

# To what extent can social media influence parental engagement in a primary school?

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## Abstract

Parental engagement is important to support children's learning and positive environment for their nurturing. Primary schools have increasingly been using social media in recent years to communicate with parents, yet there is currently limited discussion about how the use of social media can influence parental engagement in this area.

In this study there is an opportunity to bring together social media through a Facebook Group, with the context in a primary school, and for the purpose of understanding how it influences parental engagement. An intervention was run with parents of children in one class and used a parallel class as an initial comparison group. A small pre-intervention survey of parents gave feedback, which was supplemented with semi-structured interviews with parents from the target class at the beginning of the intervention and followed up eight months after the intervention concluded to reflect on their experiences. Engagement data from the Facebook Group was also captured to understand online experiences.

A lower level of parental engagement with the intervention was found than was anticipated, and during this study I have reflected significantly on possible reasons for this including technological barriers, the impact of power relationships and dynamics between stakeholders, and the impact of low engagements particularly from socioeconomically deprived parents in the sample. These lessons are drawn together to provide a revised view of how primary schools can collaboratively approach parental engagement activities by using social media, and how teachers and school leaders can use these experiences to strengthen their own approach to using social media to positively impact on parental engagement.

## Declaration of original authorship

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will cover three main areas. Firstly, I will set out my background and interest in this area, illustrating how my professional experience has led me to be interested in this area of work. Secondly, I will begin exploring the importance of this area of research including touching upon the gaps in our current understanding which will be explored further in Chapter 2. Finally in this chapter, I will outline the structure for the remainder of this thesis.

### 1.1 My background and interest in this area

I am a teacher, having worked in two primary schools in south-east England, over the last 11 years. My first school serves a community of predominantly of middle-income families. My second school is only 2.5 miles away in another suburb of the same town, yet serves a community of predominantly working class or out-of-work families. My personal reflection is that the numerous differences between the schools' interactions with parents are vast and fascinating, neither being better than the other but rather catering appropriately to the communities with which they work. Having been involved on a daily basis with parental involvement as a class teacher, I have always found the interactions to be both intriguing and challenging. As a teacher it would take some time and effort of getting to know the individual parents, as well as the children, to know how best to approach them or respond to them. Upon reflection there are many things I would do differently, and the benefit of greater insight is a key driver behind my wanting to understand this area in greater depth. My interest in the socioeconomic dimension of community engagement has also been supported by my main volunteering role with the county-wide team of a national youth charity, with my role being to lead the focus on growth including steering through specific



projects working with areas of greater deprivation. I have found it insightful and rewarding to work with a range of communities within the third sector, as well as within a statutory service for my job.

The second dimension of my interest in this area is around the use of technology. I have a personal interest in the area and have used this to become the ICT, then later Computing, lead in both of my schools. This role led me onto undertaking additional professional training and accreditation for this subject specialism, and collaborating with a colleague at another institution to establish a regional peer support network for other computing leads. As well as being keen to support colleagues with the curriculum aspect of computing, I have also been keen to support and lead a number of school-wide initiatives seeking to use technology both to enhance learning, and to underpin school improvement.

During the time I have been a teacher, the use of technology in and around schools has grown significantly. While this could be most evident through the proliferation of laptops and tablets in classrooms, arguably a greater paradigm shift has been forced by parents becoming more reliant on technology to engage on a whole range of issues. If a holiday on the other side of the world can be booked by a few taps and in a few minutes on a smart phone, it's difficult to explain why a parent should have to wait days, weeks or months to find out information about their child's education and to do so by rummaging around for a crumpled up piece of paper at the bottom of a bag, or wading through a lengthy document posted on a website: the salience of engagements is an aspect I will revisit throughout this study. While there are some correlations noted between attendance at parents' evenings and student success (Inglis, 2014; Barg, 2019), other reports attribute the relationship more causally (Social Market Foundation, 2017). This report also showed a positive correlation

between family income and attendance at parents' evenings (p. 46), though it also notes (p.49) that attendance at a parents' evening is a proxy for parental engagement, rather than being present for that event in itself contributing towards a child's progress or attainment. In my own setting, attendance at parents' evenings has been around 55% in recent years, yet all parents then also receive a one-page summary report either during the meeting or a copy sent home with their child the following week.

Like many others, my school uses a public Facebook Page and text messages to engage with parents, though it has not previously used any closed Facebook Groups for the parent community as a whole or cohorts of parents. The school's Facebook Page is 'liked' by around 500 people in a school of around 300 pupils which has gradually grown over time. The distinction between a Page (open) and a Group (closed) is an important one to make when considering how parents may view the online community, and its purpose for all stakeholders. By creating a closed Group for parents of children in the same class to interact, I will seek to understand how these engagements may affect parental engagement. Before considering literature in this area, it is important for me to recognise my own positionality in relation to the topic. More widely, 88% of adults have a Facebook account yet more recent reductions in its usage are largely amongst younger adults in their late teens and early 20s thus may not yet be seen as a manifest shift in usage amongst current parents of most school-aged children (Ofcom, 2020, pp. 12, 19).

With so much attention on the role of social media in modern society, I have seen schools adopting a range of approaches to make best use of it for parental engagement. Apart from small and limited case studies, I have not come across systemic reviews of the use of social media for parental engagement in primary schools, and this is an area of work which

remains important to explore in the future as more small-scale and in-depth studies continue to emerge. Combining my professional background of primary schools, with the important theme therein of parental engagement, alongside my passion for technological improvements, made the question “To what extent can social media influence parental engagement in a primary school?” a clear area of interest for me to pursue further.

Throughout my study, I will be drawing on a conceptual framework situated in the UK primary education sector as domain. Due to a small number of studies considering parental engagement and social media in UK primary schools, I will draw on elements here which can be learned from other realms including outside of education. Whilst the sectoral nature of this domain underpins two other concepts, it is important to acknowledge the differences of the sector from the UK early years, secondary or tertiary sectors; in the same way that differences in how different countries approach the primary education phase, whilst of course drawing examples from elsewhere to add richness to these considerations. The central concept is that of parental engagement which has a long genesis and multiple approaches, which will be considered in the next chapter. Due to the differences in approach and emphasis throughout existing work on parental engagement, I will conclude Chapter 2 by settling on a working definition of parental engagement; seeking to draw on the most relevant aspects of a number of models and approaches to being most suitable for the context in which I undertook my study. The platform for my study is social media, situated in the broader realm of technology usage for education. As with parental engagement, there are elements here which can be learned from other realms including nursing (Wysocki, 2015) and I will signal these when relevant and I believe my study is strengthened through the use of multidisciplinary literature and practice. By combining parental engagement and social media in the domain of UK primary education, I believe this

study is situated at a fascinating intersection of many aspects of different work and is well-positioned to provide a contribution to work and understanding in this area. I also believe that my primary focus on understanding parents' perspectives of this intervention presents a valuable alternative approach to most other work in the area which either explicitly or implicitly uses the school as the primary prism through which to consider parental engagement.

Through professional networks, I know that many primary schools use social media for communication, but it is less clear how robust its usage is planned and evaluated, nor how many primary schools undertake their use of social media with an explicit focus on parental engagement in its broadest sense beyond solely one-way broadcast communication from schools to parents. There is a limit to the published understanding of how primary schools engaging with parents through social media can influence a wide range of factors (e.g. attainment, progress, parents' satisfaction with schools, behaviour, volunteering, development of peer support networks, etc.). My study does not seek to address all of these areas, but I will outline in the next section the specific gap I believe my study makes a contribution towards further understanding.

## 1.2 The importance of this area

Schools and families working together is important to support children. The emphasis is seen in public policy (Department for Education, 2011; Ofsted, 2011) as well as through academic research: much of which I will draw upon as foundations in this study including Epstein (2019), Eccles and Harold (1996), Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995), and Goodall and Montgomery (2014). Each of these variously emphasise how schools and families can

work together constructively, with opportunities to transfer findings into different situations. One challenge with the transfer into the context of this study is the limit to published work focusing on using social media to foster relations between primary schools and families. As I will explore throughout this study, in spite of the limited research in the field there is much to be learnt from the corpus of existing work in this area, including student attainment, parental self-efficacy, different models of engagement, how engagement varies by some protected characteristics, and the use of technology to work with families; as well as an important gap around how primary schools and families making use of social media can affect relations. Each of these areas are explored in Chapter 2. Pursuant of a social constructivist approach, understanding the impact in specific contexts is important in order to best offer support to others in transferring lessons from this case study into other contexts.

Furthermore, garnering understandings from work done by secondary schools to engage students using social media (Grant, 2011; Lovecchio, 2013; Russell, 2017) is contributory though not synonymous with this study. I believe that the use of social media as a communication tool between primary schools and parents is important given high levels of prevalence and usage, as well as capacity for community-building; both of which are explored in my study and have the potential to enhance relationships both between the school and parents as well as amongst parents in a peer-enabled community format. As well as exploring the use of social media in the context of a primary school, I believe that my study also explores the peer-community aspect of using social media through a closed Facebook Group rather than a broadcast communication approach such as a Twitter account as employed by Biddle (2018) or a Facebook Page used by Russell (2017).

Following on from this focus on peer-community aspect of using social media, I am also mindful of the importance of understanding parents' perspectives in this study, as I recognise that other studies focus on the approach of the school trying to engage parents. Some have already challenged this power imbalance including Crozier and Davies (2007) and Kavanagh and Hickey (2013). Torre and Murphy (2016) identify five elements which should be present for parents and teacher: care/respect, trust, shared vision, authentic membership, and collective work. I believe that not only should home-school relationships embrace these, but academic research around this should also embrace these and consequently my focus is on better understanding parents' perspectives around home-school relations. The perspectives of parents is sometimes neglected in studies of home-school relations, and rarely focused on as the principal lens through which to consider approaches.

I have pursued my study in order to explore some of these areas and provide a contribution to understanding and practice where I believe some gaps exist. Principally, this is around using social media for parental engagement in primary schools, and doing so with an explicit consideration to understand parents' perspectives. As I have outlined above, there are aspects from existing work which contributes greatly and have driven me towards identifying this specific area of work in which I am interested and believe my study makes a useful contribution to our ongoing journey of understanding in this area.

### 1.3 Thesis structure

Social media is near ubiquitous and its influence is felt keenly in many aspect of lives, whether professionally or personally. As a readily-available means of communicating,

schools are using it in different ways which have themselves evolved in recent years. In my study, I am seeking to understand: **To what extent can social media influence parental engagement in a primary school?** To help structure my approach, this aim is divided into three research questions:

1. Which elements of parental engagement do parents value the most?
2. What opportunities could a closed Facebook Group offer to improve parental engagement?
3. Which challenges to parental engagement could a closed Facebook Group introduce?

My aim and questions are focused on the perspective of parents as I believe that understanding their perspective is essential to embedding engagement practices which are sustainable and successful. It would be too easy to consider engagement from the perspective of a school, and as we will see in the next chapter some existing literature risks “othering” (Rohleder, 2014) parents who are an essential stakeholder in the relationship.

As noted earlier, there is limited literature which combines concept of parental engagement with social media as an approach for primary schools and families to communicate or build relations. My approach to parental engagement is informed by a wide range of relational work including Eccles and Harold (1996); Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005); Epstein (2009); Goodall and Montgomery (2014), as well as being influenced by foundational theoretical works including Bourdieu and Bronfenbrenner. My approach to the consideration of social media in this context is based on classification and topological work including Brandtzæg (2010); Hargittai and Hsieh (2010); Bulut and Doğan (2017); Kim (2018) as well as work considering how people behave differently online and offline such as Ho et al. (2012); Huang

et al. (2014); Quirk and Campbell (2015). . Whilst there is much to be learned and transferred from other situations into this one, I believe there is a need to study this unique combination of factors which is the approach I take to my case study in this thesis.

Through pursuing the research questions above, I intend to gain a greater insight into what positive contributions we can make to professional understanding and practice in this area, as well as exploring challenges which are presented through this approach. In Chapter 2, I will begin by exploring what is known about parental engagement and factors that influence it; how parental engagement is represented through different models; how parental engagement is recognised to vary by socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, and power as the predominant topics explored in existing literature; how some have problematised the concept of parental engagement; and how using technology can engagement parents including understanding online behaviour typologies and the impact these can have on parental engagement.

Chapter 3 will outline the methodological approach taken in this study, including the paradigm rationale and approach; an exploration of my role as an insider researcher in the context of the school involved in the study; an overview of the data collection methods and participants. I will then turn to outline how data analysis will happen, and an overview of trustworthiness, authenticity, and my role as researcher alongside other ethical considerations. By pursuing a social constructivist approach, I recognise the importance of understanding how people perceive their own experiences. This study seeks to view parental engagement from the perspective of the parents. Beginning with a pre-intervention survey of parents, and interviews with parents eight months later for a longitudinal follow-up, this study will seem to supplement parents' views with other sources



of data to assist understanding (see Chapter 3). Throughout this study, I will note where I believe literature takes an outsider perspective of parental engagement insofar as being framed by an educator or school as 'us' and parents as 'them'; and this distinction is something I seek to dismantle during this study.

The study has used a small-scale online survey tool alongside an invited selection of parents to take part in semi-structured interviews. The intervention itself involved the creation of a closed Facebook Group for parents of children in a target class, and the use of this for a period of five weeks in order to monitor its usage and the impact of it. These are considered partially through the engagement data in the Facebook Group, but also by considering the written comments themselves. Eight months after the intervention concluded, I approached the same parents to take part in a second interview to reflect on their experiences with the benefit of longer hindsight and used this opportunity to revisit the opportunities and challenges presented by the use of social media.

Having explored existing literature in this area (Chapter 2), it will be evident that additional focus is needed which combine three factors of firstly social media, secondly for parental engagement, and thirdly in primary schools. I will explore each of these aspects individually, where schools have used social media; and how parental engagement is approached; and the significance of combining these in the context of a primary school is important to the context of this study in Chapters 4 and 5. During the period I have been working on this study, a small number of new studies have been published which assist in understanding of these areas including Russell (2017). The relatively recent emergence of these, and often as fellow doctoral theses, point to the desire from colleagues to explore these matters further and I hope that my contribution through this study will add to the experiences in this area.

We will analyse the data in Chapter 4 and will do so thematically, pulling all sources of data together to answer central questions: which elements of engagement do parents value the most; what opportunities could a closed Facebook Group offer to improve parental engagement; and which challenges to parental engagement could a closed Facebook Group introduce. Having introduced and analysed the data in Chapter 4, in Chapter 5 I will discuss what the data suggest. This chapter will be organised thematically to reflect the outcomes of study. Chapter 6 will close with conclusions about new contributions to knowledge, a discussion about staff workload, key recommendations for teachers and school leaders, and identify areas for future research.



## Chapter 2 Literature Review

My study pursues a social constructivist approach, believing that all actors play a role in shaping the world around them (Garfinkel, 1967; Becker, 1970). Working with an ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979) recognised impacts on children “reach beyond the microsystem of the classroom to invoke new interconnections among home, school, and neighbourhood” (p. 54). The importance of recognising the interactions between these different areas of a child’s experience has been built upon by many in this area which I will explore throughout this chapter, including Epstein (1997) and Olsen and Fuller (2012) recognised as drawing upon the ideas of “overlapping spheres of influence” (p. 134). Threaded throughout the works cited in this chapter is the underpinning importance firstly of recognising the socially constructed view of the world, and secondly of the importance of many of those around children working together for the child’s best interests, specifically framed as parental engagement in this context.

Within this chapter I will consider student achievement, aspirations, motivation and parental beliefs about self-efficacy. I will then move to considering a range of different models and approaches which are commonly used to consider parental engagement, and will offer a new visualisation of parental engagement. I will explore two types: those considering parental engagement through a prism of activities; and the second where parental engagement is considered as a process. These different approaches will help to meld together the importance of the topic with these views on interactions between stakeholders, which then lead into considering variations in parental engagement. Much published work considers these as ‘challenges’, yet here I prefer to explore these as variations in order that the variations are viewed more neutrally and without seeking to

attribute blame. The areas most commonly-cited and most relevant are socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender. I will focus on the protected characteristics of socioeconomic status and ethnicity for two reasons: firstly their dominance in the literature makes it important to explore in more depth, and secondly as both are pertinent to the community in which my intervention took place as having a high level of deprivation and a rich ethnic mix. Emerging from these, I will position that power dynamics and relationships has to play in parental engagement. This will lead into the fourth section of this chapter which will be to explore some authors who have problematised the concept of parental engagement; partly by drawing on the critical analysis we will see around socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender and power.

I will seek to draw together a number of aspects identified throughout literature which schools identify as challenges, as well as seeking to acknowledge how both variations can be embraced and positive contributions made by all. The final area considered in this chapter is parental engagement using technology, with an initial focus on how technology usage between schools and families have evolved up to and including social media. Secondly this section will then explore specifically how some schools use social media for parental engagement and what can be learnt from these works. Finally I will explore a number of different typologies for social media personas, and will reflect critically on these and how they could contribute value to this study. I will conclude the chapter by drawing together each of these threads in order to establish how this study has been informed by the existing body of work, in addition to aspects which have emerged as lacking sufficient attention thus far.

## 2.1 Understanding parental engagement and factors that influence it

Over time there has been a shift in the terminology of schools working with parents. It has been referred to variously for example as parental involvement, parental engagement, and school, family and community partnerships. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) outlined how discussion in this area has evolved from discussing parental involvement to discussing parental engagement. They posit that engagement

“[...] would seem to encompass more than just activity – there is some feeling of ownership of that activity which is greater than is present with simple involvement. This means that parental engagement will involve a greater commitment, a greater ownership of action, than will parental involvement with schools” (p. 400).

In seeking to establish a continuum, they also helpfully recognise that it is “not a straight pathway, nor is it meant to be seen as such. Rather, it is an attempt to describe a messy web of interactions” (p. 400). It is important to recognise this myriad of factors at the outset, and use a number of key considerations to structure my review of the existing literature. For the most part throughout this review, I will not draw distinctions between the terms used unless it is pertinent to do so. There are many aspects to parental engagement which do not form part of my study; I am focused on the communication “type” of parental engagement (Epstein, 2019) rather than seeking to cover all (parenting, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, collaborating with the community). This focused remit will allow my study to concentrate on one specific type of parental engagement in more depth as a case study rather than touching lightly on all of them.

It is also worth noting that most literature uses the term *parents* which can be interchanged with *parents and carers* depending on the context. Here, *parents* is a shorthand for *adults*

*who care for a child at home*, and as such the shorthand suitably serves this review. Some studies refer to *teachers and administrators*, particularly those situated in the US. The term *administrators* is not directly equivalent in the UK context, with a fairer comparison being to *school leaders*. While teachers may focus on their individual class of children and school leaders may focus on a wider population, the terms *teachers* and *school leaders* are often condensed into solely the former for ease of discussion, unless there is a specific need to separate them out as different stakeholders. In some cases, the term *school* is used synonymously with *teacher*, though I believe this is an amalgamation too far: it is conceivable that parents experience different engagement with an individual teacher than they do with the school as a whole; and this is an area I will revisit later. Along with a range of terms used, an even wider range of definitions for parental engagement is encountered. To move beyond this chapter with a shared understanding about the approach, I will settle on a working definition of parental engagement within this chapter to support work throughout this study.

Motivation is explored as a required characteristic of parental engagement, by which I mean a factor which needs to be considered in order for parental engagement to be successful (Grolnick et al., 1991; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Green et al., 2007; Cheung & Pomerantz, 2012). Largely these studies consider motivation of parents (addressed later in this chapter), however it is also valuable to consider the motivation of teachers also being present as a prerequisite for successful parental engagement. It is important to consider factors which may need to be present before beginning parental engagement projects in order for them to affect planning or adjust outcomes accordingly. In some cases, the absence of such prerequisites may in themselves be a barrier to parental engagement programmes starting or succeeding. Some of the factors considered here as prerequisites

will not already be known to schools thus will necessitate a discussion with parents before embarking on more substantive activities, so may in itself have demonstrable value. I will explore further factors considered as prerequisites in a number of models when considering parental engagement models later in this chapter.

In investigating how parental experiences of school contribute to experiences of later parental engagement, Veitch (2017) identified four themes: intergenerational influences both positively and negatively from their parents; diversity and school traits insofar as a lack of diversity was recognised as being a weakness both for those from minority social groups and for those not; transitions between key phases of schooling and the impact that this has on the child's identity and experiences; and social involvement including "lower-income mothers reported more negative memories related to the social side of school, or having experienced social barriers to their involvement. Upon reflection, the mothers expressed the desire to create a better social environment for their own children" (p. 48). Veitch recognises more similarities than differences between higher- and lower-socioeconomic status parents within these themes, but notes the "the degree to which each theme made an impact on the two samples was one of the major differences" (p. 49).

In a notable work pulling together many existing studies in the area, Desforges (2003) recognises the important role of a parent's belief in their own ability to effect change upon their child's upbringing, in this context their learning and development, and uses the term *self-efficacy*. He recognises parental self-efficacy as a prerequisite to parental engagement, however there are also arguably prerequisites built further into the process such as a parent being informed and modelling expected behaviour for the child. It is possible to argue that these are not necessarily prerequisites because they are only required once a particular



stage of parental engagement has been reached or is attempted, but equally it could be argued that these are factors which could be evident barriers before embarking on parental engagement activities. Kavanagh and Hickey (2013) note that many parents in their study in Ireland found that if their home language was not the same as the language their child is taught in at school then their belief in their own self-efficacy is significantly reduced, a finding also echoed by Crozier and Davies (2007) in relation to Bangladeshi and Indian families in the north-east England which will be explored later in this chapter, but crucially sought to challenge the notion of 'hard to reach parents' and replace it with 'hard to reach schools'. They cite examples where parents leave the child to learn more independently, others where there is a fear that they might get it wrong, and some concerned about their child laughing at them. While all of these concerns might also be common even amongst families for whom English is not an additional language (EAL), this study has not sufficiently isolated EAL as the cause of these variations. It also does not include the celebration of cultural diversity as a contribution which EAL families would be able to contribute to the life of the wider school community.

A seminal work on parental engagement was Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) which recognised knowledge and skills, time and energy, and family culture to be context variables, as well as parenting role and efficacy for helping as personal motivators. Later in this chapter I will explore a number of seminal models which consider parental engagement, including the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model (Figure 2.2 Model of the parental-involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, p. 74)

). Shortly after, Eccles and Harold (1996) accounted for a wide variety of factors in their model (Figure 2.1 Child, teacher and parent factors influencing parent involvement in school and the implications of involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996)

), many of them in boxes A to E do not input directly to the model, whereas box G considers parental beliefs generally, and specifically to the child. Some of these are common to how other models consider prerequisites, and additionally they also consider a parent's gender-role schema, ethnic schema, knowledge of techniques, view of school's receptivity, affective relationship with their child, and achievement expectations. Despite now being some time ago, both the Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, and Eccles & Harold studies remain important influences in this area of work. Their models have influenced subsequent work, and models will be revisited within this chapter.

Epstein (2019) argues that both Bronfenbrenner's internal and external "theories of overlapping spheres of influence" recognise elements including interpersonal relationships, and patterns of influence within the three spheres of a young person's life: home, school, and community. She provides a clear assessment about the importance of parent involvement to each stakeholder: teachers want to increase student success, parents and carers want to know that schools are doing the best for their child and how to work alongside them, and students want to do well and recognise that support comes from multiple sources. This initial assessment about the motivations of key stakeholders in education is important as it considers motivations and outcomes, and there is an implied consideration of the initial positions of all stakeholders. Given the multiple spheres of influence which should be able to work collaboratively in order to support wellbeing and attainment, each stakeholder should be cognisant of the positions of others. This is built upon by Epstein in the recognition of *school, family and community partnerships* which suggests a more collegiate approach involving multiple stakeholders.

Firstly, I will consider the importance of parental engagement in supporting learners through two themes which emerge from existing literature in this order of dominance. The first of these is student achievement, usually measured through some form of standardised testing process, which I will review critically given its overriding focus on academic attainment levels yet briefly as it does not form an explicit focus of this study. The second theme I will explore will be the aspirations of students and parents; whether parental engagement can go some way towards raising life goals of young people and thus contributing towards social mobility, and the role of self-efficacy alongside motivation and aspiration.

### 2. 1. 1      How parental engagement can be effective at improving student attainment

Many sources consistently point towards parent engagement as being beneficial to student achievement specifically, and do so with a focus on quantitative measures. The focus of my study will be on the perspectives of parents and the relationships involved. Although I will not consider the impact of my study on pupil attainment, I will explore it here as a theme given its dominance in the literature. Whether considered at a policy level by Ofsted (2011), a Department for Education (2011) meta-review, or work by Education Endowment Foundation (2018), the consideration of this area is deep and routinely makes strong assertions about the correlation between student achievement and parent engagement. The dominance of academic achievement as a focus in studies discussed here, as well as models discussed later, presents a fundamental challenge to understanding the value of

schools and parents engaging not being reduced to solely an increase in an attainment score.

Studies in the UK and the USA have found that parent motivation and efficacy were contributory factors to higher student achievement (Grolnick et al., 1991; Hughes & Kwok, 2007), as well as the related benefits of the child's autonomy and motivation (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hong & Ho, 2005). It is acknowledged by Rogers et al. (2009) that higher parental engagement correlates to higher academic achievement, as well as positive attitudes towards school. A meta-review by Henderson and Berla (1994) of 66 studies identified benefits of higher academic attainment, attendance, homework completion, positive behaviour and attitudes, retention rates into postsecondary education, and fewer placements into special educational settings. Considering 25 studies in a separate meta-review, Fan and Cheng noted "The overall relationship between parental involvement and students' academic achievement is close to .30 [...] this represents a medium effect size in social sciences" (2001, p. 18). It is also worth noting that correlations are not universally observed. For example Schlee et al. (2009) found that children whose parents attended "school open house" events (similar to open days for prospective parents) scored .037 standard deviations higher in reading and .052, yet attainment was 0.037 standard deviations lower in reading and .035 lower in maths for children whose parents did attend a parent teacher conference. These two measures at first appear to draw opposite trends: the first suggesting that more motivated parents attend open events prior to their child starting school, yet then more motivated parents attending parent teacher conferences have children who attain less well. However there are likely to be a number of other factors which are not controlled for in this result, for example whether the school are more persistent about parents of lower attaining children attending an appointment.

Nevertheless they conclude “it is clear that parents can have a significant impact on the academic achievement of young children,” and go on to say that “parent resource capital was found to relate to children's academic achievement” (Schlee et al., 2009, p. 232). This is particularly prescient in the context of parental engagement, considering that Schlee et al.’s definition of *parent resource capital* include social class, mother and father’s education, frequency of library visits, frequency of home reading, owning a computer, child frequently accessing the computer, and child using the internet. These many and disparate factors are common to other studies explored throughout this chapter.

Further to discussions about student attainment within the same year as an intervention, or at the end of a multiyear phase of education, Sammons et al. (2015) found that parental involvement when aged seven was a good predictor for higher attainment at GCSEs when aged 16, with students attaining one fifth of a level higher in English, half a level higher in maths and a third of a level higher in science. While not all measures were such confident predictors of higher future attainment, the longitudinal nature of the study makes it significant in addition to its relatively recent publication and its focus on a UK context. This adds further evidence to the working belief that effective parental engagement can support children to attain higher than they would otherwise have done. Although it was undertaken some time ago, Mattingly et al. (2002) found “little support for the widespread belief that parent involvement programs are an effective means of either improving student academic achievement or changing parent, teacher, and student behaviour” (p.571). This review of 41 studies focused largely on the evaluation element of the studies and was critical for studies commonly omitting to identify a control group and thus were not able to isolate improvements as derived from the intervention rather than other factors. The studies considered in the paper are not discussed elsewhere, but it is nevertheless provides a





Walberg et al., 1987; Marzano, 2000). Elsewhere, Cummings et al. (2012, p. 11) recognise that self-efficacy can also be recognised as synonymous with a locus of control and that this is also closely connected to the value that a parent places about their child's schooling. The motivations of parents to be involved in their child's education could include "financial resources, home culture, school culture, and leadership influence" (McClain, 2015, p. 81).

It has long been argued that "parents become involved because they have a sense of personal efficacy for helping their children succeed in school" (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, p. 311). Through the work of Bandura (1986; 1989; 1989), the authors subsequently derive that both direct experiences (from their own parents) and vicarious experiences (observed from others) are beneficial to influencing a parent's involvement in their own child's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, p. 314). The extension of these observations is that if schools can offer greater opportunities for parent engagement then the amount of both direct and vicarious experiences will increase, having positive benefits for the current generation in addition to subsequent generations. The challenges of measuring engagement is an area to explore in the subsequent section.

Harris and Goodall (2007) recognise a difference between "parental involvement in schooling" and "parental engagement in learning in the home" (p. 38). In addition to delineating involvement and engagement, more fundamentally they establish firstly that learning is bigger than what happens in school, and secondly that learning can happen in the home. In their explanation they recognise that many studies struggle at *getting parents into school*, which is arguably misplaced on parents reacting to schools rather than being proactive. For a parent to feel able to be engaged with their child's learning, it is likely that a number of preconditions are required in order for them to feel comfortable and able to so.



Harris and Goodall show the views of stakeholders in their study as represented by a Venn diagram (p. 41) of staff, pupils, and parents, where the overlapping portion of all three represents learning. I would argue that the only one of the outer circles which should be considered appropriate is moral support for the pupils. For schools to see the purpose of parental engagement as to support them is to make assumptions about priority and value. For parents to see their contribution to be encapsulated in homework is similarly woeful and narrow in focus: and consequently would likely have negative impacts on parents' motivations and beliefs of self-efficacy. The report goes on to cite "parental experience of education" and "parental lack of skills" [to support their child's education] as the first and second most common barriers to engagement (pp. 52-54), which further underlines the importance of broadening this interconnected view to support parents to become engaged beyond supporting homework tasks. Placing 'learning' in the central intersection of the diagram is supportive of the Epstein approach of framing the relationships as 'partnerships.' It is also encouraging that the emphasis is on learning as a process, rather than attainment as an outcome.

Green et al. (2007) found that:

parents' "self-efficacy beliefs are a strong positive predictor of home-based involvement but a small negative predictor of school-based involvement. This may be because parents who are strongly motivated to be involved but do not feel efficacious in their involvement efforts are likely to reach out to the school for assistance" (p. 540).

This view about parental beliefs towards their self-efficacy challenges the model outlined by Harris and Goodall above, and builds on understandings about how intricate and involved this area is beneath the surface.

Parents may feel isolated in their desire to support their child's learning, and will respond differently when asked to volunteer depending on whether the activity involves only their child or others in the school. Park and Holloway (2016) explore these, in addition to a third consideration of parent peer networking, used "to obtain information about school policies and practices and to help monitor the behaviour and achievement of their children" in order to "develop shared norms and group solidarity, enabling them to organize and advocate for school improvement" (p. 2). As currently framed, they find a differential in the use of these peer networks with white or higher socioeconomic status (SES) families benefitting more from them. Disappointingly they found "that the size of parent network was a very powerful predictor of school-wide achievement" and as such "to maximize the benefits of PI, additional attention should be devoted to improving schools' ability to leverage the considerable social and cultural capital of low-income families" (pp. 12-13).

In a snapshot online survey during a global health crisis, a sample of parents in the UK faced with supporting their child to learn at home during the Covid-19 pandemic showed a significant proportion did not have the belief of self-efficacy to support their child's learning. 22% of parents were neither confident nor unconfident, and 15% were not at all confident. Taken together, more than 1 in 3 parents did not feel equipped to support their child's learning during this time (Parentkind, 2020). It could be argued that this reflects directly back onto schools who had arguably not put in place systemic support previously to enable parents to have a better understanding of their child's learning, and how they as a parent

can contribute to supporting it. As much as the speed and scale with which schools needed to adapt to remote learning was unprecedented, it may follow that those with more embedded parental engagement practises were better positioned to introduce and evolve their approaches as partnerships with families.

As already discussed, a parent's belief about their efficacy in supporting their child to achieve well has been observed to be a contributing factor towards parental engagement and subsequently higher student attainment. Although this is an important factor:

“self-efficacy beliefs are a strong positive predictor of home-based involvement but a small negative predictor of school-based involvement; this may be because parents who are strongly motivated to be involved but do not feel efficacious in their involvement efforts are likely to reach out to the school for assistance” (Green et al., 2007, p. 540).

As such the burden placed on self-efficacy beliefs should be tempered against other factors, and their effect on all types of engagement should not be overstated. Nevertheless, it is important to explore some of the roots of parental beliefs about self-efficacy, how it can manifest itself, and the benefits of it. Experiences, preconceptions, and views about power relationships can all contribute to how the parent consciously and subconsciously approaches their child's school.

To consider how self-efficacious parental behaviour could manifest itself, it is worth considering what a school may expect a parent to do to be engaged. Epstein (1997) outlines six types of involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating in the community. These represent a breadth of ways to involve parents but do not in themselves speak to how engagement can be recognised,

including for engagements which may be hidden from a usual view. Torre and Murphy (2016) recognise five elements they suggest need to be present for parents and teachers: care/respect, trust, shared vision, authentic membership, and collective work. These elements then contribute towards intermediate outcomes for teachers and parents of capacity; and norms and attitudes for teachers, and efficacy for parents. Their model suggests that these underlying elements coupled with the intermediate outcomes will contribute to engagement, and subsequently student achievement and engagement. It is notable that the Torre and Murphy model places student engagement alongside student achievement, whereas other models considered such as Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) focus solely on student achievement. In all models it is evident that with a small number of one or two outcomes, there are a plethora of underlying factors or processes which contribute to these. As shown in Figure 2.2 Model of the parental-involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, p. 74)

, parental self-efficacy is recognised as an essential contributing factor within their model alongside other foundational elements.

The impact of a parent's belief in their self-efficacy to support their child has been established as a development towards the concept of a growth mind-set:

“It appears that parents who believe in the development of intelligence, most notably through effort and perseverance, tend to emphasize the role of effort (their own and the child's) in the learning process. Research indicates that parents with a strong belief in their ability to help their child succeed are likely to have an incremental perception of intelligence, that is, they believe their involvement in the child's education will help improve his or her knowledge and performance. On the other hand, parents with a weak sense of self-efficacy tend to hold to an entity

theory of intelligence: they believe that success at school depends on ability rather than effort and that their help will consequently have little impact” (Henderson & Dweck, 1990).

This acknowledges both the importance of self-efficacy as already discussed, but also that an underlying conception about intelligence plays a contributory factor. Depending how engrained such beliefs are, schools may find their influence to affect them significantly reduced. Due to these being deep-seated roots in an individual’s psychological schema, this is not attempted to be considered or influenced within this study. Goodall (2020) recognises “effective parental engagement with learning means the attitude towards and support for learning in the home,” which underlines the importance about acknowledging the importance of family beliefs systems in the parent supporting their child’s education.

## 2.2 Exploring different models used to represent parental engagement

Having established how parental engagement can be essential to support child development through attainment, aspiration, motivation and parental self-efficacy, I will now turn to consider different models used to represent parental engagement. Such models do not exist in isolation and many develop from each other; consequently I have sought to identify commonalities between them and have collected them together as such. As already acknowledged, there is disagreement about how to define the topic of parental engagement, and the nature of language involved (Bower & Griffin, 2011). The models considered in this section are commonly cited in literature around parental engagement, thus are recognised in the field as having value to the discussion. It became evident to me when considering the range of approaches and models that they could fall into two broad categories: those focusing on activities, and those focusing on the process. Most models would not self-identify into of these as distinct groups, but for the purpose of this review I see value in separating them as such.

Firstly I will consider models which address parental engagement principally by considering activities undertaken; and secondly I will look at models which consider parental engagement as a process. Both themes contain some of the most commonly cited works in the field, as well as some more periphery works which compliment or contrast them by approaching it differently. I will seek to identify the core concepts of each, draw comparisons between them, as well as consider others' critiques of their approach. These models will then feed into my own conception of a model through which to consider parental engagement using social media in primary schools, which will draw on relevant strengths and contributions of a number of existing models in doing so.

Although not forming a substantive portion of this discussion, there are transferable elements in their findings which are valuable to capture as part of my study. When using the Salamanca framework (Unesco, 1994) to consider parental engagement of children with special educational needs, a range of different categories of parents were identified: hostile, uncooperative, perfectionist (or excessively worried), professional, dependent, overly helpful, overprotective, neglectful, parents as clients, fighting parents, and involved-uninvolved parents (van der Wolf & van Beukering, 2002). The value of considering different approaches of parents and parental perception of schools is important when considering various models of parental engagement. This assists in recognising that although they have commonalities, parents are not a homogenous group and thus necessitate being considered individually. Consequently, I have considered each model with a range of families in mind to reflect on their suitability to different situations.

Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) consider “parents’ behaviour, parents’ personal involvement (including affective experiences), and cognitive/intellectual” (p. 239). Each of these three areas was considered for both parents; alongside parental education, and additionally self-regulation, perceived competence, control understanding, grades, and teacher competence ratings (p. 245). These gave a framework of ten variables to consider, which the authors originally applied to their sample of 302 11-14 year olds, judged on questionnaires completed by pupils and teachers. The perspective of parents was not a consideration for this framework. This appears to take a more psychoanalytical approach to the question of parent involvement than Epstein’s social constructivist and ecological approach. Despite a different approach, the authors use a number of activities within their framework which are also used as examples in Epstein’s framework, for example: meeting the teacher, participating in school events, attending parent-teacher conferences. However they

additionally consider activities the parent undertakes themselves (or at least the child's perception or recollection that they do), for example: reading books or newspapers, talking about current events, taking courses, going to libraries, museums or concerts, buying books for the child, and looking up words in a dictionary (p. 242). Although some of these activities could be held up as not encompassing of current technological norms (e.g. paper books, newspapers, using a dictionary), I believe that this framework nonetheless remains another useful approach to consider parent engagement.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) explored a number of factors which influence parental involvement, which they summarised in four headings: individual parent and family factors; child factors; parent-teacher factors; and societal factors (p. 39). A number of these directly contribute to parents' beliefs about self-efficacy, and a number more could indirectly contribute to the context surrounding the relationships which could affect beliefs of self-efficacy. This model is attractive as it does not purport to represent a process, nor does it attempt to establish a hierarchy between factors: instead it presents a breadth of factors under four clear headings. Each factor could be explored in a vast amount of depth in itself, but they are shown here to illustrate a multifaceted yet flat view of the factors.

### 2. 2. 1      [Considering parental engagement through activities](#)

Throughout many years of work in this area, Epstein has developed a framework through which schools, family, and the broader community can consider their interactions. This framework categorises all activities into one of six types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2019, p. 16). This taxonomy was first established in the late 1980s, and although



the elucidation and applications have evolved, the core types remain. Epstein has published extensively in this area; both through academic books and journals, as well as publications aimed at school leaders in more accessible formats. In her most recent professional-facing publication, she considers the “sample practices, challenges, redefinitions, results for students, results for parents, and results for teachers” within each type of involvement. (pp. 20-21) Given the importance put on emphasising the three spheres of influence, it is notable that ‘results for the community’ is not considered as part of this list.

While the professional-facing handbook is constructed primarily of case study narratives, it is notably absent of specific outcomes attributable to the interventions. Given the previous edition was published a decade earlier, it would have been reasonable to expect the references particularly around communication to be more contemporaneous in their reflection of the evolution of technology including the use of social media. Save for a number of passing mentions about using technology, there are no specific discussions about the use of social media to support any of the six types of involvement. I recognise this as a limitation of the case studies used, hence the desire of this study to explore the application of social media to support parental engagement. It is evident how social media could be applied to the improvement of any of the six types of involvement. As this discussion progresses further, the gap in the work of Epstein will become more notable.

Notwithstanding Epstein’s own decision not to consider this application explicitly, others have used her framework as a basis for work on social media such as Dardenne (2010) and Zywica (2013). In the context of this review it is unfortunate that Epstein has not focused on the use of technology as a method of parental engagement other than through incidental examples, nor is there explicit consideration of social media. Even if Epstein had explained

why it is not worthy of further expansion, or by conducting studies to explore a null hypothesis, it would have strengthened the relevance of the model for having done so.

For this discussion, I will draw mainly on the 'type 2 – communicating' part of Epstein's framework, although the need to communicate with families is implicit in each of the other types of involvement to varying degrees. Insofar as creating categories can enable some analysis, the 'communicating' type is most relevant to this study. The relative imprecision of 'type 6 – collaborating with the community' makes it less easy than the other types to be able to draw upon related examples. Notwithstanding these caveats, Epstein's framework will be used throughout this discussion as a reference and comparison point – both for its own intrinsic value, but also because of the readiness of comparisons given the propensity with which it has been cited by others undertaking similar work.

Other types of parental engagement activities outlined by Epstein can be valuable to consider methods of engagement, but the model falls short of giving schools a plan within which to achieve engagement. Some have recognised that "the Epstein Model may not fully capture how parents are or want to be involved in their children's education" (Bower & Griffin, 2011, p. 84). They also go on to acknowledge that the discussion may need "redefining parent involvement from purely academic roles toward more collaborative roles with other parents, such as parent support groups, parent teams for school events, or presenters in classroom cultural enrichment activities" (p. 84). Some of this is already addressed within Epstein's involvement type of 'collaborating with the community', but these authors appear to be suggesting something broader in both outcome and method. As discussed throughout this chapter, a number of parental engagement models seek specifically to raise academic attainment and as such may end up focusing on engaging

families in isolation rather than collaboration. A collaborative approach may help to provide support to parents in themselves, as well as vicariously through their children, with potentially a larger benefit for parents who feel more isolated within their local community. I have already touched on the recognised support benefits of parents having a peer-support network available to them. Although this may not fall into the Epstein typology of ‘collaborating with the community’, it could nonetheless provide a great deal of opportunities and benefits to a range of stakeholders depending on the nature of the peer-support network.

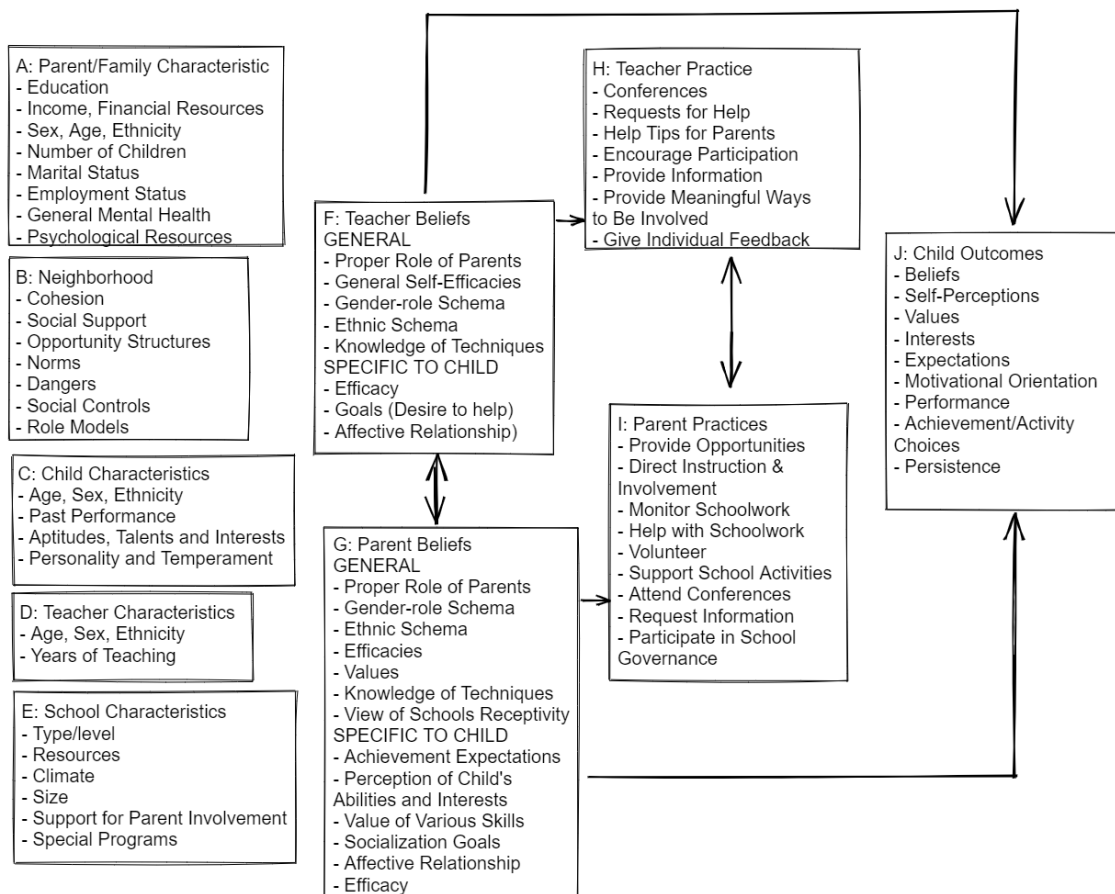


Figure 2.1 Child, teacher and parent factors influencing parent involvement in school and the implications of involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996)

A further framework through which to consider parent engagement is that provided by Eccles and Harold (1996). In this they categorise parent activities as one of: help tips, goals, requests, encourage, or feedback (p. 16). In itself this framework is not strikingly different from the Epstein model already considered, but they note a difference in approach when considering the difference in engagement by the age of the child. The authors noted (pp. 13 – 15) that the frequency of parental contact increased significantly amongst parents of children at the beginning of middle school, and they suggest that this could be because by this stage parent feel less familiar with the content of the curriculum and are attempting to increase their contact levels to those previously experienced in elementary school. In a UK context, this provides us with some areas to contemplate with regard to how families experience key transition periods in a child's schooling for example from Early Years to Key Stage 1, from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2, or from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3.

Moreover, the Eccles and Harold study notes that mothers are most frequently involved in maths and reading, and that fathers are most frequently involved in sports. Other than these variations, the gender split of involvements in different areas was not significantly different. However they note two characteristics that significantly correlate: intellectual confidence, and achievement motivation ("liking intellectual challenges and sticking with hard problems rather than giving up"). Also positively correlated was valuing mastery ("importance of learning, sticking with problems, and using time productively"), and valuing competition ("importance of winning, doing better than others, and the enjoyment of beating each other at games") (p. 21). As Figure 2.1 Child, teacher and parent factors influencing parent involvement in school and the implications of involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996)

shows, Eccles & Harold identified a number of factors which influence the process in boxes A to E. Alongside this in boxes F to J they recognise the multidirectional and interconnected

nature of parental involvement as a process. These culminate in box J: Child Outcomes, and unlike some other processes the intended outcomes are broader than academic success. These outcomes are varied and more diverse than other models considered: beliefs, self-perceptions, values, interests, expectations, motivational orientation, performance, achievement/activity choices, or persistence. Although the model does not show explicit arrows emanating from the outcomes box, it could be taken as implied that the process can be iterated whereby the process would restart and follow the same approach.

