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Understanding the value of parental engagement through pupil voice in a Scottish Primary School

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Captions

Figure 1. Diamond ranked, self-generated drawings of learning at home. Primary 2 pupils.

Figure 2. Illustration of thematic analysis process, drawing on the overarching theme, 'Developing skills, knowledge and responsibilities required for family life.

Figure 3: a tripartite framework, examining the issue of power dynamics in home-school partnerships.

Abstract
Schools strive to respond compassionately to disadvantaged families. However, barriers to authentic home-school relationships persist because the concept of parental engagement at home is not well enough understood. Socio-cultural stereotyping still contributes to schools' fixed impressions of what parental engagement should consist of, and the abilities of disadvantaged parents to support their children's learning. This qualitative case study provides new and unique insights into learning at home. A child-centred study was undertaken in a small Primary school, in a deprived area of Scotland, exploring the importance of home learning with young children. The findings indicate the young participants had an acute understanding of the significance of home learning for their ongoing and future development.

Key Words
parental engagement, family learning, home-school partnerships, child-centred research, pupil voice, visual methods.

Introduction

Most parents want to be involved in their children's learning and want their children to do well at school (Kim, 2009; Goodall, 2012; Tan, 2019). The positive effect on children's academic success, from both parental involvement with school and parental engagement with children's learning at home, is well established (Epstein, 1987; Catsambis, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2011; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Sylva, 2004; Redding, 2004; Spera, 2005; Kim, 2009; Goodall, 2012, OECD, 2019) but the home environment is generally acknowledged as the more significant factor in children's academic achievement (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Sylva et al, 2004; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Kim, 2009; Goodall, Vorhaus et al, 2011; Goodall, 2012). Schools are generally unsure how to best support parental engagement at home for the benefit of children's academic progress and, possibly more importantly, parents are often unaware of the valuable connection between home influence and children's academic success (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Kim, 2009; Ellis & Sosu, 2015; Goodall, 2018).

This case study was developed out of a desire to explore the influence of parental engagement on children's learning and development at home. Schools complain of difficulties supporting 'hard to reach parents' (Crozier & Davies, 2007). Knowing something of what parental engagement at home looks like might better inform parental engagement policies and practice. This child-centred study with young Primary school pupils from a disadvantaged area in Scotland offers new and unique insights into parental engagement at home. It explores with young children, what learning at home looks like to them and what value they place on it. The children's voices offer us new ways of seeing and thinking about parental engagement within the family home without unnecessary intrusion into the private lives of families.

Research has found it very difficult to capture how parental engagement at home influences children's academic achievement (Redding, 2004; Rasbash, 2010, Goodall, 2012). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) report on the effects of school life on students' home lives (OECD, 2019), identified parental engagement at home as being key to creating a positive school climate. Despite acknowledgement that 'at-home

good parenting' (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p.4) has a greater impact on student outcomes, school-based parental involvement is the focus of the report (OECD, 2019). In Scotland, the most recent national policy on parental engagement and involvement, *Learning Together* (Scottish Government, 2018), at least recognises that parental engagement at home is not well understood. The policy draws attention to the value of learning at home but is reticent to address the difficulties inherent in supporting parental engagement at home.

Literature Review

There are few reliable, large-scale quantitative studies on parental engagement at home (Erion, 2006; Kim, 2009; Manz et al, 2010; Goodall, Vorhaus et al, 2011) and most of the studies conflate the terms, 'parental engagement at home' with 'parental involvement with school.' Consequently, 'parental involvement' has become a coverall term, associated with the more impactful indicators of pupil achievement, particularly in USA studies, (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Crozier, 2007; Kim, 2009; Campbell, 2011; Goodall, 2012) , and despite studies showing little or no evidence that parents' physical involvement with school resulted in measurable improvements in children's academic achievement (Redding et al, 2004; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Ellis, 2015; Malone, 2017; Tan, 2019).

Schools have tended to associate better education outcomes with parents' visibility in school (Sylva et al, 2004; Goodall, 2012), whilst attention to what parents do at home receives less notice (Crozier, 2007, Campbell, 2011; Goodall, Vorhaus et al, 2011). Whilst it is widely recognised that multiple disadvantages have a negative impact on children's long-term cognitive, social, and emotional development (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Sylva et al, 2004; Mowat, 2020) and academic outcomes (Sosu & Ellis, 2014), it is also known that economic, educational, and social barriers prevent parents from becoming more involved in their children's schooling (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2007, Ellis & Sosu, 2015), reinforcing parents' reputations as, 'hard-to-reach' (Crozier & Davies, 2007, Campbell, 2011, Ellis & Sosu, 2015). Treanor (2017) argues that working-class parents in the

UK value schooling as much as middle-class parents do and have similar positive aspirations for their children. However, for many families living in poverty, negative experiences of schooling as a child (Hoover- Dempsey, 1997); fear of being judged as inadequate as a parent (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Goodall, 2012; Ellis, 2015), or a lack of knowledge and skills with which to negotiate the education system (Crozier, 2007), coupled with complex family circumstances and inflexible working patterns (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Goodall, Vorhaus et al, 2011), are some of the psychological and practical barriers to disadvantaged parents' closer involvement with their child's school learning. Care should be taken connecting pre-determined ideas about parents with children's overall academic potential when ideas are based on the kinds of quantitative studies which equate children's academic outcomes with parents' class, education levels, and income (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Parenting practices are dynamic, inter-related, and affected over time by school, locality, and societal characteristics (Epstein, 1987; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Redding et al, 2004; Rasbash, 2010, Goodall, 2012; Tan, 2019).

