each new school year from parents for teachers and children to be able to communicate online out of school hours.

Links:
School website: www.saltash.net
Dan Robert's blog: chickensaltash.edublogs.org
NING social network site: www.ning.com
Edmodo social network site: www.edmodo.com

Case Study 2: Noadswood School, Hampshire

Noadswood School is a mixed comprehensive and a specialist sports college in Southampton, Hampshire for students between 11-16.

The school is involved in the 'Learning Futures programme' (run by Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Innovation Unit) which is 'rethinking and modelling what goes on in our schools'. As part of this project the school's innovation work focuses on engaging parents in their children's learning. The use of new technologies is seen as crucial in achieving the school's aspirations and goals in this area.

As part of its strategy to develop greater links with parents, Noadswood has set up a Parents' Focus Group (made up of a cross-section of parents of 100 of its students). These parents communicate with the school and with each other via a purpose built online portal that contains email, access to a forum where topics for discussion are set and feedback requested, and questionnaires.

One area of development is in online reporting (currently used in science and being introduced in English and mathematics). The aim is to involve parents more deeply in assessment for learning and to create a feedback system that fills the gaps between the traditional termly reports. Teachers record assessment results on an ongoing basis using Excel with this data converted into simple graphical displays of the student's progress and emailed to parents on a regular basis. The feedback from parents has been positive with many parents responding to the emails: 'Thank you for Matt's merit award. We are very proud of him. Hope he keeps up the good work. Any problems please do contact me'.

The school is also using their School Information Management System (SIMS) to electronically record details of teacher-student mentoring conversations so the outcomes and targets can be accessed by parents and has a texting system in place that allows timely communication with parents via their mobiles. Noadswood focuses on developing resources that are flexible and can be accessed anywhere online. The school's Moodle VLE is used extensively for posting resources and homework tasks. The school also uses 'Films for Learning' across subjects and students are encouraged to use film as a medium in which homework can be submitted, with many parents getting involved in creating videos with their children.

Subject-based peer mentoring has been recently introduced in science and history. Mentors and mentees are linked by a VLE-based forum so that students can access support with homework outside school. Some of the mentors are ex-students and all mentors have been trained in basic learning pedagogy. The school is also considering further developments using e-portfolios, wikis, and weblogs to encourage parents to access their children's learning.

Links:
School website: www.noadswood.co.uk
Moodle: moodle.org
Films for Learning: www.filmsforlearning.org
Paul Hamlyn Foundation:
www.phf.org.uk/landing.asp?id=368
Learning Futures: www.learningfutures.org
Innovation Unit – learning futures:
www.innovation-unit.co.uk/images/stories/files/
pdf/learningfutures_booklet.pdf

3.3 PROBLEM-SOLVING

Catching and acting on problems quickly
Teachers, children and parents generally appreciate the role that a good home-school relationship can play in resolving problems that children may be experiencing at school. Children may experience problems with their behaviour in school, their progress and achievement, or their social and emotional adjustment. Identifying when a problem arises and taking steps to tackle it quickly is crucial in making sure it does not become entrenched. Parents and teachers can sometimes be reticent to contact one another about a problem, unsure of the response they will receive. In some cases, by the time a parent comes to school with a problem, they and their child are angry and upset. A more trusting relationship can break down this reticence and result in problems being addressed more swiftly.

Capturing, tracking and sharing data on children's progress on a frequent basis is one way in which problems can be identified at an early stage by teachers, parents or children themselves. Where children are falling behind, or repeatedly missing homework, waiting until parents' evening may mean a lost opportunity to address the problem, and that problem becoming more serious and more difficult to resolve. The online reporting expectations include plans to make data on progress and behaviour available to parents, but it is important to consider how parents, children and teachers can act on the information they receive. For parents, the next step is usually talking to children to understand the issue, followed by talking to teachers to see what can be done to address it. Tracking information through online reporting has been used to support face to face 'structured conversations' focused on listening to and learning from parents and children in a project that aims to improve the outcomes for children with special educational needs and disabilities[71]. Making data transparent therefore needs to be seen as the start of a conversation between parents, children and teachers, not an end point in itself. Schools can therefore consider how they can present data in ways that facilitate such productive conversations.

A good relationship between parents and teachers also means that consistent expectations of children's behaviour can be shared between home and school, meaning that they are less likely to 'play off' teachers and parents against one another. Developing these expectations needs to be done in consultation with parents and children, so that the school and home work to a set of shared values. As well as asking parents to support the school's policies, the school is in a stronger position when it also understands and reinforces the expectations that children live up to at home. Communication about behaviour needs to happen as close to the event as possible in order to have an effect and to reflect a consistent message across the school; digital technologies can support this swift communication and help co-ordinate messages across the school (see also 'See the Bigger Picture').

> "If you're in trouble then if your parents know they can talk to you and help you suss it out." (Year 10 student)

Addressing problems with school
Inevitably, there are times when children or parents have a problem with something happening in school, or a complaint about how the school has approached or dealt with an issue. When these complaints are serious, there needs to be a straightforward policy for how they are dealt with, and in most schools this is in place. However, parents also want to be able to provide feedback to the school in a 'low-key' way, providing suggestions for improvement or letting the school know when things have not gone quite right. Bringing such feedback into the school provides another perspective for the school to use in its development, and can also stem the circulation and escalation of complaints that can undermine the school if not addressed. Digital technologies can provide easy mechanisms for such feedback, as well as making public responses where appropriate.

Involving children in finding a solution
Children are very clear that they want to be involved in the problem solving process, as they are the key players and solutions developed without their input have a more limited chance of being successful. Children often feel they do not have legitimate authority to raise problems at school on their own, and usually turn to parents in the first place for support.

71. The 'structured conversation' approach could easily be applied to any children experiencing problems within school. For more information on the 'Achievement for All' programme and structured conversations, see
nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/node/253403?uc=force_uj

When parents are unable to engage with the school to help their child resolve a problem, this can undermine the parent-child relationship, as well as the child's and the parent's engagement with school. As children get older, there may be more opportunities to facilitate them to take a greater role in the resolution of their own problems.