Many further models of parental engagement exist which also delineate engagement by activities, including Cervone and O'Leary (1982) who conceived four types: reporting progress, special events, parent education, and parent teaching. Williams and Chavkin (1989) drew six types of engagement: an audience, a home tutor, a program supporter, a co-learner, an advocate, and a decision-maker. There were five modes identified by Greenwood and Hickman (1991): acting as the audience, volunteering, teaching their own children, learning, and decision-making. These are just a small number of other models which have considered parental engagement through the activities undertaken by parents. These and a number of other models (Hester, 1989; Hill & Taylor, 2004) identify in different ways the role of a parent as a learner, either directly or alongside their child. This is both pertinent for the concept of lifelong learning, and of particular relevance to my study the onward implication for the role of the school and teachers in this relationship if there is also an expectation that parents learn through their relationship with their child's school. A number of interconnected implications are revealed by the recognition that schools have a role to help parents learn, including for power dynamics and relationships which will be explored further in Chapter 4. I will also explore in more detail in Chapter 5 the implications

of parental engagement activities on teacher workload, as well as the prominence or otherwise of parental engagement in initial and ongoing teacher education.

### 2. 2. 2      Considering parental engagement as a process

Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's model of the parent involvement process considers parent engagement as containing five levels: beginning with personal motivation, invitations, and life context; before moving through mechanisms and forms of involvement (broadly what Epstein would recognise as *types of involvement*) at level two; then moving onto characteristics mediated by children's perceptions of parental engagement; which contribute to level four of child attributes conducive to attainment; and the final level being the outcome of student achievement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Green et al., 2007).

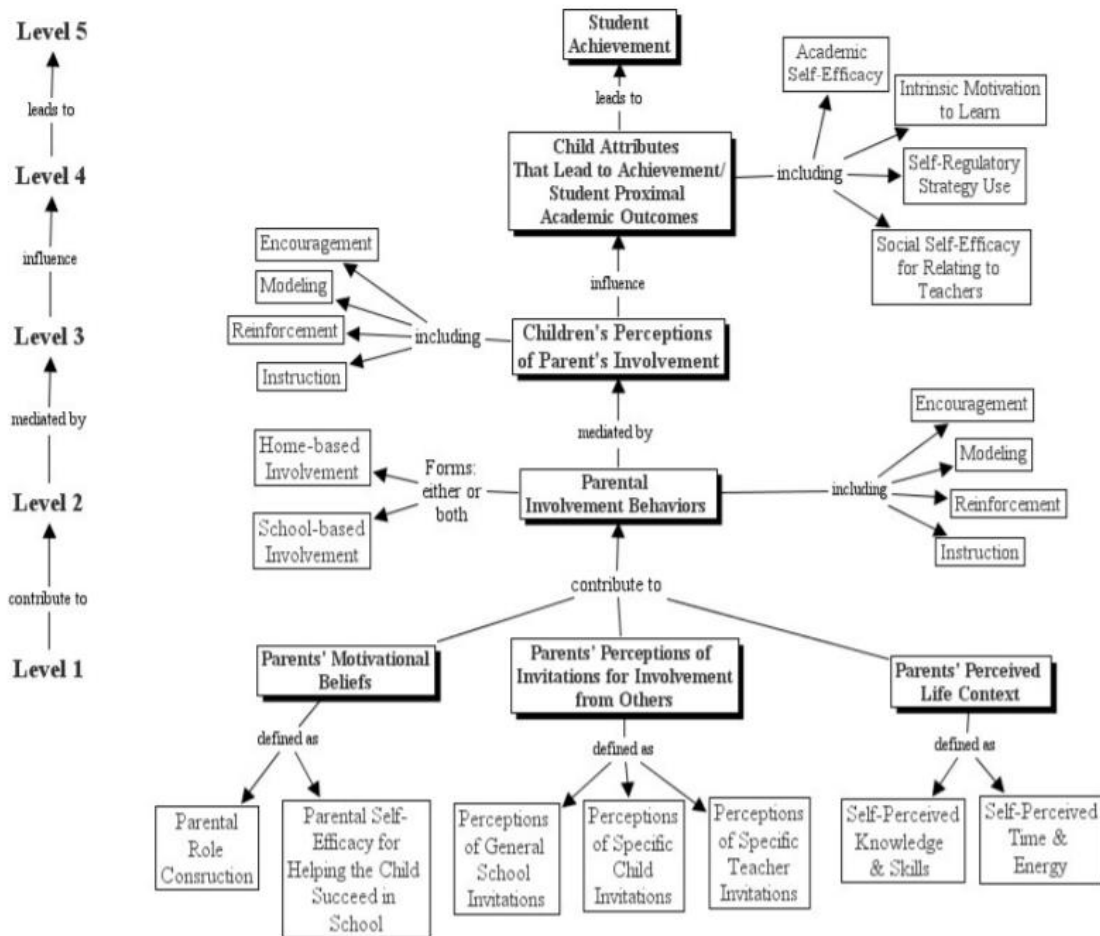


Figure 2.2 Model of the parental-involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, p. 74)

The approach of describing parental engagement as a process determines that later levels are conditional on the impact of previous levels. I consider that the approach of considering some conditions being necessary before further steps can be taken is pragmatically sound, and it is valuable to consider that the first level considers parental motivation and life contexts in some depth, whilst also considering the multiplicity of invitation possibilities made to them. A concern about the visualisation is that arrows are only drawn in a unidirectional manner (Figure 2.2 Model of the parental-involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, p. 74)

). Whilst carrying the illusion of simplicity, my concern is that it does not invite people to consider that parental engagement could be cyclical, interconnected, and indeed messy. It is conceivable that approaching parental engagement could need a number of iterations before being able to move beyond a particular level, and that this should not be considered either a failure or a barrier; arguably the depth of the engagement could be more meaningful for having spent greater time or efforts on earlier levels.

I would also argue that the model could be simplified by coupling together a number of the levels which would naturally cohabit the same space. This is particularly notable with level 2 (parental involvement behaviours) and level 3 (children's perceptions of parent's involvement). Separating these two connected parts of the activity arguably creates an artificial distinction whereby one could exist exclusive of another: to which I would argue that if parental involvement behaviours were undertaken with even partial enthusiasm and purpose then level 3 will coexist. In a similar vein level 4 (child attributes that lead to achievement) is artificially separated from level 5 (student achievement). Although it is possible to construct an argument whereby all of the features of level 4 are present yet do not lead to level 5, I do not find this convincing: rather I would argue that had all of levels 1 to 4 been present then level 5 would be present. Although the model uses the term "achievement" to describe level 5, the authors make a more full description which acknowledges that this was recognised solely through standardised test scores (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, pp. 33-36); and thus should be termed "student attainment."

Arguably a fairer representation of such interconnected variables, influences and outcomes was made by Desforges (2003). This proposes a non-linear approach to considering parental involvement whereby the results of some stages may iterate through the same or another



route before progressing. Due to the nature of the descriptive language involved there are not bidirectional shown, but I believe that this goes some way towards representing a process of parental engagement closer to the terms of systems diagrams in order to more fully understand the interdependent relationships. It is also takes a broader view of the outcomes from parental engagement: rather than framing it as attainments in standardised testing, it considers “adjustment” alongside achievement which allows broader considerations.

The Desforges (2003, p. 50) model builds upon the model illustrated by Sacker et al. (2002, p. 866) which specifically considers the multiplicity of connections between various factors. Although I have recognised the strength of Desforge’s systematic representation of the non-linear and often imperfect or messy processes and relationships involved in parental engagement, I consider that the Sacker model here to be overly connected so as to lose clarity of purpose. By showing how almost every factor is connected, it lacks a coherent message. Furthermore it begs questions between unconnected factors, such as whether ‘school composition’ can be considered directly connected to ‘parental involvement’ by means other than intermediary factors.

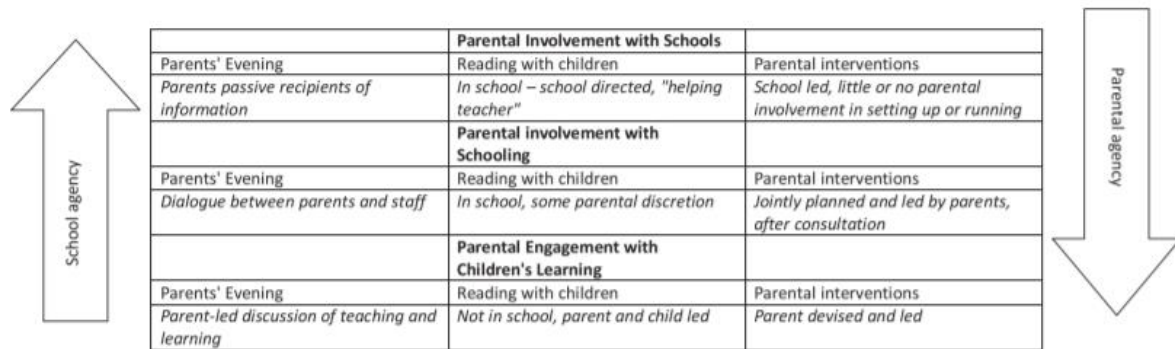


Figure 2.3 Continuum from parental involvement to parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014 p. 403)

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) built upon approaches by Epstein and others to consider how schools can view a transition from parent involvement to parent engagement. Framing this as a continuum (Figure 2.3 Continuum from parental involvement to parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014 p. 403)

), they recognise a number of different approaches to the same activity which demonstrate a shift of agency between school and parent through three levels: parental involvement, parental involvement with schooling, and parental engagement with children’s learning. In considering two examples of activities, they illustrate how reading with children can move from “in school – school directed, helping teacher” whereby school has maximum agency and the parent has minimal agency; through to “non in school, parent and child led” whereby school has minimal agency and the parent has maximum agency. While this continuum retains the focus on the activity, it helpfully gives a number of stages through which the activity can be seen, and does so through the lens of agency. As already discussed, the aspirations; and motivation and self-efficacy are established as being important factors contributing towards parental engagement. Goodall and Montgomery

define agency in this context as “a process of social engagement informed by the past and oriented toward the future and the present and encompassing the possibility of choice and action” (p. 401). In the context of parental engagement, this suggests that agency requires interactions (rather than one-way broadcast communications), and that there are elements which are optional or variable. For a school, this is an important distinction to recognise that parental engagement cognisant that agency needs to recognise that parents should be able to make different choices about their engagement. It is possible to imagine that these choices are from a suite of positive actions or options, rather than it being a choice not to engage or support as this would fall short of the earlier part of the definition which necessitates a social interaction. They are also keen to establish that “this is a continuum, not a journey: it is not expected that schools will start at the beginning and move to the end, nor yet that parents will follow the same path” (p. 407).

## 2.3 How parental engagement can vary

Having considered a range of work, a number of variations have repeatedly been presented – both through the seminal framework discussions, and through the individual studies, here I will collect together recurrent themes, and where possible identify where others have attempted to ameliorate these in their work elsewhere. The three most commonly-cited themes through the literature are social class, ethnicity and gender. I will explore these in turn, focusing on socioeconomic status primarily as the most relevant to the context of my study, giving brief acknowledgement to ethnicity due to its prevalence in the literature, and revisiting gender given how it emerges later in my study in chapters 4 and 5. In recognising these variations as challenges, I would argue that many published works consider schools to be both the principle source of truth in regard to parental engagement, and as the principle sources of contribution to such studies. Taken together, these create a critical lens through which to view the language of ‘challenge’ commonly used when discussing variations between families. I will then conclude this section by exploring the underlying issue of power relationships and dynamics within parental engagement, which will draw together many lessons from these three key areas as well as offering a further critical lens through which to self-reflect.

Goodall (2021) builds on the works by Gillies (2005), Vincent (2017), and others as well as drawing fundamentally on the analyses of Gorski (2008) around the ‘culture of poverty’ and the way in which systemic failings are absolved in favour of blaming individuals or families for their own outcomes. Coupled with the idea of creating a divide by the middle-class system ‘othering’ by creating a “culturally negative and subordinate” group (Hughes and Mac Naughton, 2000, p. 1243, cited in Goodall, 2001), in this case deprived families. Goodall

advances five interconnected areas of concern, challenging accepted norms and offering alternatives: the culture of poverty; whether the 'private sphere' holds meaning; what 'good parenting' means; gender; and what parental engagement can do in amongst systematic inequalities. I will draw out the most relevant points from each of these in the context of my study, before drawing together this section on problematising parental engagement. The term 'culture of poverty' was coined by Lewis (1966), yet as Varenne and Scroggins (2015) note Lewis' biographer drew out six oft-cited flaws in his approach: sampling was not income-based but focused on those he believed displayed certain traits; lack of clarity around a 'cultural trait'; lack of standard measures; the absence of longitudinal studies to support some assertions; reliance on observed causal connections; and samples skewed by exceptional cases (p. 593). Bourgois (2015) reflects these concerns by contending that "poverty research throughout history has been more successful at reflecting the biases of an investigator's society than at analyzing the experience of poverty" (p. 719). Given the ongoing critique of the term and approaches surrounding the 'culture of poverty', it remains valid for considering in my study but with it viewed through a critical lens.

The first focus on the culture of poverty draws on assumptions around a "cycle of deprivation" (Gillies, 2005) and thus the importance of re-educating parents in order not to perpetuate the experience from earlier generations. The problem with this cyclical view is that it places the emphasis, and often blame, with the family rather than properly accounting for the systematic problems which have resulted in people being failed and underserved for successive generations. The risk of this deficit discourse is that by viewing 'others' as less than it does not begin relationships between families and schools on a respectful and open footing, but instead absolves those in societal roles of responsibility because the focus is on the family. Goodall argues that although it might be morally

convenient to believe that we operate in a meritocratic society, we cannot ignore the large role played by cultural capital which supports middle-class families far more than working class families are able to access. By extension, it is not hard to find examples of working-class families with all of the right approaches and attitudes who are unable to achieve their desires, contrasted with middle-class families without the same approaches and attitudes yet who have access to cultural capital which allows them better outcomes.

The second of Goodall's foci is around whether the notion of a private sphere holds meaning, given impetuses from altruistic, economic, or political forces seeking to engage with or influence families. Altruistic interventions may seek to improve life chances, and be justified by improving the life chances of future generations. Economic interventions may seek to save money in the long term and thus be the state making a social investment. A political intervention may be seeing families and communities becoming increasingly essential for creating suitably active citizens. Taking each of these three together, we could be led to consider *who* is good for the state. By reframing the maxim, we re-evaluate who the beneficiaries are: perhaps not the individual or families, but the state; perhaps as a collection of people and communities, but perhaps seen more narrowly as public expenditure costs. Goodall questions whether these three impetuses have in fact been derailing good parental engagement by holding the focus as the state rather than honestly focusing on the family or the child.

The third area of critical focus for Goodall is the concept of 'good parenting' and the associated judgements which come with this including the presumption that 'good parenting' can overcome all manner of other societal inequities which draws on Goodall's first area of concern about the deficit dialogue around the culture of poverty, as well as

similar concerns explored earlier by Gillies (2005) and Vincent (2017) about the 'responsibilisation' of parents and parenting in the face of all else. When held up positively, this could be seen as aspirational and praiseworthy that 'good parenting' can help children to flourish; though the inverse logic would also arrive, that judged 'failures' in young people's prospects must therefore be a result of 'bad parenting' rather than systematic issues. The likelihood of cultural capital featuring highly in 'good parenting' is high: a system which makes the good/bad judgement will be designed and populated by middle-class people and values, exercising 'othering' approaches visited above, and thus will broadly reproduce the status quo with a small number of exceptions which can be highlighted as token examples of 'overcoming adversity'. Goodall addresses the issue of gender explicitly as her penultimate focus, which is a topic also problematised by Gillies (2005) and Vincent (2017) as outlined above. The heightened focus on mothers responsible not only for the bulk of childrearing but now also to continue their own employment or career trajectories places mothers in an increasingly impossible position. Goodall highlights that a number of those within positions of influence are men whether in roles as policy makers, academics in this area, authors of public reports into associated areas, or commentators including in the popular media. The predominance of male figures in roles commenting on an area largely affecting women is a further example of her earlier criticism about the drive towards maintaining the status quo through cultural capital and broadly unchallenged norms and conventions. Whilst there is clearly much to be said for male dominance in society at large, I have drawn on the work of a number of prominent women in my work which can go some way to recognising the importance of their voices in this area and I welcome the opportunity to show that gender is not an overlooked topic; and it is drawn on throughout this study.

The final and concluding area of exploration for Goodall is what parent engagement do in the face of these many systemic inequalities. Firstly is the importance of contextualising parental support work; by making it attuned to the cultures and values of the parents is essential to its success. Secondly, Goodall warns about the risk of placing too much emphasis on parenting alone to overcome all ills when many generations may be working against the parents trying to do the best for their child. Taken together, Goodall argues that these observations allow us to critically reflect on parental engagement which I hope to do throughout my study, as focusing on parents' perspectives of their relationship with the school in order for my study not to be dominated by my own perspective.

Desforges (2003) notes the nature and impact of parental engagement is lower for families from a lower SES, or who face material deprivation. A lower level of maternal education, a single-parent household or mental health difficulties all contribute towards lower levels of engagement on average. He also notes that engagement "changes form" as children get older; though in contrast this does not concur with others' observations that there is always a decline in all engagement as children get older. There is an arguably an inbuilt self-perpetuating cycle inbuilt into Desforges' observation that children with higher attainment see the greatest involvement. In itself this claim presents two alternative conclusions: either that greater involvement led to higher attainment, perhaps due to a stronger foundational basis for the child's development in the early years; or secondly that parents of higher attaining children are more comfortable to engage with the school, either because of self-efficacy beliefs or perhaps because their interactions tend to be more positive than a parent whose child's attainment is lower. By extension, Desforges notes that children "take a very active role in mediating between parents and schools" (p. 85); and thus perhaps children who attain well or enjoy school are more inclined to encourage their parents to be involved



when compared to children do attain less well or do not enjoy school. Finally, he notes that involvement is “influenced to some degree by the ethnic culture of the family” (p. 84); though crucially this is not noted as a negative correlation as earlier points are.

Whilst these can each be relevant, here I will explore those most commonly cited in the literature discovered: social class, and ethnicity. Mindful of the context of the school involved in my study, these themes are also prescient themes to explore further. The exclusion of other considerations does not diminish their importance, it simply recognises that not all of these are able to be explored in the context of my intervention therefore will not be explored further here. Other challenges have already been identified in earlier discussion of motivation and self-efficacy, as well as through consideration of factors in different models which consider parental engagement. Whilst the van der Wolf and van Beukering (2002) consideration of challenging parents takes a more behaviourist approach, Epstein consider demography more pertinent by identifying single parents, working parents, fathers, those with cultural/linguistic diversity, those lacking access to technology, those lacking confidence with technology (Epstein, 2019).

### 2.3.1 Considerations around socioeconomic status

A key aspect of parental engagement is the ability for schools and families to interact successfully, and for this to be done with mutual recognition and respect, an acknowledgement of Bourdieusian concepts is important. Bourdieu (1984) discussed cultural capital as able to be inherited or acquired, and the addition of educational capital as enjoying “a dual title to cultural nobility” (p. 81). Consequently, a number of studies consider social class through proxies not just of employment or household income,

sometimes through onward proxies of benefits, but also through education levels of one or both parents. Considering cultural and educational capital as the ability to interact favourably in desirable situations, their inclusion as concepts relevant to social class is crucial. There are examples of power among parents being unequally distributed (Syeed, 2018) whereby some initiatives can entrench cultural, social or educational capital and result in less socioeconomically advanced parents and their children to become more disadvantaged. There are some examples (Santiago et al., 2016) which suggest parental trust in a teacher is significantly decreased if the family are from a socioeconomically deprived background, whilst the presence of an alternate caregiver increased parental trust in a teacher, and families having a different home language made no difference to levels of trust. The same study found no correlation with parental education level, which is used in my study as a proxy measure for deprivation in the parent survey. The authors found higher levels of trust where children display higher prosocial behaviour, lower levels of peer problems, and lower overall difficulties. Arguably these factors would all reduce the instances of a parent needing to interact with a teacher, as explored earlier as parents reflected primarily on when they have needed to work with the school on 'an issue'; so perhaps the starting position for most parent is trust, then interactions with teachers which are not sufficiently satisfying erode this to a lower level.

The acceptance of cultural capital as a relevant concept is not universal, with a central critique being that Bourdieu built the concept on economic foundation (McClenaghan, 2000), which thus makes the comparison with revolutionary socialism interlocked. For this discussion it is possible to recognise that indicators or proxies for social class both have imperfections and utility. Whether considering underpinning approaches such as cultural capital or specific measures and schemes, each will always retain some inherent

imperfections which are worthy of acknowledgement and discussion, but not worthy of discarding the ideas entirely.

Cultural or social capital recognises values and norms of different groups (Boeck, 2007); considers disparate influences including parenting, child development, and self-improvement (Thomson et al., 2003); or can distinguish between bonding, bridging, and linking forms of social capital (Putnam, 2000). The idea of three different forms are compelling: bonding social capital “for getting by”, bridging social capital “for getting on”, and linking social capital “for links to powerful or influential people” (Boeck, 2007, p. 8). These distinctions are helpful to recognise that cultural or social capital can exist and be exhibited in different ways and for different outcomes. The role of cultural capital in discussing parental engagement can be considered through these three elements: bonding social capital could typify the relationship between parents and teachers; bridging social capital could be seen in children and parents trying to become upwardly socially mobile; and linking social capital could be relevant when if children or parents look to establish connections for future education or employment opportunities.

Within the literature a range of terms are used to discuss social class, most notably socioeconomic status, deprivation, and lower cultural capital. Although each term has its own definition when used by different authors, I am considering them together here as contributing to an overall understanding about how parental engagement is affected by social class. It is also worth noting initially that observations made can appear as generalisations or as if those in particular socioeconomic groups are homogenous: I don't believe that these are the intentions of any discussed, and often trends or averages are

suggested to be representative of the demographic group more broadly in order to more fully inform considerations of inclusivity.

Furthermore, in most contexts there are specific definitions for what constitutes a lower socioeconomic status, or a deprived community. These vary across time and geography, with the current measures in the UK including: the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), which contributes to the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), Free School Meals (FSM), Pupil Premium Grant (PPG), and PPG Ever 6. These metrics are used variously by statutory agencies and as such the identification of families who fall within these definitions are commonly used by school leaders and classroom teachers. Each metric depends on different data points thus give a different perspective when considering the socioeconomic status of individuals, cohorts or communities. Prior to the introduction to Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) in 2014, the measure of Free School Meals (FSM) was able to be used as a measure of deprivation more readily than after that point. Due to a large reduction in FSM claims from children in Key Stage 1 (Whittaker, 2017), it is now more common for proxy measures of deprivation to use the Ever 6 form of the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG). This is the proxy measure used during this intervention, though others are considered below.

Additional school funding and accountability driven by the introduction of the PPG has heightened focus on reducing the gap between average attainments of pupils from deprived backgrounds and those from non-deprived backgrounds. The intentions to create the PPG as a tool of social mobility voiced by the Conservative Party as a means of “improving the prospects of the most disadvantaged in our society” (Gove, 2008, p. 87). These sentiments were echoed by the Liberal Democrats: “Poverty, parental occupation and education, and

family structure all have a marked effect on a child's chances of success. In practice, these characteristics are strongly associated with each other – reinforcing disadvantage, and impeding social mobility” (Laws, 2008, p. 85).

The initial PPG was introduced in 2011, and refined in 2013 as additional funding streams were added and were known as Pupil Premium Plus (PPP), and were for Looked After Children, and Service Children. In 2019/20 PPG for primary schools was £1,320, and for secondary schools was £935. PPP for Service Children was £300, for Looked After Children (LAC) was £1,900; and for those post-LAC children now adopted, having a special guardianship, child arrangements, or residence order was also £1,900 (Department for Education, 2019a). In the context of the PPG, and PPG Ever6, it can be seen that they are seeking to reduce the attainment gap between those from a deprived background. The nature of these include service families who can be displaced by changes to postings, children looked after by the local authority, and those whose parents are in receipt of a number of working age benefits including relating to disability, unemployment or low household income. These each support the observations of Desforges (2003) in considering material deprivation, cultural capital, employment, and somewhat by extension parental education.

A meta-review in 1994 concluded that “children's grades, test scores, graduation rates, and enrolment in post-secondary education tend to increase with each level of education that their mothers have completed” (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Not all studies have found such correlations between indicators of SES and parent involvement. For example, Eccles and Harold (1996) found:

“Contrary to what was expected, neither a mother’s education level nor a family’s income was related to the mother’s involvement in her children’s education for either math or reading, perhaps because the sample of two-parent families was composed of largely middle-class families” (p. 21).

It is encouraging that the authors offer the limitation of their sample, and as such we should derive caution from the resultant framework before applying it to families of all socioeconomic statuses.

Social class can also be considered in more narrow terms, such as by considering parental education. It is common for these to consider either the educational level of the mother, then to a lesser extent to consider the educational level of her partner (Green et al., 2007, p. 537). These find a strong positive correlation, whereby parents with higher levels of education are more engaged in their child’s education. For related reasons, studies have also consistently found a positive correlation between parental engagement and higher levels of employment, and inversely unemployed parents are on average less engaged with their child’s education. The final interconnected proxy for social class is material deprivation. This could often be argued to be a by-product of levels of parental education, or employment status: whereby more highly educated and employed parents are in a better position to provide material or practical support for their child’s education.

Lareau (2011) describes multiple interlocking factors which contribute towards differential development between middle-class and working-class families. Characterised in the US as white-collar and blue-collar upbringings, she notes the difference in the frequency of organised extracurricular activities and the resultant pace of life; a difference in the volume of dialogic interactions between parents and children; and different expectations about

their interactions with school. There is a clear recognition that all parents want their child to succeed in school, yet parents from different social classes approach this intention through different actions: lower SES families are more deferential towards schools whereas middle-class families are more demanding – an approach she terms *concerted cultivation*. Lareau observes that schools complain about the deferential approach of lower SES families in favour of the more demanding approach; in effect a recognition that a predominantly middle-class staffed school system would prefer to perpetuate its own approach to parental engagement rather than accepting that different parents will engage differently.

When revisiting her cohort of students ten years later, Lareau commented that “class advantages are linked to the fact that as schools sort children, these [higher education] institutions prioritise and reward particular cultural traits and resources” (pp 264 – 265). This echoes Bourdieu’s work on cultural capital, and in particular how it is self-reinforcing. Her revisiting reinforced the differential in language skills, as well as economic resources (seen in the amount of extracurricular activities), and possessing the skills to negotiate various institutional interactions over that period. She did also acknowledge differences which show lower SES and migrant families more positively than they are sometimes characterised. By recognising that these families in her study were sometimes more open or forthcoming with their praise, comfort or encouragement for their children. In contrast some of the middle-class families did not openly display signs of affection, and Lareau suggests that this could be emblematic of an approach seeking to build resilience. The merits of both approaches are valid, though it is worth drawing attention to the more openly warm approach seen in some lower SES and migrant families as an additional way of adding depth and richness to considerations of how these factors impact on family dynamics and thus parental engagement with schools.

Attitudes and expectations of parents have been studied as having an impact on parental engagement outcome; for example in the US, Yamamoto and Holloway (2010) found correlations between parental expectations and their sociocultural context. Noted in particular were “parents' own experiences with school institutions and their perceptions of how school personnel treat members of their ethnic or cultural group” and “mistrust of teachers among minority or low-SES parents [...] may lessen parents' reliance on school feedback.” They also noted that “parents' sense of self-efficacy in supporting their children's schooling is conditioned by available resources and sources of support” and “low-SES and/or immigrant parents, may underestimate the likelihood of their children's future academic success even when past performance has been high because they do not feel personally capable of helping their children attain the required skills” (Yamamoto & Holloway, 2010, p. 207). They found additional compounding variables affected expectations of parents from an ethnic minority, including communication difficulties both with the school and also in parents expressing their expectations to their children. Consequently their review concluded on the need for “better communication between school personnel and racial/ethnic minority parents” (p. 210), which the authors acknowledge as building on the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 2005); Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005); Green et al. (2007) principle of “teacher invitation” as being an important factor to enhance parental engagement.

Rätty (2011) has explored the impact of a parent's own experience of their schooling on their later engagement as a parent, with a particular focus on families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. In general he reports that parents from higher income, middle class, or higher socioeconomic status backgrounds recall their own schooling experiences positively. This is in contrast with parents from more deprived backgrounds who are reported to have a more



diverse set of recollections, or relatively negative memories of their own schooling. In his 2011 work, Rätty shows how the two factors which contributed the most to more negative memories of schooling experiences were gender and socioeconomic status; and he also found that a compensatory parental engagement: “parents with negative memories of their own school, motivated by their experience, wanted to ensure their child’s success and thus save her/him from negative experiences of her/his academic performance” (p. 357). This study explores how parents’ recollections change over 9 years, and draws on a number of trends which emerge over that period including recollections about schooling generally, perception of teachers, relationships with peers, reflections about resources and more. While gender and socioeconomic status are identified as representing differences, it is done so in the context of a broader study about parent memories and their impact on their subsequent engagement with their child’s schools.

In her study of low-income families in India, Ganapathy-Coleman (2014) explores how all of the participating low-income parents reflect on their own lack of ability to study well and how this drives a desire for their children to do better at school, which in turn drives higher levels of parental engagement. The second overarching theme was a cultural deference towards teachers, summed up as “Teachers are good. Children have flaws. [...] They taught but we did not study” (p. 39). As well as alluding to different cultural norms, this study also implies an accepted power imbalance in favour of teachers rather than a ‘co-creating’ narrative which has been present in some western literature.

It is important for us to acknowledge that there is not universal consensus on the impact of socioeconomic status on parental involvement, largely because it can be hard to separate it from other variables. Grolnick et al. (1997) recognised:

“family SES was a strong predictor of involvement, especially school and cognitive. Interestingly however, taking into account other factors, personal involvement was not associated with SES, suggesting that the more affective types of involvement may occur equally at all parental occupational and educational levels” (p.546).

As such in my context we should continue to consider socioeconomic status as a relevant factor, whilst at the same time recognising that there are other influences which could be more instrumental in affecting parental engagement.

In their case study work to apply the Epstein model in a high-deprivation, high-ethnically diverse school in the US, Bower and Griffin (2011) identified a number of challenges which they were able to overcome using approaches not contained within the Epstein model. They concluded “The Epstein Model may not fully capture how parents are or want to be involved in their children’s education, indicating that new ways of working with parents in high-minority, high-poverty schools are warranted” (p. 85). This criticism has merit, given that the original Epstein (1997) research is not clear on the demographic composition of the samples from which it drew its conclusions. As well as recognising that:

“Although African American, Latino, and parents in poverty may be more difficult for schools to engage in traditional methods of parent involvement, the evidence [...] suggests that these parents are involved in their children’s education [...] and shows that teachers are trying to engage parents” (p. 84).

In addition to the broadening of outcomes I identified earlier from purely attainment focuses, Bower and Griffin also conclude that for some schools it:

“may mean redefining parent involvement from purely academic roles toward more collaborative roles with other parents, such as parent support groups, parent teams for school events, or presenters in classroom cultural or enrichment activities. These networks could impact academic achievement not only by helping parents engage more directly with the school but also by empowering parents to serve as supports for each other” (p. 84).

They recognise that developing these different approaches to engaging with parents should assist in improving parents’ self-efficacy, which I explored earlier this chapter as an important contributory factor to embedding effective parental engagement approaches.

It is valuable to consider a number of authors who have problematised parental engagement on a number of fronts: including Gillies (2005), Vincent (2017) and Goodall (2021). I will explore each work from each now to provide greater depth in considering a number of problems in this area of work. Before doing so, I will first explore work around the ‘culture of poverty’, principally by Gorski (2008) and Treanor (2013) upon which later work has developed.

Gorski (2008) drew the term ‘culture of poverty’ from Lewis (1961, cited in p.32) who had identified common themes which those living in poverty shared. Gorski characterised this as a deficit view deprived families and went on to illustrate how some common myths are untrue, including work ethics and motivation, parental uninvolvedness, linguistic deficiency, and drug and alcohol abuse. Gorski’s rallying cry is that: “the socio-economic opportunity gap can be eliminated only when we stop trying to “fix” poor students and start addressing the ways in which our schools perpetuate classism” (p. 35). He ends with a reflective look at

where the deficit really lies; pondering that it is not amongst the most disenfranchised in our communities, but instead in our systems and whether it:

“lie[s] in us—educators with unquestionably good intentions who too often fall to the temptation of the quick fix, the easily digestible framework that never requires us to consider how we comply with the culture of classism” (p. 36).

Treanor (2013) critically considered the UK government’s “Family Resources Survey”(FRS) which considers ownership of a range of items and draws an arbitrary deprivation cut-off mark at 25 items out of 54 relating to adults and 30 relating to children (S. McKay & S. Collard, 2003; S. D. McKay & S. B. Collard, 2003, p. 80). Treanor (pp. 6-7) argues that because of the way the FRS has weighted the total of some characteristics, shifting the measures by a moderate degree shift the perception of deprivation much more significantly. Without any justification, the government’s own method for determining material deprivation provides no material to support the categorisation and thus in Treanor’s eyes lacks validity as its determinations demonstrate a stable increase and thus calls into question the arbitrary nature of the threshold. For because there was a steady increase in factors such as item ownership, the FRS is skewed by creating an arbitrary cut-off point rather than recognising the gradual distribution.

In Treanor (2016), she continues a methods-based critique; this time in how ‘relative deprivation’ is calculated by using a self-selecting comparison group which skews the scope of the study, again for not being able to rigorously justify determinations made. Having established flaws in the received view of poverty by both Gorski and Treanor, I will now turn to the work of three other seminal figures in this area who have used these and other observations to problematise parental engagement.

The work of Gillies (2005) has been developed upon by others for some of its foundational approaches including the “social and material grounded nature of childrearing” (p. 835). She recognises that often a focus on parental engagement is done *by* middle-class educators *to* working-class parents, using language such as “socially excluded parents” which seek to “indoctrinate middle-class values as a way of tackling disadvantage” (p. 836). Rather than seeking to perpetuate existing social class structures, Gillies advocates a move towards “redistributing possibilities as opposed to wealth” (Giddens, 1998, as cited in p. 837). Gillies notes that Giddens’ approaches were adopted by the New Labour Government in the UK from 1997 onwards to “equip working-class parents with the skills to raise middle-class children” (p. 838); and showed that parenting support initiatives would then imply that those who do not access them “are destined, through their own personal failings as parents, to reproduce their poverty” (p. 840). Whilst I find some parts of this argument compelling such as the desire to make equal access to opportunities and resources, I find more problematic the conclusion that those who do not embrace the opportunities are labelled as failing parents. I would hope that as a developed civil society we would be able to appreciate many different lived experiences and the importance of embracing these in order to ensure inclusion of all families to the benefit of their children’s outcomes.

The second of Gillies’ criticisms of how some middle-class educators do things *to* working class parents is an extension of the first; whereby working class parents with “severely restricted access to resources struggled to preserve their limited stock of capital, and in the process actively inculcated their children with crucial survival skills” (p842). Gillies argues that an ignorance on the part of educators to these plights can exacerbate such positions and that if educators were more attuned to the circumstances of their families. In contrast she notes that for middle-class parents the “perceived failures of particular parents and

their children provided a clear marker from which to judge and warrant their own children's successful development": combining both to note a "middle-class 'culture of entitlement', which itself becomes key resource for cementing family privilege" (p. 842). I feel it is worth drawing this observation out as a separate point, as not only is she arguing for the need to shift from focusing on social class to social inclusion, but she is illustrating how a continued focus on social class continues to perpetuate inequity rather than challenge it. Finally, Gillies brings together these two areas to more fundamentally challenge the concept of classes as "zombie categories" (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, cited in p. 841) insofar as they are too broad and open to interpretation to retain sufficient meaning. Although she challenges their rejection of the class categorisation, she offers a number of alternative measures including "occupation, education, family background, social networks, household income, housing status and geographical location" which "may overlay a greater complexity" (p. 842) but allow for a more detailed analysis of the real effects of class for example for those families without the prerequisite capital and foundational support to embed and sustain effective parental practises.

### 2.3.2 Considerations around ethnicity

As in earlier discussions about how social class is defined and considered, there are similarly contested variations between considerations of ethnicity. For the purposes of this discussion, I am not seeking to compare parental engagement of different ethnic minority families. Instead we will consider how engaging with families from an ethnic minority background can vary, particularly if many school staff do not come from those communities.

Crozier and Davies (2007) argue that *parents* cannot be seen as a homogenous group, particularly not when viewed through a normative lens of white, middle-class and often male viewpoint. This failure to recognise an entrenched bias within some parts of education can lead to a stigmatisation of ethnic minority families leads to them being “invisible, in terms of what they have to offer” (p. 296). Rather than describing hard to reach *parents*, they began with a reversed paradigm exploring hard to reach *schools*. In their sample the authors found a number of demographic and cultural factors which could contribute to a variation in parental engagement: country of education, level of education, proficiency in English, and level and type of employment (p. 298). The study found that whilst schools recognise their limited engagement with Pakistani families, the families themselves had created a peer-support network including the dissemination of information received from the school. Many Bangladeshi parents in the study did not feel able to play a part in their child’s education, seeing this as a reserved matter for schools, whereas their focus at home was to create a supportive and encouraging home environment. Basing their categorisation of parents on Vincent’s (1996) typology, they identified: parents as consumers, independent parents, and non-participant parents. My observation is that classifications such as this one are not unique to families from an ethnic minority background and could readily be applied to any family. In itself, the generalisability of such observations provides a suggestions that although variations are observed amongst ethnic minority families, they could be seen as a typical reflection of the experiences of all family backgrounds. The study makes a number of mentions about the limitations of some schools in not taking steps to celebrate the contribution of children’s backgrounds beyond a small number of tokenistic activities, yet it does not provide any insight into activities or approaches which it found or believed to be successful. The paper’s conclusions are critical of school’s communication methods, which

could arguably be fuelled by a higher than average level of trust in schools felt by Pakistani and Bangladeshi families. There was also an identified split between *professional* and *lay* parents within both communities, with the former being more confident and proactive to engage with schools. As such, while this paper examines a fascinating number of angles of parental engagement within ethnic minority communities, one of its central conclusions is supportive of the primary variation in parental engagement already explored:

socioeconomic status.

I have already explored how the Epstein (1997) approach considers activities, and in the earlier section how it attracted some criticism for not taking full account for differences in SES. Similar criticisms are levelled at the work by Green (2013) for not recognising the obligations that families have to schools and the overlapping nature of the relationships she outlines in a “traditional model” of parental engagement.

In earlier discussions about the impact of parental engagement on student attainment, I noted that the observed impacts are not universal. For example having considered a number of studies in a US context, Jaiswal and Choudhuri (2017) observed “some of the studies have concluded that this association is not consistent across ethnicity, culture and socioeconomic status,” and went on to note that “authoritative parenting was positively associated with Grade Point Average for white families but not for Asian, Black, and Hispanic [families]” (p. 118). As noted in the introduction to this section, Desforges (2003) noted that the degree of parental involvement is “influenced to some degree by the ethnic culture of the family” (p. 85). “Class, ethnicity and gender” are identified as “individual, parent and family factors” by Hornby and Lafaele (2011) in their explanatory model of barriers to parental involvement, both as ‘individual parent and family factors’ and as ‘societal factors’



(p. 39). Huntsinger and Jose (2009) found differences in how some families in the US are involved with their child's education when contrasting Chinese families with American families. While American families were more involved by in-school activities, Chinese families were more involved by supporting learning at home. A key distinction in approach is seen in Chinese families preferring a traditional grading of A, B, C, etc. for attainment to help them understand what support their child needs to improve, whereas American families preferred reports which did not include such grading.

One of three predictors for parental involvement in children's schooling is "family context", alongside "individual level" and "institutional effects" (Grolnick et al., 1997). Although mostly considering socioeconomic factors, "family context" in this study also gives examples of the "social context of parenting" and "social support" and "family resource" (p. 539, 541). It is important not to consider all ethnic minority families as a homogenous group, and in many communities an ethnic minority family may have much greater social support and family resource than another family. Deslandes (2002) uses the Bronfenbrenner ecological model to recognise the overlapping spheres of influence: "the family and the school that may be pushed together or pulled apart by three forces: time; the characteristics, philosophies and practices of the family; and those of the school" (p. 12). It also notes that these forces do not always need to be considered as being in opposition to each other and can work harmoniously: "parents become more involved in their children's education at home and at school when they perceive that their collaboration is actively encouraged by the teachers and the school" (p. 13-14).

This underlines an assertion drawn at the beginning of this chapter by Epstein (2019) that a key component of supporting a child's development is that all of those involved in their

development work together. As such it is important for schools to understand a parent's perspective as much as it is for a parent to understand a school's perspective, for them both to understand the child's perspective, and for these interconnections to extend to any community or support involvements also present. In the same way that the approach of schools varies, the approach of families will vary. In this section I have drawn out two of the most-commonly discussed themes of variation. Rather than seeking to excuse or blame any parties, I expect that a greater understanding by schools and involvement of a family's background and situation would lead to stronger and more fruitful relationships all round. As outlined at the beginning of this section, the variation of parental engagement is not a factor continued in this study because the focus on socioeconomic deprivation is more relevant in the context of the school involved in the study. The exploration of existing literature around variations identified with ethnicity is done for completeness as a recognised variable in parental engagement.

### 2.3.3 Considerations around gender

In considering gender in parental engagement, gendered roles of parents should be considered as a contributory factor. Meier et al. (2018) acknowledge a corpus of literature around the gendered nature of parent-child time, and in their own study found:

“mothers spend a greater share of time with children in more tedious and less enjoyable activities, such as housework, compared to the play and leisure more common in fathers' parenting time, which in turn contributes to less happiness and more fatigue in parenting” (p. 994).

They conclude by recognising a stress felt predominantly by mothers of stress induced by the need to “negotiate influence with peers and teachers” (p. 1002), particularly in situations where pressure to excel are felt more acutely. In contrast to some of the previous work cited, Meier et al. found parents are least happy when children are aged 13-17 yet most stressed when children are aged 6-12. These data are useful context for understanding the perspectives and experiences of parents when they engage with a school, and to consider the different roles sometimes played by mothers and fathers in families.

There is a limited volume of material focusing on variations by gender when considering parental engagement, and the studies that have been done are largely situated in the US (Fleischmann & de Haas, 2016). As well as disentangling variables surrounding the country of study, it is common to consider SES and ethnicity often alongside gender, and sometimes with further factors. These make the isolation of effects related to gender even more difficult to ascertain, and this has been recognised by a number of studies which have tried to further this area in recent years. Here, I will explore those which are pertinent to my study and explain how they contribute to understanding in this area. Gender was not a consideration at the beginning of my study, though it emerged through analysis at which point I revisited existing literature to add an additional dimension to my study. Aspects of these considerations are picked up in later chapters where relevant.

A greater number of studies have considered gender differences in parenting of young children, including Brown et al. (2012) which ran an intervention programme for some families during pregnancy and the early months of parenthood. When considering differences between mothers and fathers, the authors concluded that men have “less scripted parental role with a greater likelihood of seeing themselves as playing a supportive

role” (p. 6). They conclude that the largest determining factor of higher levels of engagement by fathers is marital status, with married couples showing higher levels of engagement. However later in the study the authors concede that unmarried cohabiting couples tend to be younger, less educated, have lower incomes, and poor health. I would contest their conclusions because these issues are more likely to represent more accurate reasons for lower levels of engagement with the programme, or lower levels of cohesion between parents than marital status which could serve as an indicator of those factors rather than the reverse. Beyond marital status, the authors do recognise that age and SES are also predictors to a more limited extent.

Discussed earlier in this chapter was the self-efficacy beliefs of parents, and a further study which contribute to this element with respect to gender is King (2016). Undertaken in the Philippines and reporting a tradition of equality of parenting roles there, he reports no gender difference in how students perceive support from both parents. I looked earlier in this chapter about tasks that parents may routinely undertake to support their children’s learning, and King did not find any differences between how students perceive support from their mother or their father. Although this may not have shown differences in how the student perceives gendered parenting roles, Leach et al. (2019) discovered that fathers respond very poorly to gender-neutral language in Facebook adverts asking for “parents” to get involved in a project (27 responses) compared to Facebook adverts asking for “fathers” to get involved (1,441 responses). This was an unexpected result for the team, and they speculated that it was due to two reasons. The first is that fathers did not feel engaged by the original gender-neutral adverts and felt more connection with the later gendered adverts. The second is that Facebook adverts were viewed by a greater number of women

due to the higher proportion of women who regularly use social media sites, as seen separately by Ofcom (2018, 2020).

A small collection of research around the involvement of fathers focused on reading, which is a common example cited in earlier models (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Epstein, 1997; Harris & Goodall, 2007). Baroody and Diamond (2013) asked parents, teachers and students to report on a student's engagement and attainment with reading. They found that reports by parents and teachers were broadly similar and that students tended to give more favourable reports of themselves. Across the study the authors found that parents and teachers gave "significantly higher" ratings to girls than to boys, which is concurrent with other literature in this area. In considering their approach of seeking ratings from multiple stakeholders, they comment "ratings from different informants are meaningful since each accounts for unique variance in children's achievement scores" (p. 300); this in itself adds weight to the approach of considering the perspectives of parents in my study in order to consider the perspective of additional "informants". Separately, Lynch and Zwerling (2020) undertook a case study of one elementary class in the US and looked particularly at the impact of actively inviting fathers into school to read with children on a regular basis. They noted four reasons for positive results: the presence of a positive male role model; an increase in motivation for reading; fathers' confidence in parenting; and fathers' respect for reading volunteers at school. This echoed some other studies' findings around the "volunteering" type of parenting advocated by Epstein (1997) for all parents, but with additional benefits cited due to the concerted engagement with fathers which was previously less common in this setting than with mothers.