There is little research generally on disadvantaged parents' school involvement (Crozier, 2001). Research on school-created barriers to disadvantaged parents' involvement is also difficult to find (Kim, 2009), but more easily available are quantitative studies that consider the 'deficiencies of minority parents' (Kim, 2009, p. 81). Here, 'disadvantaged' or 'minority' refers to parents disadvantaged by one or more of: ethnicity; culture; lower socio-economic status (SES); single parent status; and parents with English as an additional language. Kim argues that in such studies blame for the low academic achievement of disadvantaged pupils is mostly attributed to parental lack of involvement with school (Kim, 2009). Negative school attitudes persist about the parenting abilities of disadvantaged parents because such parents tend to have fewer or more 'problematic' connections with school (Kim, 2009; Goodall, Vorhaus et al, 2011). Predictably, when schools perceive parents as holding intransigent attitudes to school involvement, they become less likely to involve them (Crozier, 2007; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Kim, 2009).

There is also a view that the research on the involvement of disadvantaged parents with their child's school learning is hierarchical (Crozier, 2001; Kim, 2009) and is based on a lack of social and cultural comparability between teachers and disadvantaged parents on both

sides (Bourdieu, 1973; Crozier, 2007; Harris & Goodall, 2007). Several studies argue that teachers take less cognisance of parents whose involvement with school does not fit teacher perceptions of society's cultural norms (Crozier, 2007; Kim, 2009; Goodall, 2012). What often constitutes the 'good parent' is one who is considered actively involved with school and is often based on a perception of white, middle-class cultural norms (Young, 1990; Crozier, 2001). Kim further argues that such perceptions and attitudes underpin school assumptions about which children are likely to do well, so reinforcing perceived causal links between education systems and social class structures (Kim, 2009, p. 82).

Bourdieu's theory on power dynamics and societal advantage argues that dominant cultures are replicated through education systems; assumptions are made based on dominant cultural values and hence levels of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973; Crozier, 2001). Some parents, notably middle-class parents, know how to play the school game better than others (Ellis, 2015). Their children become young adults who are more likely to have a better understanding of how institutions work (Lareau, 2015). Middle class families have an unequal advantage in that their parenting methods seem to align more closely with school expectations, unlike the parenting methods attributed to working-class and poor families (Lareau, 2003, as cited in Lareau, 2015).

Studies on parental aspirations reiterate how an uneven value system reinforces divisions of power between school and home (Epstein, 1987; Crozier, 2007; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Goodall, 2012; Treanor, 2017; Tan, 2019). As Treanor notes, '… it is the structural elements of poverty, and the middle-class culture of education, that presents a barrier to children's education and not a deficiency in parents' or children's aspirations' (Treanor, 2017, p. 2). Goodall reminds us of how little schools and parents are served by fixed ideas of disadvantaged parents' capabilities. Yet schools continue to adopt a reductionist view of parents' engagement in their children's learning at home (Goodall, 2018).

Learning Together (Scottish Government, 2018), introduced earlier, positions itself as emancipatory and calls for the kinds of dialogic approaches to parental engagement which can have a transformative effect on practitioners' attitudes (Pena, 2000; Baker, 2016). However, authentic home-school dialogue and collaboration require agentic levelling on

both sides. Problematically, teacher agency also suffers when a results-driven agenda conflicts with inclusive practices (Priestley, 2015; Chong, 2017, Mowat, 2018). Recent calls for children to catch-up on lost learning following the Covid 19 pandemic places additional pressure on schools and may also now favour more compliance-based approaches to working with parents. In addition, education policies often look to large-scale quantitative studies for their evidence base but in doing so they are also more likely to reinforce narrow views of parental capabilities (Crozier, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kim, 2009; Tan, 2019). Generalisable family and background factors influencing children's academic achievement are difficult to ascertain (Redding, 2004; Rasbash, 2010; Goodall, 2012). However, when qualitative evidence is involved, the positive aspects of parental engagement at home can be seen (Sylva et al, 2004; Malone, 2017). Recent research has shown statistical evidence of the positive snowballing effect of parent-child discussions on attainment (Tan, 2019) and, how family learning programmes can mitigate deficit perspectives held by Head Teachers (Tett & Macleod, 2020, as cited in Mowat, 2023).