Problems at home
There are also occasionally problems children experience outside school that affect their behaviour and progress within school. Sometimes these might be very sensitive issues of death, divorce or poor health. Children want to be able to choose which teachers are told about such issues, choosing those whom they trust and already have a relationship with. Communication via an anonymous central administration system is not appropriate in these circumstances, and children and parents want to be sure that such private information is not shared with other students or staff who do not need to know about it. While children sometimes resist such information being shared with school, particularly where it concerns bullying, they recognise that it may be necessary, and at least want to be included and informed about what is being said and to whom, so avoiding a perception that teachers and parents are 'talking behind their back'. The relative distance provided by digital communication can suit some children and parents when informing the school about such home issues, but for many the more personal forms of face-to-face or telephone conversations are more appropriate.

Digital technologies can also provide a relatively easy way to keep track of any ongoing special needs or health problems over a child's school career, and can be particularly useful when a child moves school or has a new teacher such as a supply teacher, who can quickly check the needs of children in a particular class.

Questions
_ What data can be tracked and monitored to allow early identification of problems?
_ Do parents and children know what steps to take to work with the school when they identify a problem?
_ How can parents and children provide low-key feedback to the school in a way that can be dealt with constructively, not defensively?
_ Can children be included by default in the sharing of information about them and in processes to address problems?

"Where does a child go when it's got a problem? To the parents or their friends. But on my incident, my child's coming to me, what are we supposed to do about it? I've rang 'em [the school], twice, and I've been up here three times, so what am I supposed to do about it? So I feel personally that I'm letting my daughter down." (Parent)

Choosing the right technology for the message

Schools are increasingly using digital channels to communicate with parents and children, and many parents welcome being contacted by email and text instead of looking for letters in children's bags or trying to get through to reception. Consultation with parents to discover how they prefer to be contacted is a necessary starting point, for example, not all parents work in an environment where checking emails and taking calls on their mobile phone is appropriate.

Different technologies are appropriate for different types of communication. As described above, it can be useful to think about 'thick' and 'thin' forms of communication. 'Thick' communication – in-depth and nuanced communication such as face-to-face discussion – is necessary when there is a sensitive or difficult problem that needs to be resolved. Text messages and emails are 'thinner' forms of communication, but are ideal for more lightweight information such as sending reminders and notifications, and parents appreciate being able to read and respond to messages when they have time, rather than during the school day. However, when there is asynchronous communication like this, it can be difficult to know that a message has reached the correct recipient, and some form of acknowledgement of receipt is important to ensure that communication is trusted.

_ Alerts for new messages / urgent content to phone or email
_ Record of sent messages essential
_ Acknowledgement that message has been received by correct person – not just a 'black hole'
_ Profile pictures popular – and linking to webcam
_ Photos more important for children – photos of themselves

3.4 CHILDREN'S VOICE AND DEVELOPING AUTONOMY

Children's independence
During their time at secondary school, children are learning how to 'be in the world' as independent adults on their own terms. As children get older, parents' role in supporting their learning changes. Parents start to step back from helping directly with homework as children are able to take more responsibility for themselves, and as parents feel less qualified to offer help with school subjects. Both parents and children are looking towards a time when parents will not be able to support children at every turn. However, parents do still play an important role in children's learning as they get older, in encouraging and motivating them, and helping them to make decisions about educational choices such as taking GCSE options, and post 16 and post 18 choices. Negotiation between parents and children fluctuates during this time, for example, some research suggests that children aged 14-16 want greater freedom from parents in their education than they experience, but at age 16-18 tend to want more involvement from parents at a time when parents are generally backing off[72].

> "Once she gets to a certain stage I'll be like, 'well I've no idea what you're talking about'" (Parent)

> "You're not going to be there for their exams" (Parent)

Children may be independent and autonomous in some aspects of their learning, but need more support in others. Children may be intellectually capable of completing homework independently, but parents provide great support in fostering skills of resilience and time management that ensure that children complete the work in a reasonable time.

Children themselves are often very active in involving their parents in their learning, and can be supported by the school to guide their parents in how to best support them. One school involves pupils in setting their own targets and priorities for the term ahead, and then children themselves share this information with parents via the schools' learning platform (virtual learning environment)[73].

There are likely to be some tensions between school and home as parents and teachers negotiate with children about the extent to which they are responsible themselves for their own education. Some parents may try to encourage children to take responsibility for their own school work by letting them reap the consequences at school if they do not fulfil the requirements, while schools may interpret this as a lack of responsibility on behalf of parents. While good relationships between home and school can work very well to support children's learning, there is a danger that excessive management of children's learning by parents and teachers leaves them no room for negotiation, and no opportunities to develop their own independence and responsibility.

Digital technologies can provide opportunities for greater co-ordination between parents and teachers by sharing information about children's education and providing opportunities for closer communication. However, it is important that these opportunities do not close down the space for children to exercise responsibility for themselves, make their own decisions and have their voice heard in matters of their own education. Children themselves therefore need to be visible, and to have some level of control for themselves within digital systems to support home-school relationships.

Children's voice
Children are very clear about wanting to be listened to by parents and teachers in matters concerning their education. Children are particularly resentful when they feel teachers and parents are talking behind their back. When children participate in such discussions, they are more likely to have some ownership of and commitment to any action taken as a result.

72. Interview with Anne Page, Policy Manager, Family and Parenting Institute.
73. Interview with Brenda Bigland, Head Teacher, Lent Rise Primary School.

With the growing attention paid to questions of student voice, it is important that children's views and ideas about the home-school relationship are sought and listened to. Children don't necessarily come to such discussions with a fully formed agenda, but do have strong views about how the relationship between home and school impacts on their lives. Involving children in decisions about how to manage the home-school relationship can be combined with learner voice initiatives, but as with many such discussions, their involvement needs to be carefully and creatively scaffolded to allow them to engage with the issues and develop and express their ideas[74].

Children often have difficulty communicating with their parents about their learning, feeling frustrated when they cannot make their parents listen to or understand them. Using technologies to let parents know what is happening at school, thereby giving parents the opportunity to ask specific questions about the children's school days, can help support conversations between parents and children[75].

Children need to "know that you're on their side, take an interest, breaking down the thing that 'why do you care, you get paid for it'. It's having the time to not just brush them aside. And then when there is a problem, your concern does not appear 'fake' to them". (Teacher)

Children also need to know that they are listened to and understood by teachers at school. They need to know that teachers care about what happens to them, and have an interest in them beyond simply doing their job. When a teacher who a child doesn't already have a good relationship with tries to talk to them, it can be perceived as intrusive and as 'fake', whereas existing trusting relationships between teachers and children can allow children to speak to teachers when they are experiencing problems at school.

