Department of Education, University of Oxford

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A qualitative study of teachers' perspectives regarding the integration of home-school link applications into their practice.

Joshua Denton

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Abstract

Focus:

As the importance of engaging parents is widely acknowledged by schools and the steep rise in use of home-school link applications within schools, there is a need for research to begin to focus on these home-school link applications. Teachers are now responsible for integrating these applications into their practice. This study focuses of providing these teachers with a voice as they attempt to integrate homes-school link applications into their practice. Furthermore, it to consider the perspectives of teachers who are yet to implement a home-school link application in to hear to aspirations, expectations and concerns regarding the integration these applications.

Research design:

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were selected as the data collection method to answer the proposed research question. 17 interviews were undertaken including a mixture of teacher and SLT members and from a range of schools and year groups. These participants represent two distinct groups, those who were yet to implement a HSLA and those who had already implemented the application. Following the interviews, the data was coded using inductive and deductive coding.

Findings:

This study argues, teachers view the Senior Leadership Team's vision and ethos as a vital factor in the successful integration of a home-school link applications. Furthermore, pressure from the Senior Leadership Team, is the largest pressure teachers experience while using HSLA although those who are yet to implement a home-school link application consider time pressures as a key factor when integrating home-school link application. When teachers consider how they use home-school link applications in their practice, they consistently believed viewing other teacher's post leads to them developing their practice.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of home-school link applications into teaching practice has the potential to revolutionise the way in which schools engage with parents. The meteoric rise of home-school link applications in the last 6 years has been remarkable. For example, in 2016, 3 million teachers and 35 million pupils across 180 different countries were using ClassDojo (Williamson, 2015). While ClassDojo is the biggest home-school link application (HSLA), it is simply one of a growing arsenal of applications that aim to help schools with engaging parents – other notable apps include Homeroom, Ejucomm and Edjunction. With the uptake of the HSLAs occurring so rapidly, research into these HSLAs lags the implementation of these application within schools. In contrast to the mass of literature on older methods of parental engagement, there are only a small number of high quality studies that focus specifically on introducing an application to engage with parents.

Many teachers are nevertheless required to integrate a HSLA into their teaching practice, and it is crucial that their voice is heard in this process: what are the benefits of using an app? What are the challenges that they face in integrating an app into their day-to-day teaching? What additional pressures might it bring to the profession? With the spread of HSLAs still ongoing, it is also interesting to contrast the thoughts, concerns and aspirations of those who are yet to implement an app in their school with those who have experience of doing so. Providing a voice to these teachers will hold major benefits to the rest of the educational community. Firstly, this research will allow us to better understand the dynamic pressures facing teachers before they integrate a HSLA along with comparing these to concerns raised after

implementation has occurred. Furthermore, this research will highlight where future practice concerning the integration of HSLA should be maintained or adapted to better support teachers. This in turn should strengthen school parental engagement policies to better engage parents and ensure more children benefit from having truly engaged parents. Finally, the opportunity for developers to learn from teachers should allow the better development of applications in the future to better suit the needs of teachers and the ways they use the application.

The literature uses two terms to describe engaging parents: parental involvement and parental engagement. Parental involvement is parents joining in with school activities (Goodall, 2013). This study prefers the term parental engagement and uses it throughout. As Goodall & Montgomery (2014) suggest, the term 'engagement' should encompass more than just participating in activities in a school. Instead, engaged parents have some feeling of ownership over the activities and communication they have with schools. While HSLAs offer teachers the opportunity to share with parents the learning that is happening throughout the school. They also often allow parents the ability to initiate communicate with the teacher either privately or publicly about topics they feel are important to their child, allowing some agency and ownership to be placed with the parents.

This paper begins with a detailed review of the literature in the parental engagement field and demonstrates how the study adds to the current body of literature. This review provides the background to the study and discussing issues including the benefits of engaging parents,[1] why some parents are still struggling to engage with schools and the benefits and drawbacks of current methods of engaging parents. This will be followed by an explanation of the methodological approach used to conduct the study. The Methodology

[1] This dissertation uses "parents" for brevity but it is intended to encompass parents, guardians and anyone else who may take an interest in the child's education.