Methodology

Child-centred research can challenge the dominant discourse that parents from disadvantaged areas lack capacity to engage positively with their children's learning at home by elevating the children's voices (Johnson et al, 2006). Seeking the seldom heard views of young children may help us 'see' something of the engagement with children's learning at home which is perhaps 'unseen' by school (Pilcher et al, as cited in King & Horrocks, 2010; Lundy, 2011) through the richness of the socially constructed, multiple child views and their specific situations (Creswell, 2000; Kincheloe, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Hammersley, 2008, Dockett, 2014). This case study explores with children their awareness of learning at home. The case study format offers a useful system for an open-ended, qualitative examination of individual situations (Yin, 2003). The inclusion of authentic pupil voice is also new in this field of study as pupil voice features rarely in parental engagement research (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Authentic pupil voice in this study refers to the inclusion of children's views by means which not only take cognisance of their rights (United Nations,

2009) but also develops their social and cultural agency and evolving capacities to contribute (Lundy, 2011; Graham et al, 2013).

Ethical concerns

Child-centred research becomes more ethical when the methodology is underpinned by a rights-based perspective; is closely connected to pedagogy and fulfils a purpose that makes the children's participation necessary (Tisdall et al, 2009; Wall, 2017). Lundy's ethical concepts of space, voice, audience, and influence (Lundy, 2011) reflect the spirit of the UNCRC (United Nations, 2009) and framed the research process and methods. The dialogical element of the study was created to be respectful to the young subjects so that the children's participation can also be a source of social and cultural empowerment for them (Prout & James, 1990; Rinaldi, 2006; Stephenson, 2009).

Gaining young children's consent for research participation has inherent difficulties in terms of agentic awareness. Children may find it difficult to resist requests for information from friendly teachers/researchers (Brostrom, 2012). The researcher here works as a visiting Specialist Support Teacher in the participants' school. In line with a rights-based perspective, the children's individual consent was sought prior to involvement and ongoing participation invited at each stage (Maggi, 2016). In this way, ongoing assent considered the children's evolving capacities as participants in research (Graham et al, 2013).

Metacognitive development underpinned the pedagogical aspect of the study. Incorporating metacognitive practices into the research process is another potential lever to the ethical development of participants' social and cultural capital. The success of dialogic teaching confirms that developing children's metacognition is also more likely to develop democratic and culturally empowering outcomes because of the teacher's active listening role and the evaluative thinking encouraged in the pupils ((Assessment Reform Group, 2002; Rinaldi, 2006; Stephenson, 2009).

Visual Methods

Creating effective conditions for development of authentic pupil voice is central to the democratising endeavour of involving children in research as social agents (Lundy, 2011)

and informed the choice of research methods in this study. Visual methods help develop participant agency (Brostrom, 2009) and ensure that the research subject's voice is appropriately heard (Allen, 2008). The visual-based activities used in the study helped build researcher/participant rapport; reduced interview stress and helped sustain assent to ongoing participation (King & Horrocks, 2010; Hall & Wall, 2016). Visual methods also enrich data by helping participants reveal tacit knowledge of their day-to-day activities at home (King & Horrocks, 2010).

Visually mediated data collection still involves a cognitive and/or social burden on the participants to explain data choices (Hall & Wall, 2016). The expectation that one's opinion counts and one's voice will be heard is also a social and cultural skill (Packard, as cited in King & Horrocks, 2010). However, there is epistemic value in their use. The examination and creation of visual materials as part of an interview can, '…encourage interviewees to engage in deeper reflection on an interview topic than they might otherwise' (King & Horrocks, 2010, p. 148). This development of richer metacognition contributes to purposeful, pedagogical outcomes for the participants and helps create the necessary bridge between ethical research and pedagogy for the benefit of both (Wall, 2017).

Context and sampling

The participants came from a small, denominational Primary school in a deprived, urban area in Scotland. At the time of the study, over half of the school population lived in neighbourhoods categorised as Levels 1 and 2 on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation[1]. One fifth of the school's families claimed free school meals and school clothing grants. Ethnicity was majority white, Scottish. Attainment levels were slightly lower than local and national averages and overall pupil attendance was around 95%.

Children from Primary 2 and 3, (6 and 7 years old) were given the opportunity to volunteer to participate and all volunteers were included in the research sample. Consent forms were

[1] The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a government statistical tool used to identify concentrated areas of multiple deprivation to target policies and resources. SIMD level 1 categorises the most deprived areas, SIMD level 7, the least deprived.

sent home. The choice of classes was decided by the Head Teacher, based on school priorities at the time and knowledge of the pupils and parents.

This study used a three-stage process. Initial familiarisation was piloted with a Primary 4 class. One of the challenges of researching with young children is accidental direction by the researcher (Dalli & Te One, 2012). During the pilot, the researcher evaluated the use and impact of open-ended questioning, and images were enlarged for the research proper as misconceptions arose during the pilot about some of the settings portrayed in the images.