"Don't just leave them [children] to do it by themselves, talk to them. Cos if they need help then they will actually tell you that they need help, ... then they're not going to get upset during the lesson cos the teacher just yelled at them." (Year 8 student)

Questions
_ How can children be supported to express the varying levels of support and independence they want from parents and teachers over different aspects of their education at different times?
_ In what ways can children of different ages be supported to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning, including being given the chance to do things differently and take risks?
_ How can space for children's voices to be heard be included in digital spaces for home-school communication?
_ How can children be scaffolded to develop their own ideas about how home-school relationships can support their learning?

74. For more about learner voice, see Rudd, T, Colligan, F and Naik, R (2006). Learner voice: a handbook from Futurelab. Bristol: Futurelab. www.futurelab.org.uk/resources/publications-reports-articles/handbooks/Handbook132
75. For ways in which technologies can support parents' listening to children see Byron, T (2009). The "Oh, Nothing Much" Report: The value of after-school conversation. Coventry: Becta.
nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/Global/The%20Oh%20Nothing%20Much%20report%20-%2023.03.09.pdf

Case Study 3: All Saints Roman Catholic School, York

All Saints Roman Catholic School, in York, is a comprehensive school for 11-18 year-olds with specialisms in languages and performing arts. Just over a year ago modern foreign languages (MFL) teacher Suzi Bewell introduced the All Saints languages blog to her classroom and in that short period of time it has revolutionised Suzi's teaching practice and is responsible, in part, for her new position as one of the SSAT's lead practitioners for languages.

The decision to introduce technology was based on trying to capitalise on what the students seemed to be spending their time doing anyway; Suzi thought it would be more appealing to them than the traditional text books that have been used in MFL for decades.

"I listened to the kids and they seem to be online all the time and talking about MSN or Facebook. There was also a lot on the radio about podcasts and blogs, so I thought if they were hearing that in their everyday life, I would try to use it in the classroom."

Originally the blog was used for presenting content in a multimedia format for class work, then as a platform to share brilliant examples of students' work, but now it has a much bigger impact and creates a link between learning at school and home. The blog also includes video footage from activities that take place in lesson time, so parents have a window on what is going on in the classroom. This is a very rare opportunity for parents who have reported finding it helpful to see what their children are doing in school.

The impetus for using a blog rather than the school VLE was to extend the audience for students' work beyond the school.

"When a student has realised that there is potentially a worldwide audience for their work, there is a certain pride. But also it raises the game and they know next time they submit work they need to make a real effort."

One of the challenges was in initially setting up the blog, but once it was up and running Suzi has found it has taken on a life of its own and over time the work has lessened as pupils contribute their own content.

As well as the blog, a wide range of web-based technologies are used to link students' school learning to home. Homework is set and often completed online and students themselves suggest links to online content and activities such as French YouTube videos. This approach sees parents doing homework with their children and students communicating with one another and commenting on each other's work. Students have also been asked to respond in French to a question on Twitter or share what learning a language means to them on 'Wallwisher', a virtual notice board to which a group can add notes, photos and videos. The students produce their song and pronunciation podcasts published in a section of the blog called 'Rosbif Radio'. Many students also have their own 'voki' – a speaking online avatar that they use to communicate on the site. Suzi believes that the use of the blog and Web 2.0 technology has increased her pupils' motivation – especially the boys - with more homework completed, and much more engagement and active involvement in learning.

Links:
All Saints languages blog:
www.allsaintslanguagesblog.typepad.co.uk
School website: www.allsaints.york.sch.uk
Wallwisher: www.wallwisher.com
Twitter: www.twitter.com
Voki: www.voki.com

Case Study 4: Partners in Learning, Lewisham

The Partners in Learning project was a pilot as part of the Black Pupils' Achievement Programme (BPAP) in Lewisham. It explored how the use of mobile PCs could encourage and support a relationship between the 'learning triangle' of the teacher, learner, and the learner's family that would improve communication between home and school, motivate learners and lead to higher achievement in GCSE grades.

Twenty-two families and six teachers participated in the project. Each family and each teacher were given a Samsung Q1 Ultra-Mobile PC (UMPC) – a very small and light laptop with wireless internet access. This was used to support students' and family learning, particularly in mathematics and science. The devices came equipped with RedHalo software which provides each student with their own personal learning space to store their work - handwritten notes from a lesson, typed homework, photographs, videos or audio recordings. The software automatically generated a web page of the student's work, which was then accessible by the teacher.

Although the project's main aim was to raise GSCE results for Year 11 students, in many cases it also had a positive impact for other family members. There was evidence of students teaching parents, of younger siblings using the UMPC, and of families using it together for other means, not just for school set tasks. For one mother and daughter it was the impetus to do some research about recycling together, and to start composting at home.

A parents' page was set up for the project which allowed them to communicate directly with the school. Support for the project was provided in the form of face-to face workshops for everyone involved to learn how to use the devices, and to share best practice and study skills.

The students in the trial used the UMPC for a number of activities including revision, homework, coursework, as well as a number of social activities. However, the most significant benefits for students were being part of a positive and supportive community and the flexibility that the mobile device gave them to carry out their homework whenever and wherever they chose to do so. Parents benefited from information on how to support their children, sharing experiences with other parents, and better communication with their children's school and teacher.

Links:
Information about the project from Handheld Learning conference: www.handheldlearning.co.uk/content/view/47/60/
Black Pupils' Achievement Programme: www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/ethnicminorities/raising_achievement/Af_Cab_Ach_Aug04/?section=1
Red Halo software: uk.ts.fujitsu.com/rl/servicesupport/techsupport/pda/LOOX-EDA/Docs/redhalo_flyer.pdf

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3.5 BOUNDARIES AND PRIVACY

Connecting different identities

The child at home is not the same as the child at school. The differences in 'identity' and values between the home and school can sometimes be a source of tension. Teachers who know something about children's home lives can avoid unnecessary friction if they make mistakes about parents, etc. When children know something about teachers' lives outside school this can make them see more 'human' and again break down barriers in communication.

Parents may not always realise their children can be quite different at school to how they are at home; children who at home are talkative and lively may be quiet and reserved in school. When parents see video of their children's classroom, they are often most interested in the way that their child acts in this different environment, gaining a new understanding of different aspects of their children's personality. When teachers have seen photos of children's lives and experiences outside school, it has in some cases helped them understand the diverse range of experiences that a class of children bring with them to the classroom. In these and other ways, digital technologies can be used to share aspects of children's home and school lives with teachers and parents so they both have a more rounded and complete understanding of the child[76].