consisted of conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews, utilising a sampling strategy and carrying out data analysis using inductive and deductive codes. Furthermore, this section will discuss the limitations of these approaches and detail how the study aimed to minimise the effects of these limitations. Next, within the Findings section, the six themes which emerged from the data analysis and their links to one another are presented. These themes include implementation, aspirations and expectations, pressures, Senior Leadership Teams, continuing professional development and parent-teacher relationships. Finally, the Discussion chapter develops these themes further and explores their impact upon future teaching practice.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This section will review the currently literature regarding the engagement of parents. It will explore the many available methods of engaging parents and provide the background to more specific discussion regarding HSLAs. It will be divided into six sections. Initially this section will outline the social constructivist perspective upon parental engagement. This section will then explore the continuum between parent information, where parents are passive recipients of information from the school, to involvement whereby they participate at the request of the school, to engagement, where they exercise agency and choose to approach teachers and discuss their children's learning. Next, this review will outline the benefits of engaging parents. The fourth section will focus upon the range of available methods that schools have used to engage parents, ranging from newsletter to phone calls and text messaging. Finally, this chapter will introduce home-school linking technology in more detail.

2.2 A social constructivist perspective on engagement

Parental engagement can have a significant impact on a child's academic achievements and social development (Fan & Chen, 2001; Grabbe, Sylva, Hunt, & Barreau, 2004; Macbeath, Galton, Steward, Macbeath, & Page, 2005). From a social constructivist viewpoint, this would be a natural consequence. A social constructivist, such as Vygotsky (1978), believes that learning occurs through social interactions: through sharing experiences and communicating ideas to one another, humans construct an understanding and internalise knowledge. Learning in the home adds to the learning undertaken at school with one's

peers. As parental engagement informs parents of where a child is in their learning, and what subjects they are currently studying, a seamless link is created between in-school and at-home learning and encourages a dialogue between parents and children about their learning, which strengthens the learning undertaken at school. In addition, a social constructivist viewpoint finds learning relies on an understanding of the cultural and contextual background of a piece of knowledge. As parental engagement ensures parents and teachers are providing similar cultural and contextual reference points, Olmstead (2013) believes that parental engagement is crucial to learning and this explains the need for parental engagement in schools.

2.3 Agency

However, parental engagement should not be viewed as a linear process and one in which can be pushed forward by the school alone (Goodall, 2013). Instead parental engagement must be viewed as a continuum, with no parental involvement, parental involvement and parental engagement all at different points along the continuum. Importantly, schools may move forwards and backwards along the continuum throughout the year (Goodall, 2013). At the heart of this boundary between the 'parental involvement' point of the continuum and the 'parental engagement' section of the continuum lies parental agency. Emirbayer & Mische (1998) describe agency as decisions which are informed by past events to change present or future events which crucially rely on some element of choice. At one end of the parental engagement continuum, where parents are simply being given information and asked to participate in events, the agency lies with the school. However, when parents are independently approaching teachers to discuss their children's learning or clarify their understanding of the information given out, the parents are providing the agency. Until this parental agency and school agency is recognised by both parties, an equal home-school partnership cannot be attained (Groves & Baumber, 2008). Lawson, (2003) and Henderson and Berla

(1994) argue that schools currently view engaging parent through a school-centred lens rather than considering the needs of parents. Schools and headteachers often claim working parent-school relations to be a 'partnership' albeit a partnership where schools can impose their views and rules on parents rather than operating as an equal coalition (Alldred, David, & Edwards, 2002).

2.4 Benefits of engaging parents

The ancient proverb that "it takes a village to raise a child" appears to be very fitting when considering engaging parents with schools. The main body of evidence demonstrates that engaging parents has a positive effect upon academic achievement. While there are many variables that may affect a pupil's academic achievement, there is a clear causational link between parental engagement and academic achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001). Huat See & Gorard (2015:360) carried out an extensive review of research focusing on parental engagement from pre-school upwards. The authors conclude that this body of evidence is now so strong, "there is considerable evidence that parental interest and involvement in their child's education are associated with…educational outcomes. This is true from pre-school upwards." Pure academic achievement is not the only positive effect that engaged parents have on students. Studies have highlighted dropout rates are lower when parents are engaged and there are less requests for special education needs (SEN) places.