The familiarisation proper took place within Primary 2 and Primary 3. Pre-existing photographs depicting learning in different environments were examined in a photo-elicitation activity with the whole class and then diamond ranked for their learning value within small group discussions. This introduced potential participants to the important metacognitive processes that would be a key pedagogical attribute of the study. Diamond ranking (e.g., Figure 1) is a thinking skills tool which helps participants explore thoughts and feelings. It brings a dynamic element to the research process and improves the ethical standing of the research as an inclusive tool which improves participation (Clark, 2012). A volunteer group of 13 Primary 2 and 3 children came forward from this familiarisation stage to participate in the study.

In the second preparation stage, volunteer Primary 2 and 3 participants met with the researcher in four small groups of 2, 3 or 4 pupils, outside the classroom. Participants repeated the diamond ranking process individually, with individual sets of the familiar pre-existing photographs. Their decisions and opinions were audio recorded. Practising metacognitive processes and using tools like diamond ranking - prior to data collection - is more likely to encourage further metacognition when the pupils come to reflect on their own self-generated data (Kirkwood, 2005). This also contributes to reduce some of the cognitive and social burden experienced when explaining choices during data collection (Hall & Wall, 2016).

In the third stage of the study, one week later, participants met with the researcher in the same small groups and made individual drawings of what they thought they had been

learning at home over the previous week. Each child diamond ranked their own drawings of learning, and their subsequent descriptions and explanations were audio recorded for data collection.

Figure 1a and 1b go here, side by side as one entry, (Figure 1)

Data-Analysis

The final interviews were transcribed, and a thematic analysis of the verbatim recordings was made using King & Horrocks' model (King & Horrocks, 2010). This model was chosen for its recursive qualities and ability to highlight thematic patterns. Despite complexity in separating out or attributing influences on thought and opinion (Yin, 2003), thematic analysis permits tentative theoretical exploration of young children's sociocultural contexts at home (Wall, 2012). Figure 2 outlines the thematic analysis process.

Figure 2 goes here

Findings

73 examples of analysed data illustrated a wide variety of learning experiences at home which the children were able to value rank and give explanations for. The examples demonstrated the children were engaged in learning centred on social growth and development rather than school-based activities. Three overarching themes emerged, around skills, knowledge and responsibilities required for: family life; self-development and learning to play/ learning through play.

Family Life

It is within the theme of Family Life that we are very likely to be aware of direct parental engagement with the children as they learn to take on chores at home. What came through in the children's comments were examples of the kinds of essential learning required for household duties, learning through adoption of a nurturing role or responsibility, and learning just from spending time with the family. Learning household tasks were ranked highly by the children, suggesting an internalisation of family values, such as a Piagetian respect for compliance of rules (McLeod, 2015).

> Pupil B: "*And washing is important as well. You know how? It's… you won't have enough clothes to wear".*

Family experiences valued for the skills needed to cooperate with or look after younger siblings, suggested maturing moral development and empathetic understanding in the young participants.

> Pupil E: "*Watching my wee brother is important so he doesn't run away*"
> Pupil C: "*Dressing my baby sister. And for that one you need your privacy".*

Learning from observing the nurturing behaviour of other family members also emerged, e.g., Pupil A (Primary 2) identified that watching his grandfather play with his younger brother was a learning experience for himself, *"And my wee brother is learning how to play a game as well, with papa".* The observational learning was then reflected in Pupil A's own interactions with his younger brother, "*and I was reading a book, so I was teaching my brother how to read".* There is something of an empathetic awareness in his comments as he reported the importance of learning how to develop nurturing behaviour towards his younger sibling.

Spending time with the family as a learning experience was also highly ranked by the children.

> Pupil M: "*Me spending time with my family (on the couch, watching TV). It's because I think you should spend time with your family most of the time because they're the ones what are buying you new clothes and new things and everything and you should spend time with your family".*

This appreciation by the pupil of family members reflects close family relationships and a mature appreciation of the advantages of family life. Taken together, this theme highlighted a strong sense of moral maturity and respect among the pupils for family life, and a clear understanding of the value of learning to live well in daily home life.

Self-Development

63% of all learning experiences ranked 'Most Important Learning', referred to learning for self-development. This theme encompassed: learning for adult life in the future; learning to take responsibility for oneself; and responsibility for one's safety and for one's good health. Comments showing awareness of learning as part of growing up, or learning for future adult life, were most numerous within this theme.

Pupil E: *"I learned how to cook dinner. Learning how to cook dinner is important because when you are an adult you need to cook dinner for everybody".*

Pupil C reported on academic learning, not to do well at school, but for real life future needs: "*And you need it (*learning to read*) to grow up*". Pupil C's further explanations for high ranking of writing and spelling reinforced this, "*…. to be an adult, so you have to learn"*. Pupil H stated: *"I think the football (and gymnastics) are at the top because I can make a job out of them…and the football, I can make quite a lot of money by".* The young child's prospective thoughts for his future shows internal motivation; a desire to do well later in life.