"I'm a completely different person at home"
(Year 8 student)

Maintaining boundaries and school-home balance

Children are also keen to protect the differences between home and school, and keep some separation between the different spheres of their life. Certainly if any personal information about their home lives is to be shared with teachers at school, children want to be the one to do it, to manage which staff and children see it, and to at least know what has been said.

"When I get home, that's my time"
(Year 10 student)

Digital privacy and data security

If digital technologies are used to connect children's lives at home and at school, children need to have some control over who can see which photos, documents, data about them, choosing privacy options at a granular level. While children will not always have the last say about which information is shared between parents and teachers, they need to at least be included in any communications between home and school about them.

Keeping data private and secure is a requirement of schools sharing information about children outside school[77]. It is also important to consider how the use of digital technologies in home-school relationships is integrated with child protection policies. Questions of moderation, child protection, and procedures for dealing with potential disclosures of abuse via digital channels need to be considered.

Children are also often protective of their home as a space of relaxation, of freedom from the demands and pressures of school, and are as concerned with achieving a good 'work-life' balance as many working adults are. For many children, time at home is 'their' time. Children can therefore resent what can be perceived as the intrusion of school into their time at home. For example, when parents continually emphasise the need for revision, children feel they are never able to be free from the pressure of exams.

As many people who own email-enabled phones know, it is all too easy for digital technologies to blur the boundaries between work and home life. In the drive to use digital technologies to support parents' engagement with children's learning, there is the possibility that children's home lives become increasingly defined by school expectations. So, when digital technologies are used to enable children and their parents to log on to school resources and continue school learning at home, it is worth considering how to support children and parents to achieve a good balance between the demands of school and the need for relaxation and leisure time within the home.

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76. The video and photo sharing activities here were used within the Home-School Knowledge Exchange project, see Hughes, M and Greenhough, P (2006). Boxes, bags and videotape: enhancing home-school communication through knowledge exchange activities. Educational Review - Special Issue, 58,4: 471-487

77. There is a series of good practice guides describing how to keep sensitive and personal data on learners, staff and other individuals secure, available from Becta at **schools.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=lv&catcode=ss_lv_mis_im03&rid=14734**

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Accessibility and usability

How easy will parents, teachers and children find it to use any software the school adopts to support home-school relationships? Parents and children may have special needs including visual impairment or deafness, low literacy levels or keyboard skills, or have English as a second or other language that need to be catered for in the design and functionality of any software. As a minimum, school websites and software packages need to be designed with accessibility in mind[79]. Usability is also important; neither parents or teachers are likely to spend a long time learning to use complicated software or websites, and difficult navigation can be a real barrier to use. Rather than require users to undergo a steep learning curve, software that is more intuitive, and follows the same conventions as popular and familiar applications, is likely to see more use.

Questions

_ Where could greater sharing of information between home and school be used to develop a more complete and rounded understanding of children's learning?
_ What would a healthy school-life balance look like and how can children and parents be supported to maintain it?
_ How can personal information be kept confidential and secure in digital systems?

78. There is a series of good practice guides describing how to keep sensitive and personal data on learners, staff and other individuals secure, available from Becta at **schools.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=lv&catcode=ss_lv_mis_im03&rid=14734**
79. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0, developed by the World Wide Web consortium to provide guidance on designing accessible websites can be found here: **www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20**

3.6 POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Catch them being good

Teachers, parents and children felt that opportunities for positive feedback were often overlooked, and hoped that digital communication strategies would facilitate more of this.

Much communication from school to home tends to focus on negative aspects: communication is prompted when there is a concern around children's behaviour or progress. The data that is collected and shared around progress, achievement, behaviour has a tendency to highlight problems. A pressure on time also means that communication about problems tends to be prioritised as more urgent than positive feedback. However, using digital technologies might offer easier opportunities to send home positive messages about children's school life.

Sending positive feedback to both children and their parents can be more effective in supporting children's development than a constant stream of negative information. When parents only ever hear negative information about their child, and a child only ever hears negative feedback about themselves, it can come to seem impossible that they can do anything to change the situation, and lead to feelings of powerlessness and disengagement from education. Positive feedback however can show children and their parents that it is possible for them to be successful at school, and give them something to build on in order to develop further. Reinforcing praise at school with praise from parents at home can build a virtuous circle that builds children's self-esteem, showing their efforts are recognised and valued by both teachers and parents, and helps them envisage positive future scenarios[80].

Digital technologies could support the exchange of positive feedback in a number of ways. Showing examples of children's good work, whether that be written documents, photos and artworks, music and video recordings, allows others to see exactly what the praise is for, and allows teachers to model how to give praise for children's efforts and positive learning behaviour as well as achievement.

"[Positive feedback] is just really nice, cos [my son seems] very confident but he's got really low self esteem. So when he gets things like that you know it's really like 'that's brill, well done'. And you know it might just build him up a little bit, it just gives him a bit of, you know, puff doesn't it?" (Parent)

Parents are often pleasantly surprised by the quality of the work children complete in school. Giving positive feedback is often overlooked as it is time consuming and not always a high priority. Digital technologies could provide reminders to look for opportunities to provide positive feedback and can make the process of sending feedback quicker and easier. Parents can receive feedback during the day by text or email, so that they know by the time children come home from school. Positive feedback could also be automatically recorded on a child's profile, so they can look back at their achievements over time.

Positive feedback from outside the classroom

Positive feedback should take account of the small efforts that may not usually be remarked upon and non-academic achievements, as well as their achievements within class. Children's membership of the school council, their participation and achievements in school clubs, their contributions to the life of the school can all be matters for positive feedback to both child and parents.

Positive feedback can also travel from the home to the school. While children are often embarrassed by public praise, and may not want to share some aspects of out-of-school life, having their out-of-school achievements acknowledged within school allows for children to see that school cares about their learning, development and success in a broader context, not just in terms of their exam results, and can allow teachers and children to make connections between their skills and achievements outside school and those needed to succeed within school.

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80. Chesterton College in Cambridge communicates with parents via text message, applying a policy that for every negative message sent, they will send at least three positive messages.