2.3.1 Academic benefits

The improvements in pupils' overall academic achievement, as well as achievement in specific subjects, as a result of effective parental engagement strategies have consistently been demonstrated in research. Desforges & Abouchaar's (2003) and Gutman & Midley's (2000) research, for example, demonstrate that when parents of high school students are kept up-to-date with their child's learning, the average pupil achieves a higher GPA. On the other hand, Izzo, Weiddberg, Kasprow, & Fendrich (1999) demonstrate a rise

in academic achievement in specifically maths and literacy. Fan & Chen, (2001) produced a meta-analysis to determine the correlational link between parental engagement and academic achievement. The authors found 2,000 studies which focused on the parental engagement field. However, only 25 of these produced their own quantitative findings of a high enough standard to be included in Fan & Chen's (2001) study. The research concludes that the correlation coefficient between parental engagement and student's academic success is 0.30 or 30%. To put this another way, if we assume a child's academic achievement is a line along a time continuum with success at the top and failure at the bottom of the graph, parental engagement would increase the height of this line by 30% (Fan & Chen, 2001). Importantly, similar findings have been shown throughout all ages of school (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Grabbe, Sylva, Hunt, & Barreau's (2004) study demonstrates better academic outcomes for early years' pupils when their parents are engaged. More recently, Berlinski, Busso, Dinkelman, & Martinez (2016) texted parents of elementary school pupils in order to keep them engaged in the school and produced similar results to Grabbe et al., (2004). With such a strong body of research highlighting the importance of parental engagement for the achievement of primary aged pupils, the research questions were refined to specifically target primary school pupils and build upon this growing body of knowledge.

2.3.2 Dropout rates

Whilst research clearly demonstrates a strong link between engaged parents and academic achievement, there is a similar unfortunate link between parents who fail to engage with teachers and schools and increased dropout rates amongst pupils (Bacolod, 2001). Rumberger (1995) carried out a large multi-level analysis of school dropout rates among middle school pupils. The researchers used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey and assessed different risk factors to calculate their effects on pupils dropping out of education. The data highlights the importance of parents engaging with the

school when trying to encourage pupils to stay in education. Pupils who choose to dropout of schools do so for a multitude of reasons including boredom and a perceived lack of relevance (Bridgeland, Balfanz, Moore, & Friant, 2010). However, parents whose children dropout of education regularly state that earlier communication from the school would have persuaded them to engage at an earlier stage and may have helped preventing the pupil from dropping out (Bridgeland, Diiulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008). Montecel (1993) worked with hundreds of schools and concluded that schools that engage parents with the child's learning and school decision-making were the most successful at ensuring pupils did not choose to leave of formal education. Consequently, while schools which effectively engage parents obviously raise their pupils' achievements, they can also help prevent pupils from dropping out.

2.3.3 Special educational needs placements

A similar finding concerns the demand for SEN school placements. If parents engage in a two-way conversation with the school focusing on how best to support the child in a mainstream setting, the demand for SEN places drops significantly (Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Furthermore, Lally, Mangione, & Honig (1988) demonstrate that early intervention with low-income families can help not only with school retention rates but also decrease the number of SEN places required for students. Marcon (1998) similarly found that early conversations between parents and schools lower SEN place requirements. Throughout her research, Marcon looks at the positive impacts of implementing a home school relationship from children starting school in kindergarten. Allowing pupils with SEN to maintain their place in a mainstream school comes with a host of benefits, including children being provided with the opportunity to create social and emotional relationships with a range of local students, creating an atmosphere of tolerance within the classroom and teachers self-report improvements in their teaching ability

(Macbeath et al., 2005; Westwood, 2003). While attempting to fully include all pupils in mainstream school is currently an inappropriate suggestion, should there be some opportunity to ensure the inclusions of more pupils who might otherwise be schooled in an SEN setting, than this can only be a further benefit of encouraging parental engagement.

2.3.4 Limitations of research findings

Despite the wealth of findings regarding the positive effects of engaging parents in their child's learning, there are two clear limitations within the field. Firstly, many of the findings rely on a correlation between the two variables to draw their conclusions rather than demonstrating a causational link. Despite this concern, some papers have focused on proving a causational link between the two variables. For example, as shown above, Fan & Chen (2001) successfully prove a causational link between the two variables through the use of meta-analysis. Secondly, while the field focuses on parental engagement, few research projects define parental engagement in the same terminology. 'Parental engagement' methods can mean anything from a one-way newsletter to a daily telephone dialogue. And an 'engaged parent' could mean a parent who actively discusses and encourages learning with their child or a parent who participates more generally in school life. This variety in terminology between the studies limits the value of the overall picture they create and we must bear this in mind when discussing the potential positive impact of engaging parents in the school community.