Explicit descriptions of learning about a parent's job demonstrates some active parental engagement to help their children make these real-life connections.

> Pupil B: "*Me going to my dad's work...It's kind of important seeing another person's work".*

Pupil E (age 6 years) made several references to learning to take on more responsibility for his actions, i.e., accepting blame for hurting a friends' feelings; and for himself to develop resilience during a recent martial arts competition.

> Pupil E: "*This is me getting punched in the nose. I put this one in that order because if you get hurt you should carry on…. Learning how to fight back*".

Awareness that self-discipline is a real and difficult skill to develop comes through strongly in Pupil F's comment on washing dishes:

> Pupil F: *"It's hard to want to do the dishes. I put that at the top as well because I need to learn how to do them".*

Awareness of the benefits of developing self-care as well as part of physical improvement came through in the comments about learning to develop your own good health.

> Pupil G: "*It's taking time. Taking time isn't that important but it is important because it's something that you need to know to do…well…at certain times".*

A small but distinct number of comments valued opportunities for developing a sense of social responsibility outside of the family unit, in the local community.

> Pupil M: "… *I'm trying to help people get more football because I'm telling people what to do 'cause I'm team captain, so I help people what to do at football*".

Responsibility towards the wider community came through in additional references to community club experiences and to other children and to people in general, e.g., "*playing nice with other people",* (Pupil J); *"maybe somebody needs your help to read…"* (Pupil C).

The children ranked learning to develop resilience, self-discipline, and responsibility for self, highly as part of their self-development, indicating a clear awareness of the importance of taking charge of their own development. The examples mostly all involved self-development to take on more responsibility within the home or for future adulthood. It suggests the children live in home environments where they are encouraged to make the most of themselves and develop aspirations around self-improvement. It suggests there are positive role models at home to learn from.

Learning to Play and Learning through Play

Play as learning and learning through play were ranked highly within this theme. It encompasses having fun and learning to try new things. The terms, 'having fun' and 'playing' began to merge in meaning and were latterly subsumed into the one category of play. The children were clear that playing at home was a learning experience for them. The play can be solo, but in the comments, the more highly valued play involved mostly family and sometimes friends. In some of the comments there was a clearly expressed awareness of the social learning involved in cooperative play.

> Pupil J: "*Me and my friend playing (at the park), …cause you're learning how to play nice with other people*".

Awareness of the value of play for its own sake, (Pupil A: *"You need to have fun. If you didn't have fun life will just be boring*"), and awareness of social skills learned through play, demonstrates the children's strong sense of self and shows emotional intelligence. It suggests a desire for interpersonal effectiveness, or, how to live well in family and community.

New learning comprised a significant subset of learning through play. New learning categorised comments about learning new things, principally for personal enjoyment. New learning generally ranked lower in value, despite a high proportion of pupils recording examples. Comments covered a range of new learning activities from building with Lego to spicing up a dish, to hair styling. What separates this subset from the 'Having Fun/Play' category was simply the lack of direct reference to having fun or playing.

> Pupil D: *"I just realised while Lego is a skill, it's not really that much learning going on. So, that's why I put it at the bottom".*

Pupil D seems critically adept enough to differentiate between learning just for fun and learning that will help him develop into a capable adult. Underpinning these examples of learning, the children's beliefs that they are learning about themselves through their play activities with their families suggests their families are involved in shaping these valuable mindsets and social attitudes through play.

Discussion

Parental engagement in children's learning at home is mainly concerned with sharing family attitudes through example and through informal learning conversations (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). We might re-examine the concept of parental engagement considering these children's views of what constitutes learning at home. The literature highlights how the concept of parental engagement can be narrowly appreciated. From this study's findings, understanding of how learning takes place in the home may also require closer examination. A literal consideration of the concept of parental engagement suggests parents are the main instigators of teaching their children the important life skills they need

to take their place in society. However, in the findings, where learning was reciprocal, it was more highly valued by the children. The children engaged in both active and passive experiences of learning through a symbiosis of multi-directional, intergenerational interactions. This occurred mainly between the children and their parents, siblings, grandparents, and to a little extent between the children, their peers, and their local community. The examples show the children as co-instigators of learning, sometimes acting as teachers and leaders. The children are as much a focus *for* learning as a focus *of* learning. The concept of 'family engagement at home' might be a more appropriate concept for schools to consider since the children's experiences suggest not only parents, but other family members and the children themselves are active agents in learning outside school.