Children themselves may also play a significant role in sharing positive achievements between home and school, showing and sharing the achievements they themselves feel proud of with parents and teachers. While children are reluctant to be seen as 'boasting' and may not want to show themselves as 'swots' in front of peers, they may be able to share details of positive experiences with parents and teachers in a low-key manner.

The hard currency of praise
In order to have an effect, praise needs to have some value and currency in the eyes of those who receive it. An automated message to an entire class is unlikely to have the same value as a personally written message to a single child. Making praise personal, referring very specifically to why positive feedback is being given, and is couched in personal terms, for example "I would like to praise you for your efforts in…" increases its value. Technologies can make it easier and faster to give positive feedback through automating some aspects, but losing the personal and specific aspects would be likely to undermine the effect of giving praise at all, so a balance needs to be struck.

Questions
_ Can positive behaviour and achievement be tracked and monitored to ensure that it does not go unrecognised, and as a prompt to look for positives outside the groups of usual suspects?
_ Can digital communication systems be used to quickly and easily send messages home about children's achievements?
_ In what ways can children and parents share positive achievements from their lives outside school?
_ How can positive feedback retain currency value?

Learning platforms

Learning platforms (LPs) come in a wide variety of forms. They are sometimes referred to as learning gateways, VLEs (Virtual learning Environments) and MLEs (Managed learning Environments).

Learning platforms offer a combination of services available over a network such as a school intranet or the internet. Staff, children and parents log in with a password to access a range of different services and resources. These are individual to each school, but typically include pupil information, online learning resources, pupils' work files and communications tools.

Learning platforms can allow pupils to:
_ access learning material outside the classroom

_ submit homework and assignments for marking and assessment

_ store work and notes in their own personal learning space

_ take part in live discussions with other pupils and teachers.

Children can also use learning platforms to upload and share work they are proud of with parents and teachers, taking some ownership of their own digital space on the learning platform.

For parents, learning platforms can provide communication tools and opportunities to feed into consultations, give them access to information about the school and their child's progress at school, making it possible for parents to 'log on' to see the latest news about the school or their child, which can be filtered for relevance to that particular parent.

Case Study 5: Monkseaton High School, Newcastle

Serving urban communities in the area around Newcastle, Monkseaton is a medium-sized school with approximately 800 students aged 13 to 19. It was the first Trust school, and its Innovation Trust aims to improve education through the application of new technologies and scientific discoveries to learning. Microsoft is a key partner in the Trust.

The school focuses on personalising learning for students and involving parents. Digital tools are used to collect and analyse data about students, support personalised learning strategies in and out-of-school, create environments for collaboration between students, and to involve parents in their children's learning.

Three years ago, the school developed a web portal based on SharePoint to engage parents in their child's education. Parents are able to access all of the relevant information the school has on their child, including attendance, test scores, self assessments, timetables, teacher comments, health data, and performance targets. They can also find student and staff calendars, announcements, web links, and parent consultation surveys and can email messages to teachers. To protect student privacy, the school gives out account settings and passwords to parents in person. To support parents in making use of this service, the school offers training in how to navigate the portal.

According to Simon Thompson, Assistant Head, the portal has been received positively by parents and has increased parental involvement and satisfaction at Monkseaton. Parents, teachers, and students are working together to support student progress, and enhance achievement:

"Each week, parents can read messages from up to six or seven different subject teachers, telling them how their child excelled on a homework assignment or participated in a lesson or presentation."

"They can see the lesson resources their child is working on, the presentations, the assignments. Those are the things that parents really want to know—and not just once at the end of year."

Monkseaton is now introducing the use of OneNote for use in the home following its successful use within lessons. OneNote is a software package that allows users to save multiple data formats such as video, images, written notes, files and web links in one place and collaborate with multiple other users. The idea is that parents will be able to contribute to and collaborate with their children's school and homework through the use of shared OneNote notebooks.

Links:
School website: www.monkseaton.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx
Microsoft Case Study films: www.microsoft.com/uk/education/schools/engaging-with-parents.aspx
Innovation Trust: www.monkseaton.org.uk/innovation_trust/Pages/InnovationTrust.aspx
SharePoint: office.microsoft.com/en-gb/sharepointserver/default.aspx
OneNote: office.microsoft.com/en-gb/onenote/FX100487701033.aspx

Case Study 6: Nottingham High School

Nottingham High School is an independent boys' school for ages 7-18. In the modern foreign languages (MFL) department, the use of internet tools and applications to support learning is prolific. The activity is spearheaded by José Picardo, head of languages at the school, who fervently believes in:

"making education compatible with the needs and expectations of students through the effective use of technology".

José uses Edmodo as a closed social network in his classes to set work, provide access to resources, present work, discuss and communicate – both amongst students themselves and between students and teachers.

"It acts like a mini VLE, but it's not as verbose as a VLE - it's a lot less school like and students nag other teachers to use it."

The significant use of interactive technology in the MFL department started as "a reaction to kids' use of Web 2.0 tools" which, according to José, was especially motivating to pupils in an all boys' school. Alongside Edmodo, a range of Web 2.0 applications are used such as Xtranormal (creating 3D movies from text), Glogster (create and share multimedia posters), and Go Animate (animated cartoon maker) to support teaching and learning in both the classroom and at home.

The school also recently created a blog (using simple blogging site 'posterous') to accompany a trip to Germany. Students made a video each day and uploaded it for parents to view and comment on.

José sees many advantages to using Web 2.0 tools. They can be more accessible as they are free to use and available on the web (not all students had access to PowerPoint or Microsoft Office at home for instance). Tasks can be started at school and finished at home or vice versa. A further advantage is that students can collaborate or contribute to the same piece of work, comment on each other's contributions and have conversations around their work and there is then a record of these conversations to refer back to.

The use of web applications such as GoAnimate and Xtranormal in school was quite a challenge to begin with, as the school's internet safety software automatically deemed them 'unsafe' and blocked access to them. José also found that children needed to be educated about not giving too much information away online.