2.4 Unengaged parents

While many parents do actively participate in their children's school learning, there are still some parents who choose not to engage with their child's school. With successive UK governments strongly encouraging schools and parents to engage with one another, it is surprising so many barriers to effective engagement persist. Many of these barriers revolve around parents feeling

uncomfortable or unable to approach a teacher (Epstein, & Sanders, 2006). Teachers on the other hand believe they are unprepared to create and maintain professional relationships with parents (Epstein, & Sanders, 2006).

A lack of time from both parties is often reported as one of the major barriers to parents engaging with schools. Muscott, Szczesiul, Berk, Staub, & Perry-Chisholm (2008) conclude that parents feel they do not have enough time to maintain a relationship with their child's teacher and therefore fail to ever create one. Gettinger & Guetschow (1998) and Lopez (2001) reported similar findings, arguing that parent's individual resources were the biggest single barrier to parental engagement. On the other hand, Anderson & Minke (2007) surveyed 202 parents questioning why they choose to become engaged with their child's school. Most parents in the study carried the firm belief it would benefit their child for them to be involved in the school community. Interestingly a lack of time or child care commitments did not regularly factor in their decision to become involved in the school community. The difference in results between Anderson & Minke (2007) and other research such as Muscott et al. (2008) maybe down to a difference in agency demonstrated by the parents in the studies. Whilst the participants in the Anderson & Minke (2007) study selected parents because they had already chosen to become involved with their child's school, the Muscott et al. (2008) study analysed data from a group of participants who were not engaged with the school and so had not yet demonstrated the same level of agency.

Cultural differences are another key hurdle when attempting to engage parents. Crozier & Davies's (2007) study demonstrates how parents from different cultures often view schools as difficult to reach, with many schools failing to adapt their school's policy to acknowledge the challenges such cultural differences are creating. Furthermore, it is not the cultural norm in every culture to engage with a school at all; instead school is viewed as completely separate from the home environment, meaning that parents fail to

recognise the emphasis placed upon parental engagement within the new culture (Sánchez & Alemán, 2011).

As well as a cultural difference, language often plays a key role in creating barriers to parental engagement (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011). Schools in the UK often converse with parents solely in English. If the English reading and speaking skills of the parents are limited, their ability to decipher the information sent by the school is also limited. The necessity of a translation creates another barrier to effective parental engagement.

Furthermore, school sometimes carry negative attitudes towards specific parents, meaning the parents often engage with the school less (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Kim & Schneider, 2005). This unusual barrier regularly goes unchallenged by schools (Kim & Schneider, 2005). These judgements are often unfairly based upon the parent's social capital (Feiler, Greenhough, Winter, Salway, & Scanlan, 2006; McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown, & Lynn, 2003). As well as school having a negative attitude towards parents, parents could also have negative attitudes towards schools. Parents have not necessarily had a good personal educational experience and can have emotional anxieties about returning to the school environment (Nieto, 2010). Therefore, these negative experiences from parents lead them finding it emotionally difficult to approach the school themselves. Furthermore, Williams, Williams, & Ullman (2002) report sixteen percent of parents are scared of breaking an undefined boundary between parents and teachers.

It is important for schools to develop a strong engagement strategy which drop negative conations associated with specific parents, make engaging as least time consuming as possible and break culture and language barriers to encourage all parents to engage with their child's school learning. One method of engaging these parents would be through technology as it provides parents

with the opportunity to gain information and engage with the school without having to step foot inside the school itself.

It is also vital that this paper recognises that parents who don't engage with the school links are not 'bad parents' as they are sometimes (Hong & Ho, 2005; Jackson & Remillard, 2005; Michael A Lawson, 2003b). A child's learning does not cease when they leave the school gate. Instead, their learning continues in all environments the pupil experiences (Bamberger & Tal, 2008). Consequently, parents may be helping their child learn in a different environment and might not be able to physically or socially access the school. While parental engagement with schools is important for the development of the pupil, just because a parent is currently failing to engage with the school does not mean they are a bad parent or don't care about their child's learning. Instead, the school should view this as an opportunity to educate both the parent and pupil in the importance of engaging in the child's education at school as well as home.

2.5 Methods of engaging parents

There is obviously a variety of methods that schools employ to try and ensure that they are engaging their pupil's parents. The research shows that schools frequently take the initiative to engage parents in their children's learning, demonstrating an abundance of agency from school. Unfortunately, it has also been shown that the information parents receive from school is sometimes unclear and incomprehensible (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Furthermore, with schools using a mixture of methods to engage parents the already confusing information is travelling through a variety of methods making it difficult for parents to re-check information. This section attempts to outline the main methods of communication between schools and home along with highlighting some of their benefits and challenges.