The children in this study present as self-motivated and encouraged to take on the kinds of increasingly complex challenges at home which develop positive moral, social, emotional, and physical skills, and attributes. Their ability to reflect on the value of doing so demonstrates successful strategising abilities, as exemplified in social constructivist learning theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Aspirations for positive future outcomes also seem to be encouraged at home. Such forms of encouragement are valuable indicators of the kind of positive parental behaviours which support academic achievement in school (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Goodall, 2012; Tan, 2019). It is difficult to separate out influences as little is mutually exclusive in learning (Yin, 2003). However, the pupils' strong sense of future aspirations suggests connections are being made between development now and future outcomes. Future-looking responses suggest a capacity for prospective thinking and an awareness of the real-life purpose of learning that is fundamental to effective academic learning (Scottish Government, 2007). The OECD (2010) report identified motivation and intrinsic personal drive to succeed as factors which can improve outcomes for a third of disadvantaged children (OECD, 2010).

Play is central to early child development and learning (Vygotsky, 1978; McLeod, 2015), allowing children to build self-confidence and social communication skills as they make sense of their world. It suggests that the children who ranked play experiences as 'Most Important Learning' understand something of the value of learning through play, a view replicated in play-based learning research (Briggs, 2012; Duncan & Grogan, 2019). The

participants' repeated emphasis on learning from the social interactions in their play reinforces the sense that the children regularly experience positive messages at home and locally, about the value of cooperation with others. This is not always the public view of children's lives in deprived areas in Scotland. It is, therefore, helpful to glimpse a real picture of how these children perceive themselves. The learning they experience, and value encompasses experiences which relate positively to development in all three domains of formal academic learning - cognitive, affective, and psychomotor.

Creativity and personal capability are important attributes of academic success and can develop through trying out new things and ways of thinking (Davies et al, 2013). A high proportion of the pupils generated several examples of learning new things at home. However, most gave a low ranking to new learning for its own enjoyment. This prompts the question why learning new things for their own pleasure was not more highly valued. This may reflect, for some, the influence of living within a low-socio-economic household or neighbourhood where research suggests children have less sense of entitlement and agency (Ellis, 2017). However, the children display some empathetic understanding towards family members and others, eg, a peer-group football team. Such attributes are considered integral to the development of emotional intelligence, moral virtue, character, and effective social relationships (Goleman, 1996). Conversely, a notable tendency toward selflessness, particularly in the comments on family life, may reflect the influence of the denominational school community and parallel values within some of the homes. For either reason, personal enjoyment may not therefore be considered as important to the children as helping at home and preparing for adulthood. Maturity of thought and emotional intelligence are closely associated with important emotional skills, fundamental building blocks to all-round personal development; successful learning capability, and active citizenship skills (Goleman, 1996; Education Scotland, 2008). The children's many mature reflections demonstrate the social and emotional skills that effective parental engagement develops in children, *'…mature, …independent, …social and achievement oriented'* (Goodall, 2012, p.137).

Cross-cutting themes of social responsibility and social cohesion became apparent from the many comments on learning to take responsibility for self and others and learning nurturing behaviours. The repeated tendency towards selflessness was striking. It suggests the

children have probably experienced positive examples of cooperation and service to others at home and in school. *Getting it Right for Every Child* (Scottish Government, 2011) describes such thinking of the good of others as a key indicator in the nurturing of family and community ties. This is fundamental to create stability and cohesion in the lives of children, to the betterment of their wellbeing. Social cohesion creates the foundations for effective learning to take place and improves relationships between stakeholders in society, mediating some of the potentially negative effects of low socio-economic housing and neighbourhood conditions (Green et al, 2006).

Explicit connections with school-based learning were generally less obvious. As parents often report uncertainty about school expectations (Crozier, 2007; National Parent Forum of Scotland, 2017) this may explain the children's lack of connection. However, when referred to, school learning was valued for its real-life purpose; to do well as an adult. This suggests the children have been helped to appreciate the potential significance of school learning.

The pupils distinguish themselves as independent thinkers with clear identity, purpose in life, and strong moral values. They demonstrate adequate personal agency to engage confidently and fully in the research process. The children in this study already display essential life skills in the comfortable and confident way they shared thoughts in interview. Examples of their drive for self-control and motivation to do well later in life populates much of the data.

How can schools make use of the children's insights?

The children can be judged competent interpreters of their social world from the careful cultivation of authentic pupil voice (Dockett & Perry, 2014). This facilitated trustworthy insight into the home learning environments of the children. Pupil-generated evidence about positive family engagement that helps them develop skills for learning and life, albeit within a disadvantaged neighbourhood, may help schools avoid homogenous, stereotypical views of disadvantaged families. Sharing children's views may assist parents and teachers to appreciate more fully the intrinsic correlation between effective parental engagement at

home and children's academic achievement – irrespective of socio-economic and other minority-linked factors.

Schools cannot be expected to know how learning looks within the homes of all their families. Parental engagement does not look the same in every home and one view is no more predictive of academic success than another (Goodall, 2012). The data does not tell us anything of the quality of the relationships between families and school. It does not tell us the extent to which schools and parents are aware that agency lies with the parents regarding their children's learning and development, and should be negotiated with school, not led by school (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). However, the findings reflect positively on the parenting skills operating within these families. That is a useful starting point for schools to review their role in developing collaboration with parents and families. Mowat's visual interpretation of Tett and Macleod's three levels of home-school partnership (see Figure 3), demonstrates the kind of empowering elements required within an authentic, democratic home-school partnership (Mowat, 2023, figure 11.6, drawing on Tett and Macleod, 2020, pp. 457-8).