Links:
Nottingham High School's website:
www.nottinghamhigh.co.uk
MFL website at Nottingham High:
www.nottinghamhighmfl.co.uk
Jose Picardo's blog: www.boxoftricks.net
Field trip diary on Posterous:
fieldtripdiary.posterous.com
Edmodo social network -
www.boxoftricks.net/?p=432
Posterous: posterous.com
Xtranormal: www.xtranormal.com
Glogster: edu.glogster.com
Go Animate: goanimate.com

3.7 LEARNING FROM THE HOME

Seeing the bigger picture

Children learn in different ways in many different contexts, both in and outside the school setting, drawing on a wide range of the resources they find available to them. Outside school, children may be engaged on their own projects and hobbies, producing artwork, digital media and writing, pursuing their own interests through reading, internet research and TV, participating in extra-curricular activities such as music, sport and drama, learning life skills such as cooking and managing their money, as well as less tangible learning including developing social skills, making moral choices, and developing self-resilience. As a pervasive part of our culture, digital technologies are often heavily implicated in the learning that children engage in outside school, using technologies to create and access media and communicate with others. Because it is quite different to the ways in which children learn at school, it is often easy for children themselves, as well as teachers and parents, to overlook the learning involved in many of children's out-of-school experiences. However, helping children recognise the knowledge, skills and understanding that they gain outside school can mean they have a greater range of resources and strategies on which to draw when encountering new learning experiences both in and outside school.

> "[My son] tends to do more arty things … he'll like go onto a thing where he can make models … he makes films and everything." (Parent)

Understanding how and what children learn outside school can also help the school develop a bigger picture of how particular children learn and what their strengths and skills are outside the academic context. Teachers' understanding of how particular children learn, their strengths and what motivates them can be enhanced by including the out-of-school as well as the in-school context, and they can use this understanding to consider how this wider understanding of children's lives can be capitalised upon within the school and to support more personalised learning.

Tapping into familiar digital practices

Tapping into the technologies that children and their families enjoy and feel confident using is likely to see greater returns that introducing new technologies for which they will have a steeper learning curve. Text messaging and email may be some of the most familiar technologies, but it also worth considering if people are already familiar with using social network sites, blogging and micro-blogging sites like Twitter and whether these could form part of a home-school relationships strategy. Integrating with websites and services that parents and children already use is likely to more quickly get them using these technologies to engage with the school. A technology and skills audit of parents and children can reveal the skills that it is possible to draw upon, and to identify any training needs people might have in order to make full use of the technologies being used.

Bringing together learning from home and school

As discussed above, bringing aspects of children's out-of-school and in-school experiences (their 'funds of knowledge') together to form a 'third space' that includes elements of both, can help bridge the gap between home and school, and give rise to new knowledge and ways of knowing that draws on aspects from many areas of children's lives. This is not just importing children's home learning experiences into the school, but finding ways to bring them into 'conversation' with each other, selecting aspects that can inform, challenge and reshape children's home and school knowledges. Children's use of digital technologies and familiarity with digital media forms are one significant area in which their out-of-school learning experiences may be productively brought into conversation with their school learning experiences. Children's families and the local community are also a source of experience and expertise that can be brought into the school, making further connections between children's lives outside school and their learning in the classroom.

"I'm writing a book … I've started to read a lot and I'm getting ideas from the books that I read like Harry Potter and stuff like that. Most of my friends [know I'm writing it but I do not think teachers could help] becuse they haven't written books." (Year 8 student)

Parental engagement with out-of-school learning

Parents can be involved in children's out-of-school learning in a wide range of ways, from talking to children about their lives, to introducing them to new experiences, providing encouragement and motivation, to practical support such as providing equipment, transport, and practise time. Parents and children both value the learning and activities that children do outside school for its own sake, as complementing what children learn in school, and as potentially useful for children's education and careers beyond school.

At home, parents "cheered you on and stuff" to encourage out of school learning. (Year 10 student)

Parents' involvement in children's learning at home is bound up with the emotional relationship between parent and child. Children care deeply about what their parents think of them, and one of parents' most appreciated roles is in encouraging and motivating children. Efforts to support parents' engagement in children's learning at home have tended to be more successful when they have focused on reinforcing and developing positive aspects of what parents already do with their children, and giving them access to new strategies and ideas they can adapt for themselves, rather than directly 'teaching' parents how to help their children learn[81]. Understanding how parents support children's out-of-school learning could help schools build on these aspects of the parent-child relationship in their efforts to promote parental engagement in children's school learning.

Questions
_ What knowledge, skills and understanding are children learning outside school? In what ways do they learn, what are their strengths and motivations outside school?
_ Can children and parents be supported to recognise and value the learning they do outside school?
_ In what ways could aspects of children's knowledge and skills from their out-of-school learning be brought into the curriculum?
_ What do parents do to support their children's out-of-school learning? Are there ways that the school can support parents to develop these existing practices to support school-related learning?

81. Interview with Laurie Day, Ecotec Research, about the 'Learning at home, Learning at school' study. For the full report of this study see Day, L, Williams, J, and Fox, J (2009). Supporting parents with their children's 'at home' learning and development (Research Report DCSF-RR138). DCSF.

3.8 TAKING LEARNING HOME

A bigger picture of the curriculum

Children's learning at school is intended to equip them with the skills, knowledge and understanding that will give them opportunities for personal fulfilment, participation in society and access to rewarding employment and education opportunities. However, the content of the school curriculum can seem distant and unconnected to children's lives and learning experiences outside school; or their future aspirations and gaining qualifications can come to be seen as simply a procedural activity to access the next stage of education or employment without any inherent value or relevance to what they have learnt. If the content of the curriculum is intended to enable children to be active citizens, participate in society, be creative, critical and reflective in their working and personal lives, then consideration needs to be given to how to approach the curriculum in creative ways that addresses the real challenges, aspirations and cultures that children experience outside school[82].

Continuing learning in the home context

Just as children do not leave their out-of-school lives behind when they enter school, they do not entirely leave their school learning experiences behind when they go home. Indeed, children are expected to spend some of their time at home continuing and consolidating their school learning through homework, and there is an increasing expectation that parents will engage with children's learning at home.

> "I've got my place in her life and making sure that she does her homework, [...] making sure that she's got the necessary books and pens and paper. Where the learning's concerned I'm not qualified to understand it in the first place." (Parent)

E-safety

With children increasingly using computers and the internet at home to support their learning, and schools using digital technologies to communicate with parents, schools have a role to play in ensuring that children and parents remain safe online, even outside school. Parents' concerns about their children's safety online may mean they spend more time and effort policing children's use of technology than getting involved with their learning[83]. Many schools offer workshops for parents, often as part of parents' evenings, introducing parents to the kinds of technologies that young people often use, their benefits and the potential safety implications. While parents may be intimidated by their children's seemingly competent grasp of technologies, children often do not have the experience to consider the ethical and safety implications of their own and others' behaviour. Parents and children will also need to be supported to consider the safety implications of the technologies used in the home – such as games consoles with internet access, mobile phones, camcorders – that are more rarely used in schools[84].