Vincent (2017) identifies four key themes: what 'the best' means at home and in school; the often gendered role of parenting; what 'good parenting behaviours' are and how class and ethnicity shape them; and challenge assumptions of how middle-class parents have power and working-class parents do not. To take each in turn, her first draws both on Lareau's "concerted cultivation" (p. 543) and Jensen's pivot from "what kind of parent are you?" to "in what conditions are you parenting?" (p. 545). Jensen's challenge to more traditional discussions of parental styles or approaches instead seeks to recognise the importance of parents' cultural situations and contexts in order to more accurately frame their approach to raising their own child. Along with Lareau's view that approaching parenting as active steps and choices can help us to recognise the positionality of parents including how the acquisition of a parenting role may change viewpoints and approaches, for example a white middle-class father: "I have allowed my friendships to go, my hobbies to decline as it were, my focus is my children" (p. 544); presumably this parent seeing that the choices he makes are for the greater good of family life and for raising of his child.

The second theme Vincent (2017) is the often gendered nature of parenting which she describes as "the morality of mothering". From the outset of her discussion, she recognises that more fathers are actively involved in parenting now (helped by statutory paternity leave in 2003) than they were in previous generations, but that there is still a significant journey to take until anywhere near parity would be achieved. A contradiction is drawn between the value of fathers actively involved in parenting and a man's primary role as a breadwinner (Doucet, 2006; Miller, 2011; and Edwards and Caballero, 20015, cited in p. 546). Alongside the challenge for fathers in balancing the competing expectations of modern-day parenting, Vincent recognises a "particular public ferocity is retained for women who 'fail' their mothering responsibilities"; further that "discursively positioned as

mothers first. If they are in paid work, the identity of worker is additional” (p. 546). As well as identifying tensions in thus how mothers are discussed in the media, Vincent also posits that this can create tensions around relations with schools.

Vincent (2017)’s third theme is around the perception of ‘good parenting behaviours’ and how class and ethnicity shape them. She draws on both Foucault and Bourdieu to see coercion and power respectively as being at play in relationships between schools and families, particularly in relation to class and ethnicity. Parents run the risk of showing either “too much or too little interest” (Vincent, 1996, cited in p. 547); and Vincent recounts an example of institutionalised low expectations (p. 548) whereby of a black student considering a legal career was advised to pursue shop work. Because of the challenges surrounding the classed and raced nature of views and assumptions, Vincent argues for an increased emphasis on building individual relationships between parents and teachers and an emphasis on “dialogic home-school relationship” and the “seemingly mundane moment of parent-teacher conversations” (p. 549). Vincent concludes this section by seeking a:

“discussion about, but also—and importantly—beyond the child’s attainment, to include their relationships with teacher and peers, and their home life, interests and enthusiasms. The aim is to construct a living, dynamic relationship, a dialogue of equals, between teachers and parents, and one which focuses in particular on developing a conversation with those parents who appear to lack the particular social and cultural resources to allow themselves to be easily heard in school. The difficulty of finding a space and a language in which to conduct such conversations cannot be underestimated” (p. 549).

The final theme of Vincent (2017) is around challenging the assumption that middle-class parents have power in their relationship with schools and working-class parents do not. She builds on work (Crenshaw, 1991, cited in p. 551) which suggested that identities are not reducible to one dimension and instead need to be considered in a cross-sectional analysis. Vincent draws out some underlying stereotypes which paint middle-class parents as “pushy ... entitled ... helicopter” parents, whereas working-class parents are “disengaged, uninformed, uninterested, and prone to aggressive/inappropriate behaviour” (p. 449). Without greater understanding around the nuances of class structures, including an “intermediate class” (p. 550) which would incorporate more modern classifications of occupations to better reflect the composition of a household; Vincent argues that discussions can become too reliant on only one aspect of a family dynamic or demographic and thus miss the broader and richer context.

Each of the four themes drawn out in Vincent (2017) draw together a number of problems in the discussion of parental engagement: presumptuous views of schools often based on class or ethnicity; fractions within groupings previously viewed or treated as homogenous; and shifting social trends around previously gendered roles within the home. Each of these identifies important issues around the current discussion of these important topics and in raising them here I aim to ensure I am cognisant of them by not falling into the same common traps that others have done, and that in my research I will seek to create the more meaningful and dialogic relationships that Vincent described above in order to gain a better understanding of the parents’ perspective of their relationship with the school.

As mentioned earlier, a number of studies consider gender in parenting alongside other factors including ethnicity and SES. Cowan et al. (2009) worked with lower SES black families



in the US and found that their engagement with the support programme showed increased satisfaction and retention levels. Two further studies that are of particular interest to consider are Fleischmann and de Haas (2016) and Posey-Maddox (2017). In the Netherlands, Fleischmann used survey data of Dutch, Turkish and Moroccan origin families. They found language barriers could be overcome through continuing education or support, though gender differences did not differ significantly by family ethnicity even though the authors had expected to see variations due to their perception of more traditionally gendered parenting roles within Turkish and Moroccan families. In contrast, they found that gender differences were much larger than ethnicity differences in all groups and “none of the explanatory factors for parental involvement was able to explain why mothers are so much more involved in their children’s schooling than fathers,” and as such “future research is needed to understand this gender difference and how it affects children’s outcomes” (p.561). They conclude “While skills, resources, and motivation were successful in explaining differential forms of parental involvement, these factors were unable to explain the large gender differences in parental involvement” (p.562).

Finally, Posey-Maddox (2017) considered black fathers from lower SES backgrounds. She found that some of their engagement strategies varied from broader approaches by fathers: goal setting and communicating high expectations; reinforcing and supplementing classroom learning; advice-giving; making their presence and engagement known; monitoring for potential educator bias; and advocating and intervening (pp. 582-590). The author attributes some of these to heightened consciousness of ethnicity issues and a desire to positively address them. She also attributes some of them to not engaging with school personnel due to negative responses from white staff including attitudes around fathers’ assumed absence from the family home by white staff, and some examples around their

assumption about the fathers' parenting approach being the source of a child's behaviour issues. In conclusion, Posey-Maddox found that "while mothers were in many cases the primary point of contact with teachers, fathers in the study were nevertheless involved in their children's education and engaged in a number of efforts to show their children that they cared and valued their success" (p.590). As mentioned in the opening of this section, a number of studies considering parent engagement combine aspects considered this chapter including gender, ethnicity and SES. This is pertinent with the Posey-Maddox study, which makes a number of claims about the impact and perspectives of black fathers; though it is unclear whether these considerations can be isolated to gender, ethnicity or SES. Nevertheless, their inclusion here adds an additional dimension of consideration for how future studies can approach the consideration of gender in further approaches.

#### 2.3.4 Considerations around power

The themes explored above show how others have considered the variation of parental engagement by socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender. In addition to each of these bringing with it very specific contextual experiences and cultural implications, it is also prudent to consider a theme which arguably underpins them: that of power. Here I will consider principally the works of Foucault, Freire and Gorski in order to consider the concept of power in relation to parental engagement.

The work of Foucault (1976) has been built upon by others including Deacon (2006) and Moghtader (2017) that power is coercive by positing that “power is everywhere” (1976, p. 63) insofar as every person, organisation and structure has a power dimension to it which are always in flux and need to be examined and negotiated. In the context of parental engagement, these core observations underpin considerations explored in recent sections around socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender to draw more profound and underlying lessons to the fore. The Foucauldian assertion that power is everywhere presents a challenge to parental engagement insofar as the teacher or school may be perceived as being the more powerful party in the relationship which could disempower parents. In my study, I am seeking to bridge this divide to understand engagement from parents’ perspectives, and will explore in Chapter 3 the challenge of doing so for example as an insider researcher as well as other elements which impact on the power dynamics which could affect my study.

Deacon (2006) recognises an historical shift from the 17<sup>th</sup> century which operated through negative control and restriction, to the positive approach from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards

which operated through entrenchment and expansion, representing the growth of schools' role as the:

“chief socializing mechanism intermediate between the family and the world of work. The school was not the only institution that offered education; it was in direct pedagogical competition with institutions peddling in apprenticeships, salvation, rehabilitation, cure, moral instruction, and the arts of war” (p. 179).

This shift represented schooling as the “moral orthopaedics” (p. 181) through various developments including pedagogical developments and Foucault’s idea of “judicial power within the school” (p. 181) due to the authoritative processes surrounding mass education, which reach beyond the classroom and into relationships between schools and parents. Deacon draws on Foucault’s assessment of organisations which focus on capacity, communication, power; with Foucault distinguishing schools as focusing on communication whereas other institutions such as prisons, armed forces and hospitals focus on the other blocks. Later I will explore the Gorskian view of power focusing on the individual teacher, and it is helpful here to consider the Foucauldian view of power at a macro level, and how this impacts on parental engagement. By being mindful of such dynamics and designing the study to be sensitive to all participants and self-reflective about my own role within structures, I will endeavour to ameliorate some of these issues whilst not being able to neutralise them.

Others have tackled issues of power relationships in the context of teaching and learning including Freire (2004, 2014, 2018) who took a similarly critical view of educators and emphasised the need to be aware of ideological choices and their operation within classrooms, schools and the system more broadly. Gorski has written passionately in

critique of some of the terms socioeconomic status and ethnicity in particular and concluded the need to approach this area with a view to four steps towards 'equity literacy': firstly to *recognise* all inequities; secondly to *respond* immediately by challenging inequities; thirdly to *redress* deeper cultural dynamics; and finally to *sustain* equity efforts even in the face of resistance (2016b, p. 225). Whilst Freire framed equity literacy as principally considering practice within classrooms, I see parallels to how these four steps can be applied beyond when considering relationships between schools and parents. By considering the steps of recognition, response, redress and sustainment when schools and parents work together, schools in particular could benefit from being self-reflective about how they approach situations and whether the parent would perceive a power imbalance.

Gorski built this approach from earlier work (2008, 2013, 2016a) throughout which he highlighted: the risk of schools assuming that families have economic resources to support learning at home (e.g. poster boards, access to the Internet or printers, etc.); the need to have high expectations for all children including higher-order tasks and engaging pedagogies including a promotion of the enjoyment of literacy and reading; to focus on family involvement early and regularly including emphasising the strength of students' and families' strengths; embed the role of direct instruction; and reviewing learning materials for bias (Gorski, 2013, pp. 49-51). I find these reasons compelling but could be beyond the reach of a teacher to achieve within their routine practice given the external factors involved with curriculum design. Gorski's focus on practical actions to improve the educational experiences of all children is empowering and is underpinned by deep analysis and a structural critique of the language and approach to this area, which I will address now.

Gorski (2016a) argues against the dominant narrative in current educational discourse of grit and meritocracy. He argues that these ideas are a mask for a deficit view whereby poorer parents are seen as uninvolved by those who have not experienced poverty themselves. Thus, the issue is around those experiencing poverty rather than grit because grit theory recognising “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth et al., 2007) compounds this deficit approach by recognising barriers but places the focus for attention and onus for action on individuals, rather than on broader societal issues. Gorski argues these unjust societal arrangements (e.g. happiness, food, time, health) are largely beyond the sphere of influence for teachers, yet thus poses three challenges. First is to develop language which problematises the deficit framing of this discussion, perhaps by drawing the discourse more into recognising power rather than culture. Secondly, he highlights the concern around ‘fixing’ individual mindsets as a way to work within grit theory or meritocratic principles, in favour of examining more deeply-rooted structural barriers in society which need attention. Finally, he emphasises the need to recognise the structural contexts within which children live in order to respond appropriately to disparities in educational outcomes. Each of these three challenges can be considered both by teachers within a classroom context of curriculum and learning, and also by schools more widely in the context of how parents and schools work together and whether there are power imbalances or other considerations which may impinge on desired outcomes.

These broad criticisms are drawn together sharply in Gorski (2016b) within which he underlines the importance of distinguishing between ‘cultural initiatives’ (portrayed as surface-level awareness-raising activities) and ‘equity initiatives’ (seeking to address deeper issues), taking a firm anti-‘culture of poverty’ approach. He challenges the imprecision and slipperiness of ‘culture’ as a term, coupled with a concern about essentialism whereby

broad groupings (race, socioeconomic status, etc.) provide a shorthand for stereotyping and providing a hegemonic approach. Gorski then extends his argument by arguing that these approaches are a matter of power rather than anything else, which perpetuate inequity and injustice by ensuring minorities are repressed or in some cases oppressed. He concludes that inequity and injustice are not cultural problems thus cannot be solved through cultural approaches, and instead need a more structural focus to address more fundamental issues. This returns to the discussion above about 'equity literacy' at a very local level of a classroom as well as being able to scale-up this approach more widely. He also highlighted a number of resource assumptions schools can make when giving tasks for children to complete at home and other actions which could spark a misguided pursuit of 'cultural initiatives' which tackle surface-level symptoms, rather than shifting focus to 'equity initiatives' which can help work towards addressing deeper causes.

## 2.4 Schools using technology to engage parents

So far I have explored reasons for the importance of parental engagement, examined a number of different models through which parental engagement is discussed, considered how it can vary between families, and explored some authors who have problematised the concepts. In the final section of this chapter, I will turn to consider how parents (as users more broadly) behave online; schools' usage of technology; and more specifically their approach to social media. The definition and understanding of social media evolves as technology and usage of it changes, but for my purposes I accept the Obar and Wildman (2015) features of social media as: being Web 2.0 applications for participation; dominated by user-generated content; the creation of user-specific profiles for a service; and facilitating connections between profiles (pp.746-747).

The focus is primarily on the use of social media between a primary school and parents, but for the purposes of context this section looks at a wider selection of material. This is done for two reasons: firstly, that there is a limited amount published on social media in primary schools, and secondly I believe there are valuable lessons to be learnt by considering a wider sphere of material. For example, I will begin by considering the use of technology in schools in its broadest sense, predating and running parallel to social media. As much as possible I will restrict considerations to primary schools, though lessons are more readily available for schools more generally as well as through different international contexts. While there are specific cultural considerations when trying to make direct comparisons with other countries, their inclusion here is intended to take a broad look at the current field of work. Omnipresent in considerations about technology, and social media specifically, is the need to consider online safety of children as well as privacy and security concerns of all involved. I



will also consider how people behave as social media users, and how this could impact parental engagement both online and offline.

#### 2. 4. 1 Evolving technology usage between schools and families

There are a number of different models explaining how the use of technology in schools has developed over time. Models such as SAMR (substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition) and TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) became used as action-research methods of approaching educational technology (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Puentedura, 2006, 2013). Models such as these are aimed at developing pedagogy by considering how to get the maximum benefit for a learner from a given technology, in a similar way to the way that Bloom (1956, 1976) created a hierarchy of thinking skills. While these models relate to experiences within the classroom, others have considered how the use of technology can be interposed in the home-school relationship (Grant, 2011; Lovecchio, 2013; Russell, 2017). Grant (2011) noted “children rarely talked to their parents about what they learnt in school” and “children’s out-of-school experiences were rarely drawn into their learning within school” (p. 298), which could be seen as strong driving reasons for seeking to develop greater engagement tools between teachers and parents directly which are not reliant on incidental communications via a child. Far from seeking to disempower learners’ voices, the Grant method seeks to enhance communications between teachers and parents. Lovecchio (2013) focuses on the role of school leaders when introducing social media, including focusing on outcomes and benefits, and not compelling staff to use it if they feel uncomfortable in doing so. Russell (2017) found up to 80% of parents followed a Facebook Page, though this operates differently to how a Facebook

Group works and thus expected results are harder to extrapolate from one to the other.

Both Lovecchio and Russell identify the need for greater support and training for teachers in the effective use of social media for parental engagement; noting concerns around safeguarding and privacy, as well as ensuring that clear intended outcomes are the focus of such initiatives.

It is arguably easy to get caught up in enthusiasm for using technology to increase appeal or engagement with learners, without there always being a sound evidence base for doing so. For example “unrealistic expectations inhibit teachers’ pragmatic attempts to integrate technology in classroom contexts, and the teachers subsequently become blamed for the failure of technology to fulfil its promise” (Convery, 2009, p. 25). Christodoulou (2020) argues that the heavy investment in classroom technology from 1997 onwards in England resulted in a rapid expansion in the mean number of interactive whiteboards per school (primary: 0.7 in 2002 to 8.0 in 2007; secondary: 3.5 in 2002 to 22.3 in 2007) contributed to a cost of £510m per year, but reflects personally “despite my best intentions, I rarely used any of the most sophisticated features, instead using the whiteboard to display pre-prepared slides and presentations” (p. 15). She similarly cites a US school district engaging in a contract to cost \$1.3bn for Apple and Pearson to provide tablets to 700,000 students, which went on to collapse because “security software was easy to delete, the curriculum was unfinished and riddled with errors, and teachers had been given little training in how to use the tablets and curriculum” (p. 17). Once more, challenges identified in the classroom can be translated and see above how Grant (2011); Lovecchio (2013); Russell (2017) have approached the use of technology in the home-school relationship.

These examples illustrate how the inclusion of technology in schools is far from always smooth and each instance brings with it a different set of challenges. Even before technologies are seeking to be introduced into a school setting, Sang et al. (2010) found a number of factors which contribute to a trainee teacher's predisposition towards using ICT in education: gender, constructivist beliefs, self-efficacy, efficacy about computers, and computer attitudes (pp. 104-105). These are themes which build upon characteristics identified by models considering parental engagement discussed earlier in this chapter.

In contrast, Ferdig (2006) concludes that:

“from a teacher perspective the most valuable aspect is that the uptake and use of digital technologies can motivate increased quality in teaching, rather than that the digital technology in itself embodies certain qualities that guarantee good teaching and learning outcomes.”

The authors go on to explore how the uptake of technologies in schools is “mediated by teacher characteristics, technological framework and the conditions within the school” (p. 112), which suggests that motivations of teachers are one of three key considerations, with the other two being somewhat beyond their control. These mirror some of the factors identified by Eccles & Harold in Figure 2.1 Child, teacher and parent factors influencing parent involvement in school and the implications of involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996)

in relation to influences on parental engagement including teacher characteristics, school characteristics, teacher beliefs, and teacher practice. Sang et al. (2010) also identify the pivotal role played by teachers, and in particular their beliefs in the technologies, and their own self-efficacy views to be able to use the technology sufficiently well to support students' learning.

As technology has developed, schools have changed how they use it to engage parents. For example, a school may previously have produced a printed newsletter, which the growing use of email allowed the communications to be done using alternative mechanisms. This communication strand of the Epstein (1997) framework could then develop into using other technologies such as Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) and social media channels. It is recognised that there is a gap between more digitally-savvy families and more institutional culture of schools (Olofsson et al., 2015), and the importance that the school acknowledges the digital divide (NTIA, 1998) and adapts its approaches to include all. Jagušt et al. (2018) recognise informal learning at home as part of their category of 'out-of-class learning'. Their meta-review found that "technology can enhance learning in and out of classroom, especially by impacting student interest, motivation, and engagement" (p. 425), though they acknowledged that very few studies demonstrated negative or neutral outcomes which echoes general concerns about a *replication crisis* and a *pressure to publish* (Case, 1928; Makel & Plucker, 2014; Schooler, 2014). This is an area which of which to be mindful in this study: sometimes null results and learning by not having desired impacts are useful points to learn from without always be able to claim a huge breakthrough.

Boticki et al. (2015) considered how schools in Singapore could use a 'mobile social learning platform' to engage children in both formal and informal learning. They found that around 25% of students' contributions from one class were flagged as 'poor quality', possibly due to "the students' inexperience or lack of familiarity with handling the mobile devices, causing them to submit duplicate or void contributions. Interestingly, there is no significant correlation between the number of low-quality contributions and students' academic success" (p. 133). They also noted that an additional small number of students did not access the system at all, which potentially signals some underlying needs which are not

addressed by the teacher usage of the app: for example, technical availability or connectivity at home, students' understanding of the app or the curriculum content, or parental support and encouragement for the child to access the system outside of school. These echo a number of the challenges of parental engagement discussed earlier (p. 52).

In recent years, schools have made use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) including Moodle, Frog, Blackboard, and DB Primary; online learning journeys including Tapestry, Orbit and LearningBook; and combinations of open alternative platforms such as blogs, Google Workspace for Education and Microsoft 365 for Education. The focus of many such systems are primarily from teachers to students, although some can add parents as additional stakeholders. Due to the design focusing on students, the applicability of these to parental engagement models considered earlier are limited, and thus are considered here in the context of how schools can engage with students who may then be supported by their families (e.g. the "learning at home" type of parental engagement by Epstein (1997)). A number of reviews consider their impact on collaboration, communication, types of assessment, enhancing experiences, and pupil engagement (Smith, 2007; Bouta & Retalis, 2013; Johannesen, 2013; Codreanu et al., 2019). Due to their online nature, pupils and families are able to access these from home, either optionally or as part of an assigned task. Most literature in this area is focused on secondary or tertiary education thus parental engagement is not a principle focus of the studies. Given that the pupil is the primary audience for such online systems, it is conceivable that more engaged parents or parents of more engaged children become more engaged in these platforms than on average, and thus that they simply add to the replication of any existing inequities rather than redressing them. In one clear case study example, Harefa et al. (2019) taught two parallel classes; one using *Microsoft 365* and the other using non-technological approaches. While both groups

saw an increase in pre-trial and post-trial scores, the target group improved their average score by 23% and the control group improved by 20%. This marginal improvement is encouraging, but based on 64 students in total so should be viewed in context.

Grant (2011) concluded that parents and schools were positive about technology which could improve communication by making it more direct and timely, and that parents would need to be supported in order to understand and act on the information from teachers. It is notable that the primary challenge was not technological, but sociological: the medium of the message did not pose the challenge to understanding so much as the content of the message itself. Although this is exposed in the context of discussing technology, this potentially speaks to a wider gap between how teachers and parents understand one another. This small-scale study gave hope that families and school who had not previously communicated using technology at all would show positivity towards it in principle, and that for the target group who used a VLE for a trial period remained positive about its application in learning and contribution to communication.

Rather than focusing on student-facing technologies such as VLEs and devices at home, some schools have developed their communication methods with a view to targeting communications to parents through channels such as social media sites. Even though there is a list of information schools are required to publish online (Department for Education, 2014), this assumes a passive approach to communication whereby parents need to find the information for themselves by looking for it. In contrast, the use of social media sites by schools could be an attempt to use platforms with which parents are already familiar and used to visiting regularly or to find information, and then using this channel to offer communications from the school. This example falls into the commonly-focused upon

activity type of *communication* from the Epstein (2019) framework. As discussed earlier in this chapter, focusing too much on just communication activities risks the school communicating *at* or *to* parents, rather than communicating *with* parents. Although each platform has different methods, there are approaches to cultivating discussion or engagement: for example, by using a Facebook Group rather than a Facebook Page which can foster a more interactive approach between users (Facebook, 2020a).

Contextual data on site and app usage by UK adults is available from Ofcom (2018), which shows how Facebook remains a dominant site, though this has been decreasing slightly. Amongst adults who use multiple sites, 88% used Facebook in 2018, down from 96% in 2013. There was a marked drop in the 43% of people who used only Facebook in 2013 to 20% in 2018; not because they had stopped using it, but because they had expanded their usage to include other apps. Most other apps included have shown growth during this period; some more sharply than others such as WhatsApp and Instagram. In the same study, they report that a combination of Facebook and Messenger was used by 94% of the UK adult population who spend an average of 23 minutes using them. The next closest were Twitter and Instagram, but lag significantly behind both on reach (59% each), and on average daily time spent (2 min 26 secs, and 5 min 8 secs respectively). Consequently, it is evident that Facebook has a dominant place in the app market in terms of its usage and reach, and this demonstrates the importance of this in relation to how much time adults spend using these apps on a daily basis. This is further underlined by showing that in the period 2016-2018, Facebook is the only social media site to appear in the top ten sites for user duration; strengthening its number 2 position from 87% penetration in 2016 to 95% by 2018. Google (98%, 98%, 99% was largely unchanged in first position, whereas there is much fluctuation and variability between the other sites in the table from positions 3 to 10. The

near-ubiquitous usage of Facebook makes this a predominant platform upon which to focus for my study. However, it is important to note that there will still be a significant, and perhaps gradually growing, minority of users for whom Facebook is not a platform of choice, as well as those who use it much less frequently than assumptions might lead us to believe. The variations in usage patterns are an area that should be born in mind as a note of caution in studies which could present time-critical materials to parents through this medium.

The use of technology by schools to provide remote learning for pupils during the Covid-19 pandemic has been the subject of much popular discussion, and as discussed earlier in this chapter Goodall (2020) and others noted effective practise for engaging parents with remote learning. The UK Government has provided funding for devices to support children learning remotely (Department for Education, 2020b) and setting up online learning with Google or Microsoft (The Key, 2020). Some schools will have made a smoother transition to providing online learning than others, and it will be intriguing to see whether others have been able to study the impact of the pandemic on parental engagement. Personally in the context of my own practise; my school has shifted to more regular email contact with parents which has been welcomed by some, and shifting parents' evenings to video calls as examples of adapting to use technology more routinely than we did before.

#### 2. 4. 2      Typological views of social media users

The purpose of social media usage for parental engagement could be considered against the Epstein (1997) framework: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, collaborating with the community. To varying extents there are imaginable situations where social media, and in particular a closed space such as a Facebook Group,



could be used successfully for each of these six types of parental engagement. During my intervention it was used primarily for communicating with some elements of learning at home. Were the focus for the engagements to be different, I believe that a similar closed Facebook Group could be used to engage with parents on each of these fronts. Models explored earlier in this chapter rightly focus on outcomes, often defined as attainment or achievement, thus the usage of social media for different elements of engagement could fit seamlessly into each of these approaches, though of course the nature of posts etc. would need to be adapted.

There are many variables at play when considering how social media could affect parental engagement. An important addition to these considerations are the many personas which people inhabit when they are online. This is a vast area of study in itself, thus I will limit ourselves to considering personas relating to social media usage in order to understand the impact this may have on my study.

It is neither possible to assume people behave the same online as they do offline, nor that they behave differently. A wide variety of factors influence a person's online behaviour and how this interacts with their offline behaviour in range of different contexts (Ho et al., 2012; Huang et al., 2014; Quirk & Campbell, 2015), and although some work has noted variances between introversion and extroversion, it is also plausible that the same person behaves differently online and offline (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Kim, 2018). Resultantly, schools may notice a disjunction between their experiences of how a parent engages offline with how they engage online. Hargittai and Hsieh (2010) recognised that key determinants of social media usage are the frequency with which users interact with a service, and how many services the user interacts with. This creates a matrix of four types of social media users:

dabblers who use one service sometimes; samplers who use more than one service sometimes; devotees who use one service often; and omnivores who use more than one service often. The authors found a weighting towards the latter two categories, but their sample was almost two-thirds 18-year old students in the United States, thus a sample of the general population likely would have been different. This simple typology based on two binary axes is attractive for its clarity both for analysis and discussion, and also for users to be able to readily self-identify and reflect upon if required. In the context of a school seeking to engage with parents through social media, it could give an effective benchmark from which a school can plan. Characteristics of higher usage categories show that they also spend higher amounts of time online compared with non-users, dabblers or samplers. The same study also found probability gaps in the diversity of social media usage in: gender by 10% between males (lower) and females (higher); 8% between Asians and Whites; 11% between 1 standard deviation below and above the mean; and 16% between those who spend 5 hours online per week and those who spend 30 hours online. All of these differentials have value in considering the context of variations discussed earlier, and for me to be mindful of in this study as we proceed.

Kim (2018) presented users with a number of behavioural, usage and opinion-based statements and used these to define four types: impression manager; lurker; social networking site enjoyer & relationship focus; and social value orientation. Impression managers focus on controlling their image and others' considerations of them through their use of social media; lurkers reveal little and only interact in order to look at what others are going; enjoyers & relationship focus users view the tools as a way to interact with their friends; and social value orientation users use their social media channels for community, social and political issues. This typology goes further than Hargittai and Hsieh (2010)

because it seeks to understand motivation, outlook and self-identity of users, and thus the types are more closely aligned to psychological traits rather than mechanical descriptors of usage. This additional thread of analysis is helpful as seeking to weave the motivations of a user alongside their usage pattern, which could come together into a fuller picture of their online persona.

Many other typologies for social media personas have been created which display subtly different emphases. These include Bulut and Doğan (2017)'s ABCD users: advanced; business-oriented; communication-seekers; and dawdlers, with this last type being most akin to the commonly-cited lurker. Brandtzæg (2010) considered typologies created by 22 studies and synthesised them into 8 types: non-users; sporadics; debaters; entertainment users; socialisers; lurkers; instrumental users; and advanced users. Themes emerge throughout the existing typologies already considered which consistently separate non-users (sometimes as a type, else by exclusion from the sample); consistently identify lurker characteristics in some form; often recognise prolific users seeking social connections; and also merging assessment criteria by considering the technical proficiency of a user in amongst considerations about intent or purpose. For example Brandtzæg (2010) gives the impression that lurkers may be less active than sporadics, but this is not borne out by his data. Similarly the behaviour of socialisers could be assumed to be more focused on family and friend interactions, but again this is not borne out by his data. The inclusion of the advanced group implies an emphasis on technical proficiency rather than merely more prolific usage of social media, but again this is not borne out by the data. As his own Table A1 shows (p. 488), the progression through the sporadic-lurker-socialiser-debater-advanced is on nearly all measures simply an increase of the mean score in each cluster. Although this

degree of detail is not evident in the analysis or discussion, it is included and so can be critiqued in this way.

A methodological consideration of typology studies is that all of them rely either wholly or largely on users to self-report their behaviours, habits and beliefs. A small number make use of data gathered from one aspect of a platform such as metrics visible to administrators of a Facebook Page or Group, but these are limited in their scope by the nature of the data provided by the platform focused on the context of the Page or Group. There is a lack of studies which have broader access to all of a user's social media data to be able to generate an independent assessment of their usage. The absence of such approaches is likely because of the proprietary nature of the code running the platforms, and the commercial sensitivity of disclosing even these data in anonymised format which could be lucrative to commercial interests.

My study does not seek to make sole use of one typology over others, instead I recognise the importance of recognising parents' starting points and agreeing upon shared goals. As discussed above, a number of others have already sought to amalgamate types between studies and have created sometimes unwieldy typologies of 8 or more personas. I believe that there is value in clarity of a smaller number of personas within a typology, but that each brings its own challenges because of the desire to consider all possible factors. It could reasonably be argued that for some portion of considerations it is most relevant to consider the overall volume of a user's social media usage; at another point it could be more pertinent to consider frequency or regularity; other points could be best-served by considering interactivity or responsiveness; and so on. With many different aspects of social media usage to be considered, it is arguably unwise to settle for one typology and in analysis

and discussion I will draw on elements from a number of these typologies which are each contribute different value to deliberations.

In the same way as earlier considered usage habits of families from different SES, it is important to also consider the different online behaviours of parents. I have explored how online personas may be fixed, may change over time, and may also change with context. As such it is likely that schools will need to plan their use of social media considering that the widest range of online personas are likely to present in each group of parents, and use this to inform their planning and expectation setting. Parents may explain how they feel they typically use a social media platform, but I have just considered the methodological challenge of relying on a user self-identifying, as well as ethical challenges of parents feeling able to be open and honest with an insider researcher about how they already view a school's communication and use of social media.

#### 2. 4. 3 Schools embracing social media to engage parents

Wilson (2016, p. 85) undertook surveys of early years' practitioners and parents to ask how settings maintain links with families. The results show some disparity between the perceptions of the two groups: most notably 68% of practitioners felt they used emails compared to only 45% of parents; and 64% of practitioners felt they used one-to-one meetings compared to 41% of parents. Broadly the disparity was in favour of more practitioners believing that they use different methods and parents not recognising as many methods used. There were two exceptions where this imbalance was evident in the opposite direction: Facebook (11% parents, 9% practitioners) and informal conversations (47% parents, 43% practitioners). Although the prevalence of Facebook was notably lower

than other methods, a greater number of parents identified this as a method used than did practitioners. Wilson does not offer further analysis of this element, though it could be inferred either that the parents' use of social media to engage with the early years setting has greater value or meaning for them; or that the omnipresent and ubiquitous nature of Facebook creates a confirmation bias about the usage of Facebook in all contexts regardless of their actual experience. Wilson suggests that combining social media with informal conversations may attract additional benefits, particularly around spontaneity of comments or questions; broadening access particular to fathers who less commonly visit an early years' setting; and providing peer-support opportunities (pp. 88, 92). The difference in perception of engagement methods between parents and practitioners is also evident in similar survey questions from Kambouri-Danos et al. (2018, pp. 7-8) where around 45% of practitioners recognise their use of e-information, compared to around 35% of parents.

Leading by modelling good practice is a well-recognised approach (Kouzes & Posner, 1987; Jantzi & Leithwood, 1996; Peterson & Deal, 1999; Fullan, 2002), and the same argument can be extended to the use of social media within schools. If schools expect parents to use social media to engage with the school, then consequently a school collectively and staff individually should also be prepared to engage through social media. This has an impact in terms of how school staff utilise the Facebook Group and if this is viewed authentically by parents. Biddle (2018) gives a narrative account of creating a class Twitter account in order to teach the children about online safety, to engage with parents, and to access other sources of information to enhance their curriculum. He draws a useful case study on how a class can use a social media platform such as Twitter to work towards a number of outcomes. It is possible that this could happen due an individual teacher being motivated to doing so, or as part of a whole-school approach. Biddle touches on how he used the class

Twitter account for parental engagement through the examples of parents who got in touch using the platform to share what their child was doing outside of school, which he as the teacher was able to share with the class. The second example Biddle gives was to engage with local community events through Twitter, which could contribute towards Epstein (1997)'s sixth type of involvement: *collaborating with the community*. The final example Biddle gives us about using Twitter to engage with authors to spark a child's motivation towards their reading or writing, and how this motivation can then spur them onto a greater enthusiasm for learning.

Of the studies which have considered how social media can be used for parental engagement, the vast majority fall into having one of two other factors: they either consider its usage to engage students rather than parents, or a smaller number consider its usage in a secondary school context. Those which consider social media for student engagement (Andersson et al., 2014; Kerkman, 2017; Martin et al., 2018; Gabbidon, 2020; Reed, 2020) cannot be easily transferred into a primary school context for a number of reasons: age restrictions on most platforms are at least 13; primary school ownership of personal mobile devices is significantly lower than secondary age students; and parental attitudes towards social media is less accepting for younger children. The scarcity of published material around the use of social media in primary schools for parental engagement is one of the central reasons cited for this study, and my intended contribution to the gap in this area. Many of the recent contributions to understanding of the use of social media in schools are made by professional doctorate students, perhaps signalling that there is an appetite within the profession to explore these areas more deeply and openly.

There are a number of studies where the focus has been on parental engagement, or at least parental communication, using social media; though this has been in a secondary school context (Mazza, 2013). Some studies provide valuable insights into how social media can work with parents, although in a different context. I contest that the relationship between a parent and their child's primary school is materially different to their relationship with their child's secondary school, explained largely by three factors: the age of the child necessitates much more regular interaction with primary school staff; generally the smaller size of a primary school compared to a secondary school is more conducive to the cultivation of more familiar relationships; and the less developed nature of a younger child mean that parent may be more involved in supporting their child's learning than when at secondary school.

Some studies exist which have used social media as the method for another investigation rather than as the focus in itself, for example: preschool obesity prevention (Swindle et al., 2018); its usage by school nurses (Wysocki, 2015); and the impact of parenting on social media and religion (Muhyani, 2019). One study of three primary schools in Spain commented a number of times that "the Internet was mainly used for information purposes only rather than for interaction" and "Internet artefacts were primarily used only for informing and not for interacting with parents" (Vigo-Arrazola & Dieste-Gracia, 2019, p. 212). There is a recognition within the study of the challenges of using social media when some families do not have the resources to be able to access it, as acknowledged above as how social class can be a challenge to parental engagement (p. 57). It concludes (my *emphasis*):



“virtual spaces either become a kind of *notice board* that is more or less used by some parents and the engagement of these parents is rather minimal or, in the schools where families are participating, the subjects are *mainly centred on the interest and activities of the school* and less on the interest of the families, so *the possibility that families have to develop their social capital is very poor*” (p. 217).

This presents a number of profound challenges to my study: firstly, to ensure that a use of social media does not become a ‘noticeboard’ for the school; and secondly to ensure that families are getting some benefit out of the experience for themselves. If the reverse were to be true on both of these measures then a study would be successful only in extending the communicative and broadcast reach of the school, rather than building a community within the parents or even achieving any dialogue between parents and the school. It is also pertinent for schools to consider how they appear to prospective parents and others online and specifically on social media (Blumenreich & Jaffe-Walter, 2015; Bloom, 2018); thus the risks are both using social media badly, and in not using it at all. Other doctoral studies (Lovecchio, 2013; Russell, 2017) acknowledge the important of using social media as a method of parental engagement to complement existing methods. They also emphasise that using solely one platform has downsides because of demographic differences between user bases. As discussed earlier, Facebook is currently by far the most pervasive platform, but it remains important not to assume that it is omnipresent nor instant for all users. Sociodemographic differences between the popularity of different platforms (Ofcom, 2018, 2020) can play an important role in how a school determines which platforms to use and how. For example, 19% of adults in lower SES households (DE) only ever use a smartphone to go online, whereas this is 2% in in AB households. Other comparisons show 59% of DE adults have a social media profile (79% in AB), and 27% do not use the internet (4% in AB).

These variations in key metrics demonstrate the broad range of family contexts with which schools will need to work in order to support all children.

Keeping children safe online is an area with which schools are familiar (Department for Education, 2019b), and is an area that parents also express concern about (Ofcom, 2018). Known variously by terms such as e-safety, digital safety, and online wellbeing, online safety has been a firm part of the expectations upon schools for some time. Most recently it is encapsulated in the computing programme of study within the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2013); as Annex C to the Keeping Children Safe in Education statutory guidance (Department for Education, 2020a); and within the school inspection framework (Ofsted, 2019). Schools and parents may be cautious about using new online sites or apps, or using existing ones in new ways. I seek to minimise this barrier by making use of Facebook which is the most widely-used social media platform in both the population and in my sample, though this in itself does not negate the hesitancy that some parents may have about using an existing technology in a new way, nor the difference in frequency or regularity patterns amongst parents.

Alongside the development of social media tools, so too has there been a development in how to manipulate content in order to get greater coverage or online engagement. Some content such as Bergviken Rensfeldt et al. (2018); Villamediana et al. (2019); Facebook (2020a) provide a description of how algorithms operate, others have critically analysed the impact of this (Schwartz & Ungar, 2015; Bloom, 2018; Kanuri et al., 2018), and others have sought to make constructive use of this to further their research (Leach et al., 2019). I believe this highlights the imperfection of engagement data derived from platforms including Facebook, and further seek to underline the importance of focusing on the human

experience and understanding of engagement and using online metrics solely to supplement this approach.

## 2.5 Conceptual framework in this study

The core conceptual framework of my study is underpinned by parental engagement and social media, both situated in the domain of UK primary school education. These are threaded throughout my aim and research questions which are used as the primary structure for chapters 2, 4 and 5.

I have explored a range of perspectives on parental engagement which each have their strengths and applications in particular situations. Due to my focus on developing the communication aspect of parental engagement in my study, I have determined to use the Epstein (1995) definition of “effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children’s progress” to be the most relevant in my context. I appreciate the particular focus on the communication aspect of the home-school relationship, whilst at the same time recognising the multifaceted purpose of communications whereas some other models seem more solely focused on academic attainment. Reflecting on their earlier mode, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) suggest that “invitations suggest that they are powerful contextual motivators” (p. 113) and also recognise the importance of schools taking actions to develop parents’ capacities for greater engagement (pp. 116-120). Each of these perspectives strengthen my approach to parental engagement insofar as seeking to develop relationships between schools and parents around the focus of their child in order to better support and develop the educational experience. I see that the concept parental engagement focusing of the communication strand of the Epstein framework has a benefit to my study undertaking an intervention using my second core concept of social media.

By providing opportunities for real-time engagements using a popular social media platform, I believe my intervention is well-situated to explore the intersection of parental

engagement and social media. As discussed in the previous section, existing work on the use of social media has presented a number of challenges. Some of these are around transferring what has been seen elsewhere into a primary school context: including from Early Years settings (Wilson, 2016; Kambouri-Danos et al., 2018); from secondary schools focused on student engagement (Andersson et al., 2014; Kerkman, 2017; Martin et al., 2018; Gabbidon, 2020; Reed, 2020); from secondary schools focused on parental engagement (Mazza, 2013); and from more specialist support services (Wysocki, 2015; Muhyani, 2019). Some work including Lovecchio (2013); Russell (2017); Vigo-Arrazola and Dieste-Gracia (2019) highlight the potential pitfall of social media channels becoming 'noticeboards' for schools rather than an opportunity to engage with parents in a two-way fashion. Bringing together each of these aspects of learning will inform how I approach the use of social media as the second core concept in my study.

## 2. 6 Conclusions from literature review

Whilst there are some common threads identified throughout the literature, none of them are universal and thus the focus of my study will be to understand parents' perspectives on their engagement with the school through a social media intervention. I have shown how a number of studies showed a positive correlation between parental engagement and higher student attainment, though this is not a specific focus of my study due to the importance of understanding parents' perspectives of the engagement activities undertaken rather than attainment being a focused outcome. I have also seen that there was greater understanding and shared purpose between schools and families who engage together, which form the conclusion for the second focus on self-efficacious parents and the interaction with pupil aspiration and motivation. Even though they are not readily quantifiable in the way that student attainment is, they nevertheless represent an important tenet of school-family interactions which can seek to overcome challenges or variations present, and can offer to be an opening for a family to be more actively involved with the school. Throughout consideration of parental engagement, it has been evident that successful engagement requires focus and time, a shared approach involving a range of stakeholders, a flexible approach which can be tailored to different populations and individuals, and an openness to the relationship being bidirectional rather than solely communication from school to parents. Language and terminology are important to a shared understanding of a concept, and even in its conception the difference between involvement, engagement, partnership or other terms conjure up different perceptions about the relationships. For this study I will continue to use 'parental engagement' as a broad term to encapsulate all approaches to how schools can work with parents, but doing so without a view to excluding ideas labelled by other terms.

The second area I explored in this chapter was a number of models for how parental engagement is studied, and my study will proceed drawing on aspects from many of them in order to provide a broad footing for the approach, seeking to gain insights by focusing on the perspective of parents.

Having considered existing literature on the topic, I will use the definition that parental engagement is about **“effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children’s progress”** (Epstein, 1995). This view of parental engagement is what I will continue to use throughout this study.

In considering the use of technology, I have identified three commonalities from the existing literature. The first is that although sometimes challenges may appear technological, this can often be a proxy for a more underlying problem such as a disjunction in understanding between family and school or other underlying issues. It may be tempting to view problems as having technological solutions, and similarly to see challenges as being technological in nature. A number of the studies considered highlighted that offline considerations need to be addressed before considering technology. The second emergent theme is to consider what parents already do online and through which platforms, then use these to reach them. This is an important distinguisher that social media has over platforms such as VLEs which require a parent to open a new app, use a separate login, and importantly to form a new habit in building it into their routine. By interacting with parents through platforms with which they are already comfortable, social media has the potential to improve engagement over other approaches. Connected to this is the third theme around the use of technology, which is that parents are not a homogenous group and that very large variations may exist – including on account of social class, ethnicity, gender, or other factors. As such it is likely

that one approach to engage all parents will not be successful, and that a school may need to approach parents in different ways in order to give them the same opportunities to be involved. The third conclusion is how people can behave differently online to offline and associated typologies for considering online behaviours, and these variations should also be borne in mind in order to set expectations and understand the nuance of impact.

In drawing together each strand of this chapter, it has been clear that there is not as much overlap between the areas as I first have considered: different authors and studies have contributed perspectives mainly to one of the key themes. This suggests that this study has identified an interaction between understandings which has not yet been sufficiently explored. Through the rest of the study, I hope to explore more fully the impact of using social media on parental engagement in a primary school. Having identified gaps in existing understanding about the impact of social media specifically on parental engagement, and in the context of a primary school, gives a clear scope within which to pursue the study and explore these aspects further.





## Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter will outline the approach taken during the study, beginning with a paradigm rationale the approach to the aim. I will then consider the context of the participants in the study, and how data were collected. Before concluding, I will then outline how those data were analysed including exploring questions of trustworthiness, authenticity; my role as teacher and researcher; and ethical issues.

In this study, I am seeking to understand: **To what extent can social media influence parental engagement in a primary school?** This is research aim has three research questions:

1. Which elements of parental engagement do parents value the most?
2. What opportunities could a closed Facebook Group offer to improve parental engagement?
3. Which challenges to parental engagement could a closed Facebook Group introduce?

These questions all contribute to my research aim, which seeks to understand the experience of introducing a Facebook Group for parents and school staff to interact.

### 3.1 Paradigm Rationale

By pursuing an anti-positivist epistemology I seek to make this focus on personal, subjective and unique qualitative experiences at the heart of my study. Through the methods used, I recognise that people are social actors with choices about how to respond and behave, whilst also recognising influences including their historic context and the significance of

power relationships on the ability of a social actor to have complete agency. As a consequence, my methodological approach seeks to explain through seeking an understanding the particulars of individuals rather than attempting to establish general or universal truths. As a small-scale intervention, it is important to recognise the richness of the focus on participants' experiences of the intervention. I am especially interested in parents' perspectives, and thus parents are the principal participants in the study and it is their viewpoint I am seeking to understand and amplify throughout my work. There are incidental mentions throughout about the perspectives of others, including children and staff but the principle viewpoint at the centre of the research is that of parents. Whilst being an insider researcher, I seek to understand the parents' perspective as central to the study. This permeates through the research tools as well as the approach to analysis and discussion; and this is done purposefully in order to shift the discourse in some of the literature discussed in the last chapter which can read as though schools select the right approach and then encounter difficulties from parents who do not respond as intended. In my study I am keen to recognise the many different starting points of all participants in the experience in order to reach a more collaborative outcome.

In addition to the qualitative approach to understand engagement from parents' perspectives, I have supplemented this with engagement data available from Facebook. As a quantitative data set, this provides an ability to compare how the platform considers engagement to vary. Whilst I find this a useful additional source of information to include, I am conscious that engagement shown in these metrics should not become synonymous with how parents understand their engagement. Within Chapter 4, I will explore how there could be many meanings of engagement and the importance of clarity in discussing each of them.