Figure 3 goes here.

Schools which work to develop consistently authentic and democratic dialogue with families are better placed to transform home-school relationships and develop a better culture of collaboration (Pena, 200; Baker, 2016). School perceptions and Head Teachers' mindsets, particularly, can dictate the power dynamic and levels of collaboration (Lord et al, 2021; Tett & Macleod, 2020, as cited in Mowat, 2023). Creating the right mindset in schools becomes key (Goodall, 2018). Adopting a strength, or assets-based mindset and approach to supporting parental or family engagement in learning will help schools have more democratic conversations with families about children's learning and empower families to more fully realise their equitable role in the home-school partnership (Moll et al, 1992; Feiler et al, 2006). Developing a mutual appreciation of the value of children's skill development at home could be an early stage in developing a school's approach. Consequently, children's learning will benefit even more when school and families engage in the more focussed learning conversations that develop when families have a better understanding of their important role (Redding et al, 2004, Sylva et al, 2004).

How can schools develop more authentic home-school partnerships?

Ethical methods, like the use of visual tools and metacognitive diamond ranking tools have been central to the process of illuminating the children's views of learning at home. They support agency and authentic voice so that young children can be develop metacognitive skills as they reflect and share perspectives. The use of similar methods by schools may encourage promotion of authentic and inclusive family voice in school, perhaps more than 'representative' parent councils (Robinson & Harris, 2014). When schools and families become fully aware of their interdependent but separate responsibilities towards children's learning, the more likely their partnership in children's education will become equitable.

Conclusions

Research posits that parental engagement is still a vague concept in the minds of teachers and parents, and that control over its meaning still resides more with schools (Crozier, 2007; Kim, 2009; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Goodall, 2018; Tan, 2019). This study challenges schools to understand and better appreciate the nature and value of parental or family

engagement in children's learning at home. Authentic pupil voice and ethical methods have provided the tools to gain clearer insight. Widening understanding of parental engagement to incorporate value for 'family engagement' in children's learning at home may help challenge some of the negative and static assumptions that schools can hold about parental capabilities in disadvantaged areas (Crozier, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Kim, 2009; Tan, 2019). The use of similar ethical approaches and methods to those used in the study, would seem essential and practical for schools to consider for home/school policies and practice as schools aspire to become more socially just and inclusive communities of practice.

Limitations of the Study

The Covid-19 pandemic restricted opportunities to triangulate perceptions about learning at home with parents and teachers. Further, it is recognised that case study research presents challenges regarding the generalisability of the findings to emerge from the study. Bassey (1999) shows that case study research is primarily interpretivist in nature, and the generalisations that can be made from large-scale quantitative, scientific studies, underpinned by positivist perspectives, cannot apply here. However, he argues that the findings from case study can generate 'fuzzy propositions'- 'a qualified generalisation, carrying the idea of possibility but no certainty' (Bassey, 1999, p. 46). As such, the findings from this study could be said to inform situations of a similar nature. Adherence to the principles of ethical research, as described by Bassey, pp. 74-77, guided the conduct of the study. The data analysed represents these children's perceptions, at this time. The study gives us an example of what learning at home can look like in one disadvantaged urban area in Scotland. The clear insight demonstrated by the children may give schools pause for thought as to their own perceptions of what and how families teach and learn from each other at home. Hopefully, it will discourage narrow views of what parental engagement in children's learning at home looks like in their own areas, and, particularly in areas of deprivation.

Areas for Future Investigation

It is already known that as children age, they are less keen to see their parents involved with school (Baker, Timperley et al, 2016) and earlier studies show parents have less confidence in their abilities to support their children in secondary education (Harris & Goodall, 2007). However, previous research also recognises that young people value their parents' involvement and interest as they progress through the secondary years (Harris & Goodall, 2007). The potential loss of parental agency in secondary school/home relationships makes the influence of family engagement at home more crucial for secondary schools to appreciate and support. Therefore, investigation of the barriers to and facilitators of parental/ family engagement in secondary pupils' learning in the home would be of value. Further exploration of the concept of family engagement at home may also open up thinking about the nature of learning in the home environment and the role of children in their own development.