Many parents are unsure exactly what is expected of them or how best they can help. Schools therefore need to consider what they can do to support parents to take on this role. Many parents feel unqualified to take on the role of 'teacher', and appreciate the opportunity to learn about the content being studied and how it is taught. However, the most successful strategies for developing parents' engagement with children's learning develop and reinforce the positive things that parents already do, rather than requiring them to take on completely new roles. While parents may not be in a position to take on the role of teacher, they can support learning by showing children how they can work things out for themselves, talking to children about their learning and modelling pro-learning values and attitudes.

82. For an approach to curriculum that takes children's concerns and experiences as a driver of children's enquiry-led learning, see Futurelab's Enquiring Minds project, including CPD materials and resources for classroom use at **www.enquiringminds.org.uk**

83. Hollingworth, S, Allen, K, Kuyok, AK, Mansaray, A and Page, A (2009). An exploration of parents' engagement with their children's learning involving technologies and the impact of this in their family learning experiences. Becta. Available from: partners.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=rh&catcode=_re_mr_02&rid=17152

84. Think You Know (**www.thinkuknow.co.uk**) and Know IT All (**www.childnet-int.org/kia**) both provide a wealth of information for schools, parents and children about e-safety and the risks and benefits of young people's online participation.

Parents' role in supporting children's learning is bound up with the intimate relationship between parents and children, and it is this that makes parents' encouragement and interest in children's learning such a powerful factor. Children care deeply about what their parents think of them, and rely on parents to provide emotional support to persevere when things are difficult, so parents' encouragement, expectations and interest in their learning is important in supporting children's belief in themselves as confident and successful learners.

School websites

School websites serve a number of purposes and audiences, including communicating to parents of current pupils, parents of prospective pupils and the wider community. For returning visitors, such as parents of current pupils, information needs to be both reliable and frequently updated, or they will stop using the site. Integration with existing updating services used by parents and children could be considered, for example linking to social network sites such as Facebook, micro-blogging sites like Twitter, and the use of RSS to feed updates from the school website to other sites.

Prompting conversations about learning at home

Parents and children talking about school and learning is one of the main ways that parents communicate their interest in and expectations of children's learning. However, parents and children often find it difficult to talk to one another about school. Children want parents to know about what they are going through at school, but often feel that parents don't understand and nag them, while parents often complain that children tell them very little. Giving parents access to more information about the school day online helps them to ask more specific questions, rather than simply 'how was school today', which often helps to facilitate more productive conversations. Schools can consider how to use a range of digital channels to provide information to parents that goes beyond simply 'reporting' but prompts a conversation between children and parents about their learning.

"Mum tries to talk my language but she never can." (Year 8 student)

If parents knew more about what happened at school "it would probably make them understand me more ... and understand what I'm going through at school". (Year 8 student)

Providing online access to information for parents is never the end of the story; it is important to consider what action they are able to take as a result. For example, if parents have access to information about children's levels of attainment, how can they be given information to use this as a basis for a constructive conversation with children, and if necessary involving the school. When parents have ongoing access to information about children's progress and behaviour, this can change the nature of the conversation between parents and teachers, moving away from teachers giving parents news, to a more productive conversation focused on what teachers, parents and children can do to support children's learning.

"You worry about what they [parents] think about you more than anyone" (Year 10 student)

Questions
_ In what ways can the school curriculum be presented and developed to closely engage with children's concerns, their future aspirations, and issues in the local community?
_ What support could be given to parents to help them engage with children's school-related learning at home in ways that build on the relationship and existing positive activities they already do?
_ What guidance will parents and children need in order to understand, interpret and act upon information about children's behaviour, progress and school day? How can the school provide information in a form that provokes constructive conversations between parents and children and teachers?

Case Study 7: Djanogly City Academy, Nottingham

Djanogly City Academy in Nottingham caters for 1800 students aged 11-19 and was in the first wave of twelve academies to open in England. The school's specialism is information and communication technology (ICT). ICTs have been used extensively in school to support teaching and learning for many years with the school named as "a consistent beacon of excellence" in Becta's 2008 ICT Excellence awards. Increasingly the school is harnessing technology to support relationships and conversations between teachers and parents and between students and parents around students' achievements and progress in school, effectively strengthening the links between school and home.

Djanogly's e-portal is accessible to all students and all parents via the school's learning gateway. Parents can access this from home or anywhere where there is an internet connection. They can access information about their child, their timetable, attendance records etc and 'student events'. These are positive and negative behaviour events that are logged by teachers on a regular basis for example, 'John worked really well today with the student teacher and produced some brilliant work on the Statue of Liberty'. All assessment data and reports are available too. Parents no longer have to wait until the end of term to get feedback on their children's progress, behaviour, achievements – this information is available on a week by week/daily basis and they are able to email teachers directly.

The e-portal is useful for administrative tasks, but more importantly it is also used as a tool to support students' learning beyond the classroom and to provide a window for parents on what their children are doing in school. Parents can see what students are doing in class and many resources are available online. Each student has their own 'My Documents' page to store their work, so they are able to show anyone what they are currently working on. "Quite often students are really proud of something they've created at school" says Matt Buxton, Leader of curriculum and learning technologies at Djanogly, "...now they can show their Grandmother when they go to visit her at the weekend rather than having to wait until the end of the school year".

The school sees the technology as underpinning the learning-related conversations which occur both between parent and child, and parent and school. The information available both facilitates and stimulates these conversations.

Links:
School website:
www.djanogly.notts.sch.uk/default.aspx
School's ICT information:
www.djanogly.notts.sch.uk/C7/ICT/default.aspx
BBC video report: news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_
news/education/7958997.stm
Teachers TV video about the school:
www.teachers.tv/video/221

Case Study 8: Charlton School, Greenwich

Charlton School is a Group 7 Community Special School for students aged 11–19 with low incidence special educational needs. The school is committed to using new and emerging technologies to support its students' learning and is keen to explore new ideas and tools for learning. The digital video profiles project has now been running for six years and the use of video and associated technologies is now utilised across the whole school and curriculum.