There are also some measures which benefit from garnering from a wider group of parents with the benefit of their anonymity through an online survey. Throughout the discussion I have drawn on quantitative results from the survey either to support or contrast with comments made by parents within interviews or as part of the Facebook Group. The benefit of this mixed approach is the “exploratory research” approach that Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2005) explained; the ability to supplement different types of data in order to consider a topic in greater depth.

### 3.2 Approach

My research is a case study. Whilst a contested domain (Yazan, 2015), I believe my study is true to the threads that many have identified as hallmarks of being a case study. Whether the rich and vivid descriptions, blending description with analysis, focusing on actors and their perceptions of events, highlighting relevant events, or as the researcher being integrally involved, my study would be recognised by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) as a case study. Similarly it fits the Denscombe (2014) view of case studies being an in-depth study of one setting; focusing on process, interactions and relationships; holistically focusing on the particular; using multiple data collection methods; and focusing on people in natural settings. I believe that I have been able to develop conceptual categories inductively in order to explain initial assumptions (Merriam, 1998) to produce an interpretative case study as I recognise the situational context and nuances which enrich the study yet mean not all aspects will be transferable to a different situation. I am proud that as an insider researcher,

I am situated within the case I am exploring and thus can provide an interpretive approach to the case study given the benefits of some existing relationships with my participants.

Merriam builds on the Smith (1978) approach of viewing 'the case' as a bounded system to be considered as an object rather than a process, and aligns with the Stake (1995) emphasise on defining boundaries, fencing in, or delimiting the scope of the case in order to define the case to be studied. In my study, the case is the interactions between parents and the school and how this relationship is affected by the introduction of a closed Facebook Group. Given the short intervention period, my case study share more hallmarks with a snapshot study rather than a diachronic study (Thomas, 2011).

Yin (2011) describes a case study as beginning with "the desire to derive a close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single or small number of cases, set in their real-world contexts" (p. 4). He continues that the case study approach "assumes that examining the context and other complex conditions related to the case being studies are integral to understanding the case" (p.4). In my study, I consider a number of factors which contribute towards the context of the case including parental beliefs about self-efficacy, perception and expectations of communications with school, and how parental engagement may vary by some protected characteristics. Given the inclusion of these 'complex conditions' and my desire to understand the relationship from parents' perspectives, I believe the Yin approach to case study research fits well with my approach.

My study ran an intervention with parents in one class, and used parents in a parallel class as additional participants for a pre-intervention survey. I felt it was important to focus on one target community for the intervention in order to spend time working with them as part of the intervention and being able to collect qualitative data before and after the

intervention. The additional group of parents from a parallel class was used only for the pre-intervention survey in order to provide some comparison for the quantitative elements of the survey and to provide some comparison of whether the data for the target class are in line with other classes in the school.

One of the first messages I shared in the Facebook Group set some guidelines for the group. These were created in consultation with the Headteacher to provide boundaries for the remit of the Group, and submitted as part of the ethical considerations for the study. The published guidelines for the group were:

- We want this to be a friendly and supportive place to be. Please be respectful with the language you use and be sure not to exclude people.
- You're welcome to share photos, videos, links, etc. - but if you're posting anything which can identify other children please make sure you've got permission from their parents/carers.
- This isn't an official school communication channel, so it's not the right place to raise complaints which should either be directed to the school office, or to a member of staff in person.
- This group is limited to June - July 2019 as part of a research project. We're looking forward to learning lots from it, but this doesn't set an expectation that this will happen all of the time.

On reflection these guidelines could have been the result of a process of discussion with other participants, notably parents. Had the purpose and approach to the Facebook Group been co-created with participants, this may have had positive impacts on engagement with the intervention. My decision to limit the intervention to a short period was driven by a number of considerations. Firstly the final half term of the academic year was chosen to allow existing relationships to have become established before introducing an intervention;

this was in order for customs and expectations from all stakeholders to be embedded before seeking to change the approach by introducing the use of a new Facebook Group. Secondly, running the intervention for a reasonably short time period ensured that the data generated were focused on the time period of the intervention and produced a manageable quantity of qualitative information; otherwise running the intervention for a much longer period may have created so much data that it could have been more challenging to delve into the depths of the data to the same extent as I have been able to in this study. The final consideration for the length and timing of the intervention is the additional workload generated by the intervention for the researcher as a class teacher. Teacher workload will be discussed further in chapter six, and I was conscious of the need to establish an approach which did not create undue workload for colleagues should they decide to follow my approach in the future.

### 3.3 Context

The school in the study is in south-east England, serving half of a housing estate comprised of a large amount of social housing. In considering a number of factors, the study is reliant on a proxy measure to determine deprivation, where the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG) is the most readily-accessible and most widely-understood proxy measurement of family deprivation. Others exist, discussed in Chapter 2, including the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), or the more pertinent Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). Whilst these are statistically more robust when considering the wider population, they are not available at the granular level considering a class or an individual.

Table 3-1 Deprivation measures of context school

	2015	2019
<b>IMD (Indices of Multiple Deprivation) (Ministry of Housing, 2019)</b>	40-20% most deprived	30-10% most deprived
<b>IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index)</b>	30-20% most deprived	20-10% most deprived
<b>PPG (Pupil Premium Grant)</b>	33%	39%
<b>SE England highest level of education attained (Office for National Statistics, 2019b)</b>		33% degree 23% A-levels 6% no qualifications
<b>Parents' survey</b>		14% degree 36% A-levels 43% no qualifications

The school in which the intervention took place had 45% of families eligible for the PPG, compared to a local authority average of 21.7% (source omitted for anonymity) and an England average of 22.7% (Department for Education, 2019a). Whilst this makes the school well-positioned to consider any differential impact of parental engagement from socioeconomic status; the sample size already discussed, together with the voluntary and self-selecting nature of parent participation in the study means that the data cannot be relied upon to be representative of either deprived families (eligible for PPG), or non-deprived families (not eligible for PPG). However it does add to the richness of the data to be able to consider a school in such a socially diverse position as part of this study. In addition to using PPG as a measure of deprivation, I also asked in the pre-intervention parents' survey for employment status and education level. This is not used on individual



basis as the survey was anonymous, but it is valuable to illustrate the composition of the sample, which will be revisited during both analysis and discussion.

In 2014, around five years before my study began, I led the school in undertaking a project to introducing class blogging across the school, and as an adjunct to this created a series of class Twitter accounts with the aim of engaging a broader audience including parents. The school report that these Twitter accounts were successful at engaging others in the education community and outside audiences such as authors and celebrities, but were very unsuccessful at engaging parents. The school discovered that their parent community did not use Twitter, and the feedback was that they were more comfortable with Facebook. Consequently, the school created a public Facebook Page to share information to all parents in the school. The school report that this has been successful, and the Page having around 500 likes with a school population of around 300 children. However the genesis of the research aim is how the addition of a closed, invitation-only Facebook Group for the parent community in one specific class could affect parental engagement for those parents. As the platform itself argues, a Group is a better-suited tool for community engagement and discussion, whereas a Page is suited to an organisation publishing news and updates (Facebook, 2020a).

### 3.4 Rationale of Data Collection Methods

Within the study, I collect both quantitative and qualitative data. This mixed approach recognises the historic critique of the approach which I believe seeks to combine the quantitative benefits of measurability with the qualitative value of recognising agency, individuality and personal experience. Cohen et al. (2018, p. 49) recognise the value of a

mixed approach “ that enables rich data to be gathered which afford the supplementation that has been advocated in research for many years, that respects the mixed, messy real world, and that increases validity and reliability; in short, that ‘delivers’ ‘what works’.”

My study uses a range of data collection approaches which seek to understand the perspective of parents of how using social media to engage with a primary school. In order to do so, I have undertaken a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis. Table 3-2 details the sources of data. Due to the nature of using a social media platform (which tends towards quantitative data for engagement metrics) for a small case study (which tends towards qualitative data), there are a range of data sources used. Given that I am keen to understand parents’ perspectives, it is important to include parent interviews before and after the intervention; as well as considering their engagements with posts in the Facebook Group. “Facebook Group Insights” is a data analytics function provided to those running a closed Groups, though this intervention did not benefit from this because it fell below the membership threshold of 50 people (Facebook, 2020b). To ensure these usage data were included, I manually gathered the engagement information for each post and compiled it into a spread sheet for analysis. This is discussed within the next chapter, summarised in Table 4-3, and illustrated through a range of screen shots from the Group.

Table 3-2 Sources of data

Data source	Number of participants	Notes
<b>Pre-intervention online parent survey, target class</b>	7	No identifiers collected. Responses ~ 25% of class.
<b>Pre-intervention online parent survey, additional class</b>	7	No identifiers collected. Responses ~ 25% of class.
<b>Pre-intervention parent interviews, target class</b>	4	Parents (demographics in Table 3-3) Parents invited to participate as a cross-section of high, moderate and low engagement. Three activities with statements as stimuli for discussion provided additional data sources.
<b>Facebook Group engagement data</b>	13	Facebook Group Insights data is not available to small Groups, so relevant metrics were recorded manually. Also used are anonymised screen shots of posts and commented to show examples of the experiences.
<b>Parent interviews, target class post-intervention follow-up</b>	2, with the remaining 2 unavailable	Longitudinal follow-up 7-8 months after intervention as an unstructured discussion to capture parents' reflections on the intervention.

For this study, I was keen to understand the experience of parents using social media to interact with each other and with the school in the context of the class. This led to the study creating a closed Facebook Group for parents in the target class, and the acquisition of data from this Group including numbers of likes, reactions, comments, and posts. While these are numbers on a small sample of the population, I have been able to glean a great deal of understanding about the experience of the intervention through these data which are explored fully in Chapters 4 and 5.

A pre-intervention survey was undertaken with the desire to seek the input of a wider selection of parents ahead of the intervention beginning, as well as using it to inform the semi-structured interviews with parents before and after the intervention. I chose to use a

survey as it allowed me to obtain personalised response data from a larger number than would have been practical for interviews. Bhattacharjee (2019) recognises surveys are excellent for measuring “preferences, traits, attitudes, beliefs or behaviours” which are many of the areas explored (see Appendix C). The survey was undertaken with parents in both classes, with a modest number of 14 responses in total. Some responses also allowed me to compare the sample as proxy measures for factors such as socioeconomic status with national and local data for comparison. Conducting the survey online gave greater equity of access because I was able to use the school messaging system to send a link directly to each parent in the classes which reduced the likelihood of paper copies being lost in transit which covers a number of the benefits of internet surveys recognised by Cohen et al. (2018, pp. 361-362) including cost, speed, contact, access, convenience, ease, environment, and anonymity. I felt that these outweighed the recognised disadvantages of the approach (pp. 362-363) including abandonment and dropout (of which I had zero cases), computer difficulties, design matters (such as the impact of some null responses, discussed in Chapter 5), and lower response rates. Although not a perfect approach, I reflect that the inclusion of a pre-intervention survey gave a valuable insight into the opinions of some parents which gave me additional depth with which to approach individual discussions and the approach of running the Facebook Group for this study.

A small sample of parents were interviewed at the beginning of the intervention, drawn from a spread of engagement levels as perceived by me as the class teacher considering indicators including regularity and purpose of contact, attendance at parents’ evenings, and previous experience of invitations to become involved in activities. These interviews were semi-structured (see Appendix B) in order to obtain responses to some consistent questions, as well as giving the participants an opportunity to speak openly about other aspects. In

order to “enable respondents to say more about the subject” (Chrzanowska, 2002, p. 122), I used the stimulus materials in Appendix B2 to support the discussions by providing parents with opportunities to reflect, for me to guide questioning, and for the actions of manipulating the materials to provoke discussions (Padilla, 1993; Atkinson et al., 2000) through the use of “clues, microcosms or provokers” (Törrönen, 2002) which combined a mixture of “anticipated probes, spontaneous probes, conditional probes, and emergent probes (Beatty & Willis, 2007) . I combined the approaches of clues, provokers and probes through planned questions, unplanned questions resulting from the flow of discussion, and stimulus activities.

The interviews included three activities with stimulus statements which were designed to assist parents in reflecting on their own use of technology by providing a range of different apps, and to reflect on which existing forms of communication with the school they value most highly. As well as creating their own data, both tasks enabled me and the parents to discuss other unplanned topics which arose from the tasks. Three interviews lasted around 15-20 minutes, with one lasting 30 minutes. I have used direct quotations from these interviews throughout this study in order to demonstrate the richness and depth of the data, and where relevant have contextualised these with background information about the family.

Throughout Chapters 4 and 5 I have included screen shots of a sample of posts from the intervention Facebook Group. I believe that these help to bring the relationships alive and get a more direct feeling of how parents engaged. Given how ubiquitous and omnipresent Facebook is as a tool, these screen shots are a very accessible way of presenting data in a concise format. They show metrics of how many have seen, reacted, and commented on it;

as well as enabling the reader to infer and deduce additional information about style, tone and register from language and other communications methods using including emojis.

### 3.5 Participants and Data Collection

The target class for the intervention was a mixed group of year 3 and 4 children, aged 7 to 9.

This class was chosen because I was the class teacher so already had access to implement the intervention and was a known person to the parents, children and school staff. With the year group falling around the middle of a child's time at primary school, it presents a useful sample for a number of reasons pertinent to parental engagement. It is established that parental engagement tends to be more regular and frequent for younger children, particularly in the Early Years (Wilson, 2016), and there is some argument that engagement becomes more focused towards the end of the primary school experience due to the nature of the Key Stage 2 SATs tests and in readiness for the transition to secondary schools (Kambouri-Danos et al., 2018). Fortuitously, having a target class between these points of a primary school experience may have presented an opportune snapshot.

As described above, parents from a parallel class of year 3 and 4 children were used as an additional class for the pre-intervention parent survey. The inclusion of an additional class for this research tool was primarily to increase the overall response rate at the beginning of the intervention. The inclusion of an additional group in a largely qualitative study is done so consciously to provide points of comparison within contextual information captured in the pre-intervention survey. For example when asking about overall satisfaction of communication with the school, responses from parents in both classes were broadly similar. Albeit with small samples in both groups, this gave some reassurance that responses

from just the target class were not distorted beyond what could be expected in the broader context of the school setting.

*Table 3-3 Interview participants*

Family code	Demographic	Interviews engaged	Engagement profile assigned
<b>Coates</b>	White British Non-PPG Male child Mother participated for pre; both parents for post interview	Pre- and post-intervention	High engagement
<b>Taylor</b>	White British PPG Male child Mother participated	Pre-intervention	Low engagement
<b>Jayawardena</b>	South Asian Non-PPG Male child Mother and father participated	Pre-intervention	High engagement
<b>Williams</b>	White British PPG Female child Mother participated	Pre- and post-intervention	Medium engagement

In order to explore issues in more depth I invited a purposive sample of parents to take part in semi-structured interviews at the beginning of the intervention, and then invited the same parents to an open interview 7-8 months after the intervention to reflect on the experience. Using knowledge as the class teacher, I approached six parents altogether and four of them accepted the invitation. Two parents were invited who the researcher deemed to be highly engaged, two who were deemed to be moderately engaged, and two who were deemed to have low engagement. These engagement profiles were assigned by the researcher alone and were not shared with others, not were the approaches to the

interviews different between the different profiles. The pseudonym codes used throughout the study to report on the parents (or families, in the two cases of two parents attending an interview) are shown in Table 3-3.

For the purposes of determining the engagement profiles for the purposive sample, I considered my experience of engaging with the parents during the school year. Examples of factors considered included whether parents attend parent-teacher meetings; attendance at events, meetings or workshops; their approach to interactions before and after school; and any previous engagements via telephone, email, the school messaging system, or social media. The categorisation of engagement level was used solely for the purposive sampling for interviews and was not used elsewhere in the study other than as a point of reference during analysis.

All parents in the target class were invited to take part in the Facebook Group. An information letter about the study was sent home to all families to give them context (see Appendix B), then a link to the Facebook Group was provided through email and two text messages. Each separate communication resulted in an increase in requests to join the group.

The Headteacher and the class' Teaching Assistant were also part of the Facebook Group. The involvement of additional staff was done so for two reasons: firstly to provide ethical support to the researcher in the eventuality of any difficult situations such as inappropriate comments, fortunately none of which arose. The second reason was to encourage a community approach to parental engagement by reducing the impression that the group was solely for the teacher to use for communication, and both additional staff members engaged actively in the group with the aim of encouraging parents to do the same. Although



valuable for support and oversight, the inclusion of additional members of staff in particular the Headteacher may have added to any concerns about the asymmetric nature of power relationships which may have adversely affected parents' behaviour in regard to engagements such as commenting or posting. Table 3-2 outlines the sources of data collected and used throughout the study. The survey was run using Microsoft Forms which allowed anonymous submission of returns. I trialled the survey myself beforehand to ensure it functioned as planned and to assess the approximate time taken to complete. Interviews were undertaken in the school meeting room, which is a familiar space to parents whilst being a confidential space. I audio recorded and transcribed the interviews in full with all identifiers replaced with pseudonyms. Verbatim quotations from these interview transcripts are used throughout the study. The intervention took place at the end of the school year thus immediate follow-up was not possible, and was subsequently deferred beyond the Autumn term in order to capture more longitudinal reflections from parents, when it became evident during analysis that there was additional value to be gained from speaking again with parents about their experiences. By the nature of longitudinal follow-up discussions, there is attrition in participation. Whilst there are benefits of reflecting back using longer-term memories, participants can also forget some aspects which they would have previously recalled as prescient (Field, 2011) The follow-up interviews were undertaken shortly before the closure of schools for the Covid-19 pandemic and not all parents were able to return for a post-intervention interview. I considered using a survey to follow up with parents after the intervention, but decided against it given my desire to better understand the depth and richness of parents' experiences which can be more subtly explored in an unstructured discussion rather than using a survey tool.

I have already outlined how this study is strengthened by being a case study, and as such some of the limitations are indicated. For example because the research was undertaken by me as an insider researcher, the data are situational and contextual to the environment. I believe that the breadth of data collection methods and participants add depth to the study and offer some opportunities to supplement responses between different sources. Throughout this study I am open about the absolute numbers involved and the limitations of this small case study alongside the depth and richness of the data.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Analysis of the data outlined above was undertaken solely by the researcher. Survey information was analysed using Microsoft Excel, which included restructuring some of the data in order for them to be more graphically digestible for inclusion in this study. Interview transcripts were approached principally using an open coding method using NVivo, before moving onto analytic coding, and finally considering how various codes interrelate (Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 671 - 673). A summary of the coding notes used are shown in Figure 3.1, which emerged as I was reading through interview transcripts and themes of parental perspectives became evident.

Through the pre- and post-intervention interviews with parents, it became evident that the theme of “communication” was particularly pertinent. This code was derived partly deductively given Epstein’s (1997) categorisation of it as one of the ways in which schools can engage with families. Notwithstanding this and other prior work considering communication to be key to parental engagement (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Eccles & Harold, 1996), the code would have been reached inductively given the volume of material

volunteered by participants which were relevant to communication as a theme. Many chose communication as either the first or second topic they feel most involved with by the school, with all also agreeing that their current experience matches with their expectations and desires about the priority for involvement.

Nodes			
Name	Files	References	
Communication		8	27
Parents using technology		4	19
Meetings		3	8
Learning at home		4	7
Decision making		6	7
Volunteering		3	6
External activities		2	6
Children using technology		2	2

Figure 3.1 Coding summary

During the pre-intervention interview, discussion stimuli activities were used focusing on engagement approaches, communication methods and social network usage (see Appendix B: Parent interviews). Photographs of these were taken and are summarised later in

Table 4-2. Post engagement data from the Facebook Group (views, likes/reactions, comments) were transposed from the user interface into Microsoft Excel and analysed using those tools. Screen shots of posts and comments were saved, are used within analysis and discussion to illustrate commentary and have had identifying information redacted to preserve the anonymity of participants.

Null responses such as 'not applicable' were not offered as responses to questions, neither were any questions marked as mandatory for parents to complete. During the analysis of survey results, a determination was needed about how best to handle null responses to survey questions. Some questions offered a middle option (e.g. "neither agree nor disagree"), whilst others did not lend themselves to such a response, and similarly some questions offered a "not applicable" option whilst others did not. Had all questions offered either a null or middle response, it would have been possible to make questions mandatory. Instead the survey design lent itself to some questions having "middle options", some having "not applicable" options and some being left blank, so as to post the question during analysis about how to treat null responses. Consequently a "no response" category was added to each question to handle these non-responses and any null responses were coded against it. This was felt to be the most objective way to handle the scenario without misrepresenting respondents' feelings (such as by attributing to a "middle option"), nor without complicating comparison figures (such as by leaving out the null responses). This is recognised as a caveat to some of the survey data as a result of coding choices needing to be made as a result of the survey design. The prevalence of null responses is not significant enough throughout to cause concern throughout, but for a small number of questions there are a notable number of null responses, which makes it more difficult to infer meaning from the sample as a whole. Attention is drawn to this within analysis and discussion (Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 341-345).

Content analysis was undertaken on posts and comments made by parents in the Facebook Group. Given the small sample size, some more involved approaches to content analysis of social media such as Chan et al. (2016) was considered appropriate for the scale of their samples (e.g. >86,000 comments, p. 572), but not as relevant for the small case study

approach taken in my study. This was similarly true for mixed-methods approaches incorporating content analysis of social media including DiStaso and Bortree (2012) which considered content from 44 different sources (p. 512); as well as for lexicographical approaches to content analysis advocated by Schwartz and Ungar (2015) which consider multiples of thousands of contributions (pp. 88-89). An appealing solution to only using content analysis with large samples of social media data is made by Georgakopoulou (2016) in her advocacy of 'small stories research' using an example of five users' Facebook profiles (p.273). In my study, as will be shown later in Table 4-3, there was only one post authored by a parent, and a relatively small number of comments made during the intervention. Due to this low volume, content analysis does not form a major part of my analysis but aspects of it are used in Chapters 4 and 5 as I approached it inductively during my open coding approach.

### 3. 7            Trustworthiness and Authenticity

My research was undertaken in my school where I have a firm professional standing to uphold, combined with the requirement of my institution's ethics processes provide some assurance that the research was undertaken with rigour and a focus on ensuring that the study is a true and fair representation of the participants, seeking to portray them equitably and responsibly. Screen shots from the Facebook Group and quotations from interviews are used throughout the analysis and discussion to use their words directly in context to ensure parental voices are seen and heard throughout this study. Throughout my research, I have ensured trustworthiness and authenticity through the Cohen et al. (2018, p. 247) principles of: the natural setting being the data source; thick descriptions; data being socially situated and socially and culturally saturated; researcher as part of the research world; an holistic

approach; the researcher (not the research tool) is the key instrument; data are descriptive; showing a concern for processes not just outcomes; analysis is inductive; data are presented from the participants; and catching agency, meaning and intention. These themes are visited at key points throughout my thesis where relevant, but I have strived to uphold each of these points both as principles and in practice. My case in question focused on parents continuing their activities as part of their everyday routine, supporting the principles of both the 'natural setting' and it being 'socially and culturally saturated'. As the teacher of the class, I have been well-positioned to add additional contextual information to provide 'thick descriptions' as part of the 'holistic view' and to ensure that the 'data are descriptive' for example by adding additional demographic or contextual information during discussion and analysis. As stipulated from the outset, my study seeks to amplify and understand the perspective of parents in the situation, those supporting the principle that 'data are presented from the participants,' and my analysis being undertaken inductively in order to respond to themes which develop and emerge during the study. I have also been able to 'catch agency, meaning and intention' through deeper questioning within interviews, open questions in the survey and incorporating screenshots of whole posts or messages from within the Facebook Group.

The study and its results are limited firstly by their situation and scale. The intervention was undertaken in one class of one school, with a parallel class in the same school providing some additional pre-intervention data. The nature of this case study approach seeks to understand participants' perspectives of their experiences and identify what can be learned from these from a social constructivist perspective. In this context, credibility of the case study is weighted more heavily than reliability which would be more pertinent in the case of larger or multiple samples were involved in the study. For the same reasons, the data

collected and analysed study are presented as valid representations in the context of the nature of a case study intervention, and without seeking to impose them onto all other situations.

Parents for around a quarter of the pupils in each class participated in the pre-intervention online survey, and parents for just under half of the pupils in the target class chose to take part in the intervention on Facebook, achieved after three messages of invitation. The study did not set a minimum participation threshold, and as such proceeded with the self-selecting sample. Ethical approval required that participation was voluntary, and it was felt that three messages to invite and remind parents to join was sufficient without making parents feel under pressure to participate. I will consider some potential reasons for lower engagement rates later. As a small-scale case study, the value of quantity of participants is balanced against the richness of data obtained through the qualitative elements of data collection (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 375).

It should also be a concern that only around half of the parents participated in the study. Polar opposite rationales for this are plausible: firstly that parents are already very satisfied with engagement methods so felt that a Facebook Group would not add any value for them; else that parents were already very dissatisfied with engagement methods that they routinely ignore messages, or felt that any new initiatives would not address the concerns they had. Between the extremities of these propositions is the consideration that parents receive a large volume of communications through various media and consequently may feel overwhelmed by messages or cannot synthesise pertinent information through the volume received. In themselves, all of these possible reasons for the modest engagement rate in this study are valid to explore, and are addressed throughout the study. This is

explored more in Chapter 4 but without being able to establish conclusive reasons for it; thus it is recognised as a limitation.

A central idea tested within this study is that using social media could be a positive way to engage parents. A number of prerequisite characteristics may have to have been present for this to be validated. One such characteristic could arguably be for parents to have a positive view towards the role social media plays in their lives, and the value they apportion to it. In the pre-intervention parents' questionnaire, I asked what type of content parents would want to see shared with them in the Facebook Group. In hindsight, the phraseology used in this question could have been perceived as unidirectional, transactional, or tipping the balance of the power dynamic in favour of the school and arguably thus reducing parents' agency to fully control their interactions in such a situation. I will discuss power relationships within communication broadly and social media specifically when considering the third research question within Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

Any case study is focused on principally representing the situation in focus, yet with an eye on amplifying it in the hope or expectation that it could be emblematic of situations elsewhere and that others could derive value from the lessons learnt in one context to transfer to another. It is in this vein that in this study, I am open about both the positive lessons learnt from the study as well as the challenges encountered. Throughout my discussion, I identify features that are unique to some families and others which are common throughout. Similarly I hope that others will be able to transfer outcomes from my study either to individual or collective situations elsewhere.



### 3. 8 Role of the Researcher

Cohen et al. (2018, p. 15) recognises that “individual’s behaviour can only be understood by the researcher sharing their frame of reference.” This is especially relevant to my study given that it is undertaken by an insider researcher who is the teacher of the target class, whilst this also raises ethical considerations which are explored later in this chapter. Beck (1979) recognises that the role of a researcher is to demystify a phenomenon through the eyes of the participant, as Becker (1970) recognises that people construct their own social world, and Garfinkel (1967) suggests that experiences are fluid and changing, thus require a researcher to be close to the participants in order to understand this. Given that my study is a small-scale qualitative approach, I believe attests to Geertz (1974)’s keenness for “thick descriptions” without seeking to reduce them down. Alongside the determination to reach a greater understanding about parents’ experiences of using social media for parental engagement, I have taken a pragmatic view that having these depths of conversations with a larger proportion of the population is unlikely to be achievable thus the case study approach is most appropriate for my study.

I have acknowledged my role in this study as an insider researcher, given that I am the class teacher of the target class and thus have an asymmetric power relationship with research participants as parents of pupils in my class (Cohen et al., 2018). In a case study, this insider role is a common occurrence and the expectations to act with high ethical standards remains and my role as an insider researcher was explicitly outlined within my ethics documentation approved by my institution. Within Chapter 5, I will explore how data suggested a number of significant areas relating to the study and its implications to influence power relationships between different stakeholders. I believe that my insider status has been a positive asset throughout the study, enabling me to understand the

perspective of parents more deeply due to having established a relationship with them over the preceding year or two. The proximity of this professional relationship may have encouraged parents to be more frank and open with me during discussion than they may otherwise have been with an independent researcher, thus the data has benefited from my insider role and the case study approach. There is also a possibility that parents did not yet feel ready to engage in a Facebook Group with their child's class teacher given the power dynamics involved, and this could have been a factor in obtaining a lower proportion of parents engaging than I had hoped.

### 3.9 Ethical Issues

I have already addressed some of the ethical implications of the study such as the dual role of researcher and class teacher coexisting within the same person: thus creating the situation of an insider researcher (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 62). The imbalanced power relationship of the researcher being the class teacher of the participant's child could be considerable for some parents, and this is an area discussed in both Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 but cannot be fully cognisant of due to the nature of an imbalanced power relationship. By noting this where it is pertinent to discussions, I raise this as an ethical consideration and having taken steps to mitigate it including being a known person to the parents, and holding the meeting in a neutral space in the school, yet not being able to fully control for all aspects of it.

Before undertaking research, I obtained ethical approval from my institution and outlined the proposed approach, detailed in Appendix A. I undertook the research under academic supervision in the preparation, execution and evaluative stages. Participation was voluntary

for parents, and written informed consent was obtained beforehand. I also met with the Headteacher of the school to obtain approval beforehand, and made adjustments to the approach to accommodate requests.

In the context of the school in my study, teachers tend not to live within the immediate community and have attained higher educationally than the average for the local community. With this in mind, my role in the school of holding a position of authority and trust involving the children of the participating parents suggests not just the asymmetric power dynamics, but also an imbalance in social status. Chapter 2 discussed the relevance of work considering social, cultural and educational class, mobility and capital. These differences, real and perceived, were present in my considerations throughout the study in order to be mindful of my position in relation to parents. In particular I was mindful of not wanting to come across as issuing instructions, using language in a way which could be perceived as authoritarian, or seeking to unfairly delineate value between the actions or experiences at school and those at home. Although I am a parent of two pre-school aged children, I have not experienced school engagement as a parent and my only experiences have been during my own schooling then latterly as a teacher. I also recognise my demography as a white British man from a middle-income background will contribute to my understanding of the world. Throughout this review I have kept my own background and approach in mind and have strived to reflect critically both on the material and on my own approach. Notwithstanding these experiential limitations, I would reflect that I have positive relationships with parents, and this is borne out both by the views shown in the small parent survey and from comments made during interviews, which are explored more fully in Chapter 4.

### 3. 10 Reflections on Methodology

I have established the strength of the study in following a case study approach, and have explored how the data participants were chosen, involved and what data were collected during the study. I am confident about using multiple sources of data to approach the subject and believe that this adds a range of valuable perspectives which enable us to consider topics more deeply. I have been open about the limitations of the study, which primarily centre on lower participation rates. While these do have an impact on how were representative the parents were of of their peers, I nevertheless have been able to establish some important outcomes as a result of the study which can make a positive contribution to professional policy and practice given the depth of the insights from participants.



## Chapter 4 Analysis

In this chapter, I explore the data collected during the study in pursuit of answers to the primary research aim: **To what extent can social media influence parental engagement in a primary school?**

As throughout the study so far, this research aim is sub-divided between three research questions:

1. Which elements of parental engagement do parents value the most?
2. What opportunities could a closed Facebook Group offer to improve parental engagement?
3. Which challenges to parental engagement could a closed Facebook Group introduce?

This chapter uses these research questions to structure the analysis of the data, and will consider all sources of data within each section. Within each research question, I explore all data related to it, drawn from: pre-intervention parent surveys, pre-intervention parent interviews, social media data, and post-intervention parent interviews. During analysis, key trends emerged within each question separately. These are highlighted as headings beneath each research question, and will be explored further in the next chapter.

I will begin this chapter by considering what elements of engagement that parents themselves find most important. Drawing on all elements of the data collected, this centres on three key areas: parents accessing information from school; using technology to engage with the school; and seeing inside the classroom: experiencing their child's curriculum and learning. Having considered what parents feel good engagement looks like, I will then

explore what opportunities running a Facebook Group offered to improve parental engagement. The themes identified here emerged under two headings: frequency and convenience, which emerged inductively during analysis. Finally I will consider challenges presented by the intervention. These have emerged in three areas: different language to represent engagement online and offline; relationships; and how engagement changes for some families. I will end analysis by drawing together all themes of the three research questions into conclusions. These conclusions are discussed further in the next chapter, including impact for policy and practice.

## 4. 1 Which elements of engagement do parents value the most?

### 4. 1. 1 Parents accessing information from school

Before embarking on an intervention, a small pre-intervention survey of parents from the target class and a parallel class gave an initial assessment of their experiences and views. Seven responses from each class were received, totalling 14 parent altogether. Although the initial “Overall, how involved do you feel in your child’s education?” (Figure 4.1) question garnered similar mean scores of 4.5/5 and 4.29/5 for each class, some of the more detailed subsequent questions showed some wider variations in how parents perceived their engagements. In each class, the same question asked again at the end of the survey saw the mean drop slightly to 4.43/5 and 4.14/5 respectively. This is a strong response from the sample, yet the modest reduction in satisfaction from the question asked at the beginning of the survey compared to the same question asked at the end of the survey could be attributable to the time taken to complete the survey (around 15-17 minutes) leading to respondent fatigue (Cohen, 2018 p. 474). This duration was longer than I took to complete it in a pre-launch trial, otherwise steps would have been taken to bring the completion time closer to ten minutes. The reduction could also represent a more considered response having had longer to reflect, and having been guided to consider a number of different aspects of their relationship with the school, which was also seen from one parent who left the question blank at the beginning but by the end gave a five star response. The two parents with whom I was able to conduct post-intervention interviews both expressed confidence that they felt involved in their children’s education, and gave a range of examples in support. These included formal meeting, informal opportunities to chat with



teachers and other staff, engaging with content posted on school websites and social media channels, and curriculum-based events for which parents were invited into school.

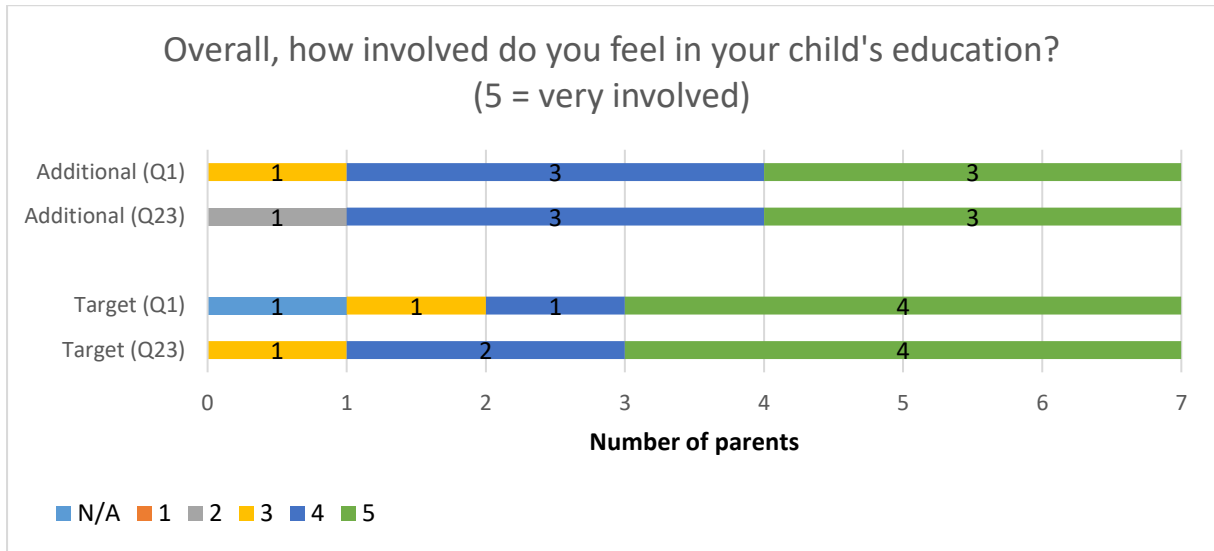


Figure 4.1: Overall, how involved do you feel in your child's education? (Asked at the beginning and the end of the survey)

These examples suggest support for the survey findings that most parents feel positive about their engagement with the school. In discussion, parents made supportive comments about their communications with the school. One single-mother from a lower SES who had attended the same school herself as a pupil reflected:

“I have quite a lot of communications with the ladies at reception [...] if there’s ever a problem with Kayden in school then obviously they communicate well and let me know. Obviously I try to communicate to solve the problem, so that’s the main one for me” (Taylor pre-intervention interview).

It is notable that the primary recollection of the parent about communication is around a negative experience of a “problem”, rather than in finding out general information or updates. This was one of the parents who was not available for a follow-up interview, and at that time she was having more regular involvements with school leaders due to her child displaying increasingly challenging behaviour. Upon reflection, this is perhaps indicative of her recollections of communications with school focusing on an ‘issue’ or ‘problem.’

Another parent also reflected on communication with the school being strong, even though the example given was also around handling of an issue. This mother was older and had experienced her two older children moving through the same school many years earlier and was now experiencing engagements with the school with her younger children:

“If I need to talk with the school I feel like I can talk all round with the school – I can go to reception, and they’re all aware. So I feel like I’m on a level with the teacher, reception, so I don’t have to ever worry or go into something with them because they know mostly. [...] I always like to get in and make sure I can get in and talk to whoever it is about anything. So I’m happy with that” (Williams pre-intervention interview).

For each parent, the theme of communicating with the school involved them actively speaking with a member of staff about their child in particular. This was contrasted to a more passive broadcast example of accessing information the school has published such as using the school website or public Facebook Page. Accessing this information is picked up throughout this chapter, but it is notable that for the parents who gave these examples that their thoughts were around needing to communicate for an issue relating to their child individually as their first response.

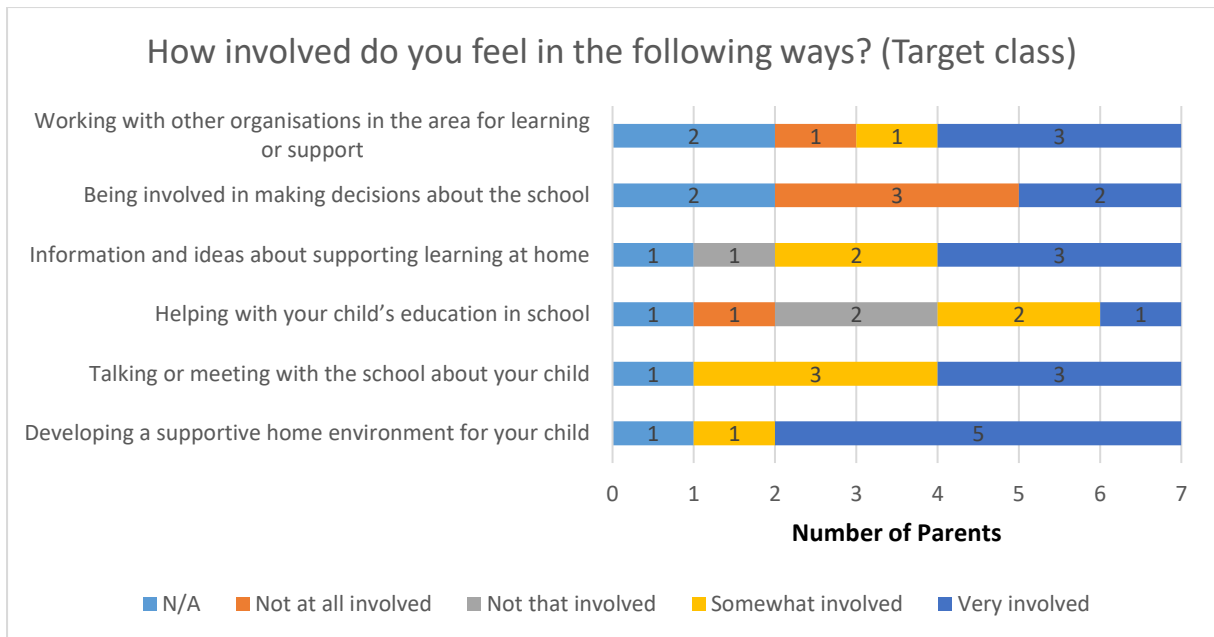
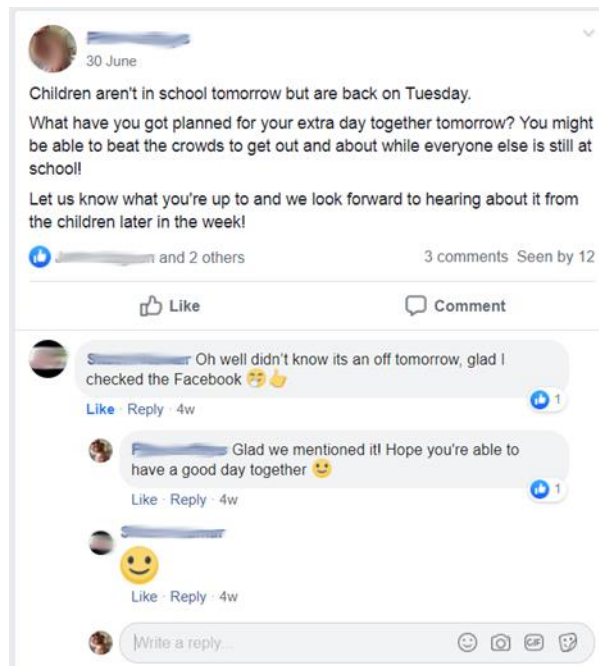


Figure 4.2 How involved do you feel in the following ways? (Target class)

Results for the target class (Figure 4.2) show how involved parents feel in different aspects of their child’s schooling. The categories in this question used the Epstein (1997) framework from which one of the six parental involvement categories is communication. Although they are physically collocated, operate in the same school policy framework, and take part in the same jointly-planned curriculum, there are evidently other factors which influence parents’ perceptions of their engagement. Examples of potential differences between parents as well as between classes are discussed throughout this chapter are drawn from examples given by parents during the pre-intervention interviews, such as parent-teacher meetings, and informal opportunities such as speaking just before or just after school. Given that these were referenced by all parents interviewed both pre and post-intervention, it can be inferred that the value placed on these is high. Four parents in the additional class did not respond to this question, thus the smaller response did not provide a robust comparison

point though a few small differences could be attributed to the personal styles of different staff, the perceived approachability and nature of established relationships between parents and the relevant teacher. The high non-completion rate for this question makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions from the responses to this question, and reflects an iterative learning point about making responses mandatory if responses are likely to be important for analysis.

Within the target class, all seven parents rated formal meetings as very good/good and five gave those ratings for informal conversations. Later in this chapter, I will look in more depth at relationships between stakeholders: it could be reflected that these two communication methods could be much less about the school as an institution and are more about the personal interaction between a parent and a teacher, and as such could plausibly be open to more subjective variation throughout the school than the other methods listed. Although the relationships on a personal level between parents and teachers have been shown to make a difference to parent engagement (Pallini & Baiocco, 2015; Eliyahu-Levi & Ganz-Meishar, 2019), this is not an area which is beyond the scope my study. It is an area which would lend itself to future studies using two parallel target classes, in order to isolate this as a variable.



*Figure 4.3: Post from intervention Facebook Group*

Figure 4.3 is an example of a parent of a child who had recently joined the school from another area and was not aware of the school being closed for an Inset day. This had been communicated through the usual channels of a paper diary dates flyer at the beginning of the term and text message reminders, though the parent had not been aware. This shows how using a closed Facebook Group could provide an additional avenue for parents to access information from the school, and perhaps in a manner that is more timely or accessible to them for the way that they manage their communication channels. The use of emojis in their responses could suggest a comfort level and relative informality in the Facebook Group, and an informality towards their interactions with the teacher and school in the environment. This informality was also evident where parents used exclamation marks, sometimes multiply, added to their comments. The increased use of exclamation

marks is recognised in popular culture as having increased in line with the usage of social media (Guardian, 2015; Griffiths, 2016; Taylor, 2016a, 2016b).

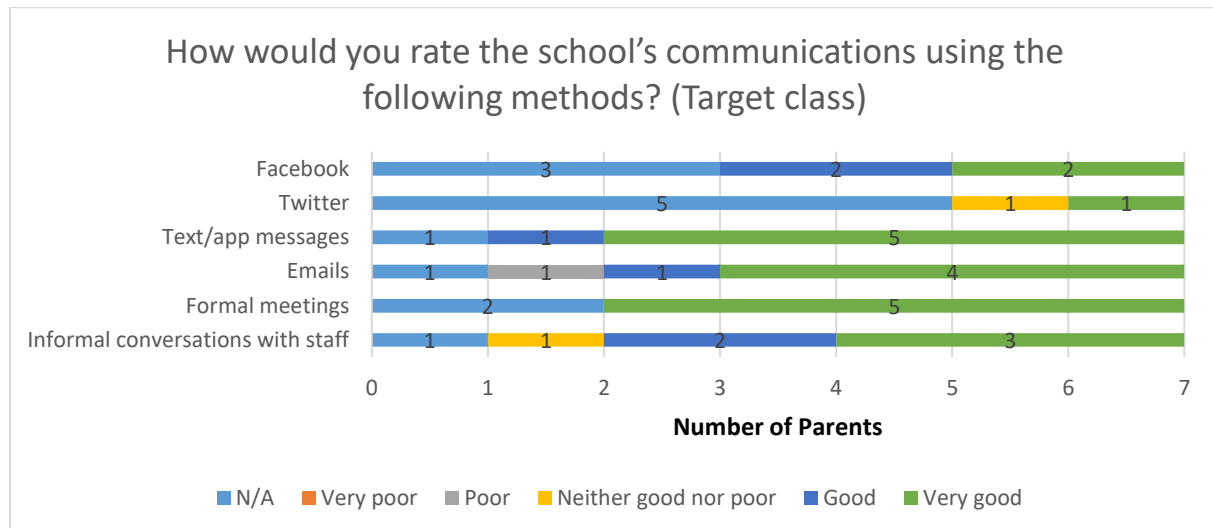


Figure 4.4: How would you rate the school's communications using the following methods? (Target class)

Responses to the pre-intervention survey suggested that parents were broadly positive about the current ways in which they communicate with the school (Figure 4.4). Especially notable is that parents are positive about their experience of emails and text messages from the school, which are valued more than Facebook and Twitter. This is also reflected later in Table 4-2, where parents in interview discussion give higher ratings to text messages over social media. This distinction is key for a number of possible reasons. Firstly emails and text messages are universal and do not depend on having a separate account on a proprietary social media site, thus the barrier to entry is lower. Further to this, emails and text messages both use 'push' approaches rather than the 'pull' approaches of social media. Emails and

text messages are sent directly to a user's account and device, whereas Facebook and Twitter rely on a user choosing to open an app then find the school's page or account to see the information, not all of which may be relevant and those pages or accounts with high volumes of content will prove challenging to access meaningfully. Depending on a number of factors including the frequency of use and number of information sources followed, a user may need to adjust their notification settings in order to ensure they see some content.