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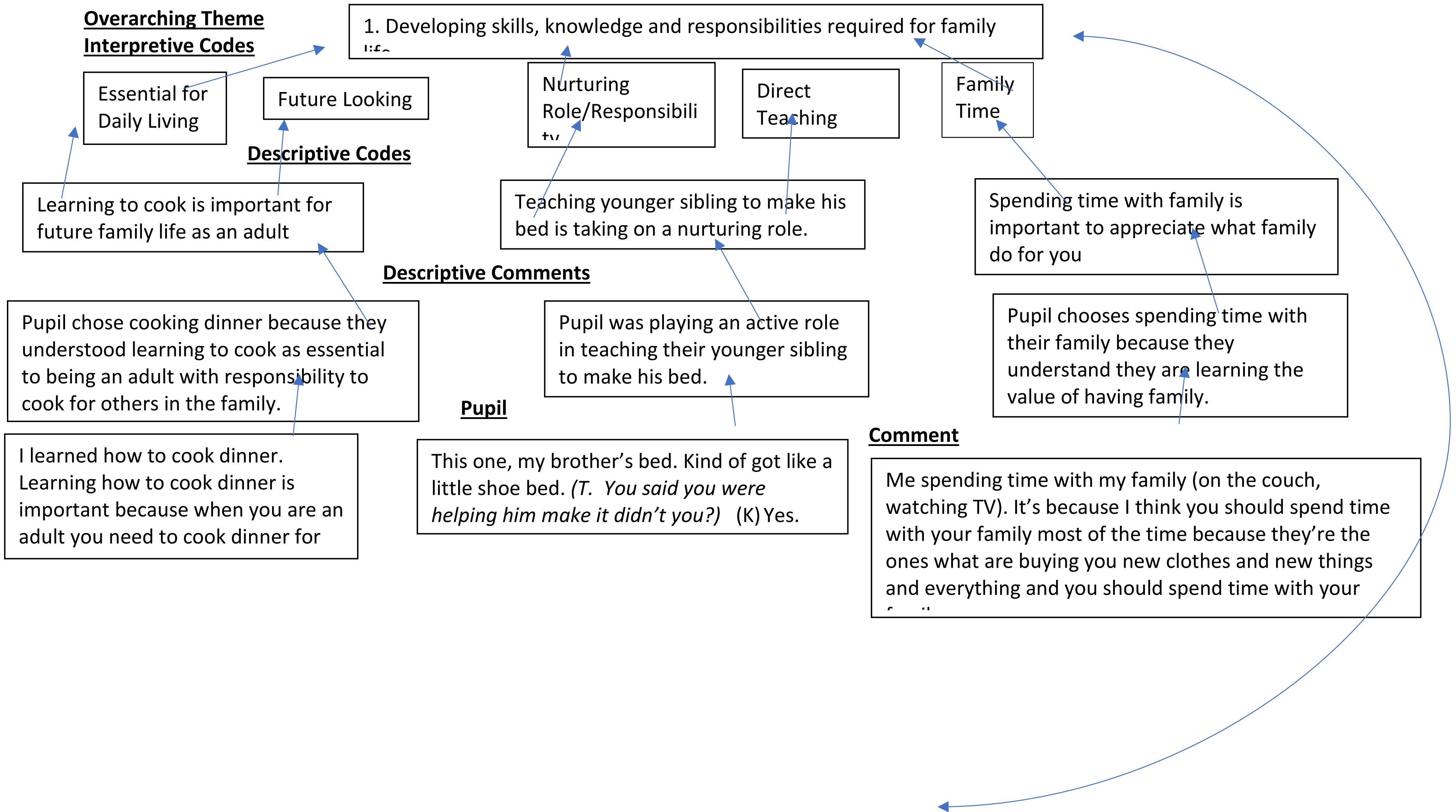
Figure 1a examples of diamond ranking

Figure 1b more examples of diamond ranking


Overarching Theme
Interpretive Codes
1. Developing skills, knowledge and responsibilities required for family life
Essential for Daily Living
Future Looking
Nurturing Role/Responsibility
Direct Teaching
Family Time
Descriptive Codes
Learning to cook is important for future family life as an adult
Teaching younger sibling to make his bed is taking on a nurturing role.
Spending time with family is important to appreciate what family do for you
Descriptive Comments
Pupil chose cooking dinner because they understood learning to cook as essential to being an adult with responsibility to cook for others in the family.
Pupil was playing an active role in teaching their younger sibling to make his bed.
Pupil chooses spending time with their family because they understand they are learning the value of having family.
Pupil
Comment
I learned how to cook dinner. Learning how to cook dinner is important because when you are an adult you need to cook dinner for
This one, my brother's bed. Kind of got like a little shoe bed. *(T. You said you were helping him make it didn't you?)* (K) Yes.
Me spending time with my family (on the couch, watching TV). It's because I think you should spend time with your family most of the time because they're the ones what are buying you new clothes and new things and everything and you should spend time with your family

Authentic Partnerships	•Empowerment-orientated, based on equal power relations: parents are seen through a strengths-based perspective with a pro-active participatory approach adopted.
Traditional Partnerships	•The school lies at the heart of partnership: a more respectful and collaborative relationship but there is no coherent strategy to promote parental engagement nor to develop staff in this regard.
Nominal Partnerships	•One-way: the school is seen as the imparter of knowledge and parents the recipients of information, with reality and truth seen as objective, re-inforcing power differentials.