A 'digital video profile' (DV) holds information about each individual student and takes the form of an interactive DVD with a combination of video, photos, text information with a menu to navigate through the content. Each student is involved in designing, deciding what information to include and creating their own DV profile. The project has provided a visual way for students to celebrate their strengths and achievements and provided a medium in which to voice their own aspirations and needs. It has helped to build confidence, self esteem and prepare the students for life changes and transition from school. The DV profiles are also a useful tool for students to reflect on their own achievements and progress. With video files accessible on demand they can relive experiences, evaluate their performance, and decide what their goals are going forward.

These DV profiles have provided an effective communication tool, giving Charlton students an active role in educating others in meeting their often complex needs – both in school and in their wider lives. Students get a lot out of putting their DV profile together, but once complete it can also be used to communicate, educate and inform others about themselves. For parents with English as a second language it is an accessible way of sharing information about their child. The profiles have proven a very effective way of mapping a student's progress and then sharing this with significant others in their lives, effectively bringing students, parents and professionals together.

Links:
School website:
www.charltonschool.com
Information on DV profiles:
www.charltonschool.com/resources/
Profiles.htm

4. CONCLUSION

This handbook has set out a policy, research and theoretical context to support educators to think about the importance of the home-school relationship for children's learning. A number of strategic considerations that schools are likely to face as they develop strategies to support home-school relationships using digital technologies have been set out to provide practical support for school staff.

It is hoped this handbook will remain a useful reference point as schools develop strategies to support the home-school relationship. A useful starting point may be for school staff to discuss as a group how each consideration plays out in their particular school context and within their local communities. Case studies provide real-world examples of how schools are already using technologies to support the home-school relationship. School staff could identify which aspects of the practice identified within these case studies they would like to adapt within their own context.

The following overarching key points and questions could be used as challenges to guide discussion amongst school staff, parents and children, with reference to the considerations and other resources within this handbook.

_ The business of supporting children's learning cannot stop at the school's walls. Schools are just one, very significant, resource that children draw on to support their learning. **How can schools enable children to connect and draw from all the resources for learning they have at their disposal?**

_ Children have an active role in mediating the relationship between home and school and involving their parents in their learning. Children therefore need to be considered as at the heart of any strategies to support home-school relationships and parents' engagement in children's learning. **How can children's voices be listened to and how can they be supported to take responsibility within the home-school relationship?**

_ Children need to be able to make meaningful connections between their learning at school and their lived experiences in their home cultures. This is not about just making learning directly 'relevant' but about equipping children with the knowledge and understanding to live and effect agency in their local and global communities. **How can schools support children to create spaces that draw on knowledge and practices from home as well as from school?**

_ Transplanting school practices of teaching and learning into the home environment is unlikely to fit easily with parents' skills and the cultures of home, while valuing and developing home practices may be more successful. **How can schools find out about the ways in which children learn at home and in their families, and build this knowledge into learning activities to undertake in the home?**

_ To work together, teachers, parents and children need to have some shared expectations of their own, and each others', roles and responsibilities. Teachers, parents and children are not homogenous groups and each will have different priorities. **How can schools engage with parents and children in a more explicit process of negotiation and consultation to develop clear, shared expectations of one another?**

_ The home-school relationship is core to children's learning and needs to be embedded within the whole school strategy. **How can an understanding of the nature and importance of the school–home relationship inform the work of the school, including how the curriculum is taught, pastoral care, extra-curricular development and behaviour strategies?**

5. TOOLS AND RESOURCES

This section provides links to digital tools,
guidance materials and useful organisations
that can support schools using digital
technologies in parental engagement and
home-school relationships strategies.

There are few available resources that address home-school relationships in the wider sense that we have discussed here; the following tools and resources focus on parental engagement in children's learning and communication with parents.

For information about the Home Access grants available to families on low income to buy computer and internet packages, see
www.homeaccess.org.uk

Think You Know and Know IT All both provide a wealth of information for schools, parents and children about e-safety and the risks and benefits of young people's online participation
www.thinkuknow.co.uk
www.childnet-int.org/kia

Becta have produced two online reporting toolkits to support schools to meet the expectations for online reporting and use ICT to support parental engagement in children's learning.The secondary toolkit is available from:
publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=38170.
The primary toolkit is available from:
publications.becta.org.uk/display.cfm?resID=39669

The EPRA Secondaries toolkit provides an online self evaluation framework to enable schools to improve their engagement with parents.
www.ssatrust.org.uk/achievement/eca/Pages/Engagingparentsinraisingachievement.aspx

For more examples of schools using technologies to support parents' engagement in children's learning see case studies from the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust ICT Register at:
www.ict-register.net/pe-schools.php
and from Microsoft at:
innovativeschoolsonline.com/casestudies/default.aspx

Becta's Harnessing Technology channel on YouTube has a playlist of videos featuring schools using technologies to improve the quality of discussion between parents and their children about their education.
www.youtube.com/user/harnessingtechnology#g/c/EEBEB4ECA156BBDA

A free Google docs presentation created by teachers about encouraging families to visit school blogs
docs.google.com/present/edit?id=0Ad-ljWyserhSYWg5c2pwaGd2bnQ5XzI1Y2Jtd2QzZzI&hl=en

Learning and Teaching Scotland has a wealth of resources about parental engagement, including a toolkit for schools.
www.ltscotland.org.uk/parentsaspartnersinlearning/index.asp

The BBC provides online learning activities for parents and children to do together, and support for parents to engage with children's education.
www.bbc.co.uk/schools/parents

The Learning at home, Learning at school project ran over two years from 2007-09, to identify how schools can support parents with their children's "at home" learning and development. Project reports and information about the approaches trialled can be found on their website.
www.learning-hs.org.uk/default.asp

Becta's 'Parents as partners' website provides further case studies of schools using technologies to communicate with parents and resources for schools to structure their journey towards parental involvement.
nextgenerationlearning.org.uk/At-School/Parents-as-partners

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About Futurelab

Futurelab is an independent not-for-profit organisation that is dedicated to transforming teaching and learning, making it more relevant and engaging to 21st century learners through the use of innovative practice and technology. We have a long track record of researching and demonstrating innovative uses of technology and aim to support systemic change in education – and we are uniquely placed to bring together those with an interest in improving education from the policy, industry, research and practice communities to do this. Futurelab cannot do this work on its own. We rely on funding and partners from across the education community – policy, practice, local government, research and industry - to realise the full potential of our ideas, and so continue to create systemic change in education to benefit all learners.

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