#### 4. 1. 2 Using technology to engage with the school

Given that parents' understandings of the intervention centred on communication and in trialling a particular communication method, much of the pre-intervention interview discussed communication methods. As well as "communication" being the most used code within these interviews (see Figure 3.1), "parents using technology" was also a frequent code which derived from the interpretation of the interview transcripts. In some cases, parents volunteered their own lack of confidence. A highly-engaged mother who lacks confidence using technology reflected: "I don't post on there because I'm not quite sure what to do" (Coates pre-intervention interview). A moderately-engaged mother was also forthcoming about her own lack of confidence and ability using technology: "I haven't managed to get any of these setup. I'm not very good with technology!" (Williams pre-intervention interview).

Others were much more confident including the father from a first-generation migrant family: "now we're into WhatsApp and now we're... in Sri Lanka sometimes WhatsApp is restricted like around election time when there's some military action, it's restricted. In that time people use Telegram..." (Jayawardena pre-intervention interview). When asked if they

felt a closed Facebook Group could improve a parent’s understanding of their experience at school, the balance of opinion was positive towards exploring the idea. In the additional class, this was similar at four parents choosing ‘yes’ and three ‘maybe’. Whilst still recognising the small sample size, these positive responses gave me encouragement that the intervention method was one to which parents would be receptive.

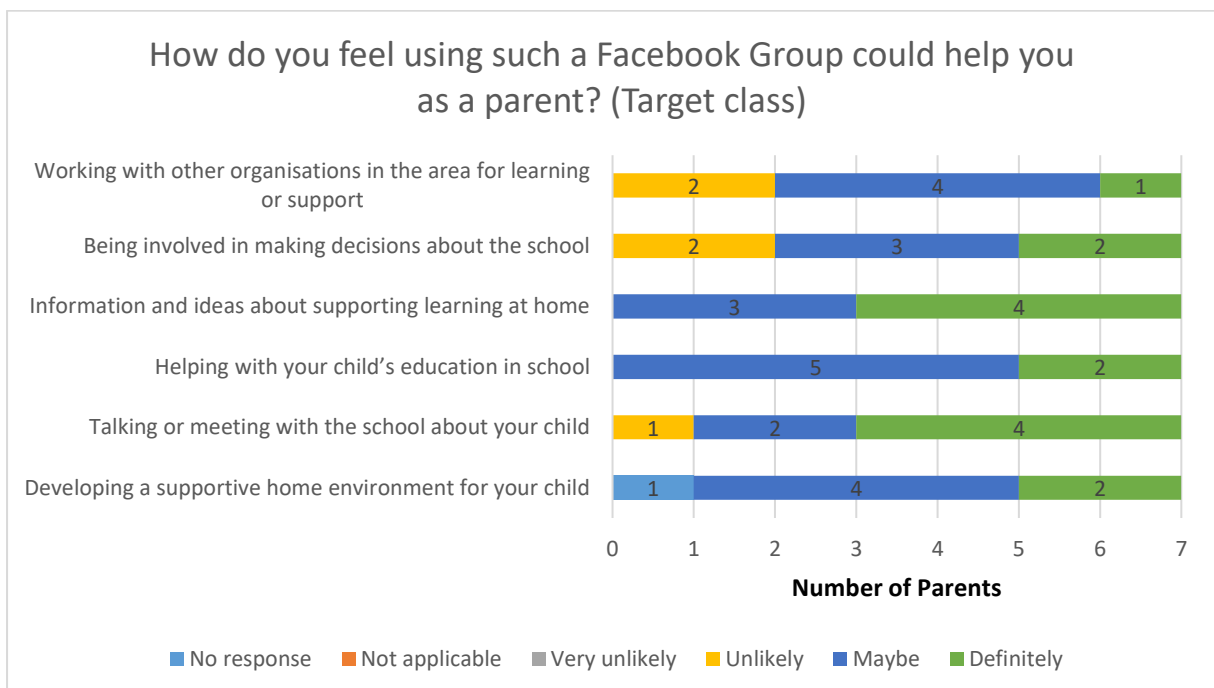


Figure 4.5: How do you feel using such a Facebook Group could help you as a parent? (Target class)

Despite parents within interviews giving social media a mediocre reception and prioritising other communication methods, responses to the pre-intervention survey had suggested an appetite for the intervention using a Facebook group. As Figure 4.5 suggests, parents felt a Facebook Group could “definitely” or “maybe” help them in some areas. There were some



variations between the classes, for example parents in the additional class were more positive about content aimed at “helping with your child’s education in school:” five felt it could definitely and two thought it maybe could help, compared to two and five respectively in the additional class.

As noted in Chapter 3, the parents interviewed represented a cross-section of parents showing high, moderate and low engagement behaviours. During pre-intervention interviews, one parent who tends to be moderately-engaged with the school shared:

“I’m always good with one-on-one communicating and also with things like letters rather than on my phone,”

And:

“Most people would check their emails two or three times a day, but I’m not – I’m that once a week person. Yea, I’m not a very big email lover. Text messages, I will get round to it as and when” (Williams pre-intervention interview).

The habits of this parent do not lend themselves to the school regularly using social media to communicate essential information. Despite having taken part in both the pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews for the study, this parent did not join the Facebook Group. In the post-intervention interview she was honest about her reluctance to join because of a fear of using unfamiliar technology. Other parents with a range of engagement profiles also drew a distinction between text messages and emails: “I just find [text messages] really quick and easy. Emails I need to log into and it takes a bit longer” (Coates pre-intervention interview).

In contrast, another parent uses social media to actively consider the opinions of fellow parents to an issue before deciding on their own approach towards an issue: “we check on the other parenting groups, and we get information from these groups because when there were comments coming from this group and we like to see from other parents” (Jayawardena pre-intervention interview). The parent explained their keenness to understand other parents’ perspective was influenced by their cultural upbringing outside of the UK:

“We’re coming from a very rigid and strong cultural background, and even sometimes some of the things are very important for us. But because we live in a very multicultural multi-ethnic [...] we need to adapt the culture for the... So Avyan’s not growing in our background culture, he’s growing in a British culture so we give a home for Jayawardena to grow and we want to take everybody’s opinions into Jayawardena’s adapted as a British man. So that’s where we take other people’s opinions” (Jayawardena pre-intervention interview)

This analytical and explicitly culturally-sensitive approach to the use of social media to consider parenting decisions was uniquely expressed during the Jayawardena interview, and was not a practice that other parents discussed. Though all families may sense this desire for them and their children to fit into commonly-accepted cultural norms, it might not expect them to be so explicit in their purposive use of using social media for these social interactions. From this, I could surmise that the Jayawardena family could desire to assimilate into the local community in a more pertinent way than other families may do, and attempt to do this by using social media to better understand the parenting choices of others. Although only a snapshot of one family, this could be more pertinent to first-

generation migrant families as in this case. In the example it could be possible for parents to gain a great deal from online interactions without needing to contribute much themselves: the phenomenon of “lurker” online behaviour, discussed later in this chapter when considering online behaviours. It could also be pertinent to consider whether the Jayawardena approach to considering the opinions and approaches of others reflects analyses made within considerations of a Cultural Deficit Model (Moynihan, 1965). Used variously, this considers that those from minority communities are either disadvantaged by the majority community, or that the minority community feel that they need to make additional efforts to become as advantaged as majority communities.

Interactions with other families using social media did not feature in discussions with other families, other than seeing updates from their own friends and family: they did not appear to use social media as a tool to support their approaches to parenting. A number of possibilities present themselves as to why this level of analysis was only evident from one parent. It is possible that other parents go through the same process but either did not articulate it, or were not consciously aware of having done so. It is also possible that due to their background as first-generation migrants, their desire to assimilate and provide a culturally assimilated upbringing for their children is more attuned. Finally it could also be the case that of the four parents interviewed, only the Jayawardena family are interested in what other families are doing and the other three families are content to make their decisions more independently as they did not make explicit reference to considering the opinions of other families either on social media or more generally. It is also possible that the nature of their social media use in this way is by chance displayed by an ethnic minority family rather than my inferring any link between the two factors. The Jayawardena family were the only family from an ethnic minority background to take part in the interviews.

Their child is high-attaining and they are very involved in supporting his learning at home, as well as providing a wide-range of extracurricular activities with different community groups. This attainment and engagement profile appears contrary to the characteristics suggested by some proponents (Ishimaru et al., 2016) of a cultural deficit model, whereby children of non-majority cultural backgrounds attain less well because of their cultural background. It is positive that this study has been able to explore examples of ethnic minority families being highly engaged with their child's school, which can sometimes be lost in other published accounts which consider "*challenges*" of schools engaging with ethnic minority families.

Another parent could be said to fall between these two examples when talking about her experience of seeing the school Facebook page: "[I see the school on Facebook] Quite a lot, yea I do see something about [the school] pop up," before going on to add "Sometimes I read it, sometimes I start reading it and then I'm like "Nah"-" (Taylor pre-intervention interview). A mother with four children of various ages in the school reiterated this by sharing a similar experience of her more minimal usage of Facebook:

"It's nice they like to be able to see what the school's doing, what's been happening at school, but I don't post. John [husband] has liked things before on our behalf if the kids have been on something. But it's more like just to see what's happening with the school and that sort of thing" (Coates pre-intervention interview).

I was able to revisit this with some parents during post-intervention discussions, and drew a stark distinction between the two parents in the Coates interview. First the father explained:

"Normally, school stuff comes up. I think I've got notifications set for things from school, so it will flag if school posts something. So that's I know that the school's

done something because it comes up with a bell icon, and I can go and see what it is.”

This contrasted with the mother’s approach:

“It’s different for me. If he’s at work, and I have to physically go onto the Facebook page and I just type in [school name] and it comes up. But I have to physically look otherwise it won’t come up” (Coates post-intervention interview).

This shows how parent engagement can vary a lot between parents in the same household, and could rely on some very non-technological solutions such as one parent mentioning something to the other to nudge them to look at something for themselves. Although the pre-intervention survey was sent to all parents, if only one of them completed it then the results may still not be representative of both. This could suggest a number of reflections on methodology of emailing all parents in each class. The first is that as email was not routinely used for communication by the school, there is a higher likelihood of email addresses being incorrect or outdated. Parents may not be familiar with seeing the school name in their inbox so it may be marked as junk or be otherwise missed. Parents also received a text message link to the survey, which is a method more routinely used by the school so would overcome these challenges, though despite also using a familiar mechanism the response rate was still relatively low. I did not follow up the messages with in-person communications, which data now show strongly parents value as the top forms of engagement; thus it would have improved response rates for staff to follow-up either with reminders in person, or by also handing out a hard copy of the survey with a verbal request to return it.

Regardless of how the Facebook engagement data are interpreted, this chapter shows how it is less than straightforward to infer meaning from them solely. In both post-intervention parent interviews, it was striking how differently the parents reacted, but at the same time how motivated and engaged they were to support their children, yet did so in different ways. The father in the Coates family was diligent in setting up notifications for the Group, checking the posts, and recalling the details of the posts many months later. Because they did not engage in the way to show up in Facebook engagement data, they would falsely be seen as a more passive category of the “seen by” statistics. Williams did not take part in the Group yet was familiar with some of the content both through other parents and through her child relaying information to her verbally. This could mean that they could be interpreted as not engaged because they did not join the intervention at all, which would do them a disservice as they demonstrated that they are very engaged and supportive of their child’s time at school but experience technological barriers and lack resilience to overcome them:

“It’s stupid really because there’s so many courses where I could do computer-wise, but I’m not very confident person with that, so I always shy away from it. I did do a computer course, and to go further you have to pass this sort of thing, so I tried it three times and I didn’t do it, and I thought I’m not going to do this anymore, I give up. Which is terrible because I wouldn’t let my kids give up, but because I’m older I can’t grasp it because everything’s so different now for me from when I was younger. It’s like “Oh no, I’ll just wait,” and as long as I know my kids can do it, they are using computers and things at school. I just think I’m alright, I’ll just stick with what I know.” (Williams post-intervention interview)

It is also plausible that although parents are familiar and comfortable with using Facebook as a platform, that they are less comfortable with using it for interactions with the school. This might be for a number of reasons, which will be explored later in this chapter. Despite reservations and lower engagement rates, I maintain that this was still the right intervention to undertake in the context; this is borne out by the richness and depth of the data able to be garnered from a range of sources even though the intervention itself was not as successful as anticipated.

Table 4-1: Parents' usage of online tools

	Use regularly	Have an account but don't use regularly	Have heard of, but don't have an account or use	Have not heard of
<b>Ask FM</b>			1	3
<b>Bebo</b>		1	1	1
<b>Facebook</b>	3	1		
<b>Flickr</b>			1	3
<b>FourSquare</b>				4
<b>Google Plus</b>	1		1	
<b>Habbo</b>			2	1
<b>Instagram</b>		3	1	
<b>Last FM</b>				4
<b>LinkedIn</b>	1			3
<b>NetMums</b>			4	
<b>Pinterest</b>		2	1	1
<b>Skype</b>	1		2	
<b>Snapchat</b>		2	1	
<b>Telegram</b>	1		1	1
<b>Tumblr</b>			1	3
<b>Twitter</b>		1	3	
<b>Viber</b>	1			3
<b>WhatsApp</b>	2	1	1	
<b>YouTube</b>	4			

During interview discussions, I gave parents a selection of online tools and asked which of them they used regularly, have an account but don't use regularly, have heard or but don't

use, or haven't heard of (see Appendix B). The summary of these responses are shown in Table 4-1. Of the 20 sites offered, only eight were used regularly by any parents, and five of these were only used by one of the parents. This shows that the most commonly used tools are YouTube (4/4), Facebook (3/4) and WhatsApp (2/4). Other for which parents have accounts but do not use regularly are Instagram (3/4), Pinterest (2/4) and Snapchat (2/4). The third category that parents have heard of them but don't use at least shows recognition if no other attribute: NetMums (4/4), Twitter (3/4), Habbo (2/4) and Skype (2/4). It was notable within this task that the Jayawardena family have a markedly different tool usage profile to the other families, particularly by regularly using tools such as Viber and Telegram. The cultural differences around the sensitivity to encrypted communication were explored earlier in this chapter.

This generally high rating of Facebook gave a pre-intervention confirmation that using a Facebook Group was an appropriate platform with which to engage with parents given that three-quarters of them attest to using it regularly, and as such by using an app with which they are familiar should have reduced barriers or friction to participate in the intervention. This was also supported by the pre-intervention parents' survey which showed that nine parents were positive about the use of a Facebook Group to help them improve their understanding of their child's experience at school, and the remaining five responded 'maybe', with no parents expressing a negative response to the question. The intervention sought to use Facebook to engage parents, so it was encouraging that most used it regularly. For the parent who did not use it regularly herself, she recognised that her husband did make more regular use of it and so they were familiar with it, which have been touched upon on already in the contrasting usage between the parents in the Coates family.



I will explore later some of the challenges encountered even though the intervention used a platform with which all parents were familiar to some degree.

It was clear from follow-up discussions that parents saw communication as an essential method of engagement with their children's school, but that they did not rely solely on one method of communication for their information. One mother, Coates, was fastidious about following updates posted within the Facebook Group, although they did not comment or post themselves and despite her self-attributed lack of confidence or ability at using technology. Another parent, Williams, did not engage with the Facebook Group at all, citing both technological barriers alongside lacking an imperative to join the Group. Considering Williams first, her firm view was:

“Before all of this, it was them coming home and telling me and bringing stuff home from school, so – because I’ve got older kids and I know what they’ve got, and this wasn’t around – them bringing home their stuff like end of term things like that. To me that’s – I didn’t feel like I was missing out on anything because I’d see it eventually anyway” (Williams post-intervention interview).

This was in contrast to the experience of the father in the Coates family, who was keen not to miss any updates:

“I think I’ve got notifications set for things from [the school], so it will flag if [the school] posts something. So that’s I know that [the school]’s done something because it comes up with a bell icon, and I can go and see what it is” (Coates post-intervention interview).

This suggests highly-engaged behaviour, and a clear motivation to participate in communications from the school. However because the engagement involved only looking at the content, it was not classified as an engagement by Facebook – which would have necessitated the parent liking, reacting, or commenting on the post. Early in the discussion, Coates recognised that participation in the Group was low:

“I think it’s a shame you didn’t see more parents – I was one of those that didn’t do it – you didn’t see them saying what did you do outside of school. I did see one of them posted [...] So that was nice for me to share, but only one or two people did that, so that was a bit of a shame.” (Coates post-intervention interview)

This suggests that although the parent was not active in contributing or responding to posts in the group, they were purposefully engaging with the community. It also suggests early stages of developing an online community amongst the parents, which is an element of the Salmon (2011, 2013) frameworks. The father in the Coates family further echoed the experience of the Facebook engagement data by reflecting that they were most attracted by photos and videos:

“It was more about imagery wasn’t it – seeing pictures and videos of the children and what they’re doing [...] The ones I remember were the ones with the pictures. Even with the text pictures it’s much better because otherwise the black and white text is so small. That’s bigger and bolder.” (Coates post-intervention interview)

This resonates with parents’ desires before the intervention (Figure 4.12) and the Facebook engagement data (Figure 4.7). The experiences of Coates and Williams were polar opposites, and as such very useful for comparing a range of behaviours. Williams did not engage because of uncertainty around technological barriers (real or perceived), did not ask

for support to get involved, did not see or contribute any of the Group-specific content, yet was not particularly disappointed or frustrated at this as they felt her child would update her on anything she needed to know. The low participation rate in the study overall has already been noted, and although it is not possible to extrapolate the experience of Williams to all parents who did not engage with the intervention, it is reasonable to surmise that their outlook will be shared by at least some others. Some reasons for Williams not engaging could be addressed by schools, such as a more specific briefing or instruction at the outset, the explicit opportunity for a member of staff to support the parent to get involved, or a mechanism to encourage peer support between parents to achieve this, for example. Williams explained how she often seeks out peer support for help with technology:

“I’m terrible – I’ll even ask Leanne, PD’s mum, can you help me with that. Then she’ll say yea come round to fill in online forms and get into things like that. It’s good that I’ve got a friend who can help me out with things like that. [...] I know I’m comfortable asking her” (Williams post-intervention interview).

This peer support was not an element factored into the intervention, thus it is a fascinating insight into the routine peer-support mechanisms created by some. In contrast to Williams was the father in the Coates family who joined the intervention Group quickly, set his notification settings to show all updates from the Group, engaged with the content efficiently and deeply as suggested by comments above, though did not show many active engagements on the platform (such as liking, reacting, commenting, or posting), and as such did not appear to be that engaged when viewing the Facebook engagement data. It was striking that both parents in the Coates family could recall many types of posts, and specific

examples of posts, from the Group even though the discussion took place seven months after the intervention ended. They gave a number of examples about how they engaged their child with the content posted, and how their child encouraged them to access the intervention Group because of activities in class. As a result of the post-intervention interview, I can conclude that Coates are highly-engaged and highly-motivated parents who were keen to be involved with new communication and engagement practices. As I will explore later, there is a disparity between Facebook engagement data and a more nuanced offline understanding of engagement.



Second parent to respond to this post is the only parent who makes her own post into the Facebook Group (see Figure 4.13)

Figure 4.6: Post seeking feedback from parents

In Figure 4.6, I was seeking direct feedback from parents. Although only two parents commented, their responses were rich and valuable and it also showed that they were sometimes open to a dialogue in the Facebook Group. This was an experience I did not repeat during the intervention, but it does give some encouragement that the study has been able to achieve some glimmers of engagement insight which give seed to further discussion and exploration. This was also a rare example of parents engaging with each other during the intervention by responding to comments from others. There are a number of aspects to this interaction which suggest that parents approach the Facebook Group informally, including the use of the 'like' and 'reaction' features, the use of exclamation marks, retelling an anecdote from home and inclusion of the informal term "Haha". I will explore relationships between stakeholders, including parents in different families, more in Chapter 5 when considering relationships; and this example was a rare opportunity in this study to glimpse at some interfamily interactions.

We have already noted that parents valued personal interactions with teachers both informally and at formal meetings, though Coates commented:

"We see a few bits and we have our meetings with [teachers], but we don't see that much of what's going on. A lot of time can go by between updates. [...] But again, it's quite lengthy periods of time. They'll come home and say what they've done, but it's really nice to see some imagery of what they've done" (Coates pre-intervention interview).

This suggests that although personal interactions are valued, the infrequency of them is regretful and thus the use of social media can, for some, fill a void to provide regular or

semi-regular updates on children's activities in school. It is also worthy of reflection that the benefits of home-school interactions has focused on the activities that children undertake, rather than either on information updates or on academic attainment-based information which echoes the desires of parents expressed through the pre-intervention survey (see Figure 4.12 later).

### 4. 1. 3 Seeing inside the classroom: parents experiencing their child’s curriculum and learning

Within interviews, parents readily shared that they would likely be most interested in posts which shows them what their children are doing in school, or images of their children in school. These initial statements are borne out by the resulting engagement figures seen through the Facebook Group (Figure 4.7). Engagements were highest for posts which contained images or videos: these showed engagements through likes and comments higher than some posts which set out to improve engagements, such as polls or questions. During the intervention there was only one poll and two question posts, so perhaps if these use of these had been expanded then a more direct correlation may have visible. Comparative engagements are explored further in Table 4-3 later in this chapter.

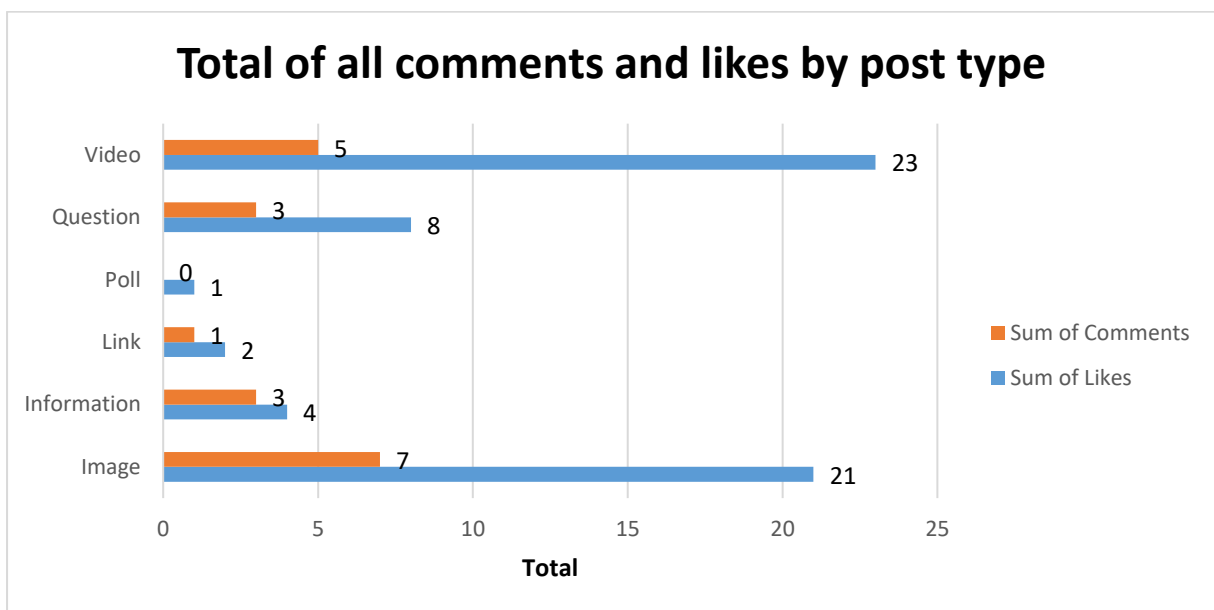


Figure 4.7: Engagements by Post type

When considering all of the different methods of engagement, the Jayawardena family reflected that for them communications from school “is specifically about the communications of what’s happening in the school” (Jayawardena pre-intervention interview). This situates the Jayawardena expectation about communications with school to focus on school activities and learning rather than venturing into other areas. As an extension, another family felt that class-specific communications would be of benefit when discussing the Facebook Group:

“It’s nice that it’s just for your class, a bit like those blog things. We don’t seem to hear much about those anymore – that was quite a key thing for their class, so it’s quite nice that it’s just for your class” (Coates pre-intervention interview).

This was a theme which occurred in all parent interviews, with one low-engagement parent making helpful comparisons between other instances where she sees communications:

“Yea, definitely so I can see what’s going on with him. [...] As I’ve been walking through I’ve seen his picture before coming down the slide when he was in nursery and on the screen there [in the reception area] they show the different classes, their work and that. So I think it’d be good because I’d be able to see what he’s doing in his class work-wise. So yea, I think it’d be really good for that” (Taylor pre-intervention interview).

Her reflection about knowing what happens inside the school, including in a very physical sense of what is displayed on the walls is an aspect of the school that many parents would not routinely be aware of. A number of parents have already talked about seeing more of what children do at school to be able to get a better insight into their time at school, and



this gives some suggestions for schools about some of the perhaps easier things that could be shared to involve parents in what happens within school.



Figure 4.8: Post showing English work photos

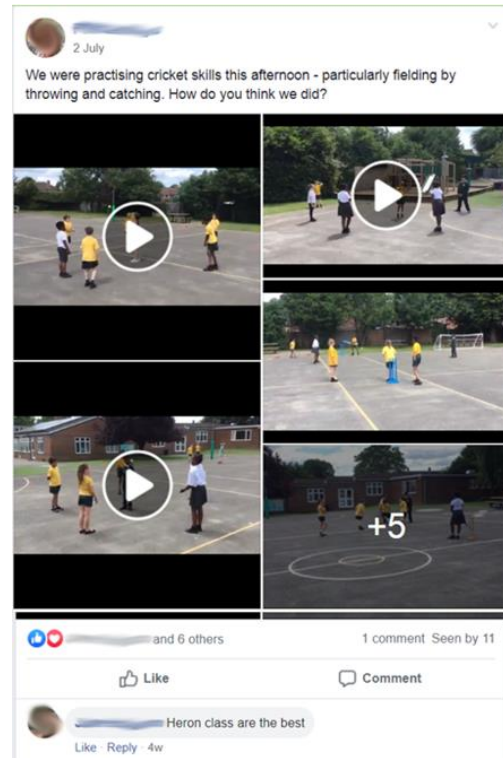


Figure 4.9: Post showing PE lesson photos & videos

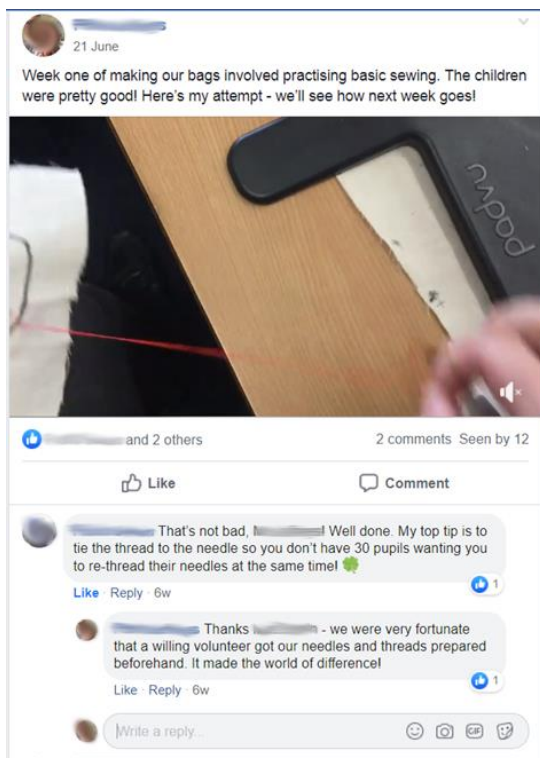


Figure 4.10: Video post showing teacher modelling sewing



Figure 4.11: Post showing photos of children sewing

We are able to see in Figure 4.8, Figure 4.9, Figure 4.10 and Figure 4.11 the range of rich content shared as part of the intervention which showed parents their children or their children's work in class. As discussed above, seeing what children do in school is important to parents and doing so with photos and videos helps to bring the experience alive in more engaging ways than a text update. Figure 4.10 shows me modelling sewing, and Figure 4.11 shows some photos of the children. Even though the focus of these posts was on hands without identifying faces, they both still garnered above average levels of engagement for the intervention. Figure 4.9 was a post containing a mixture of photos and videos of children practising cricket skills in a PE lesson, which also garnered higher levels of engagements through likes and reactions in particular. The post message in each of these examples was intended to be written informatively but informally, in keeping with the style and tone of social media conversations and being mindful that the content should look and feel accessible to parents so as to invite engagements. The inclusion of photos and videos in these posts was attributable at least in part for higher levels of engagements. However, these engagements were principally through likes and reactions rather than comments back from parents. This begs an intriguing question around online behaviours and what parents feel comfortable doing on social media, which is an area I will visit later in this chapter.

We have established that content sharing photos and videos was viewed most favourably by parents: they were highly rated by parents in the pre-intervention survey (Figure 4.12); when considering the raw popularity of posts by type (Figure 4.7); when considering the weighted impact of different types of online engagements (Table 4-3); and when taking into account feedback through post-intervention parent interviews (Coates post-intervention interview). Given that the focus of the intervention was to understand more about how the use of social media could affect parental engagement, these data suggest that schools can

curate the type of content they produce in order to appeal directly to what parents want to see, and to use the positive approach of the Facebook algorithm towards images and videos to appeal to the algorithm to disseminate the content to more of their audience (Ho, 2020). When turning attention to considering challenges later in this chapter, I will consider the impact of various online user typologies and the challenge presented if a high proportion of a user base engage passively with a social media group yet still find this a rewarding experience.

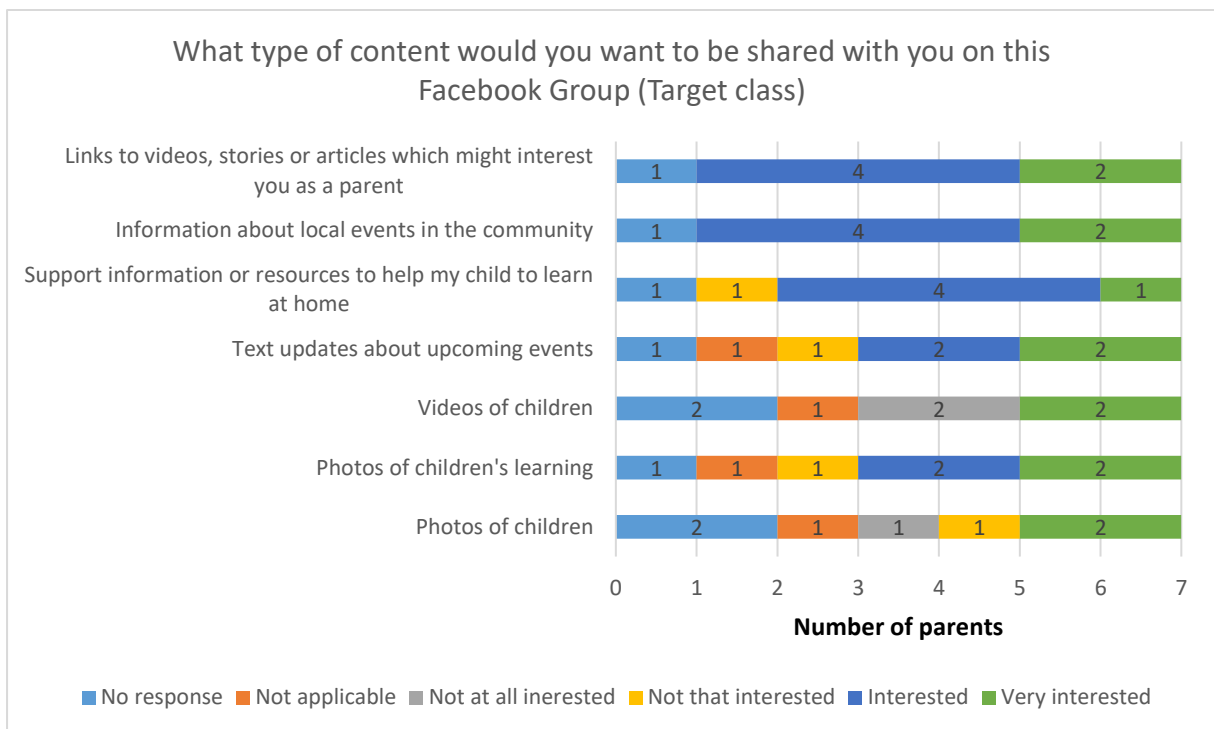


Figure 4.12: What type of content would you want to be shared with you on this Facebook Group? (Target class)

Other popular posts within the group are shown throughout this chapter and summarised in Table 4-3 later in this chapter. All except one post (Figure 4.13) were posted by the

researcher. All of these popular posts talked about what children were doing in class, most included either photos or videos, and those that didn't were specifically asking a question to prompt engagement. This supports the views made by parents in the initial online surveys (Figure 4.12) that photos and videos of children or their learning were the most popular of the suggested types of content. The contrast between the low engagement on 13<sup>th</sup> June and the more encouragement engagement on 25<sup>th</sup> June is notable: the former is only around a fortnight later once involvement in the group was more established yet it received more likes – potentially a reflection of it including photos of children's work, and being seen less as the school asking parents to take homework-style action as was on 13<sup>th</sup> June.

## 4.2 What opportunities could a closed Facebook Group offer to improve parental engagement?

In this section, a number of positive opportunities will be identified from running the intervention. These are best summarised into two themes: frequency, and convenience. By virtue of engaging with interviews for this study, parents made comparisons about how the use of social media in the intervention compared with the use of social media by the school generally, and other methods of communication used. Some parents benefitted from drawing on experiences they had with older children at other schools, or communications tools they are familiar with through their personal or business lives. These additional comparisons added some depth to the analysis in both of these themes.

Parents were unanimous in their praise for the school's openness and the willingness of staff to be available to discuss concerns or questions. This quick, informal and reassuring access point with the school was echoed throughout the discussions: "It is lovely that we are able if we have something to say to you quickly in the morning and it's very informal, it's nice to have that ability to have something to say" (Coates pre-intervention interview).

### 4.2.1 Sharing content with parents more frequently

Although the data in Table 4-2 do not show a clear trend line, it is notable that 'social media' was not in the top two preferred methods for any parent, and it was within the least preferred methods for almost all of the parents. Two of the parents chose to give more than one method on the same rating, and as such the ratings are shown here for completeness rather than being aggregated. Despite these ratings, parents made positive comments about

the inclusion of social media as an engagement tool as already explored earlier in this chapter.

Table 4-2: Preferred engagement methods by parents

	Coates	Taylor	Williams	Jayawardena	Total ranking (low = most preferred)
Text messages	1	1	3=	3=	8
Informal conversations	3	3	1	2	9
Formal meetings	5	2	2	1	10
Emails	2	5	3=	3=	13
Social media	4	4	5	3=	16

As already recognised, parents in the Coates family were definitive in their praise for the importance of visual updates in the Facebook group: a view borne out by the higher engagement rates of photos and videos in the Facebook engagement data (Figure 4.7, Table 4-3). Although hard to verify because the algorithm is neither published nor peer-reviewed, a number of sources suggest that Facebook weights images and videos more favourably than text-only content (Sprout Social, 2019; HootSuite, 2020). If parents are reporting that this type of content is most appealing, engaging, meaningful and memorable for them, then this gives schools a clear steer on how to make best use of social media to communicate and engage with parents.

Despite the Facebook algorithm not being available for scrutiny, it is suggested that interactions such as comments carry greater weighting than interactions such as likes, which in turn carry greater weighting than simply being viewed (Ho, 2020). As such, a simple rating has been constructed within Table 4-3, giving 'seen by' a weight of one, 'likes' given a rating

of two, and 'comments' given a rating of three. Consequently the rating is derived from a  $a + 2b + 3c$ . This allows us to see a combined metric showing which posts performed 'the best' akin to the Facebook engagement data. It is recognised that the weight given to comments could be seen to disfavour parents with lower functional levels of English, or whose confidence to comment to the school or in an online community is lower. The formula used in Table 4-3 has been created emulate Facebook engagement metrics, which in turn feeds how likely users are to see content at all or in the future from that source; both of these have a material bearing on the effectiveness of Facebook Groups or Pages to reach their parents.

The primary and secondary post types were attributed to the messages during analysis and were not visible on Facebook or to parents at any point; they have been used in analysis to reflect on the nature of the content. It is not surprising that most posts were focused around the 'communicating, with a small number on 'parenting' and 'learning at home', with the remaining areas not covered during this intervention. Some types of involvement may have been more difficult to achieve engagement with, for example decision-making, collaborating with the community, or volunteering. It was not a focus of the intervention to achieve an equal distribution of these types of post, but the inclusion of the categories in Table 4-3 is shared here to show the dominance of the 'communicating' strand of parental engagement during the intervention. Upon reflection, had these been used before or during the intervention then it could have highlighted the narrow type of posts being shared and encouraged a wider variety of messages to be shared as part of the study. I also recognise that the final post in the group, from 13<sup>th</sup> July, was the only one to be posted by a parent and as such should represent a higher level of parental engagement to create content in the



group, but this is not accounted for in the formulation as it is one outlier event which can be recognised though being highlighted as such.

*Table 4-3: Summary of intervention engagement data from Facebook Group*

Date	Primary post type	Secondary post type	Category (Epstein's 6)	Seen by (a)	Likes (b)	Comments (c)	Rating (a+2b+3c)
28 <sup>th</sup> May	Information		Communicating	5	0	0	● 5
13 <sup>th</sup> June	Link	Information	Learning at Home	10	0	0	● 10
17 <sup>th</sup> June	Information	Image	Learning at Home	11	0	0	● 11
17 <sup>th</sup> June	Image		Communicating	12	2	1	● 19
18 <sup>th</sup> June	Image		Communicating	12	1	0	● 14
18 <sup>th</sup> June	Video		Communicating	12	3	0	● 18
20 <sup>th</sup> June	Poll		Communicating	12	1	0	● 14
21 <sup>st</sup> June	Video		Communicating	12	3	2	● 24
26 <sup>th</sup> June	Image		Communicating	12	5	0	● 22
26 <sup>th</sup> June	Image		Communicating	11	4	0	● 19
27 <sup>th</sup> June	Image		Communicating	11	1	3	● 22
29 <sup>th</sup> June	Image	Re-share	Communicating	12	2	0	● 16
30 <sup>th</sup> June	Information		Communicating	12	3	3	● 27
1 <sup>st</sup> July	Link		Communicating	12	2	1	● 19
2 <sup>nd</sup> July	Video		Communicating	11	7	1	● 28
1 <sup>st</sup> July	Question		Communicating	12	7	0	● 26
3 <sup>rd</sup> July	Question		Communicating	12	1	3	● 23
4 <sup>th</sup> July	Image	Re-share	Communicating	12	3	0	● 18
8 <sup>th</sup> July	Information		Parenting	12	1	0	● 14
10 <sup>th</sup> July	Video		Communicating	12	6	1	● 27
12 <sup>th</sup> July	Video		Communicating	12	4	1	● 23
13 <sup>th</sup> July	Image		Parenting	13	3	3	● 28

Table 4-3 shows the volume of posts made during the intervention period. This is much higher frequency of communication than parents were accustomed to experiencing through

other routes including the school Facebook Page, text messages or emails. Consequently parents were provided with information and updates in greater volume and timelier than they were used to. Subsequent feedback from parents was praiseworthy about seeing information specific to a class, and having a higher interest towards photos and images. All posts in the Facebook Group were created by me, with the exception of the final (13<sup>th</sup> July) post which was added by a parent. Chapter 2 explored user typologies, and this will be revisited towards the end of this chapter and into Chapter 5 including what can be surmised about different only behaviours and personas.

An area worthy of further exploration is the extent to which photo or video content need context or explanation. As can be seen in the examples of posts shared (Figure 4.9, Figure 4.8, Figure 4.11), most posts explained what children had been doing in class alongside the photos or videos. The intervention did not test posting media without narrative, for example as a photo album or as a sole video post. The posting of context-free or context-light media could give parents an opportunity to discuss with their children the images shared. Coates recognised that the Facebook tool for posting text updates as images achieves the aim of making the information more engaging: “Even with the text pictures it’s much better because otherwise the black and white text is so small. That’s bigger and bolder” (Coates post-intervention interview).

Content was posted both during the school day, and at other times such as evenings and weekends. There did not appear to be a correlation between times of posts and engagement rate; instead the correlation was more related to the content of the posts. Consequently this suggests that the popularity of content would remain broadly consistent whether posted at peak or off-peak periods. Although this runs counter to received wisdom

of social media analysts long stressing the importance of timing (Villamediana et al., 2019), perhaps the small and focused nature of the intervention group means that the timing of posts was less sensitive than it would have been in a larger or more disparate audience on Facebook.

#### 4. 2. 2      Sharing content with parents in a way that is more convenient for them

The second theme identified as a benefit of using a closed Facebook Group within the intervention is that of convenience. As already seen in Table 4-1, parents are familiar with a relatively small number of apps: primarily Facebook, YouTube, and WhatsApp. This validated the decision to make use of Facebook to run the intervention, as it would be a convenient solution for parents who already had an account and used it personally, thus making it an appropriate platform from which to run the intervention. Choosing an unfamiliar or new system could have increased friction in the relationship, and given the desire to make engagement as smooth and natural as possible for all stakeholders, it was logical for my study to use an already familiar system.

A comparison of the metrics of all posts in the Facebook group are shown in Table 4-3. Posts were added at a range of times of the day and on different days throughout the week. It did not appear that these time or day variations affected the engagement levels as much as the type of posts, as shown earlier in Figure 4.7. Having created this combined rating, a number of trends are evident. Firstly there are more posts with a higher rating further into the intervention, despite the number of participants being fairly constant from around the 17<sup>th</sup> June onwards. This suggests that one or both of two things could have happened. Firstly, I

may have become more attuned to types of posts that were working for the group; and secondly the parents could have become more motivated to engage as interactions increased.

The challenge for those running such a group is to engage members in commenting, or to motivate them to do so for themselves. This is a key step in creating online communities, as explained by Salmon (2011, 2013), and it is not evident from the data collected that the intervention was successful in creating a cohesive online community amongst this group of parents. The intervention sought to engage parents by posting questions on a number of different topics, and sometimes this resulted in higher engagement but not always; this seemed to be an area which proved harder to show impact. The relatively short time period of 5 weeks could be a key factor insofar as the Salmon model needs a greater amount of time to embed each step of before expecting participants to feel comfortable with higher levels of engagement.

Earlier in analysis the passivity of online engagement was considered, and this will be explored later in this chapter when considering how different language is needed to describe online and offline engagements. However within the context of Table 4-3 it is worth pausing to consider the posts on 26<sup>th</sup> June and 1<sup>st</sup> July, which did not garner any comments but had a higher number of likes which results in their overall rating being amongst the higher rated posts. So higher engagement can be achieved without comments, but these are anomalous examples which highlight the otherwise established pattern.

Having considered the opportunities presented by the frequency and convenience of using a Facebook Group, I will now move on to consider the challenges presented by the intervention.



#### 4. 2. 3 Many meanings of engagement: the challenge of discussing engagement both online and offline

I have discussed in Chapter 4 how people behave differently, and the implications that this has when considering online engagement data. The father in the Coates family explained how he uses Facebook notifications to ensure he always sees messages published by the school, whilst also acknowledging that he reads them though does not engage further for example by reacting to or commenting on them. Subsequently, this means that he will only be visible in the 'seen by' number on a post, and never in the Facebook Insights data which consider reactions and comments. The disjunction here is that in an offline context, a parent keen to digest all information published by the school could suggest strong motivation and willingness to engage, yet due to the social media typology of the father Facebook would not consider him to have engaged with posts due to not making additional clicks.

It was clear from Table 4-1 that parents were most familiar with Facebook as a platform, hence its selection for the study. The narrow interpretation of 'engagements' on Facebook has already been discussed, though there is not transparency around the exact method or metrics for calculating all aspects of these algorithms (Sprout Social, 2019; HootSuite, 2020). In the previous chapter, I outlined how I used basic measures of using 'seen by', 'likes and reactions', and 'comments' weighted together to produce a simple algorithmic view of the relative nature of engagements on each post (Table 4-3). Due to the Facebook group being under the threshold size of members, the Facebook "Insights" data were not available (Facebook, 2020b), which presented a limitation for monitoring and later analysis and discussion of this area. Nevertheless, here I will explore some of the challenges relating to how engagement in this context is understood.

I contend that in this context, the Facebook measures of engagement are too narrow, because it only considers an active interaction to count as an engagement – for example a like, reaction, or comment – yet do not consider the number of views (‘seen by’) as an engagement. This is in contrast to a number of technology industry norms, such as: a direct message such as text message, or WhatsApp message having been delivered or opened; or an email message being opened, read receipt delivered, or tracking pixel activated. All of these are akin to ‘lurking’ (Brandtzæg, 2010; Hargittai & Hsieh, 2010; Bulut & Doğan, 2017; Kim, 2018) compared to an interaction on Facebook, yet could satisfy other definitions of engagement because the audience has seen the message and the assumption is that they have read and understood it. Although these assumptions will not be universally true, it is perhaps safe to assume that a higher proportion of people will have processed the message by reading it than are excluded from the ‘engagement’ figure in the Facebook algorithm. Although it would not be safe to assume that everyone who sees a message has engaged with it, nor is it fair to presume the opposite to be true. Although the Facebook engagement data for a post is clear, what remains opaque is how this translates into how much the message is syndicated into news feeds for other users to see it and be nudged to engaging with it. It is evident that more popular posts then continue to become more highly engaged with, which could perpetuate the problem of a user not seeing many messages in a school Facebook group if not many people engage with them, which then continues the cycle of not many people engaging with them. One solution from Facebook for a higher proportion of your audience to engage with the content is to make it a paid-for message through adverts or ‘boosted posts’ (Ho, 2020).

In Chapter 2, I outlined that the definition of parental engagement I use for this study is “effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school

programs and their children's progress". This is built principally on Epstein (1995), upon which Goodall and Montgomery (2014, p. 405) in Figure 2.3 Continuum from parental involvement to parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014 p. 403)

recognise the continuum of parental engagement on a movable scale of agency between schools and parents, and how a very similar activity such as reading at home could be undertaken in a number of different ways which potentially reflect on a parent's approach to engaging with a school or their child's learning. This understanding of engagement is broader than Facebook engagements in a number of important ways, including the challenge of this broader definition of engagement. Brandtzæg (2010) suggested the likely split between people who lurk, interact occasionally, and interact regularly was 90%, 9% and 1% respectively. If this view were replicated in my study, engagements would in fact have been significantly lower. Against these measures, engagement rates are more encouraging than for social media generally. Although the Brandtzaeg study did not separately consider whether this split would vary significantly between sectors, it could be a reasonable presumption that a Facebook group for parents of a primary school class may be more motivated to engage with the content as they have a closer personal and emotional connection to the school community than many more peripheral social media groups may represent.

Whilst I can be reassured that the rate of lurkers in the study was not quite as high as 90%, it is not clear what level or type of engagement would be desirable during this type of intervention. Perhaps an ideal view would suggest that parental engagement in a primary school should aim to engage 100% of the parents. The average of all posts was 'seen by' 97% of users, 'liked or reacted to' by 16%, and 'commented on' by 4%. Calculating the average 'lurker rate' would subtract the latter two figures from the first to give 77% of users



who saw messages and did not interact further on the platform. This supports the speculation and hope that my sample has a higher degree of belonging than an average social media group. As noted variously, a target engagement rate for the intervention was not set, though there remains value in considering an appropriate ambition at this stage. Whilst idealistically 100% engagement rate could be an aspiration, it would be necessary to set more realistic aims by which to measure efforts. As outlined in Chapter 3, the greatest impact of parental engagement may not be demonstrated through quantitative measurements, but instead by getting into the richness and depth of qualitative stories. While it is important for initiatives to involve the right people, it is conceivable that the valuable impact is not seen in hard metrics, but instead in human stories. By illuminating such approaches and perspectives, I hope that others will be able to identify with the situations and the solutions may resonate for them to trial similar undertakings in their schools. I would like to consider the impact of some carefully-crafted and precisely delivered and timed support for a family in need of support with a particular issue is far greater than reaching an arbitrary measurement on a spread sheet. For these stories to be understood, a school's parental engagement strategy needs to have capacity to understand a family's circumstances, strengths and needs; then to be able to revisit them on an individual basis to follow up on support provided to understand what impacts it has had.

#### 4.3 Which challenges to parental engagement could a closed Facebook Group introduce?

Within this chapter I first identified the characteristics of what parents understand engagement to be, then moved onto consider the opportunities created by such

interventions, and now turn to consider the challenges of this approach. These are broken down into three areas: different language to represent engagement online and offline; relationships; and how engagement changes for some families. I will explore each of these in turn, before ending analysis by drawing together a number of conclusions.

#### 4. 3. 1      The need for a different language to discuss online and offline engagement

As explored within Chapter 2 there are competing definitions about how to define engagement, and even less agreement about how or even if engagement can be measured in a quantifiable way. This was not part of the remit of my study given its focus on a small-scale qualitative case study. For the purpose of this study, parental engagement is about “effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children’s progress” (Epstein, 1995). Engagement in this sense could be seen as more fluid, and less rigid than a series of metrics provided by Facebook. To the contrary the surveys of parents in this study have illustrated engagement in a number of different ways, as has the use of engagement metrics derived from Facebook, contributing to elements of the mixed methods approach. Consequently there are a number of parallel understandings of what engagement means in different contexts, and as such rather than seeking to combine them would be a mistake and instead I seek to retain two distinct understandings about what engagement means: engagement by Facebook, and engagement more broadly. Clarity of language throughout this analysis and subsequent discussion should be transparent around the nature of engagement being discussed.

Although this study is situated in the context of Facebook, other social media platforms

provide similar metrics and analytics around users' online engagements. The distinction here is not about how a platform reports engagement, but rather there is a distinction between any of these metrics for 'online engagement' and what would otherwise be considered engagement more broadly, which can be characterised as 'offline engagement'. Whilst it would be foolhardy to separately entirely the engagement into online and offline engagement due to the considerable overlap of experiences, for this discussion 'online engagement' is taken to mean engagement data as constructed by an online service.

I outlined earlier the experiences of the father in the Coates family who shared that "I've got notifications set for things from [the school], so it will flag if [the school] posts something [...] it comes up with a bell icon" (Coates post-intervention interview). This suggests a motivation to see information published by the school, but without necessarily the intention to interact with it in a way that would be acknowledged through Facebook data. This behavioural insight underlines the current juxtaposition of how engagement can look different online and offline, and as such caution should be exercised in assuming a translation of online engagement data into offline behaviours.

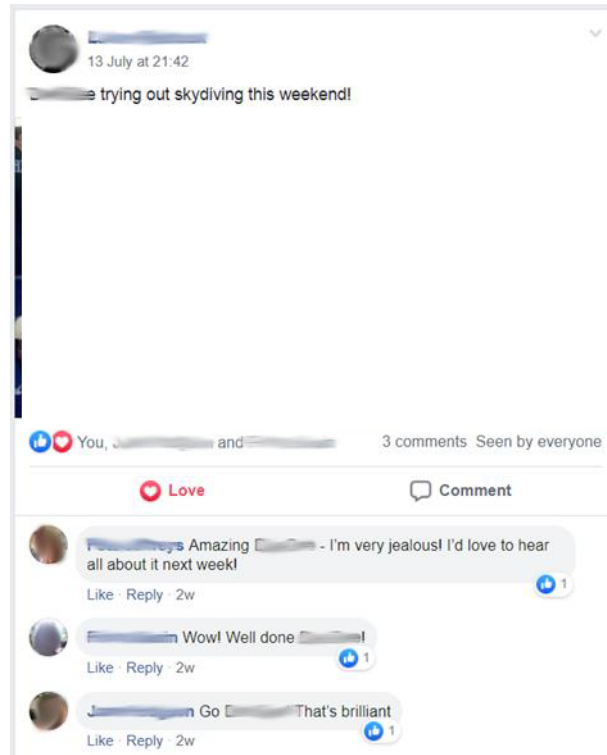


Figure 4.13: Post from intervention Facebook Group

Facebook engagements require the user to do something active such as commenting or reacting (pressing a button to like, etc. the post), rather than just having viewed it. Given this distinction, the Facebook definition of engagement sets a higher threshold than definitions of engagement previously discussed. Of the posts made in the intervention group the highest number of likes or reactions was 7, out of a possible 13 members of the group. Many of the posts were viewed by all or almost all members of the group, but it is a source of intrigue that the most popular post garnered engagements from fewer than half of the members in the group, as shown in Table 4-3. There are a number of notable points about the most popular post, Figure 4.13: it was towards the end of the intervention, it was made by a parent, it included photos, and it was made outside of school hours.

Taking each of these in turn: the fact that this post was made towards the end of the intervention period could be claimed as a success for the intervention, given that the in Chapter 3 I acknowledged the need to build online engagement using the Salmon (2011, 2013) model from a standing start with the eventual hope that peer collaboration could exist. In this one post from a parent, it can be suggested that peer collaboration in the form of a parent wanting to share their child's experiences with their class and doing so in a format which had previously only been used by the class teacher was evident. This leads onto the second notable factor: this was the only post to be made by a parent. As already acknowledged the timescale for this intervention was short, lasting only 5 weeks. Had the intervention been able to last longer perhaps more parents could have felt comfortable to make posts into the group and could thus have seen a sharing space being created. The third factor to consider is that the post includes photos, which Figure 4.7 shows yielded high engagements alongside videos. Finally, the post was made on a Sunday evening whereas other posts were mainly made during or shortly after the school day. However this last correlation should not be overjudged as the intervention had already made a number of other posts at times later in the day, some with positive results but there are not enough data to draw a definitive conclusion. A number of possibilities could be true: working parents do not have time to view posts during their working day, conversely others may find their time more flexible at work than when parenting at home, and this is an area for further research in the future.

Despite Facebook being one of the most regularly used apps by parents, engagement experienced during the intervention was not as high as the expected level of engagement given both the parents' self-declared regular usage, and the broader national trends for the near-ubiquitous presence of Facebook in everyday lives. Consequently it is valuable to

consider taxonomies and typologies of online behaviour considered in Chapter 2. One of the common labels used is “lurker” to describe users who “read or observe but do not contribute [...] non-contributing” (Brandtzæg, 2010, p. 32). Citing a now-dated (2006) study, Brandtzaeg draws upon the 90-9-1 rule whereby 90% of users lurk, 9% contribute intermittently, and 1% contribute heavily. They also suggest that lurkers comprise the largest group of social media users, at around 27%, followed by socialisers (25%), sporadics (19%), actives (18%), and debaters (11%). Given the experiences of the fathers in the Coates family who has set notifications for school posts on Facebook yet then did not ‘engage’ by reacting or commenting, this type of behaviour may be problematic to categorise accurately without extrapolating online behaviours into offline equivalents.

Notwithstanding the acknowledged limitations of Facebook engagement data, engagement metrics provided through the Facebook group can be considered as done so in Table 4-3. I created a number of posts in the Facebook group which could broadly be seen as announcements or information broadcasts. These included links to online multiplication tables games, homework information, or comments about the weather ahead of sports day. These all experienced low engagement rates, even when they contained an image. As such although image and video content did show higher engagement, an inverse correlation is not true. Schools may experience low engagement rates with more direct communication methods (e.g. text messages, emails) and could look towards smaller Facebook Groups as a way to improve this. Experience from this intervention suggests that that there is a difference between engagement in the Facebook definition, and engagement seen as consuming published information. If schools are seeking to increase, or at least to quantify, the readership of published information, then using a Facebook Group would be a good way to achieve this. From around the middle of the intervention period, almost all posts were

read by all but one member of the Group, representing a 92% open rate. Even if parents took no action other than reading the information, some schools would find this an improvement on their current readership rates, whether these are already quantified or anecdotally perceived. One sectoral analysis showed that open rates for education emails is 23.42% and 25.17% for non-profit emails. (Mailchimp, 2019)

The challenge allied to this high open rate is that it could give false reassurance to schools who believe that 92% of parents are engaged with the message. As discussed, getting an interaction to register as an engagement by Facebook requires a like, reaction, comment (or share in other contexts). This intervention shows that this would seem to be quite a high threshold by which to measure engagement if it meant those not seen as engaged would be assumed to be unengaged or disengaged. On the most engaged post (Figure 4.9), there were seven likes and one comment so the metric would show 8 engaged parents out of 13 in the Group, so a 62% engagement rate. By most measures this could be seen as very successful, yet for a school seeking to engage as many parents as possible they may still remain disappointed that almost 4 in 10 parents were not engaged by that post. Considering another interpretation of the same post was seen by all 13 people in the Group, which would represent a 100% readership open-rate. The challenge of using readership as a proxy for engagement is that, as Facebook accurately describes, it shows you only how many people it has been “seen by,” rather than how many people have read it and gives no indication about whether it is valued, affects behaviour, or has any otherwise positive effect on the parent. The threshold for a parent to be classed as having seen a message is that it would appear in their News Feed, or they would have clicked on the notification. As the father in the Coates family recognised: “At work I get thousands of notifications on Google Plus, popping up as emails and notifications, you just have to filter some of it out to view what’s

important for you” (Coates post-intervention interview). Consequently, even though it may be tempting to interpret the “seen by” data as being more representative than the engagement data, it could be that this number is similarly misleading.

Here, it is clear how engagement can be taken to mean a number of different things: principally the distinction between the Facebook meaning of engagement being something more than simply being “seen by,” and the broader understanding being that parental engagement is about “effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children’s progress” (Epstein, 1995). By combining these different sources of engagement information, I have been able to gain a better understanding of how some parents experienced the intervention and their subsequent approaches to engagement. These also underline the two further challenges exposed by this intervention: relationships, and how engagement changes for some families.

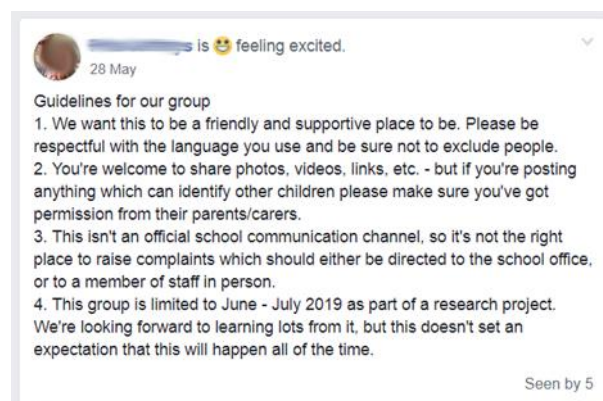
#### 4. 3. 2      Implications for relationships between stakeholders resulting from the intervention

In Chapter 2, I explored how parental engagement activities by necessity require considerations around power dynamics and relationships due to the asymmetric nature of parent-teacher relationships. Added to this was my position as an insider researcher, then thirdly the additional dimension of using social media and the different ways in which people interact through Facebook.

The intervention highlighted power dynamics, some expressed explicitly and others implied: between parents and school; between parents in different families; and within a family. To



consider these in turn: the relationship between parents and school has been one of the main themes already identified, though the challenge is that this becomes a one-way information-dissemination mechanism as already discussed. During the intervention, I was seeking to understand how the use of social media could affect parental engagement with a desire that could demonstrate positive examples, including by sharing examples of content from the Facebook Group with children in the classroom. This could have presented a challenge for parents who chose not to engage insofar as they felt less engaged with class activities. However as already explored, not all parents felt like they missed out for not engaging in the intervention, including the mother in the Williams family who felt she would “see it eventually anyway” (Williams post-intervention interview).



*Figure 4.14: Post from intervention Facebook Group showing guidelines for the group*

The Salmon (2011, 2013) model for developing online communities notes that there are distinct steps to increase interactivity, considering both “e-moderating” and “technical support” activities. There are 5 steps to move from the entry-level “access and motivation” up to “development”, akin to how Bloom’s taxonomy (1956) can be used to illustrate

higher-order thinking. During the intervention I sought to step through these five levels in a week each, which may have proven to be more challenging and not giving parents enough time to feel comfortable as an online community. This was noted by two parents, including:

“I think sometimes there weren’t many comments when you put a question on there for a bit of feedback. [...] Yea there weren’t many likes and things, so that might come back to the thing that not many people might’ve seen it” (mother in Coates family post-intervention interview).

If the intervention had run over a longer period of time, perhaps more time for parents to feel comfortable in the online community could have helped them to feel more at ease with the various relationships within the group and thus contribute more actively. One example of interactions was seen

Secondly, considering relationships between parents in different families was an area that presented some intriguing data through this intervention. For example Williams explained how her lack of confidence using technology means that she often asks another parent for support and it is worth reflecting on the fact that the intervention did not offer support for parents to use the technology. In this example Williams created a peer-support relationship with a friend, and quite differently Jayawardena explained how they use social media to understand the opinions and approaches of other parents, including those with whom they have no connection: “We check on the other parenting groups, and we get information from these groups because when there were comments coming from this group and we like to see from other parents” (Jayawardena pre-intervention interview). In their different ways, both Williams and Jayawardena have established a peer-support mechanism which runs alongside whatever engagement plans a school puts in place; in the case of Williams due to

lack of confidence using technology, and in the case of Jayawardena due to a desire to understand the perspectives of other parents. As such although a school might be an important source of information for parents, these examples show how other relationships are also be important to consider.

It is recognised in a range of fields including journalism (Broersma & Elidge li, 2019) and social activism (Foster et al., 2019) that social media has substantially changed interactions in such spheres, and argued that “social media platforms have penetrated deeply into the mechanics of everyday life, affecting people's informal interactions, as well as institutional structures and professional routines” (van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 3). This echoes almost exactly the same pre-social media observation by Altheide & Snow (1979): “every institution has become part of media culture: changes have occurred in every major institution that are a result of media logic in presenting and interpreting activity in those institutions.” If institutional power relationships were transformed because of the mass media in the 1970s and then transformed again in the 2000s because of social media, perhaps some solace can be taken from the idea that such relationships are routinely transformed and that this presents an ongoing challenge to institutions seeking to engage with new and changing audiences of customers, users, and in this situation parents.

If institutional power relationships have been transformed by the use of social media, the argument would continue that the change has brought about some elements of increasing plurality, transparency and openness in discussions. This was not evident during the intervention, which was dominated by my posting content for parents to consume. Far from showing the transformation of institutional power relationships, this echoes the traditional model of broadcast communications from the centre. As discussed already, parents

subsequently continued to report positively on their interaction with the school.

Consequently perhaps parents are not seeking for a redress of the imbalance in this power relationship: they have the ability to start new conversations, and reply publicly or privately to existing ones, yet choose not to do so. This could be seen as a clear outcome in two ways: either that parents are satisfied with the nature of the communication relationship, or that both parties are perpetuating the long-standing power differential. My discussion here suggests the former: both for the parent who did not participate in the intervention but remained satisfied, and for the parents who did participate and were thankful for it albeit maintaining a 'lurker' typology to their online behaviour in the group.

The third relationship dynamic evident in the data is relationships within a family. A number of parents cite that they believe the confidence and capability of their child when using technology is greater than their own. Of course it is worth a parent considering whether the confidence of a child is the best judge of their digital literacy and perception of relative risk when using technology, but it is clear that some find their child's adaptability with technology to be supportive. In both post-intervention interviews, parents explained how their children nudged them towards content relating to what they had done at school. For one this was online: "He wanted to show us, tell us all about it [...] he was chuffed" (Coates post-intervention interview); and for a parent who did not engage with the intervention the interaction was offline: "The kids come home and tell me day to day what they do anyway" (Williams post-intervention interview).

The other relationship evident through this study has been the relationship between parents when more than one is present. During the pre-intervention interview with Jayawardena, both parents were present and the mother is the primary contact for the

school yet the father contributed most to the discussion and appears to be the more dominant role in the relationship. The post-intervention interview with Coates was also conducted with both parents; and as discussed already the mother was much less confident in her abilities with technology than the father. Both parents were engaged with routine communication from the school as well as the intervention group run for this study, but the father's adeptness at using technology enabled him to bring that knowledge to their relationship. From these examples, I can surmise that the access to communication within and between families will vary to other families, and may well alter within the same family over time.

Having considered the first two challenges presented through running this intervention: different language to represent online and offline engagement; and relationships, I will now turn to consider the final challenge experienced: how engagement changes for some families. After doing so, this chapter will draw together a series of conclusions.

#### 4. 3. 3      How engagement changes for some families

The final challenge presented by engaging parents using social media is one of how engagement changes for some families, meaning that engagement was experienced differently between demographic groups. Suppositions can be drawn from these experiences that some parents may have felt some restriction on their participation in the engagement because they perceive themselves submissive to the dominant role of the school in the relationship. This could be felt more poignantly by parents with lower levels of employment or education.

It was notable that a number of differentials were evident around which parents participated in the intervention: gender and socioeconomic status. All but one participating parent in Facebook Group was female, with the sole male participant joining very late in the intervention period and was not represented in the interviews. Whilst two fathers took part in the interviews, neither of them joined the Facebook Group themselves, presumably viewing the Group through their partner's membership, or by them passing on information. I did not explore the gender imbalance during the intervention, though this reflection has been touched upon here. The school in my study normally sends information only to a primary contact for each child, which is often the mother. Mindful of this potential impact, I sent to all contacts for each children, yet this still resulted in an almost all-female sample group. As discussed in Chapter 2, a large number of studies suggest a positive correlation between both parental involvement and improved academic success, and positive attitudes towards education.

The second differential noted was socioeconomic status. Within the target class 50% of families were entitled to the Pupil Premium Grant (PPG), though of the 11 families who engaged only 2 of them were entitled to PPG, representing 18% rather than 50%. This split was not known at the time of the intervention, and along with gender could have been acted upon during the intervention in an attempt to rebalance both metrics. McBride et al. (2005, p. 212) found a positive correlation between student success and both family income level (an accepted measure for socioeconomic status), as well as student computer use. Given how the use of technology has expanded in the subsequent 15 years, it would be reasonable to expect use of technology to have increased by students as well as parents. As discussed earlier, the relative confidence of parents to make use of technology can affect their engagement with a school. Hornby recognises that teachers recognise "the 'good

parents' who typically are white middle-class, married and heterosexual," in contrast to those who do not possess cultural capital in the same way and as such as not as valued by teachers (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011, p. 41), which draws on the earlier discussion of a the Cultural Deficit Model and its impact here in the context of SES. I have explored how parents with lower levels of English or media literacy were not included well enough in this intervention, and this is evident through the disparity of lower SES families in the intervention group.

The study sought to determine SES through a number of proxy measures, discussed in Chapter 2: current employment rate, highest education level in the anonymous survey; as well as using school data for which the school receives additional funding through the PPG. I will consider these in turn before exploring correlations between these proxies and their engagement. The intervention was undertaken during 2019 Q2 when the UK unemployment rate was 3.9% (Office for National Statistics, 2019d), which is also broadly in line with the modelled unemployment rate for the local authority, 4% (Office for National Statistics, 2019c). Given these rates, I might have expected to see a broadly similar picture from survey respondents. However, four out of seven respondents in the target class were not employed, whilst two out of seven in the additional class were not employed. Echoing previous caveats, these are small and not necessarily representative samples of the studied population although anecdotal reports from the study school suggest that neither of these figures would be especially remarkable of any class within the school.

In addition to current employment, the survey sought to use the proxy measure for highest level of education completed as an indicator of socioeconomic status. These are summarised in Table 3-1 earlier, showing the context school deprivation measures are

higher than the regional averages. This shows that the sample from both classes represented a lower level of formal education than the regional and national averages. Whether considering the socioeconomic proxy of employment or highest education level, it is clear that the population sample represent a significantly more socioeconomically deprived sample than the average in the area. This was previously indicated by the high rate of PPG allocated to the study school, discussed above. This would have given a great opportunity to look more in depth at the attitudes and behaviours of those from a lower SES, though without either claiming that this small sample is representative of all lower SES parents, or that either the deprived or non-deprived populations share universal characteristics. Had the respondent lower SES groups not been so much lower, I could have explored this in more depth. This remains an area for further research.

As already noted, the proportion of deprived families participating in the intervention was lower than the proportion of them in the class population which only became evident after the intervention and during analysis. Considering the Bourdieusian concept of cultural capital, it could be understandable that deprived families find engagements with a school to be daunting. This fear could reasonably apply to specific actions, for example a parent may feel comfortable to join a group and “lurk” by viewing the content but feel too much pressure to comment or post their own message. Given the lower level of education in the sample suggests, some parents left school at or before the age of 16 so may not have positive memories of their educational experiences, which could be explicitly or implicitly affect interactions with their child’s school.

Chapter 2 also explored considerations of parental engagement by ethnicity and gender. As noted there, the consideration of gender was added after the intervention as a result of



analysis identifying the underrepresentation of fathers taking part in the online intervention. I have noted above, and will revisit in the next chapter, how the monitoring of gender should have formed a consideration for the study throughout which could have provided opportunities to take additional actions. Due to the involvement of only one father in the intervention Group, I cannot draw conclusions from this. Two further fathers were involved in the interviews: one pre-intervention, the other post-intervention. Although both generally highly engaged with the school, neither of them joined the Facebook Group but were happy to be involved in the study through participating in interviews.

In considering ethnicity, it is important to note diversity of the population of the community in which the intervention took place. Five parents who joined the Facebook Group were White British, with six being from other ethnicities. This compared to 43% White British in the class, 44% in the local authority, 35% in the region and 54% in England (Office for National Statistics, 2019a). Although a small sample, the representation of families from a diversity of ethnicities was relatively strong. There were no notable variations identified during analysis between how parents from different ethnicities interacted within the Facebook Group.

Having now considered the three key themes identified as challenges to parental engagement within this study, my study is now better placed to consider conclusions from these data alongside the opportunities afforded, and the characteristics of effective parental engagement.

#### 4.4 Summary of analysis

To summarise this chapter, I will bring together the key conclusions explored to answer each of the research questions in turn. I found the important characteristics of parental engagement to be: parents accessing information from school; using technology to engage with the school; and seeing inside the classroom, experiencing their child's curriculum and learning. Parents were broadly content with how existing communication channels support them to get information from school. A strong message emerged both from parents and from Facebook engagement data to show that content which featured photos and videos was much more engaging than other types of content. It was also striking that parents use a more limited range of apps than might have been expected, with Facebook dominant amongst these. This further supported the method of this project to use an existing app rather than seeking to establish an alternative intervention mechanism.

The sample of parents who took part in the survey and interviews showed a wide range of confidence and competence levels in using technology: some regularly used a wide range of apps and tools for a variety of purposes, and others found common tasks challenging. Many commented on how they feel their children are more confident in using different technologies and that this can be a source of support for parents at home. Others have established informal peer support routes through asking a more technologically confident friend or family member to support them with tasks when they need it, though these examples would likely be exceptions rather than constant support. There also appeared to be some appetite for more structured system of technical support from the school, such as drop-in sessions or workshops for parents to get their devices configured correctly to make best use of the communication tools.

To help parents 'see inside the classroom', I found that information links did not gain much interest. For content to be relevant, parents engaged best with pictures and videos of children in the class doing engaged in tasks, or photos and videos of children's work. This suggests that parental usage of Facebook is much more experiential and driven by close experiences, rather than broader information topics such as units of work or whole topics. In a similar way to how children often appeared to be supportive of their parents using technology, here I found that children often provided nudges to their parents to look at content online by encouraging them to look at content shared into the Facebook Group. Intriguingly, parents said that they were more motivated by photos and videos of children's work, rather than by photos and videos of children themselves. Perhaps parents are conscious of privacy aspects of publishing children's images online, or they could be considering how they could best understand children's learning in order to support them more fully at home.

The second research question considered opportunities created by this intervention, which emerged as two key themes: frequency and convenience. For frequency, parents were keen both before and after this intervention to see information from the school which related ideally to their own child, or at least to their child's class. Information shared through the whole-school public Facebook Page is less frequent than this class-specific closed Facebook Group: during the intervention period there were 22 posts in the Facebook Group, whereas there would normally be no more than one or two posts from the target class on the whole-school Facebook Page. Throughout the intervention I have used the Epstein (1997) framework for parental involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. Most of the posts are primarily in the category of communicating, with some also supporting learning at home, or

parenting. Parents naturally tended towards feeling comfortable talking about communicating and rating the existing performance of the school higher in this area than others. The convenience aspect of the opportunity was derived mainly by choosing to use Facebook which all parents were familiar with to some extent, so it did not require a separate download, setup or account to access. Crucially the app would then 'push' information to parents, rather than relying on them to 'pull' information from a school website or other platform for example.

The final research question concerned challenges introduced by this intervention, which emerged into three themes: different language to represent online and offline engagement; relationships between stakeholders; and how engagement changes for some families.

Engagement data provided by Facebook requires a user to do something more than just read the message: they need to like, react to, or comment on it. This is a higher threshold than other measures of engagement such as email open rates, or non-technological understandings or engagement for which participation (the equivalent of reading a message) may sometimes be the right level of engagement with which to be satisfied. The difficulty then becomes how to consider the "seen by" metric in Facebook: should it be treated as counting this engaged because they have looked at the message, or should it be disregarded in favour of counting online likes, reactions and comments. Regardless of any theoretically correct approach to these data is a greater overarching question to resolve before embarking on any project: what outcomes are desired?

The second challenging aspect presented during this intervention was one of relationships: between parents and school; between parents in different families; and within a family. I found some of these mentioned explicitly such as parents finding technological support

within their family or friends, and others talking about how the two parents in the household approach the use of technology very differently to each other. There were also aspects of power relationships alluded to, for example some parents implying that communications from the school are the correct nature of information for what they need; this showing an asymmetric power relationship within which parents could feel like recipients of a service, rather than active collaborating partners.

The final challenge uncovered within this intervention was a difference in engagement between groups based on some demographic criteria. It was most notable that many more women participated than men, as well as the significant underrepresentation of more deprived families from the intervention. This latter imbalance was not discovered until after the intervention so actions were not able to be taken to address it at the time. This is an area worthy of significant further research, in order to ascertain whether some approaches to engaging parents are more effective with families from lower socioeconomic statuses.

Within this chapter I have considered the research aim: **To what extent can social media influence parental engagement in a primary school?** In the next chapter, I will explore these key themes further including their impact on policy and practice.



## Chapter 5 Discussion

Having analysed the data collected, I am now able to discuss its implications and explore it in more depth. This chapter will build on the analysis in Chapter 4 and use the key outcomes to structure the discussion, as well as combining with commentary and drawing on existing literature already addressed in Chapter 2. Firstly I will consider what elements of parental engagement is valued most by parents, focusing particularly on comparing what is meant by engagement both online and offline; then secondly considering the trend that parents want engagements to be personalised to them or their children; and finally to consider which published information is valued most by parents. Following this, I will then turn to consider the opportunities that using a closed Facebook group brought for parental engagement, particularly for the frequency and convenience of these engagements. A number of elements of the desire for personalised content and an evolving understanding about how engagement is viewed differently online and offline can also be considered as opportunities which have arisen from this study. Having recognised the opportunities, I will turn to consider the challenges posed by the study, beginning with the varying confidence levels of parents towards using technology, then turn to considering how the dynamics of relationships between those involved can be affected, and finally to consider how engagement can change for different families, principally based on SES and gender.

Parents made positive comments during interviews about their relationship with the school, and in particular about face-to-face contact they have with staff. With all four parents interviewed being broadly satisfied with their communication, engagement and relationship with the school, it provides an opportunity to reflect upon what this study is seeking to understand. Such “parental practices” of monitoring or helping with schoolwork, supporting

school activities, attending meetings, and requesting information are recognised by Eccles and Harold (1996) in Figure 2.1 Child, teacher and parent factors influencing parent involvement in school and the implications of involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996)

(p. 43) as one important collection of factors which influence parental engagement. These are identified as “parental involvement behaviours” by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) in Figure 2.2 Model of the parental-involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, p. 74)

. They also identify as being mediated by “children’s perceptions of parent’s involvement”, including encouragement, modelling, reinforcement and instruction. It is therefore reassuring that the parents I spoke to for interviews were positive about their relationships with the school, and the results seen from the parents survey results such as in Figure 4.2, and Figure 4.4 (p. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**).

## 5. 1 Making it personal: Which elements of engagement parents value the most

### 5. 1. 1 What parents feel is most important: It needs to be about my child

My revised view of parental engagement (Figure 6.1b) takes account of the many variables which are relevant to parental engagement including: participant contexts, agreed focus areas, tools, barriers, and collaborative reviews to iterate process. These are drawn from a number of seminal studies, including Eccles and Harold (1996) who focused heavily on considering the factors influencing parental involvement (Figure 2.1 Child, teacher and parent factors influencing parent involvement in school and the implications of involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996)

): parent/family, neighbourhood, child, teacher, school, parent beliefs, teacher beliefs, parent practises, and teacher practices. The depth of information even within this illustration is emblematic of how many moving parts there are within these relationships, and thus the importance of understanding what parents find important to begin with.



Also within the revised view of parental engagement, I drew on the work of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) who recognised the importance of parents' motivational beliefs, perceptions of invitations for involvement from others, and perceived life context to contribute to their parental involvement behaviours (Figure 2.2 Model of the parental-involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, p. 74)

). In essence, actions from the school need to be and feel inclusive to who a parent is and their life context. Within each level of their framework, communication is implicit: effective communication between all participants is essential in order for any engagements to be successful. Being mindful of teacher workload, there are different approaches to communicating which can be tailored and personalised without a large increase in staff time required. For example messages can use 'mail merge' style features to pick up the names of parents and children, can choose appropriate pronouns, and could append a brief personalised comment where appropriate; all of which may go some way to making an otherwise general communication appear much more individualised.

In comments made within interviews and questionnaires, parents engaged on their experience of needing to resolve an 'issue' with their child, such as friendships, behaviour or attainment. It was notable how examples parents recalled, both prompted and unprompted, were of an 'issue' being a negative focus which required them engaging with the school. It was also notable that the focus on an 'issue' suggests that their perception of parental engagement to be on an individual basis focused around their child. Chapter 2 discussed how the work of Wilson (2016) and Kambouri-Danos et al. (2018) suggest disjunctions between perceptions of staff and perceptions of parents. Some of these could be explained by the nature of staff engagements taking a larger proportion of their time, such as one-to-one visits or meetings; or engagements which may be personalised to

individual families and as such not all families may receive them, such as individual phone calls or emails. In contrast, much of the content shared within the Facebook Group by me was generic such as curriculum information or other broader updates about class or school activities, which I will explore more fully later in this chapter. Drawing these two observations together makes it comprehensible why many posts in the Facebook Group received lower levels of engagement as parents would not have felt that the information was personal enough to them.

A key question in the parents' survey asked about how involved parents felt in different aspects. Within the user interface this would have appeared as one question, but in analysis I was able to look at the individual aspects separately to compare and contrast them. As discussed in the previous chapter, missing responses from four out of seven respondents significantly affected the usability of this portion of the data, particularly given the small sample size. It is recognised that if data are likely to carry particular weight, the survey design should make responses mandatory. The survey could therefore be comprised of some questions with mandatory responses and others with optional responses. While this could increase the trustworthiness of the data set, it also risks increasing user fatigue or frustration in being prompted to reconsider questions and therefore may have results in a higher drop-out rate. In this case, a balance should be struck between how desirable data are when weighed against the need not to prolong the user experience.

The highest preference from parents (Table 4-2) was for some form of face-to-face contact, such as informal conversations or formal meetings – often citing both as a good opportunity to understand how their child is attaining and progressing in school, which reinforces existing conclusions from others (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Epstein, 1997; Wilson,

2016; Kambouri-Danos et al., 2018). Whilst recognising the likelihood of a range of views, it would nonetheless have been helpful to have an understanding about how often parents wanted to see messages from the school in Facebook.

In the previous chapter, I established Table 4-3 showing a simple metric whereby 'seen by' is given a value of 1, a 'like or reaction' is given a value of 2, and a 'comment' is given a value of 3. This scale seeks to differentiate between the quality of interactions: seeing at a basic level, then moving onto recognition, then into discussion. I believe that there is value in monitoring posts in this way for two reasons: firstly that it seeks to emulate – albeit at a basic level – some simple aspects of how the Facebook algorithm works for engagement; and secondly that it is important for us to understand the differences between the depths of engagement in order to understand what topics are most engaging and thus plan future content. However, it is worth considering that all parents may not feel comfortable enough to write a comment in this way. For example some parents may lack confidence in their literacy skills and may feel self-conscious writing in front of other parents with whom they may not be familiar or friendly, as well as posting the message on a school social media channel where they may feel judged by the school. The experience of some adults when they were at school was not positive and can stay be an unpleasant recollection far into adulthood, and thus engaging with the school online could reawaken these memories. Although I did not ask explicitly, I do not believe that there are other social media groups active within the school other than the whole-school public Facebook Page. Some other schools have active cohort groups on platforms including Facebook, WhatsApp or Instagram; either organised by the school, organisations such as PTAs, or by parents independently. While I am aware that parents do communicate directly with each other, there does not appear to be other social networking between groups of parents.

### 5. 1. 2 Which published information is valued most by parents

It was clear from the pre-intervention survey that parents were most keen to see content which related to their children directly, or about their learning in class. Grolnick and Ryan (1989); Epstein (1997) and others identify the importance of identifying motivators for parents so that the school can respond appropriately and provide content which parents find engaging and relevant to them and their child. These initial desires were borne out by the higher engagement levels for messages containing photos or videos of children or children's work. These received a much higher number of engagements through likes and also particularly through comments. The high value placed on images and videos were emphasised strongly in one of the post-intervention parent interviews during which both the mother and father explained why they found this an important element of the intervention. As well as the interest of seeing their own child or their work in an image or video and being able to use this to initiate a conversation with their child about their learning, the father also explained how he spends large amounts of his day looking at screens and so the inclusion of some media content was an important way to make it attractive enough to pause upon to engage. The focus on engaging fathers with schooling has been identified as an area which could benefit from the use of social media (McBride et al., 2005; Wilson, 2016; Cohen, 2017; Kadar-Satat et al., 2017). It is also notable that the father in the Coates family reflected on the greater value he places on multimedia content within a social media platform, which is supported by the reverse-engineering of Facebook data undertaken by Ho (2020).

There are potentially two contributing factors to the online engagement being higher with images and videos; the first of which is the parental desire to see media of their children or their children's work in school. The school has collected granular permissions from parents including one for them to opt into images of their children being permitted to be shared on Facebook. Those children without this permission can still have their work shared without personal identifier and sometimes techniques such as taking a photo of a child's hands whilst working can give the child pride in their achievements being shared without breaching their privacy or parental consent. The second could be the favourable treatment given to posts including media by the Facebook algorithm (Sprout Social, 2019; HootSuite, 2020). Even though the intervention Facebook Group in itself was not inundated by content which relied on the algorithm to prioritise, the wider user experience on Facebook is still dependent on posts from various Groups, Pages and users being sorted and prioritised against one another. This is best illustrated with a thought experiment of two edge cases: the first being a user whose only Facebook interaction is with the intervention Group; and the second being a user who is an avid consumer of content on Facebook through high numbers of Groups, Pages and Friends. Making assumptions about regularity, frequency and duration of usage, the first user would be more likely to see content shared from the Group; whereas the second user's News Feed experience delivered by the Facebook algorithm would be much busier and thus they may not see content shared from the Group.

Although the desire for posts to be viewed makes the authoring of posts seeking higher online engagement easier by the simple inclusion of media, it also could risk the addition of media losing value or becoming tokenistic which in itself could then result in lower engagements with the content if parents perceive that the content was not of sufficient quality for them to value. While some messages naturally have media to accompany them,

the risk of operating within this algorithm is that important content which does lend itself to eye-catching media could be seen as less important. This was seen during the study when links to curriculum-related online resources were shared with encouragement to use them at home, yet they yielded low engagement figures. While this could be because parents found it less engaging, I believe there is an element of it being that the Facebook algorithm disfavours non-media content (Ho, 2020). It is worth reflecting that “information and ideas about supporting learning at home” was one of the top priorities for parents at the beginning of the intervention; thus this content could otherwise have been expected to gain higher engagement rates.

Midway through the intervention, I noted lower levels of engagement recorded so sought to undertake a multiple-choice poll in an attempt to encourage engagement through one click. This poll only elicited responses from four parents, all of whom were already regularly engaged in the group. This was perhaps a practical reminder that engagements cannot be forced and need to be nurtured organically and meaningfully. This could also be another manifestation of the concern, discussed earlier, that parents may feel that their interactions online are in a group “owned” by the school and that their contributions may reflect adversely on them or their child. Making use of tools within Facebook and elsewhere to schedule content for particular times is an area which could be explored in the future and there are examples from business (Kanuri et al., 2018) which suggest that planned scheduling of social media content can increase profits in this case by at least 8%. While there are difficulties in transferring business-centred examples into education, Liang and Shen (2018) suggest (using Twitter) that users are most likely to emulate those they follow rather than those who follow them. If Facebook Group Insights were available during the intervention, it would have been possible to see information relating to the times of day

that users were active and therefore plan content accordingly. As such without this information, I manually trialled different times to see if there was an impact but I could not determine one with any transferability: as already discussed, the trends about higher engagement appeared to relate more around the content of the post and inclusion of media rather than timing of the post. Whatever the best approach to the timing of posts, it should remain of paramount importance to schools that the first consideration is whether posts are relevant to parents and as such that content and purpose are overriding considerations rather than the frequency or scheduling of posts.

## 5.2 Frequency and convenience: Opportunities that a closed Facebook Group offers to improve parental engagement

Some parents commented before the intervention that they have felt at times like the volume of communication from the school was high, though they recognised that these occasions are rare and that normally messages are spaced well. The spacing and sequencing of messages and other engagements was an area the study considered, for example in using the Salmon (2011, 2013) model of a graduated increase in the depth of engagements. One parent explained how he had changed the notification settings on his Facebook account so that he always sees updates from the school first, though he was the only person to volunteer that he had done this. The risk of the Facebook algorithm is that by overwhelming a group with too many messages, parents will only see either the most recent one or the post with the highest level of engagement. As such a balance needs to be struck between messages being frequent enough to sustain a community and for parents to value it, whilst not becoming overloaded. This did not manifest itself as a concern during my study due to the moderate number of posts, but it is a risk to be aware of for larger or more prolifically-posting Groups.

During analysis, it was evident that the communications mapped against the Epstein (2019) framework showed a dominance for 'communicating' with a small number of other activities. While this was expected to be a popular theme, I could have put greater efforts into including a broader and more balanced set of messages within the intervention group. This may have gone some way towards improving the engagement levels if there was a more varied range of content for parents to engage with. Epstein does not suggest any requirements for equal numbers of activities from each category of activity, though she is at pains to emphasise the importance of a plan involving all stakeholders, and reviewing this



regularly as part of a wider strategy for parental engagement. As discussed above, “information and ideas about supporting learning at home” and “helping with your child’s education in school” were popular themes in the pre-intervention parent questionnaire, so this could have been an area upon which to place greater emphasis to develop during the intervention. Also as noted previously, had the intervention begun by agreeing an approach and focus with parents, it may have enabled a more open dialogue with which for them to engage and steer priorities in their own direction.

## 5.3 Confidence, Relationships, and Variability: challenges to parental engagement from using a closed Facebook Group

### 5.3.1 Varying confidence levels of parents towards using technology

This was a theme within which a large number of related issues transpired, which was to be expected given that the study was discussing communication using technology with parents.

The first overriding theme was how confident parents were with using technology themselves. Some parents chose to compare their own confidence or proficiency with that of their child or partner. In some cases a parent commented that their partner was the more capable user of technology, or that they would often ask their child for guidance or support in using technology. Some comments suggested that parents considered their child to be better placed because of their demographic as a digital native (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b). This is a contested area of work, including challenging the assumption that confidence should not be mistaken for competence, how a tinkering approach can masquerade as knowledgeable interactions, and that a strength in the use of technology does not necessarily equate to a strong understanding of its implications including for online safety.

A number of the parents recognised their own limited technology skills as a limiting factor to how they are able to use online tools, not just for engagement with the school but more broadly in everyday life; and this may have been a factor which contributed to lower participation rates with my study. Two parents in particular, both non-working mothers, felt somewhat embarrassed about their lack of technological skills. They also recognised that they could have sought out ongoing learning opportunities through face-to-face or online courses, but had limited confidence and motivation to do so. In one case, the mother was

explicit about her reliance on her children for their guidance on using technology; and in the other case, the mother deferred to her husband whose job working with technology she is comfortable to rely upon. One of these mothers also explained how she relies on support from another parent in the class who helps her with technology issues when they arise, such as using online public services. My study did not explore peer support amongst parents as a theme, nor did I offer technological support to parents for them to be able to make use of the intervention: this is an area to be considered in the final chapter.

While it may be advantageous to seek out learning opportunities, this may not appeal to everyone. It is worth us reflecting on what level of technical skill or confidence a parent should reasonably be expected to have in order to engage with their child's school.

Livingstone and Blum-Ross (2020) profiled two families whose lacked the knowledge and confidence to encourage their children in the right way to pursue their digital interests; and reflected how these portraits were emblematic of an underrepresentation of both socioeconomically deprived and non-White people in digital sectors (pp. 66-67). It would have been an ethical concern had the lack of access to equipment put the parent or their child in a less favourable position with regard to schooling, and it was known beforehand that this was not a barrier for any families. Although parents gave moderate to positive ratings for their confidence in using technology and social media within their lives, these ratings were subjective thus did not provide a standardised view about skill or confidence levels. Whilst the inverse of this position could result in schools needing to aim their engagements at the lowest level of competence, which would also not be appropriate, it is instead suggested that schools need to be mindful of the range of positions that parents are in and be able to offer a selection of communication methods from which a parent can

obtain all of the required information and support without being disadvantaged if they do not access all of the communication channels.

In the previous chapter a number of typologies of online users were explored, and I can draw parallels from some points of the data and some of the personas explored. For example, parents were broadly positive about the idea of having a Facebook Group to see information about the learning in their child's class. Of those who joined the group, many did not actively engage in most messages thus could reasonably be considered a lurker (Kim, 2018), and in themselves this group forms around half of the parents in the class who joined the group. While the remaining half of parents would not be correctly classified as non-users or digitally excluded, it is perhaps more accurate to consider parents who did not join to the group to be lurkers, and for those in the group to be considered to be dabblers whereas those parents who reliably engaged with most posts would be either devotees or omnivores (Hargittai & Hsieh, 2010). Some baseline and ongoing assessments of parental behaviours within a social media group may support the iterative review process suggested in Figure 6.1a and Figure 6.1b in the next chapter.

Rich discussions during parental interviews helped me to explore parental attitudes towards different technologies. Firstly I was able to gauge the level of usage and understanding of technologies through a discussion stimulus activities (see Appendix B) and the resultant conversations. Responses to semi-structured questioning also showed that all parents preferred to use different communication methods for different purposes. Although there was some reluctance to use email from some parents because of it being less instant and not pushing notifications to them, parents recognised its role for longer or more detailed information. There was a high amount of value placed in text messages possibly because of

their quick delivery, limited length for concise information, and push notifications on devices. Parents valued social media, particularly Facebook, in different ways. Some use the platform frequently in their daily lives whereas others needed to make a conscious effort to access it; and some readily interact with content and share their own whereas others are more cautious about what information they publish. Despite these differences, all parents recognised that Facebook is not a panacea for communication needs and that it is easier to miss information shared through social media than it is for text messages or emails. Each of these different approaches to technology suggest that the study needed to be clear on its intended outcome: for example it may have been about parents seeing the information in the quickest time; or could have been for them to engage with the content in a meaningful way; or could have been something else. I have not been able to establish further patterns about how parental usage may relate to engagement level (

Table 3-3), family deprivation status, or other identifiable characteristics.

The discussion stimuli activities suggested, in contrast to Ofcom (2020), that parents in the study use a very small number of apps. It could also imply a number of considerations about the typologies of parents in my study, or more specifically their typology within this context. It could be that a higher prevalence of lurkers or dabblers was seen in the sample, or that these behaviours were more evident during the study than they would have been elsewhere in parents' online behaviour. Some parents mention their consideration of others on social media, and it is worth considering how dynamics within the Facebook group could influence individuals' behaviour, and this could be in ways unbeknownst to the researcher. For example some parents may carry more social kudos amongst the parent community and as such could be more influential within the group, both positively and negatively. If it were

possible to have had a deeper understanding about relationships and dynamics within the parent community, this may have been able to affect engagement within the Facebook group. For example it may have been beneficial if I had engaged specifically with parents identified as being influential or respected by other parents.

A final area of consideration for how parents use technology is parents identifying their own sources of support from their peers. This is an area from which lessons can be learned from beyond considering parents or even education; O'Leary et al. (2017) and Shorey et al. (2019) are studies considering mental health and postnatal depression respectively which saw significant benefits of introducing a technology-mediated approach to peer-support. One parent in my study explained how she relies on one of her friends, also a parent of another child in the target class, for support if she needs to do something involving technology. I will explore later one how of the challenges identified from this study of the impact on dynamics between parents, which is also relevant here. There were two examples of couples where one parent was more enthusiastic and confident about their use of technology, alongside a less confident and more reserved parent. In both of these cases, the more confident parent was the father and the less confident parent was the mother; and the gender imbalance is also an area I will discuss in more depth when considering the challenges identified. In follow-up interviews, there were some suggestions about whether workshops or drop-in sessions to provide technical support to parents could have been beneficial and could have been beneficial to enhance parents' social, cultural or educational capitals Bourdieu (1984) through facilitating their digital skill developments. This is an area which is worth exploring in future research, potentially with two intended outcomes: firstly, to support more parents to engage with the intervention; and secondly, to understand whether providing technical support results in higher levels of online or offline engagement with the intervention.

### 5.3.2 How relationships between various stakeholders can make a big difference

During analysis the imbalance in power relationships involving parents, children and teachers was recognised in addition to considering the multifaceted nature of power in the context of parent engagement, social media, and an insider researcher in Chapter 2. Some parents may feel that schools are institutions of the state either to be wary of, or to be deferential towards. At the same time, other parents may have negative memories of their own time in education and so may view schools with some trepidation, thus do not feel a parity of esteem with them. An imbalance may also exist in the other direction, whereby a parent feels that their own role of experience puts them in a superior position to that of their child's school, thus consequently may find the relationship challenging from their position, perceived or real, of superiority over the school. Perhaps the most serious concern about the intervention is that it simply added an additional broadcast communication method for the school to use, whilst adding little in terms of engagement for parents. Einarsdottir and Jónsdóttir (2019) recognise that the Scandinavian model of 'communicative collaboration' may challenge the professional identity of a teacher even though the intention is to 'co-create' expertise using adults from home and school to contribute to children's learning.

While parents may routinely share their views and experiences of the school with each other, this would not normally happen in a forum where the school is a participant as was the case in the intervention. If parents perceived the school to 'own' the Facebook group, then they may see its purpose is for the school to determine rather than for them as parents

to influence. The risk of the perception being that the group is school-led is that parents may not feel comfortable sharing their honest views and experiences. They may fear reprisal against themselves or their child by the school; they may not feel comfortable expressing their views in a mixed forum of parents whom they may not be familiar with; or they may be self-conscious about their literacy levels for example because of using English as an additional language, through lower levels of education, or a concern about being judged on their written comments by school staff.

A study considering interactions between parent-teacher trust relationship, lower parental engagement and using technology was undertaken by Houri et al. (2019) who recruited lower-engaged families in a US school district, a high proportion of whom had unstable Internet access. They double-blinded a target group and a control group, and provided the parents of the target group with support on 'parental wise feedback' to engage with teacher communications. The positive impact on parental ratings of their relationship with the teacher for the target group was significant after the intervention (p. 428), and notably was able to be achieved whilst not increasing teacher workload as the system Class Dojo was already being used, it was arguably more purposefully achieved due to their targeting lesser engaged parents, and demonstrated a focus on learning and relationships rather than on technology and communications. This study was published very shortly before my study was undertaken, yet its discovery during the analytical process has presented some thought-provoking and reflective opportunities which I will use throughout this thesis.

In post-intervention interview discussions, parents spoke in a way which implied that they believed the school 'owned' the Facebook group, and that they were invited to join it; in contrast to the hope that the group was a shared space for parents and the class teacher to



interact on an equal footing. The perception of the school's ownership of the group was perhaps perpetuated by almost all posts coming from the class teacher, and the limit to how much discussion there was on posts. I have already discussed a number of times the recognition that had the intervention been part of a wider strategic approach to parental engagement in the school then it could have been more successful at encouraging parents to contribute to the group. To address the perception of ownership directly, actions such as approaching some parents to act as co-hosts of the group could have encouraged a community-led and peer-support approach to the intervention, rather than almost all messages coming out from the school. The approach of increasing the diversity of hosts within the group may also have gone some way towards addressing the power imbalance outlined above, by some parents being empowered to explicitly model how they want to make use of the group for themselves. The hope is that this equalising of the group would then have positive ripple effects on other parents and the culture of the group more broadly. This approach would assume parents have the capacity to be involved in this approach, which not all may do, but I would hope that by co-creating the experience and encouraging peer-support networks we could work towards all parents being positively involved in the community.

From interviewing parents about their schooling experience as children, Miller (2015) identified three themes: school transitions, the social environment, and special education. Fathers' reflections tended to be less specific and episodic than mothers', yet both groups of parents believed that their own formative experiences affect how they raise their own children, including in regard to engaging with their child's school. In his study, Miller noted an interest that all fathers reported broadly negative experiences of the academic side of their schooling and relied more heavily on the social aspect including the involvement of

their own parents to support and encourage extra-curricular interests such as sports. In itself the implication of how to engage parents is important, and is alluded to in how Eccles and Harold (1996) in Figure 2.1 Child, teacher and parent factors influencing parent involvement in school and the implications of involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996)

recognise the parent practice of supporting school activities, as well as the gender-role schema within both teacher beliefs and parent beliefs. It also forms a fundamental definition of parents' motivational beliefs as the parental role construction within the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) model in Figure 2.2 Model of the parental-involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, p. 74)

.

When considering power relationships, it is important to consider two well-established ethical conundrums which are evident within this discussion. The first is that of the insider researcher (Saidin, 2017), and the lack of independence that this role brings with it. For instance when parents volunteer their views they do so in the knowledge that the responses are being handled by a member of staff at their child's school, rather than by an independent research team. Even though the same levels of ethical conduct are adhered to, the perception of this relationship is altered in the participants' minds. The second ethical position to consider is an extension of this: the asymmetric power relationship which exists between a parent and a teacher (Cohen et al., 2018). Regardless of the standing of the parent outside the school in their personal, professional or community involvements, when a parent interacts with their child's teacher there is an imbalance in the relationship: the parent could feel a 'third party' in the school, and the teacher more often than not controls the situations and circumstances within which interactions take place. As with the position of the insider-researcher, this asymmetric power relationship is crucial to bear in mind on two fronts: within the context of this study, and also more broadly in the context of communications between parents and school.

Earlier, I recognised the role that children can play, for example: in “nudging” parents into action, reminding them of things, or providing some technical support. In the post-intervention interviews, one parent who had not joined the Facebook group explained that she did not feel that she missed out on anything as her daughter tells her a lot about what happens in class anyway. Another parent explained how her son was very good at “nagging” her to check the Facebook group to look at the pictures that had been put up, which she found helpful because she does not regularly use Facebook. This family dynamic cannot be accounted for in social media usage data, but was able to come through strongly from discussions with families which allowed us to glimpse into the dynamics of relationships involved in their lives.

Two sets of parents involved in the study displayed clear differences in how they use technology, with the fathers being more confident in their own skills to use technology, and the mothers much less confident. In the Jayawardena family the mother was present during the interview but did not contribute much to the discussion, with the father taking a more vocal lead in the discussion. In the Coates family, the mother attended the pre-intervention interview alone but both parents attended the post-intervention interview. During both interviews the Coates mother was positive about the intervention and about us using technology for it, and was comfortable to talk about her own lack of confidence in using technology. Within the post-intervention interview, the Coates mother and father talked together about how differently they use technology and were able to consciously contrast their experiences because of this. The father works with technology for his job and explained how he is adept at setting up notifications to see desired content and was able to give constructive feedback around technical specifics of why some content was more popular or appealing. In contrast the mother does not use technology habitually and for

example only visits Facebook to consciously look at content from a specific source such as the school. In both examples I am acutely aware of the gender dimension to the distinction of how the parents use technology, and the associated differences in the dynamics and power balance in their relationships as couple and as parents. Although now somewhat dated, Hallgarten (2000) and David (1993) remain helpful to consider given that they were concerned that the approach of schools to parents had not kept pace with changing employment trends and family arrangements and could in fact be increasing gender disparity. I am not aware of families in the target class where two parents are present and the mother is more technologically confident, though I did not seek to find this scenario. There are examples of families in the class, and those who took part in the study, which have one parent – always a mother in these cases – who are comfortable using technology, as well as other families in this situation who are less comfortable using technology. It is beyond my scope and data to explore relationship dynamics within families, and these examples are provided here as an insight into some of the richness experienced from a small number of families who took part in the study. As there was a strong representation of mothers in the Facebook group and in comparison a larger proportion of parents in the interviews, the different approaches which may be preferred by mothers and fathers should be considered, as well as the aforementioned difference on how the default communication methods of the school are to contact only one parent, who is very often the mother.

Is it more likely than not that mothers take responsibility for liaising with the school for the majority of arrangements relating to their child's education? By extension, are fathers as actively involved as mothers, or are there likely to be agreements between the parents about each of their responsibilities? A number of studies have set out to understand the role of fathers in their child's education, and how these can differ from mothers more

broadly than just in the context of Facebook or technology at large. This was not a focus for this study, but I have drawn upon a number of studies to expand understanding, such as McBride et al. (2005); Cohen (2017); Kadar-Satat et al. (2017); Waterman and Lefkowitz (2017); Rollè et al. (2019). These studies raise some intriguing questions which I have not been able to explore within this study, but would benefit from further exploration in a similar future study. I will touch upon these towards the end of this chapter both as impacts for policy and practice, and as areas for future research.

Are women more comfortable with joining groups on social media, and is their likelihood to engage once joined affected by the gender composition of the group, or existing personal connections to others in the group? If the sample is representative of the parent population, do they represent mothers who are broadly confident or broadly unconfident about their technology skills? Gender was not a focus for my study, thus data relevant to these were not gathered during the study. Nikou et al. (2018) conclude that there are gender differences in how men and women obtain information online, and more specifically in how women are more adept at engaging with social media and multimedia interactions. Bivens and Haimson (2016) recognise how advertisers have historically used gender as a key targeting criteria on social media. In recent years they acknowledge that the move by platforms away from binary gender categories has reduced the dependence of advertisers on the field, and instead the shift has moved more onto targeting users by their previous online behaviours.

As noted in in the previous chapter, Figure 4.6 was an example of parents from different families engaging with each other within the Facebook Group. This was an almost-unique example of this within the study, which may suggest a number of evaluative aspects including whether the cultural norm existed for these interactions. This post showed that at

least some parents felt comfortable engaging on this level, and through my knowledge of the families outside of the study I know that these parents were unknown to each other and would not be part of the same social circles; thus their interactions were essentially between two unfamiliar people in this space and as such the interaction was in itself encouraging and gave hope that were the intervention to run for longer then perhaps the cultural norm of these interactions would become established.

### 5. 3. 3 How engagement changes for some families

I have noted two differential engagements in particular: SES and gender. With 15 of children in the class being eligible for the PPG, it was particularly disappointing that only 2 of those families took part in the intervention. This meant that that non-PPG families were over-represented in the sample, and that the input and perceptions from PPG families was lacking. Upon reflection and given the focus of SES in this study, at least the balance of uptake amongst the class should have been monitored carefully, and appropriate steps taken to rectify the imbalance if possible. As discussed above, the feeling of a power imbalance could be felt more acutely by those from a lower SES who may have lower educational attainments or less positive memories of their own schooling.

Harris and Goodall (2008) recognised that all schools put high amounts of effort into engaging 'hard to reach' families, which often overlap with low achieving or underachieving children. Though there low achieving children and deprived families are not interchangeable, there will be overlap for us to consider in this context. They note two downsides of this focus: firstly that a lot of effort goes into getting the family to merely *interact* with the school without any further outcomes in mind and they often don't move

beyond this; and secondly that the time spent on these small number of families will by definition be at the expense of making other developments in the engagement with other families.

The second differential engagement noted was that of gender. Only one father joined the group, and that was at the end of the intervention and his partner had been a member throughout. The dominance of mothers in the group was notable, and should be considered on a number of fronts – all of which there are questions about, but my data do not begin to offer answers. To begin, are a higher proportion of mothers the ‘first contact’ on the school messaging system, and so would fathers’ contact details be as up-to-date, or would they be used to receiving messages from the school upon which they needed to act? When a message about the research project was sent, ‘all contacts’ were deliberately chosen for each child, but if these details were not stored, not up-to-date, or the recipient was not in the habit of acting on them, then the impact of this wider distribution would have been diminished. There were a small number of responses from the additional class which suggested that this was the first time the recipient had ever had contact through the school messaging system, which offers some support to these suggestions.

## 5.4 Summary of discussions

Through this chapter, a number of key areas which have emerged through the exploration of data as well as then comparing this to what is already known from existing literature have been explored. The first of these is that parents value engagement the most when it is personal to them or their children, and in particular photos, videos or examples of their work. This is conceptually straightforward to understand from a parent's perspective, yet presents challenges to teachers and schools about how to achieve this. In recent years Department for Education (2014) has determined a minimum level of information that maintained schools must publish including attainment results, policies, inspection reports, equality statements and financial information. Whilst no parents in this study cited this information as being important to them, this is not an argument for removing the information: instead it is an important reminder that whilst some of this statutory information is useful for parents to have available, their real focus uncovered in this study is that they have an appetite for more specific or personalised information to them and their child. I see a number of aspects to how this desire manifests itself, including the higher value put on images and videos of children or their work in school.

Due to the nature of social media, I have identified that frequency of engagement and convenience of engagement emerged as important themes for parents. Rather than waiting for printed information to arrive home via children, parents can see updates closer to real-time for example to remind them that the school planned to be closed the following day. It enabled parents to respond with comments and questions in their own time, rather than sending a note with a child, waiting to speak with a teacher on the playground, or leaving a message with the school office. This intervention was undertaken in the summer term of 2019, which was almost a year hence of the disruption to schooling caused by the Covid-19



pandemic. During the period of schools being closed to most children, class teachers in the target school provided their work email addresses to parents in order that they were easily contactable, and this is a trend which has continued into the autumn term of 2020 once the school reopened to all pupils.

I have also identified a number of challenges identified as a result of the intervention, the principle one of which is the varying levels of confidence amongst parents to use technology in different ways. There are vast differences between those reported as having smart phones or using social media regularly (Ofcom, 2020) and those who have more modest levels of technological skill (Walker, 2019) when considering a task-oriented approach to usage. Some parents who participated were open about their own lack of confidence in using technology and that they would defer to the support of a child when doing something new, seek peer support from a friend or partner, or avoid engaging with the task completely. I will reflect further on responsibilities for skills development in this area and how schools may be able to provide solutions which do not impinge unduly on concerns around teachers' workload. Building on this challenge, I identified how the intervention could affect relationships between stakeholders for example the asymmetric power relationship between parents and teachers, perceived potential detriment to a child as a result of how their parent's engagements have been perceived by a teacher, or imbalances in how parents interact with each other. The experience of engagement through this intervention may be differential for families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or from ethnic minority backgrounds as shown by the analysis in Chapter 4 showing lower participation rates for families sharing these protected characteristics. Whilst not imagining that all structural inequalities can be overcome by it, I recognise that teachers and schools can begin by being aware of and sensitive to these differences, and where possible and

appropriate taking additional actions to ensure that all parents are engaged in order to support all children.



## Chapter 6      Reflecting on Impact

In this final chapter, I will draw together important aspects of the study in a number of areas. The first of these will be an outline of new contributions to understanding in this area, followed by a reflection upon the impact of the study on teachers' roles in using social media to engage parents, and in particular pulling together a number of tools for others to explore in similar situations. I will then outline a number of key recommendations for teachers and school leaders to incorporate into their practice to improve the success of parental engagement using social media. Before ending on a final thought, I will acknowledge limitations of the study, and consider which areas which merit further research.

Through my study, I have focused upon the core concept of parental communication and in particular communication. This underpinning concept has driven the work through consideration of parental motivation and beliefs about self-efficacy, and my focus on understanding parents' perspectives about the relationship. By using social media as a tool for parent engagement and my intervention, I have explored opportunities and challenges arising from such an intervention, and a consideration about how this could mean engagement varying by certain characteristics, and recognising the distinction between quantitative engagement data from platforms such as Facebook and how participants perceive engagement in a more qualitative sense.

I believe that this area of work is of fundamental importance to support how primary schools and parents interact, and given the ubiquity of social media as a tool then its role in the relationship is pertinent. Parental engagement is recognised as important for a wide number of reasons including attainment, behaviour, progress, support for parenting, and

involving parents to enhance the learning in school (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Epstein, 1997; Desforges, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007). Given how important strong and positive engagements between stakeholders are, I believe it is imperative for schools to show leadership by coordinating this and ensuring parents are involved throughout the process. Understanding the impact of social media generally is not straightforward, and the same is true in the context of parental engagement. I must be mindful not to blindly pursue the latest trends unquestioningly, but I believe as professionals we have a duty to consider rigorously the best ways of working with families. One of many strengths that the use of social media brings is the already high usage rates which mean much reduced friction for families in using it, when compared against more specialist systems such as virtual learning environments that some schools use primarily for engagements with pupils and students.

Having now discussed all data, I am now able to draw a number of conclusions from the study. Here I will explore five areas upon which I believe we have been able to draw some conclusions. After exploring these, I will outline recommendations for teachers and school leaders.

## 6.1 New contributions to understanding

The first conclusion relates to understanding of what engagement means when contrasting its meaning on social media with its meaning more broadly. I have explored throughout this study how engagement on Facebook uses a narrow definition to construct its understanding, whereas a broader and more nuanced approach to understanding parental engagement and the subtleties involved. Throughout my study, I have used the definition of parental engagement as being about “effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school programs and their children’s progress” (Epstein, 1995). The challenge of relying on Facebook data to understand data is that it will miss a large number of unquantifiable elements, including family dynamics; confidence with technology; differentials relating to SES, gender, ethnicity; offline interactions between parents from other families; offline interactions between the school and parents; and risks around profiling users and negative resultant effects. Thus from this study I must conclude that while Facebook engagement data provides a useful insight into one aspect of the relationship, it should not be used as the sole measure and must be supplemented with other data. Identifying additional qualitative data to contribute to the understanding of parental engagement is essential; I gained a huge amount of deeper understanding through interviews which has allowed us to explore many different aspects of these dynamics relationships than would have been possible by relying solely on Facebook data. For example: insights into dynamics within families (Coates and Jayawardena families) about how parents share tasks; informal peer support arrangements (Williams family); and differing perceptions about preferences for engaging with the school (Taylor and Coates families).

Despite the caveats around Facebook engagement data, the second conclusion is that using this platform was a strength when compared to alternatives. Facebook was the most popular social media platform amongst the parents, confirmed by both the pre-intervention survey and interviews, and as such was a tool with which parents were familiar and comfortable. My experience of running a blogging project and the very low engagement of using Twitter to engage with parents five years before this intervention, and the school's subsequent success in using an open Facebook Page informed my decision to use Facebook as the platform for this intervention. The fact that the parent community was already familiar with using Facebook in their own lives, as well as using it for some engagement with the school, meant that the expectation of additional setup, support or training was much reduced compared to the introduction of an unknown system.

By using a platform with a low barrier to entry, I was able to make it more accessible than it could otherwise have been. In some ways Facebook was not an ideal platform to use for this study for example due to Insights Data not being available, the prioritisation of items in a user's News Feed, and the largely linear thread of a discussion; but these concerns were outweighed by its near-ubiquitous presence and usage amongst the parent population.

Although this reduction in friction for parents to access the intervention group was a benefit, it did not completely remove the barriers to involvement. The intervention group only involved around half of the parents from the class, thus others were either unable, unmotivated or unwilling to engage with it.

I saw a disjunction between what parents said they wanted to see in the group, and what they engaged most with. Thus, the third conclusion is that expectations and language were not aligned amongst all stakeholders from the start. Prior to the intervention, parents gave

high ratings to their desire for the Facebook group to include “information and ideas about supporting learning at home,” though during the intervention messages posted which pointed towards support for learning at home received amongst the lowest engagement figures of the study, and were not referenced by parents during post-intervention interviews. It is possible that the low engagement rate is an extension of the second conclusion about the representativeness of Facebook engagement data, but it is additionally possible that content audiences say they desire is different to content they actually value. Although some account was taken to understand the desires and motivations of parents at the beginning of the study, and these then used to influence the content posted, it is evident that there was then a disjunction between how this content was consumed. Thus, the study would have benefitted from a clearer initial agreement about intentions, purpose and desired content.

The final conclusion is around the success of image-based content within the intervention group: photos and videos were consistently the most successful types of posts made. I posit that there are two possible reasons for this. The first is that the Facebook algorithm provides favourable coverage to image-based content as it drives higher engagement and makes the experience of the platform more ‘sticky’ to returning visits. The second is that photos and videos in the intervention group tended to be of either children in the class or their work, and thus sharing this content saw parents demonstrating a deeper personal connection with the content than was present in other less-personally resonant content.



## 6.2 Impact for teachers' practice in using social media to engage parents

It is important to recognise the impact on workload of undertaking new initiatives such as the intervention in this study. The amount of additional work is significant: some of this is due to the requirements of it being part of an academically rigorous investigation, though some residual additional workload was inevitable given that I was going to introduce a new social media group and undertake the majority of work to setup and maintain it. Notwithstanding regulations around pay and conditions (Department for Education, 2020c), it is current public policy to monitor and where possible reduce workloads of teachers and school leaders (Department for Education, 2018). If asked to embed this intervention into their existing practice, some teachers could find the additional work to be a burden and consequently their own motivation and engagement levels with it could suffer. One of the benefits recognised earlier about using social media is that it can provide a more real-time interaction, and thus if teachers are not able to engage with the platform in a way that parents perceive as timely then the value of the intervention group may become diminished.

It is worth acknowledging the distinction between 'school' and 'teacher' throughout this study. Whilst much of the existing literature uses the terms interchangeably, the reality may differ between contexts. Some schools may have very active school leaders and administrative staff who are active on social media, whereas in other schools the responsibilities may fall to teachers to undertake these tasks. Moving beyond solely considering workload, the personal nature of engagements is an area which parents commented positively upon: they valued the one-to-one interactions with class teachers

through informal conversations or formal meetings more than they commented on accessing information on a website or calling the school office to pass on a message. I propose that the desire for these personal interactions (parent to teacher, not parent to school) are transferable into a social media context, and thus the importance of empowering and supporting the teacher to lead these engagements should not be underestimated. In addition to the aforementioned awareness of workload, school leaders also need to be mindful of safeguarding their staff through providing both technical and wellbeing support in order that they feel comfortable and confident to undertake parental engagement using social media. I have already discussed how my approach may have disenfranchised parents from feeling that the group was a community space for them to engage with, but also recognise that putting an individual in the position of being the single-point-of-failure for a communication system and for a research study is not desirable. It would be advantageous not only to have encouraged a culture whereby parents are empowered to drive conversations, but also whereby other members of staff are supported to do so too; which in turn would provide parents with a more realistic view of how different adults work collaboratively in school to provide support to their children. By diversifying the approach I hope that a more replicable model emerges to support other schools in implementing similar approaches.

At times parents have volunteered improvements they would like to see, but these are always done so in a polite and restrained manner whether as part of a survey or in an interview. It is my suggestion that parents are intrinsically aware of the ethical positions of the insider-researcher and the asymmetric power relationship, and thus adjust their behaviour accordingly. It would be valuable to test similar interventions and perception measurements in similar contexts run by an independent research team.

Drawing on conclusions as well as areas identified throughout the study, I have identified a number of areas I believe contribute positively to understanding of how social media can affect parental engagement in primary schools. These are offered as reflections from the process and invitations for others to explore if appropriate to their context. The first is to consider the ethical impact on the children and families not participating in the study. This includes those in the target class who chose not to or were unable to take part in the group, and families in other classes in the school who were not part of the intervention.

Researchers have a duty to do no harm, and while I conducted the study in the hope that there would be positive outcomes from using social media for parental engagement, I remain cognisant of the risks that using a technology can exclude some people. During the study the focus was on generating content regularly to follow the Salmon (2011, 2013) framework on 'stepping' the community through to the next level of online engagement. This was done in the hope that parents within the group may encourage more to join because of the strength of the content.

The third identified impact of this study on policy and practice is that this activity should not have been undertaken in isolation from other activities within the school and without being part of a wider strategic approach to parental engagement. The recommendation to make these activities part of a much larger approach recognises the importance of taking a multidimensional approach to this topic, and that stakeholders may have very different contributions and concerns – not all of which may be appropriate for this platform. The risk of isolating a method is that it could appear that the school believes it is their only approach to parental engagement. By extension, this broader strategic approach should be established in partnership with parents and have agreed expectations about what would make it successful for all involved. This shared starting point could help to establish a

common approach to the use of the intervention group, rather than running the risk of it feeling as though expectations are “set” by the school and that the school therefore “owns” the group.

The way in which content is shared to maximise parental engagement is the fourth recommendation for policy and practice. In recognising a number of compelling reasons for pictures and videos being popular, schools should consider their approach to sharing information through this means. A number of technical variations are possible, including “text image posts”; images to accompany a text post; an album or slideshow; links to text or videos elsewhere; and videos uploaded directly to Facebook. There is a risk that overreliance on imagery to increase engagement could result in irrelevant images being used in an attempt to increase engagement, and this approach consequently feeling to the audience that they are being subjected to artificial content manipulation.

The final impact for policy and practice is the need for there to be systems of technical support to make sure everyone can be engaged. In the study I heard how one parent uses another parent in the class as her support if she needs to do something technical; a system she established through their friendship previously but interestingly did not employ to help her engage in this study. I also heard how some parents who lack confidence to use technology or social media may rely on their children for guidance, and may appreciate support from other adults with whom they could take time and explore any concerns they may have. Alongside the third recommendation for a strategic overview, schools should establish a technical support strand to their activities in order to maximise access and ensure parents have confidence to engage with the approaches. I do not seek to establish one model for how this support and training should be provided and recognise that a

number of options exist including schools running workshops, external agencies being involved to provide support, signposting to existing resources, establishing peer-support relationships, and empowering children to provide support to their parents. All of these bring with them exciting opportunities as well as potential limitations.

### 6.3 Recommendations

Through reviewing the literature in this area and undertaking an intervention using social media to consider the influence of social media on parental engagement in a primary school, I present here a number of practical recommendations to support teachers and school leaders. Firstly is my revised model, Figure 6.1a which illustrates my contribution to our theoretical understanding of using social media for parental engagement in primary schools.

I have also created Figure 6.1a which presents a practical process which can be used by schools in their own contexts when seeing to consider how using social media for parental engagement should be approached. This model emerges partly from existing literature considered earlier in the study, as well as the experiences and perspectives gained through my intervention. By pulling all of these aspects together, I believe my model presents a firm model with a focus on providing an actionable approach with which to use social media for parental engagement in primary schools.

There are elements of each of the models explored earlier in my study (Eccles & Harold, Figure 2.1 Child, teacher and parent factors influencing parent involvement in school and the implications of involvement (Eccles & Harold, 1996)

; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, Figure 2.2 Model of the parental-involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005, p. 74)

; and Goodall & Montgomery, Figure 2.3 Continuum from parental involvement to parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014 p. 403)

) which add value in the context of my study, and other elements which are either not as relevant or are already present in other ways. I have consolidated these factors into the two new relational diagrams, Figure 6.1a and Figure 6.1a. In addition to consolidating and ameliorating existing models, my new model seeks to represent the uniqueness of using social media for parental engagement in a primary school.

Chapter 2 showed how the visualisation of some parental engagement processes appear to show relationships as being unidirectional or linear in approach: I prefer an approach which recognises the less structured nature of human interactions broadly and parental engagement specifically. As I have acknowledged earlier, my intervention would have benefited from opportunities to pause and review progress in order to adjust the intervention. Having reflected on the benefits of this subsequently, I have been keen to build the need for review steps into my model (Figure 6.1a, Figure 6.1b).

Finally it is essential that parental engagement is not seen as containing a sole aim of raising academic attainment. Considering the vast amount of energy afforded to successful parental engagement activities, it is more appealing to consider a breadth of outcomes including demonstrating positive outcomes for the child beyond their academic studies, for parents more broadly, and for other stakeholders including teachers and the wider school community.

In considering categorisations or processes of parental engagement, a lot can conceptually be derived about processes and relationships from the visualisations used by authors. A number of important factors have emerged about the processes: consideration of variety of contributing factors, directionality, and breadth of outcomes. I conclude it is important for the process to recognise the variety of contributing factors which necessarily underpin successful parental engagements, including variables relating to the child, parents, teachers, school organisation and management, community setting, relationships between stakeholders, and macro factors such as public policy frameworks.

I will first consider Figure 6.1a which is the version of my model inclusive of existing theoretical and academic work in the area to show how my work is connected to what has

gone before. Following the model itself, I will explore the key aspects of it including connections to literature. Following this, I will turn to Figure 6.1b which is the version aimed at practitioners and is accompanied by Figure 6.1 as a guide to using the model in a school setting.



## Using Social Media for Parental Engagement in Primary Schools

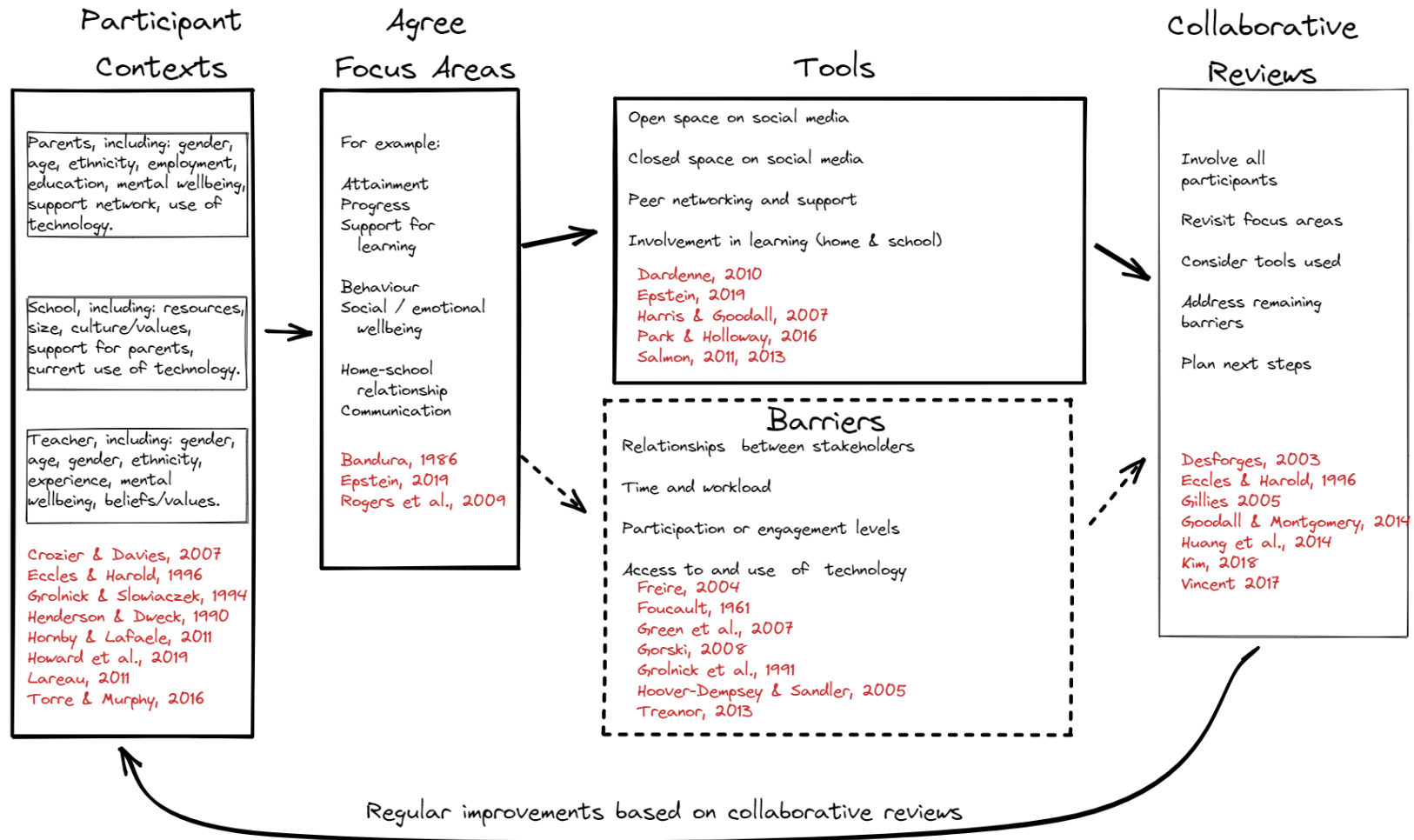


Figure 6.1a: Using Social Media for Parental Engagement in Primary Schools

My model is informed by the social constructivist approach of recognising the value of lived experiences and perspectives of all participants in order to be attuned to them when undertaking work as captured by many including Becker (1970), Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Garfinkel (1967). I believe that this model captures the many contexts to consider at the outset, as well as framing the relationship as a continuously iterative cycle whereby all participants are involved in setting and reviewing focus areas, thus leading to a model of teachers and schools working with parents and others to co-create an approach which works for them including by recognising barriers and identifying appropriate tools for their contexts and focus areas.

The first aspect of my model considers the **key participants**: parents, school, and teachers. Existing models including Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994); Eccles and Harold (1996) are clear to recognise the contextual beginnings of the participants. Henderson and Dweck (1990) have written extensively about the importance of a growth mindset to overcome challenges, and the long-form narratives of Lareau (2011) paint a rich picture outlining how the contexts of families in particular are essential to understand in order to be successful in working together.

By collecting together aspects of parents and families into one box recognises the variety of situations without seeking to overcomplicate the model. However I believe it is important to see the context of a school and a teacher to be distinct from one another; although there will be commonalities, each brings an important contribution to deliberations. A parent may have relationships with previous staff so could understand the school context but is unfamiliar with how a new teacher operates. Similarly although a school may set a particular standard or expectation of how teachers engage with parents there may be teachers who

do not fully embrace this into their practice, and others who go further than the expected level. From the existing literature and from my intervention, it is important that engagements recognise the starting points of its participants in order to engage meaningfully with them. This can involve some desktop research to provide background context, but I believe crucially must involve speaking with people directly to understand their desires, preferences and needs which are developed further in the model.

The second part of my model considers the **focus area** to be agreed. This should flow from the initial process to understand participants' contexts within the relationship. Epstein (2019) has consistently outlined six different types of parental engagement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. My study focused on the communicating aspect of this typology, and others can be used in order to select the most relevant for the context and desired outcomes. In the spirit of Epstein's "partnerships" approach, the focus areas should be agreed collectively by the key participants. As discussed earlier, a number of models make student achievement the clear outcome of successful parental engagement models. I contest that this is not the only outcome; not to devalue the importance or achievement or attainment, but rather to broaden horizons of what is possible and how the relationship between parents and schools can be a force for positive change on a number of fronts. Examples used in my revised view recognise some in-school focus areas including attainment, progress, and support for learning; some which are relevant to supporting a child both in school and at home such as behaviour, and social-emotional wellbeing; and others which focus more on a process such as home-school relationship, or communication. These are used here only as examples which recognises the expanding and fluid nature of home-school relationships, and thus the

importance of focus areas not being determined by a fixed model but as the result of a discussion and being arrived at by agreement.

The third aspect of my model considers the **tools** to be used in the engagements, focusing explicitly on the different ways in which social media can be used for parental engagement. Approaches to using social media happen in a wide variety of ways, and examples are given here are written broadly both to recognise this, and to provide a broad view which will accommodate evolutions in social media in the future. The Salmon (2011, 2013) models provide a transferable approach through which to view the use of interactive technologies to build communities or conduct purposeful tasks. These can be applied to a range of current technologies and are platform agnostic enough to be applicable to others in the future, whilst still recognising the progressive approach to build interactions in a staged manner. The Epstein (2019) framework remains relevant here, feeding naturally from the focus areas into the tools to be selected with an ever-present consideration about the typology of engagement and the partnership approach.

In the same way that outcomes are agreed, I envisage that tools used are agreed so that focus is put where it felt to be most suitable for the participants. It certainly would not be practical for an engagement approach to focus on all possible tools as effort would likely be spread too thinly rather than retaining a clear focus on the outcomes. Tools are elucidated using broad terminology here in order to transcend platform-specific approaches. Current examples would include: an open space being a Facebook Page; a closed space being a Facebook Group; peer networking being a Facebook Group or WhatsApp Group; and involvement in learning could take each of these forms depending on the approach and usage of it.

Beneath the tools part of my model is the need to consider possible **barriers**. This should also be informed by initial discussions around participants' contexts, as well as taking into account the focus areas and agreed approach to use the tools. We should also recognise the importance that participants' contexts (discussed above) may be perceived as barriers, as explored by Foucault (1966); Gillies (2005); Gorski (2008); Treanor (2013); Freire (2018) and being mindful to do so without making judgements.

Barriers are shown as examples based on the literature explored in Chapter 2, and they are included in dotted lines as not all barriers will be present in all circumstances, and it is conceivable that some participants are able to move beyond barriers without encountering them. During my intervention, I encountered a number of different online typologies of parents including disengaged, lurkers, and social networking site enjoyers. Whilst the profiling of online typologies and personas continues to evolve, I have drawn on the work of Huang et al. (2014); Ho (2020), though conscious of the need not to become over-reliant on social media engagement data the work of DiStaso and Bortree (2012); Chan et al. (2016) are helpful to consider in a mixed methods approach which should also be applied to offline engagements in order to consider the fullest picture possible and to inform considerations around barriers.

It would be a mistake to consider technological barriers as central to reasons for lower or lacking engagement. As I have explored both through literature in Chapter 2 and through my own study experience in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, true barriers to engagement are more often around other issues which need to be addressed separately to presuming either their genesis or solution are technological. I would hope that that explicitly indicating the possibility of barriers existing, it provides the opportunity for reflection and discussion about

what support could be put in place to maximise involvement from all participants from the beginning of the relationship. Barriers to engagement more broadly are considered in a number of the works discussed earlier and inform this area of my model, including Grolnick et al. (1991); Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995).

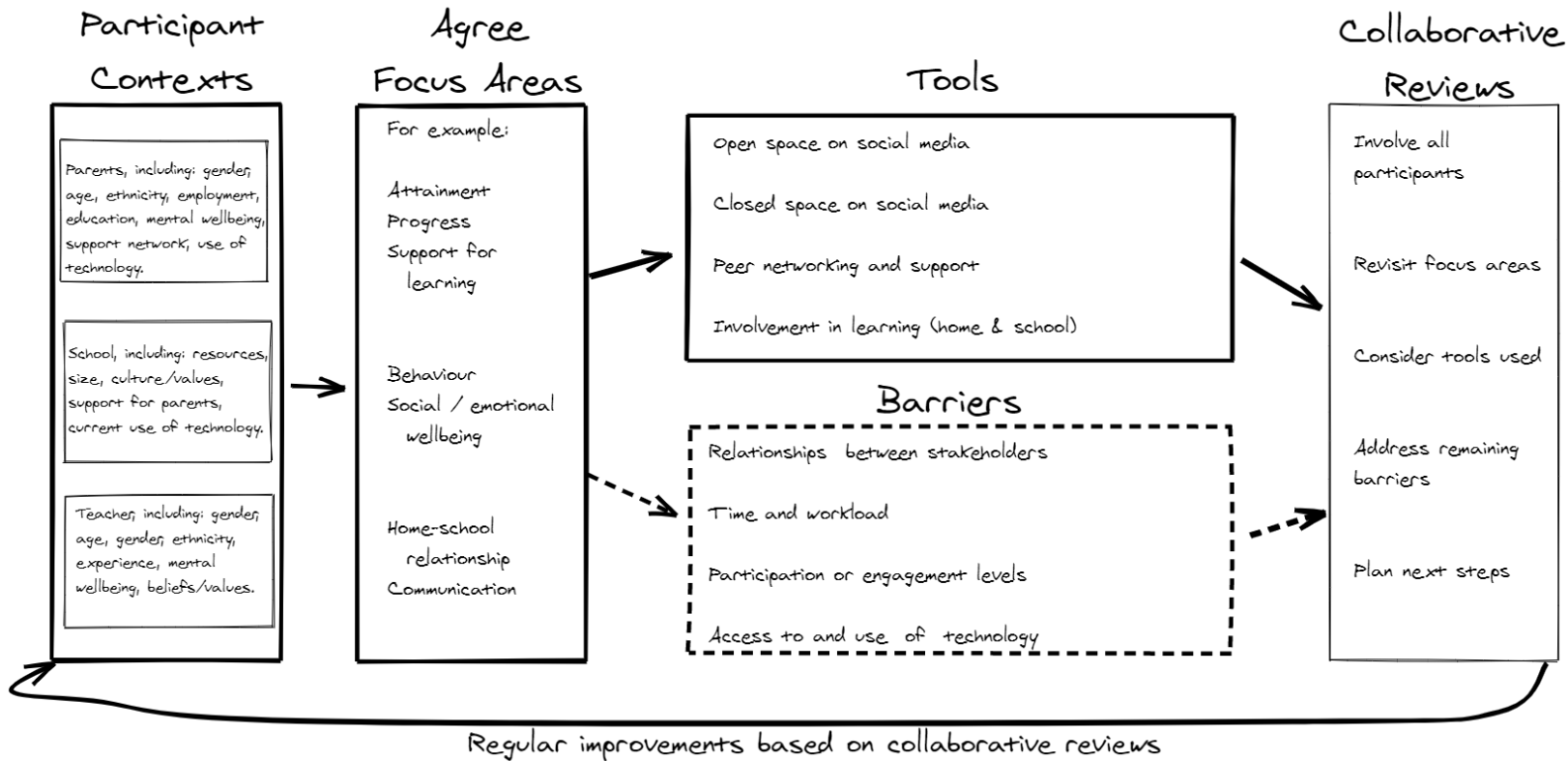
The final aspect of my model is a **collaborative review**. A review of focus areas could be a quantitative consideration of metrics such as attainment or progress, which may occur as a defined interval perhaps on a termly basis. As well as considering models of parental engagement already referenced in this section, it is prescient to consider how a similar task could be undertaken and perceived differently: an emphasis drawn out by Wilson (2016); Kambouri-Danos et al. (2018) and illustrated by Goodall and Montgomery (2014) in their example of how reading at home can be undertaken on a continuum dependent upon understanding and perception.

Other outcomes are likely to be far more qualitatively reviewed such as behaviour or social/emotional wellbeing; and these may be reviewed either at more regular intervals or at the next point where an event triggers the need to review the position. Process-focused outcomes such as home-school relationships or communication may run for longer in order to review whether new practises have established and bedded in beyond their initial implementation periods. Crucially this model includes an arrow to show how this process needs to iterate; these should not be seen as optional summative tasks, but rather as integral formative steps in order to review practise and ensure that all participants remain engaged with the focus areas. The ongoing nature of these reviews should encourage participants to reflect throughout the project and consider whether the approach remains relevant or if adjustments are needed. Some small adjustments may be possible during the

project, and others might be best done at agreed review intervals in order to consider a medium-term perspective on engagement progress and outcomes.

Having now explored each aspect of the model in Figure 6.1a and the underpinning literature, I will now turn to look at the simplified visual of Figure 6.1b which is intended for use within schools, both by teachers and leaders. As outlined already, I envisage this process being inclusive and collaborative to involve parents throughout though my model is offered up to enable schools to begin this process. Following Figure 6.1b is an expansion on the model as Figure 6.1. This is framed as a succinct, practical and professional-facing guide to explain the model without the detail already outlined above. Figure 6.1 provides the explanation of Figure 6.1b for the professional audience. The guide is not intended to be a definitive set of instructions, but rather to provide some specific and actionable points for schools to consider to structure their approach.

## Using Social Media for Parental Engagement in Primary Schools



*Social Media for Parental Engagement in Primary Schools (for practitioners)*

Figure 6.1b: Using



## Guide for teachers and school leaders to use social media for parental engagement in primary schools

- 1. Participant Contexts:** Schools must be mindful of the various contexts in which they operate: families, parents, children, school, and teachers. Each of these have many variables which will affect how using social media for parental engagement will operate.
- 2. Agree focus areas:** All stakeholders need to be involved in selecting the focus areas. Why are we doing this? What do we want to get out of it? This will be important in order to focus efforts in the right way.
- 3. Tools:** The right way of embracing social media will depend on contexts and focus areas. It might be that an open space on social media is most appropriate (e.g. a Facebook Page) so that messages can be shared widely in a public setting. Alternatively, it could be that a closed space on social media is more suitable (e.g. a Facebook Group) so the tool can be used within a specific community of parents and provide a more limited space to interact. The third example could involve using social media to encourage peer networking and support (e.g. a WhatsApp group) through which parents and others can request and offer support between themselves. If the tool is intended to focus on involvement in learning, a number of approaches could be relevant depending on how stakeholders would find most accessible and relevant, and the model recognises that this can evolve over time to adapt to the changing needs of participants.
- 4. Barriers:** Open and honest discussions are essential to understand why things may be difficult for all stakeholders, then seek to identify solutions to overcome these. For example, initial and ongoing support on using the technology successfully needs to be organised. This might be workshops run by school staff for parents, making use of external agencies available in the community, establishing opportunities for peer-support, or upskilling children to provide support to their parents. Time and workload are considerations for all involved: parents who do not find the tool easy or valuable to engage with may give time as a reason for their lower engagement; or teachers not seeing appreciable benefits may be concerned about workload burdens.
- 5. Collaborative reviews:** It would be valuable to review these intentions periodically to ensure the reasons for undertaking the initiative remain valid. These reviews should involve all stakeholders and seek to iterate practice in order to create an environment of continual improvement through reviews and evaluation. Following review, the model should be adjusted to take account of updated knowledge and improvements put in place.

Figure 6.1 Guide for teachers and school leaders to use social media for parental engagement in primary schools

#### 6.4 Acknowledged limitations of the research

As a case study, my study considered one cycle of intervention. Going forward, my model in Figure 6.1b recognises the importance of revisiting the process. The benefit of iterating to inform further cycles of intervention makes the model responsive to address shortcomings of earlier plans, and to be able to respond effectively to lessons learned during the interventions.

While the study did not achieve high levels of engagement, it has been positive in contributing to the contextual understanding of parental engagement within the school, as has been illustrated during analysis. For example I have been able to understand the markedly different engagement rates between deprived and non-deprived families, as well as having been able to explore in some depth parents' use of technology and the extent to which they turn to varying sources of support to manage this. Although it was known previously that posts with images or videos attached tended to achieve higher online engagement rates, the scale of this was amplified during the intervention including the extent to which this remained in the residual memories of parents for some time after the intervention had ended. An overriding lesson from the study is the way in which online engagement and offline engagement are considered very differently: I explored this during Chapter 5 including online typologies of users, how users may not appear that engaged online but are when they reflect on it offline, and how a good understanding of the platform algorithms is important for valuable content to reach higher numbers of the intended audience. These are a number of the stand-out lessons learnt from the study which add

value to the understanding of engaging parents using social media in primary schools, and are explored throughout this chapter.

To counteract the narrative that the intervention fell short on expectations, it is worth also reflecting that parents were not involved in contributing to the expectations for the intervention, nor were they aware of any expectations of the research. Had expectations been communicated or agreed at the beginning of the study, as advocated in participatory research (Giroux, 1983; Hall & Tandon, 2017) or co-constructed research (Horner, 2016), this could have included some explicit online behaviour suggestions including encouragements to use 'like' or 'comment' features. The omission of such suggestions was deliberate so as not to unduly influence participants as an ethical consideration, and as such should be positioned alongside the challenge in comparing what Facebook understands 'engagement' to mean compared to what others may reasonably understand it to be. Perhaps a compromise between these two positions could have been to provide parents with some brief explanations about the functionality of the platform, which may in turn have led to parents considering how they interact with the group for themselves. Analysis shows that parents in the target class were most interested in "talking or meeting with the school about your child" and "information and ideas about supporting learning at home." Higher responses for these themes suggest that parents may have responded positively towards a consultative approach about the purpose and operation of the group, which in turn may have affected many other areas of the study.

Initial data showed that Facebook was one of the most used apps by parents, and that most were positive towards the idea of having a Facebook Group for their child's class. As acknowledged, this translated into lower engagements than had been hoped for, for a

number of possible reasons. Firstly, if the study had a hope for a particular level or type of engagement then this could have formed an explicit part of the study from the beginning such as by quantifying the desired improvement level. Secondly, reflection within this study that the intervention did not achieve as much as it could have done is done so based primarily on the researcher's own reflections, rather than in conjunction with other stakeholders. Although a small number of post-intervention parent interviews were able to take place, the opportunity to supplement reflections and draw conclusions was not undertaken. The study sought to approach the topic with an open approach to understanding how the use of social media could affect parental engagement. Parts of the pre-intervention questionnaire could have been repeated after the intervention in order to track whether changes were evident in the engagement level, and a repetition of at least some aspects of the pre-intervention parent survey could be built into future research to assist with this comparison. Even had this happened, I could still not have fully understood all aspects of engagement levels. The lack of follow up questionnaire also missed the opportunity for a greater number of parents to feedback their reflections about the intervention and whether it had met their expectations and needs.

Had the intervention been planned to involve more than 50 parents into the group, Facebook Group Insights data would have become available which would have enabled greater exploration of other aspects of the group in order to tailor communications more appropriately. Through monitoring post timings, there was no correlation between messages posted at particular times or days being more successful. Instead, as discussed earlier, the strongest correlation was between the content of the posts; in particular the inclusion of images or videos, which is a recognised feature of the Facebook algorithm, though there are discrepancies about the weighing of images compared to video (Ho, 2020).

By extension, the samples in the questionnaire and interviews were not representative of the parent population in the class as a whole, which has presented challenges throughout analysis and discussion as I have been unable to draw wider conclusions other than to interpret the experiences of participants. Demographically, parents completing the pre-intervention survey appear to correlate most closely to the target population, so this was the most trustworthy quantitative data obtained. The self-selecting group of parents who joined the Facebook group were not representative by parental gender or SES, but they were representative of the diversity of ethnic minority families in the class. Similarly, parents in pre-intervention interviews were approached because they represented a cross-section of engagement levels as perceived by the class teacher and teaching assistant, but they were not demographically representative of the parent population, nor were they an accurate predictor for how parents would behave having joined the Facebook group. These various disjunctions between how one group appears alongside another give a strong rationale for a closer mapping of characteristics from the target population through to samples used in questionnaires, interviews and online. Thus while I have moderate confidence that survey results are likely to closely represent the population, samples online and through interview need to be viewed as segments of the population rather than samples.

With the benefit of reflection, I should have reviewed the number of parents engaged regularly and reached out to those not involved to understand their positions. Had this been done, there may have been higher engagements rates, but more crucially I could have learnt more about parents' perception of the intervention and adapted it midway through the intervention. By being more agile with my approach, I may have been able to achieve higher online and offline engagements. Given that the focus was how using social media can affect

parental engagement, it was important to continue with the intervention and learn lessons from it. Pursuing this approach has generated valuable data and created opportunities for insights into how this area of work could develop in other directions in the future. My focus was to understand the experiences of the intervention, rather than to meet specific measures; consequently in this context it was appropriate for us to continue with the study and to recognise the nature of the data garnered from a smaller sample.

It could have been beneficial to include some self-profiling metrics in the pre-intervention questionnaire, and potentially to have repeated this during or after the intervention. This could have been beneficial by allowing parents to reflect on their experiences and attitudes within the context of this Facebook Group rather than asking them to reflect on their behaviours generally. In Chapter 2 I explored a number of different approaches to categorising social media users which could have provided frameworks for doing so (Brandtzæg, 2010; Hargittai & Hsieh, 2010; Bulut & Doğan, 2017; Kim, 2018). When undertaking the discussion stimulus activities of different apps in the pre-intervention interview, the term “regularly” was used but without definition. In hindsight it would have been valuable to understand the distribution of regularity and frequency with which parents use different platforms. It is possible that there are patterns to the time of day a parent may access Facebook, or that their usage changes during the week around lifestyle arrangements, or that they go through periods of varying intensity of usage. Had a greater granularity of usage information been obtainable, I may have been able to learn lessons from it in order to pitch the communications at the right time for maximum impact. Due to the small size of the Facebook group, the platform did not provide us with the Facebook Group Insights tools normally available which could have assisted with this planning. Future research involving larger groups of parents could benefit from this, though unless the

platform evolves the system will remain unavailable for groups with fewer than 50 participants.

## 6.5 Areas for future research

I did not set out to establish far-reaching insights into the algorithmic functioning of social media platforms, nor generalisable discoveries about engaging families from deprived backgrounds, nor to have found the panacea for strong parental engagement. Whilst it could be tempting to see more than is here, this study is reflective and critical enough to present data for what they are: one case study from particular circumstances, borne from a desire to for better understanding of how introducing a social media group could affect parental engagement. I hope that some of the results further the broader understandings of the key themes beyond just this study, and hope that it adds to the ongoing professional dialogue surrounding the key themes. Most notably I envisage a constructive contribution to professional understanding of using social media to engage parents in a primary school setting, combined with some insights into the relative priorities felt by parents about different forms and focuses of engagement.

I believe that I have demonstrated clearly how this study has established some clear conclusions and identified areas which have contributed towards positive impact on policy and practice. There remain a number of areas for future research, both as a desire to remedy areas of this study which were less successful than anticipated, and also to seek to understand if principles or themes explored here are replicable in other settings.

To begin, I believe that future efforts should seek to establish a higher proportion of families in the target class to be engaged by the intervention. This would add trustworthiness to the quantitative data gathered, as well as providing a more equal and inclusive experience for families in the class which would also reduce ethical concerns about the impact of the intervention on the whole cohort. By increasing the number of families engaged, future



studies would also find their sample to be more representative of their target population. As well as having a more representative sample responding to questionnaires and joining the Facebook group, a future study considering this approach should also meaningfully sample families to invite for interviews. This would help provide assurance that the quality of data gathered through all sources can be as representative as possible, even with the relatively small target sizes of one class. By consciously monitoring the representativeness of data during the intervention, future studies would be able to adapt their approaches midway through the intervention. In itself, this could be expanded further by seeking to roll-out the study into multiple classes in a school; ideally in multiple-form entry year groups to ensure that parallel target and additional classes are available. The key theme explored throughout the study is the disjunction between what engagement means. Not only are there many different approaches to what it means in the context of *parental engagement* (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Eccles & Harold, 1996; Epstein, 1997; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), as well as a very specific set of criteria for what is considered *online engagement* (Sprout Social, 2019; Facebook, 2020a; HootSuite, 2020). The disjunction between these two areas of understanding merits further exploration. In my study I established that online and offline engagement are not synonymous as with illustrated examples of parents who are highly engaged in one sphere and not in the other, and the inverse being true. Future research could benefit by exploring how online user taxonomies interact with face-to-face engagements. This could add weight to already-established typologies (Brandtzæg, 2010; Hargittai & Hsieh, 2010; Ho et al., 2012; Bulut & Doğan, 2017; Kim, 2018) and demonstrate their applicability to a primary school context of parental engagement, or it may establish a new paradigm through which to consider how people interact with organisations online. In analysis and discussion I have identified that

engagement was variable by some factors; in particular by social class. As a specific strand of understanding engagement in the context of online typologies, this would contribute valuable insights.

I have seen how some parents sought technical support from others in order to feel more confident in using technology, with these examples drawn both because of the intervention and for unrelated purposes. Examples encountered included support from their children, from fellow parents, and from their partner. A small number of suggestions were made that the study may have benefited from establishing some structured support available to parents on making best use of technology. Such provision could range from small-scale tutorials on participating in the intervention, in person or remotely; to broader constructions of drop-in sessions or workshops on a wider range of topics to support parents' development of their own digital literacy skills. A range of options exist for providing this support, not limited to synchronous methods but also considering asynchronous tools including online videos, self-guided workshops or tutorials. Future research into engaging parents using social media may benefit from establishing some aspect of technical support for parents, and isolating this impact from other variables could be achieved by providing the additional support for one sample group against a control. As well as considering the specific confidence and skill levels of parents using technology, further research into this area could also be combined with aforementioned suggestion of considering how the disjunction of online and offline engagements presents a challenge to this understanding; and perhaps testing an hypothesis of providing opportunities to augment the skills and confidence of parents as part of the intervention could prove beneficial.

The final recommendation for future research combines an extended timescale with a concerted effort to nurture a distributed online community. I used the Salmon (2011, 2013) frameworks to move the intervention group from a basic level of 'access and motivation' into a higher-level of 'development'. Although there were some examples where parents demonstrated they were comfortable to respond to posts and in one case to post their own message into the group, these were limited in prevalence. Given that the intervention lasted five weeks at the end of the academic year, a future study could benefit from using the Salmon models over a longer period of time with a view to nurturing the group of parents into an online community. For example the third of Salmon's five steps is 'information exchange'; and it would be desirable for parents to feel able to share their experiences, knowledge and questions with each other in order for a distributed online community to flourish without all content being driven by the teacher. In itself, this shift of emphasis would be a thought-provoking situation through which to assess whether observations about popular content including pictures and videos would be mirrored in parents' posts – or whether the online engagement profiles are further shifted by posts coming from more than one source. If possible, running the intervention for a whole school year (September to July) would give a wealth of data along with contextual information about what was happening in school and beyond at key moments. At the same time, any longer term intervention such as this would need to be mindful of the impact on teacher workload already addressed above, perhaps by involving a wider range of staff to be involved, working alongside parents to co-create the intervention, and encouraging a less directed approach to the group.

I see these areas for future research to be exciting in the evolution of understanding in these areas. Given the limited amount of published work which combined the study of

parental engagement through social media in primary schools, there is scope for a number of disciplinary areas to be brought together in order to test how various approaches and understandings can complement one another in this context.

Using social media to engage parents has uncovered a vast array of interconnected issues and opportunities. One of my biggest reflections is that no matter how well planned or executed an intervention is, there will always be further considerations which emerge after the fact. I remain excited about the possibilities that using social media can bring, and am optimistic that my revised view of parental engagement (Figure 6.1b) can assist schools to approach the endeavour collaboratively with parents and then plan actions which are collaborative, purposeful, and iterative.

In the couple of decades that social media has existed, it has evolved beyond the expectations of many in the early days. As time moves forward, it is equally conceivable either that social media evolves further beyond past recognition, or that it is usurped by an as-yet-unknown new technology which may arrive to present different opportunities and challenges for how schools and parents engage to support children.

## Appendix A: Ethics Information

### Appendix A1: Ethical Approval Form



University of Reading  
Institute of Education

#### Ethical Approval Form A (version May 2015)

Tick one:

Staff project: \_\_\_\_\_ PhD \_\_\_\_\_ **EdD X**

Name of applicant (s): **Peter Jeffreys**

Title of project: **To what extent can social media influence parental engagement in primary schools?**

Name of supervisor (for student projects): **Dr Yota Dimitriadi, Dr Billy Wong**

**Please complete the form below including relevant sections overleaf.**

	YES	NO
<b>Have you prepared an Information Sheet for participants and/or their parents/carers that:</b>		
a) explains the purpose(s) of the project	X	
b) explains how they have been selected as potential participants	X	
c) gives a full, fair and clear account of what will be asked of them and how the information that they provide will be used	X	
d) makes clear that participation in the project is voluntary	X	
e) explains the arrangements to allow participants to withdraw at any stage if they wish	X	
f) explains the arrangements to ensure the confidentiality of any material collected during the project, including secure arrangements for its storage, retention and disposal	X	
g) explains the arrangements for publishing the research results and, if confidentiality might be affected, for obtaining written consent for this	X	
h) explains the arrangements for providing participants with the research results if they wish to have them	X	
i) gives the name and designation of the member of staff with responsibility for the project together with contact details, including email . If any of the project investigators are students at the IoE, then this information must be included and their name provided	X	
k) explains, where applicable, the arrangements for expenses and other payments to be made to the participants		X

j) includes a standard statement indicating the process of ethical review at the University undergone by the project, as follows: 'This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct'.	X		
k) includes a standard statement regarding insurance: "The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request".	X		
<b>Please answer the following questions</b>			
1) Will you provide participants involved in your research with all the information necessary to ensure that they are fully informed and not in any way deceived or misled as to the purpose(s) and nature of the research? (Please use the subheadings used in the example information sheets on blackboard to ensure this).	X		
2) Will you seek written or other formal consent from all participants, if they are able to provide it, in addition to (1)?	X		
3) Is there any risk that participants may experience physical or psychological distress in taking part in your research?		X	
4) Have you taken the online training modules in data protection and information security (which can be found here: <a href="http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx">http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/imps/Staffpages/imps-training.aspx</a> )?	X		
5) Have you read the Health and Safety booklet (available on Blackboard) and completed a Risk Assessment Form to be included with this ethics application?			
6) Does your research comply with the University's Code of Good Practice in Research?	X		
	YES	NO	N.A.
7) If your research is taking place in a school, have you prepared an information sheet and consent form to gain the permission in writing of the head teacher or other relevant supervisory professional?	X		
8) Has the data collector obtained satisfactory DBS clearance?	X		
9) If your research involves working with children under the age of 16 (or those whose special educational needs mean they are unable to give informed consent), have you prepared an information sheet and consent form for parents/carers to seek permission in writing, or to give parents/carers the opportunity to decline consent?	X		
10) If your research involves processing sensitive personal data <sup>1</sup> , or if it involves audio/video recordings, have you obtained the explicit consent of participants/parents?	X		
11) If you are using a data processor to subcontract any part of your research, have you got a written contract with that contractor which (a) specifies that the contractor is required to act only on your instructions,			X

<sup>1</sup> Sensitive personal data consists of information relating to the racial or ethnic origin of a data subject, their political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union membership, sexual life, physical or mental health or condition, or criminal offences or record.

and (b) provides for appropriate technical and organisational security measures to protect the data?			
12a) Does your research involve data collection outside the UK?		X	
12b) If the answer to question 12a is “yes”, does your research comply with the legal and ethical requirements for doing research in that country?			X
13a) Does your research involve collecting data in a language other than English?		X	
13b) If the answer to question 13a is “yes”, please confirm that information sheets, consent forms, and research instruments, where appropriate, have been directly translated from the English versions submitted with this application.			X
14a. Does the proposed research involve children under the age of 5?		X	
14b. If the answer to question 14a is “yes”: My Head of School (or authorised Head of Department) has given details of the proposed research to the University’s insurance officer, and the research will not proceed until I have confirmation that insurance cover is in place.			x
<b>If you have answered YES to Question 3, please complete Section B below</b>			

Please complete **either** Section A **or** Section B and provide the details required in support of your application. Sign the form (Section C) then submit it with all relevant attachments (e.g. information sheets, consent forms, tests, questionnaires, interview schedules) to the Institute’s Ethics Committee for consideration. Any missing information will result in the form being returned to you.

<b>A:</b> My research goes beyond the ‘accepted custom and practice of teaching’ but I consider that this project has <b>no</b> significant ethical implications. (Please tick the box.)	X
Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc.	
Parents/carers Surveys – 30 in the target class, and 30 in the control class Interviews – 6 in the target class, and 3 in the control class Teaching Assistant – 1 Headteacher – 1 Office Manager – 1  Note: Four information letters are appended: 1 – Parents invited to interview in the target class 2 – Parents invited to interview in the control class (as this does not contain information about the intervention) 3 – Staff invited to interview	

4 – Letter to Headteacher giving an overview of the whole research project (including her ability to stop it at any time)

Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words noting:

1. title of project
2. purpose of project and its academic rationale
3. brief description of methods and measurements
4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria
5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)
6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.
7. estimated start date and duration of project

1. To what extent can social media influence parental engagement in primary schools?

2. The project seeks to understand the role of social media and its influence on parental engagement in primary schools. It will seek to identify effective practise, as well as areas for further development. Although significant academic work has been undertaken on parental engagement, and separately on technology, a study considering the confluence of the primary school setting (rather than secondary, or HE), and use of social media (rather than a VLE), and considering parents/carers (rather than technology to engage pupils) seeks to address a gap in the current literature.

3. Paper and online surveys of all parents. These will be emailed, sent by SMS, and on paper using the school's established



communication channels.

Purposefully sampled semi-structured interviews of parents, and a range of staff roles. Measurements will be largely qualitative, to include proxy measurements for engagement and socioeconomic status. 6 parents will be invited to take part in interviews from the target class before and after the intervention, and 3 parents from the control class will be invited to interview just once. The sampling of the parent population will be based on the class teacher's perspective about parents with high engagement, medium engagement, and low engagement. The interviews will be audio recorded for transcription purposes, and photographs of the activity cards will be taken.

Data available using the Facebook "Group Insights" tools will be used, but will be limited to the individuals' interactions within this closed Facebook Group (rather than their broader activity on Facebook). For example this considers the posts, comments, reactions, and active days/times within the Group.

4. Letter of invitation from class teacher (principle researcher) to parents/carers of children in one class. Parents/carers can opt in to the study, and can limit their involvement to only certain aspects or can choose to contribute to more aspects of the research. There will be no selection or restriction of participants based on age, gender or other criteria.

5. An "Information Sheet for the School" and "Information Sheet for Participants" are included. These set out the required areas of the project to provide details upon.

6. The student is an inside researcher at their institution, and is aware of the power dynamic of the relationship. The "Information Sheet for Participants" states clearly that the parent/carer, and their child will not be affected by the parent/carer choosing to participate, or choosing to say something as part of the research. The researcher is aware of the perceived gender imbalance of being the only male in a team of 6, and being the one undertaking this research. This has been discussed with others in the team to assure them of the purpose and intentions of the research project.

7. Data will be collected May – July 2019. Analysis, discussion and writing up is expected to continue until late 2020.

<b>B:</b> I consider that this project <b>may</b> have ethical implications that should be brought before the Institute's Ethics Committee.	
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Please state the total number of participants that will be involved in the project and give a breakdown of how many there are in each category e.g. teachers, parents, pupils etc.
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Give a brief description of the aims and the methods (participants, instruments and procedures) of the project in up to 200 words.

1. title of project
2. purpose of project and its academic rationale
3. brief description of methods and measurements
4. participants: recruitment methods, number, age, gender, exclusion/inclusion criteria
5. consent and participant information arrangements, debriefing (attach forms where necessary)
6. a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the project and how you intend to deal with them.
7. estimated start date and duration of project

### **C: SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT:**

**Note:** a signature is required. Typed names are not acceptable.

I have declared all relevant information regarding my proposed project and confirm that ethical good practice will be followed within the project.

Signed  
Date **23/05/2019**

Print Name **Peter Jeffreys**

### STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR PROPOSALS SUBMITTED TO THE INSTITUTE ETHICS COMMITTEE

This project has been considered using agreed Institute procedures and is now approved.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
(IoE Research Ethics Committee representative)\*

Print Name:

**Karen Jones**

Date 23 May 2019

(IoE Research Ethics Committee representative)\*

\* A decision to allow a project to proceed is not an expert assessment of its content or of the possible risks involved in the investigation, nor does it detract in any way from the ultimate responsibility which students/investigators must themselves have for these matters. Approval is granted on the basis of the information declared by the applicant.

## Appendix A2: Information Sheet for Headteacher

May 2019

### **What is the study?**

Thank you for agreeing to allow the research project looking at the effect of social media on how parents and schools interact to take place within Manor Primary School. As part of my doctoral studies, I am interested in understanding what happens at the moment, seeing what works well, and identify where there are areas which could improve. An important part of the research is to understand your experience as a member of staff and how you engage with the parents, what works well, and what doesn't.

### **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

We have already discussed this project informally and I thank you for your continued support for this to happen. This letter sets out the full details of the data collection phase of the project. At all times you retain the ability to stop the research project. I will make participants aware of their ability to withdraw their involvement, and will offer that they contact me, you, or the university supervisor in the case of any questions, concerns or complaints.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

I will undertake surveys with parents in two classes (Heron and Jay), and semi-structured interviews with a small sample of them. I will invite parents from Heron class to join a closed Facebook Group for a time-limited period, and will monitor the Facebook Insights data from this. I will also invite a small number of members of staff, including yourself, to take part in semi-structured interviews to better understand their experiences and perspectives.

### **Do I have to take part?**

The participation of parents and staff is entirely voluntary, and their decision to engage or not will have no bearing on them or others. They are free to withdraw their participation at any time by contacting me by email (above), via the school office, or in person.

### **What will happen to the data?**

All personal information collected will be anonymised before being used in the research, including comments made as part of an audio recorded interview. Personal information will not be shared in an identifiable way with the school or any other third parties. The records will be retained for the duration of the research project and related publications, after which they will be deleted. You are able to request a copy of your records as part of this project by contacting me by any means.

Copies of information collected as part of the project will be stored electronically and securely, and in compliance with the University of Reading's "Data Protection for Researchers" policy.

**What are the risks and benefits of taking part?**

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

**What happens if something goes wrong?**

If you have any questions about how this project operates as part of the University of Reading, please feel free to contact the project supervisor, Dr Yota Dimitriadi on email [y.dimitriadi@reading.ac.uk](mailto:y.dimitriadi@reading.ac.uk)

**Where can I get more information?**

If you have any further questions, I would welcome the opportunity to speak to you about them. Alternatively, please feel free to contact Dr Yota Dimitriadi on email [y.dimitriadi@reading.ac.uk](mailto:y.dimitriadi@reading.ac.uk)

Thank you in advance for your interest and participation.

Mr P Jeffreys

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Headteacher Consent Form

I have read the Information Sheet about the project and received a copy of it.

I understand what the purpose of the project is and what is required of me. All my questions have been answered.

Name of headteacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of school: \_\_\_\_\_

Please tick as appropriate:

I consent to the involvement of my school in the project as outlined in the Information Sheet

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix A3: Information Sheet for Parents in Target Class

May 2019

### **What is the study?**

Thank you for your interest in taking part in the research project looking at the role of social media on how parents and schools interact. As part of my doctoral studies, I am interested in understanding what happens at the moment, seeing what works well, and identify possible areas which could improve. An important part of the research is to understand your experience as a parent/carer of how you engage with the school, what works well for you, and what doesn't.

### **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

I am inviting you to take part because you are the parent/carer of a child in **XYZ class** at YXZ Primary School.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

There are a number of different parts to this project.

1. You will be invited to take part in two surveys – one at the beginning of the project, the other at the end. This survey is online, but we can provide a paper copy if you would prefer. All results are anonymous and you cannot be identified by taking part.
2. You will be invited to join a new closed Facebook Group during the summer term which will be used to share information about class activities and school information relevant to your child.
3. You may also be asked to take part in a 20 minute discussion about your experiences of engaging with the school, which will be recorded so that I can analyse it.

### **Do I have to take part?**

All parts of this project are optional. Because the survey results are anonymous, you are not able to withdraw your responses once you have submitted them. You are able to leave the Facebook Group at any time for any reason. You are also able to withdraw your participation and consent for the audio recording of our discussion at any time.

### **What are the risks and benefits of taking part?**

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and your decision to engage or not will have no bearing on you or your child. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time by contacting me by email (above), via the school office, or in person.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Copies of information collected as part of the project will be stored electronically and securely, and in compliance with the University of Reading's "Data Protection for Researchers" policy.

By participating you will be able to enter a prize draw for a £25 Asda voucher.

### **What will happen to the data?**

All personal information collected will be anonymised before being used in the research, including comments made in the Facebook Group, or in answer to a survey question, or as part of an audio recorded interview. Personal information will not be shared in an identifiable way with the school or any other third parties. The records will be stored securely for no more than 5 years, after which they will be deleted. You are able to request a copy of your records as part of this project by contacting me by any means.

By joining a Facebook Group, we will get access to usage data relating to your activity within this Facebook Group, which will be used to analyse and evaluate the Group. Your personal data or usage of Facebook more generally will not be available to us and cannot be used in this project. The type of data made available through the Facebook Group Insights system includes totals of posts, comments, reactions, and active times/days within the Facebook Group.

### **What happens if something goes wrong?**

If you have any questions about how this project operates as part of the University of Reading, please feel free to contact the project supervisor, Dr Yota Dimitriadi on email [y.dimitriadi@reading.ac.uk](mailto:y.dimitriadi@reading.ac.uk)

### **Where can I get more information?**

If you have any further questions, I would welcome the opportunity to speak to you about them. Please feel free to speak to me in person at school, make an appointment through the school office, or contact me via email

Should you feel more comfortable doing so, or wish to raise a concern or complaint, please feel free to contact the Headteacher, Mrs ABC, via the school office email

Thank you in advance for your interest and participation.

Mr P Jeffreys

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Parent/Carer Consent Form (XYZ class)

I have read the Information Sheet about the project and received a copy of it.

I understand what the purpose of the project is and what is required of me. All my questions have been answered.

Please tick as appropriate:

	Yes	No
I consent to participating in interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the audio-recording on the interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix A4: Information Sheet for Parents in Additional Class

May 2019

### **What is the study?**

Thank you for your interest in taking part in the research project looking at the role of social media on how parents and schools interact. As part of my doctoral studies, I am interested in understanding what happens at the moment, seeing what works well, and identify possible areas which could improve. An important part of the research is to understand your experience as a parent/carer of how you engage with the school, what works well for you, and what doesn't.

### **Why have I been chosen to take part?**

I am inviting you to take part because you are the parent/carer of a child in **ZYX class** at YXZ Primary School.

### **What will happen if I take part?**

There are a number of different parts to this project.

1. You will be invited to take part in two surveys – one at the beginning of the project, the other at the end. This survey is online, but we can provide a paper copy if you would prefer. All results are anonymous and you cannot be identified by taking part.
2. You may be asked to take part in a 20 minute discussion about your experiences of engaging with the school, which will be recorded so that I can analyse it.

### **Do I have to take part?**

All parts of this project are optional. Because the survey results are anonymous, you are not able to withdraw your responses once you have submitted them. You are also able to withdraw your participation and consent for the audio recording of our discussion at any time.

### **What are the risks and benefits of taking part?**

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and your decision to engage or not will have no bearing on you or your child. You are free to withdraw your participation at any time by contacting me by email (above), via the school office, or in person.

This project has been reviewed following the procedures of the University Research Ethics Committee and has been given a favourable ethical opinion for conduct. The University has the appropriate insurances in place. Full details are available on request.

Copies of information collected as part of the project will be stored electronically and securely, and in compliance with the University of Reading's "Data Protection for Researchers" policy.



By participating you will be able to enter a prize draw for a £25 Asda voucher.

### What will happen to the data?

All personal information collected will be anonymised before being used in the research, including survey answers, or as part of an audio recorded interview. Personal information will not be shared in an identifiable way with the school or any other third parties. The records will be stored securely for no more than 5 years, after which they will be deleted. You are able to request a copy of your records as part of this project by contacting me by any means.

### What happens if something goes wrong?

If you have any questions about how this project operates as part of the University of Reading, please feel free to contact the project supervisor, Dr Yota Dimitriadi on email [y.dimitriadi@reading.ac.uk](mailto:y.dimitriadi@reading.ac.uk)

### Where can I get more information?

If you have any further questions, I would welcome the opportunity to speak to you about them. Please feel free to speak to me in person at school, make an appointment through the school office, or contact me via email.

Should you feel more comfortable doing so, or wish to raise a concern or complaint, please feel free to contact the Headteacher, Mrs ABC, via the school office email.

Thank you in advance for your interest and participation.

Mr P Jeffreys

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### Parent/Carer Consent Form (ZYX class)

I have read the Information Sheet about the project and received a copy of it.

I understand what the purpose of the project is and what is required of me. All my questions have been answered.

Please tick as appropriate:

	Yes	No
I consent to participating in interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I consent to the audio-recording on the interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Parent interviews

### Appendix B1: Questions for semi-structured pre-intervention interview with parents

These questions are designed to be run post-survey and pre-intervention. A purposive sample of parents from the intervention class will be used.

Similar questions, with time-based alterations to question wording, to be used with (ideally the same) parents post-intervention.

#### 1. Introduction

Interviewer to give an introduction including:

- Thanking the participant for agreeing to take part and their time
- Reiterating that participation is voluntary, all identifying information will be anonymised before sharing or publishing, and that they can withdraw at any point
- Restating the aims of the research project and briefly describing the proposed intervention

#### 2. Gauge engagement on Epstein's framework for parental involvement

Interviewer to share six cards on the table in a line and read them out loud.

- Parenting (e.g. developing a supportive home environment for your child)
- Communicating (e.g. talking or meeting with the school about your child)
- Volunteering (e.g. helping with your child's education in school)
- Learning at home (e.g. information and ideas about supporting learning at home)
- Decision-making (e.g. being involved in making decisions about the school)
- Collaborating with the community (e.g. working with other organisations in the area for learning or support)

Interviewer to ask: "Which of these do you feel the school involves you the **most** and why?"  
Participant to indicate which card and explain. Interviewer to move this to the top of the table.

Interviewer to ask: "Which of these do you feel the school involves you the **least** and why?"  
Participant to indicate which card and explain. Interviewer to move this to the bottom of the table.

Interviewer to ask: "Could you put the other cards in order between these two of how involved you feel?"

Participant to sort cards and share comments as appropriate. Interviewer to ask relevant prompt questions such as:

"Could you tell me why you felt more/less involved in this area?"

"Could you tell me about a time when you have been involved in this way?"

"Could you tell me about a time when you would have wanted to be more involved in this way than you were?"

Interviewer to take a photo of the cards on the table. Interviewer to clear cards from the table.

### **3. Communication using technology and social media**

#### *3.1 Individual*

Interviewer to explain to the participant that this section is about which social media sites you use individually, regardless of whether it's related to your child or their schooling.

Interviewer to share a list of social media sites/apps and ask participant to sort them into categories:

- Use regularly
- Have an account but don't use regularly
- Have heard of it, but don't have an account or use it
- Have not heard of it

For the following sites: Facebook, Google Plus, Twitter, Instagram, Habbo, Tumblr, LinkedIn, Bebo, Flickr, Last.fm, Foursquare, NetMums, Pinterest, SnapChat, WhatsApp, Skype, YouTube, Viper, Telegram, Ask.fm.

Interviewer to take a photo of the table with the cards sorted into their groups.

Interviewer to ask: "Of the sites/apps you're aware of, which of them would you like the school to use to communicate with you?"

Interviewer to clear cards from the table.

#### *3. 2 School*

Interviewer to share five cards on the table in a line and read them out loud.

- Informal conversations with staff
- Formal meetings with staff (e.g. parent-teacher meetings)
- Emails
- Text messages / School Gateway app messages
- Social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter)

Interviewer to ask: "Could you put these in order of the involvement you value the most, or find the most helpful?"

Participant to sort cards and share comments as appropriate. Interviewer to ask relevant prompt questions such as:

"Could you tell me why you feel x is more/less important to you than y?"

"How do you feel about the x messages / the x meetings with the school?"

"Is there another way the school could communicate with you that they don't already?"

Interviewer to take a photo of the cards on the table. Interviewer to clear cards from the table.

### *3.3 Intervention of a closed Facebook Group*

Interviewer to explain the purpose of the proposed closed Facebook Group to share information and updates relevant to the class, only with pre-approved adults, and children only identifiable on the page after specific permission has been received.

Interviewer to ask:

“How would you feel being invited to be part of this Facebook Group?”

“What benefits would you hope for from being part of this Facebook Group?”

“How do you think your child would react to you being part of this Facebook Group, or if they featured for example a photo of them or their work?”

Interviewer to ask:

“Would you have any concerns or reservations about being part of this Facebook Group?”

“How protections would you expect the school to put in place for this Facebook Group?”

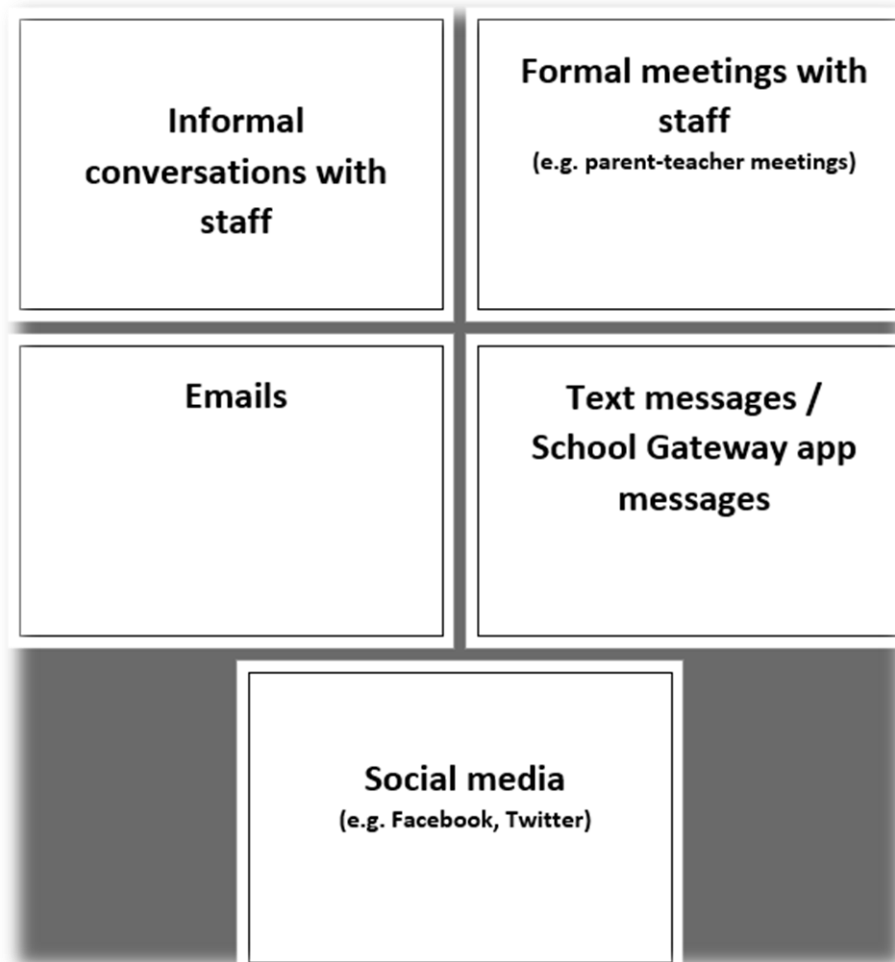
“What information or help would you want to support you in being part of this Facebook Group?”

## Appendix B2: Supporting materials

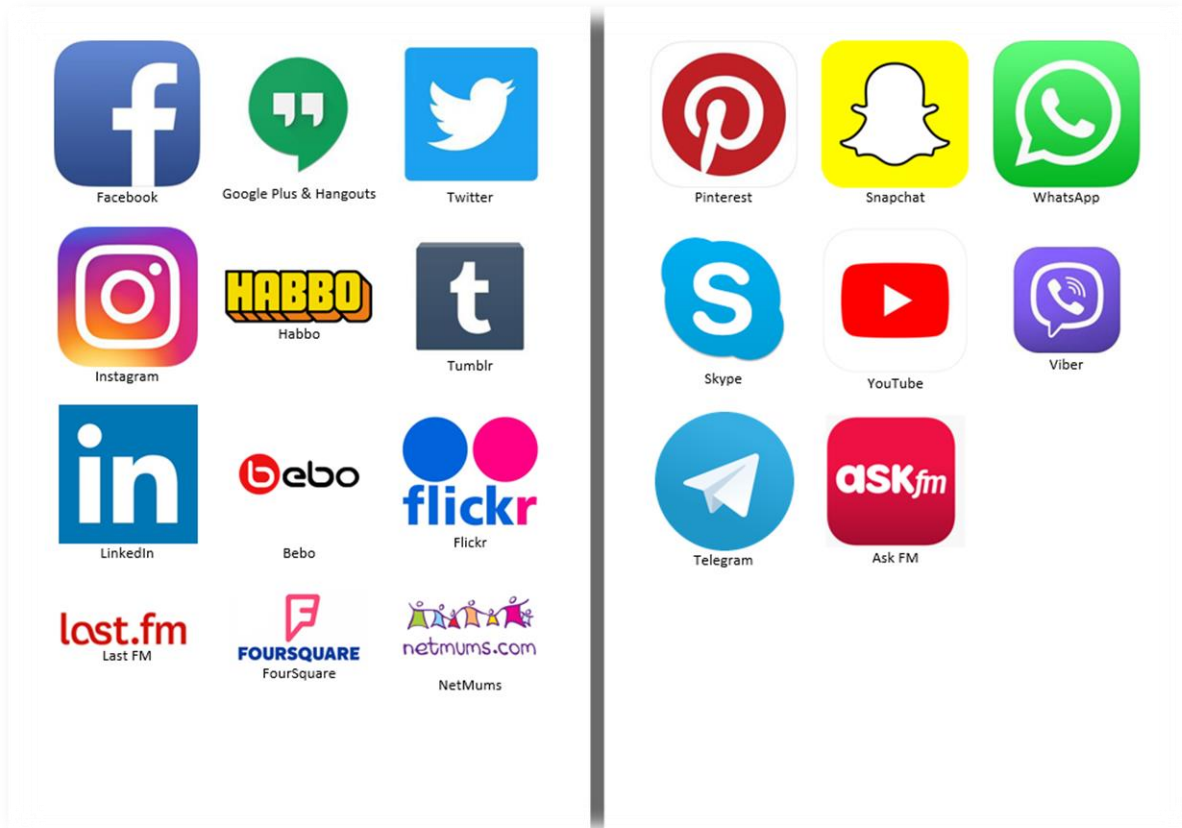
### Appendix B2(i): Discussion stimulus activity for types parent engagement

<p><b>Parenting</b> (e.g. developing a supportive home environment for your child)</p>	<p><b>Communicating</b> (e.g. talking or meeting with the school about your child)</p>
<p><b>Volunteering</b> (e.g. helping with your child's education in school)</p>	<p><b>Learning at home</b> (e.g. information and ideas about supporting learning at home)</p>
<p><b>Decision-making</b> (e.g. being involved in making decisions about the school)</p>	<p><b>Collaborating with the community</b> (e.g. working with other organisations in the area for learning or support)</p>

Appendix B2(ii): Discussion stimulus activity for parent engagement methods



Appendix B2(iii): Apps and sites cards





Appendix B2(iv): Grid for arranging apps and sites

<b>Use regularly</b>	<b>Have an account but don't use regularly</b>
<b>Have heard of, but don't have an account or use</b>	<b>Have not heard of it</b>



## Appendix C: Pre-intervention parents questionnaire

1. Overall, how involved do you feel in your child's education?



### Section 1: Your current experience

2. Your experiences of...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Not applicable
Teachers work closely with me to meet my child's needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand my child's strengths and needs in their learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child's teacher understands their strengths and needs in their learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child's teacher understands their strengths and needs in their learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know what my child will learn at school this year	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know what I can do to help my child with their learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand how I can help my child with homework tasks set by school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How do you feel when your child asks you for help with homework?

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Not applicable
Excited	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Motivated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Proud	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worried	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frustrated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confused	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fed up	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Section 2: Communication

In this section we're interested in how you currently communicate with your child's school and how they communicate with you. If it helps, please think about your recent experiences.

4. How involved do you feel in the following ways?

	Not at all involved	Not that involved	Somewhat involved	Very involved	Not applicable
Developing a supportive home environment for your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talking or meeting with the school about your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping with your child's education in school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information and ideas about supporting learning at home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being involved in making decisions about the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with other organisations in the area for learning or support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How would you rate the school's communications using the following methods?

	Very poor	Poor	Neither good nor poor	Good	Very good	Not applicable
Informal conversations with staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Formal meetings (e.g. parent-teacher meetings)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Emails	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text/app messages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. What improvements would you like to see in how the school communicates with you?

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7. How do you feel when you see a message from the school? (e.g. an email, text message, post on social media)

	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Not applicable
Excited	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Motivated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Proud	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Worried	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Frustrated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confused	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fed up	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. How important do you see some of the benefits of using social media?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not that important	Not at all important	Not applicable
Free to use	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Available 24/7	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Able to share with friends and family	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feeling connected to different communities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Less personal than being face-to-face	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Able to send quick private messages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Something I'm comfortable using	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. What concerns, if any, do you have about using social media yourself or for your child?

### **Section 3: Challenges to being involved**

In this section we're interested to understand any of the difficulties you currently experience. We're not looking to blame anybody for these challenges, but just to get a better understanding of how you feel about them.

The term "social media" is used loosely to refer to any website, app or technology which people can communicate with each other. These could include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube, etc. The school uses some of these, you may use some at home, and you might be aware of others.

10. How much of a problem are the following?

	Not a problem at all	A small problem	A medium sized problem	A large problem	A very large problem	Not applicable
I'm not sure how to communicate with the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The school is not	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The school doesn't provide enough	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
information about how I can get involved	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The school doesn't communicate well with people from my culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School staff seem too busy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I worry that adults at school will treat my child differently if I raise a concern	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't feel a sense of belonging in my child's school community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How busy I am	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My child doesn't want me to communicate with the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Negative memories about my own school experiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



11. How isolated or involved do you feel...

	Very isolated	Somewhat isolated	Somewhat involved	Very involved	Not applicable
...in your relationship with your child's school (teachers, staff, the office, etc.)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...in your life more generally (friends, family, neighbours, etc.)?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Which of these communities do you feel a part of?

	Strongly involved	Somewhat involved	Not that involved	Not at all involved	Not applicable
Immediate neighbours in my building or street	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Neighbours in the wider area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents of children in my child's class	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Parents of children at school generally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My family in the local area	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My family further away	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Friendships I have outside of family and my child's school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clubs, groups, societies and organisations I'm a part of	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Thinking about any groups you're a part of on social media, which of the following are you interested in seeing or sharing?

	Very interested	Interested	Not that interested	Not at all interested	Not applicable
Photos of children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Photos of children's learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Videos of children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text updates about upcoming events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support information or resources to help my child to learn at home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information about local events in the community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Links to videos, stories or articles which might interest you as a parent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

#### Section 4: A bit about you

Some of these questions are about you and your background. As with all of your responses, these will be treated confidentially. All of these questions are optional.

14. How confident do you feel using technology generally in your day-to-day life?



15. How confident do you feel using social media in your day-to-day life?



16. What is the highest level of education you completed? (Please choose the closest relevant option)

<input type="radio"/>	I left school at or before the age of 16/O-levels/GCSEs
<input type="radio"/>	A-levels, level 3 NVQs, award, certificate or diploma
<input type="radio"/>	HNC, level 4 NVQs, award, certificate or diploma, or Certificate of HE
<input type="radio"/>	Undergraduate degree (e.g. BA, BSc), level 6 NVQs, award, certificate or diploma
<input type="radio"/>	Masters degree (e.g. MA, MSc, PGCE), level 7 award, certificate or diploma
<input type="radio"/>	Doctorate degree, level 8 award, certificate or diploma

17. Are you currently employed?

<input type="radio"/>	Yes
<input type="radio"/>	No

18. If you are currently employed, what is your current job?

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**Section 6: A proposed trial Facebook Group**

As part of this research project, you will be invited to join a new Facebook Group specific to parents of children in Heron class. We hope that this would be an opportunity for you to feel more engaged with your child's experiences at school.

Your participation in this Facebook Group would be entirely voluntary, and neither you nor your child will be disadvantaged whether you join or not, or how you choose to engage or not in the Facebook Group.

To help us understand how to make this Facebook Group would best for you, please take a few moments to share your views here.

19. Do you feel that having a closed Facebook Group for your child's class could improve your understanding of their experience at school?

<input type="radio"/>	Yes
<input type="radio"/>	No
<input type="radio"/>	Maybe
<input type="radio"/>	Not applicable

20. What type of content would you want to be shared with you on this Facebook Group?

	Very interested	Interested	Not that interested	Not at all interested	Not applicable
Photos of children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Photos of children's learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Videos of children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text updates about upcoming events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Support information or resources to help my child to learn at home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information about local events in the community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Links to videos, stories or articles which might interest you as a parent	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

21. How do you feel using such a Facebook Group could help you as a parent?

	Definitely	Maybe	Unlikely	Very unlikely	Not applicable
Developing a supportive home environment for your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Talking or meeting with the school about your child	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping with your child's education in school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information and ideas about supporting learning at home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being involved in making decisions about the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with other organisations in the area for learning or support	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

22. If you have any questions, comments or concerns about a closed Facebook Group for parents in your child's class, please enter them here.

23. Overall, how involved do you feel in your child's education?



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