Most traditional forms of communications sent out by schools are written and distributed en masse. These communications can take various forms including newsletters, welcome sheets and information regarding trips and events. However, these rarely provide sufficient information about learning and are also nearly exclusively a form of one-way communication. Williams & Cartledge (1997) describe letters as an adequate way of engaging parents. However, with little or no opportunity to reply, it leaves many parents becoming "lurkers" and displaying a complete lack of agency on the parents behalf (Blau & Hameiri, 2012: 702). A way of encouraging parents to engage with written communication is through home-school link books (Davern, 2004). However, Davern (2004) also points out the pitfalls of using such a technique, including the necessity for teachers to carefully balance good and bad news and the potential for parents to misunderstand information. Furthermore, home-school link books are time consuming for teachers and still requires a good level of reading ability on the parent's part to comprehend the content.

Slightly more recently, schools have opened a dialogue with parents through telephone calls. Gustafson (1998) called each child's parents at least once a week to update them on their child's work. The author noted that this was an effective way of learning about the home life of the pupil and better placed her to make positive relationships with the child. Kraft & Rogers (2015) and Kraft & Dougherty (2013) carried out similar research projects calling parents daily. Kraft & Dougherty (2013) conclude that children whose parents were receiving daily phone calls on averages were 40% more likely to complete their homework, and made the pupils 15% more likely to participate in a lesson. The authors conclude there are three main reasons why these positive results exist: "stronger teacher-student relationships, expanded parental involvement, and increased student motivation" (Kraft & Dougherty 2013:199). Once again, this approach of constantly informing the parents of the child's progress and what

they are focusing on in school was shown to increase the child's academic achievement. However, calling parents every day could be considered impractical for teachers. Furthermore, it relies on finding a convenient time for both parties, which may not always be possible.

With the rise of automated systems and cheap text messaging, texting parents to keep them informed on their child's attendance and grades has become a more common method of keeping parents up-to-date with their child's schooling. Bargman & Chan (2017) ran an experiment in 22 middle and high schools, where parents were texted when the children missed classes, failed to hand in homework or received a grade in a class. For the parents who received the text messaging service, their children were 38% less likely to fail and 17% more likely to show up to lessons. These results were increased when the pupils originally achieving a below average GPA. These positive results have been repeated in several studies which all focus on an automated text messaging service to encourage parental engagement (Bergman & Leopold, 2015; Castleman & Page, 2017). Berlinski, Busso, Dinkelman, & Martines, (2016) have found similar results in primary aged pupils in Chile. The authors sent text messages to a random sample of 1500 pupil. The study found the text messages improved overall behaviour in children. However, the most interesting finding from this research is texting parents had effect on all the pupils in the class, not simply the pupils whose parents were being contacted. Although text-messaging services offer the possibility of sharing personalised information with parents, it still relies on agency on behalf of the school while encouraging the passive consumption of information that Goodall & Montgomery (2014) warn against. Furthermore, although text messages offer the possibility of sharing personalised information with parents, teachers are overwhelmingly against providing a mobile number for parents to contact them on as they are worried about the amount of messaging they would receive (Olmstead, 2013).

Most recently, emails and applications have allowed school to quickly share multi-media information on pupils' learning to parents. Ho & Kwong (2013) suggests that applications and sharing digital information with parents can be a way of instantly involving parents with their children's learning through sharing pictures and videos. The practice of sharing videos and pictures of pupils learning with parents may help highlight how practice has changed since they themselves attended schools and consequently encourage them to use best practice in the home environment (Blau & Hameiri, 2012; Merkley, Schmidt, Dirksen, & Fuhler, 2006). Bouffard (2008) carried out a major research project, using the national database, concentrating on over 14,387 16 year-old-pupils. This showed those whose parents used technology to keep in contact with the school achieved better results on average two years on. overall, schools should be encouraged to take several approaches to engaging parents as one size does not fit all when it comes to encouraging parents to engage with their children's learning (Crozier & Davies, 2007).

2.6 Home-school linking technology

Recently, schools have begun to move from emails, text messaging and phone call for a new generation of technological engagement strategies. These new strategies for parental engagement focus on mobile applications. HSLAs, use an internet connection to allow schools to share information between homes and the school environment in a two-way conversation on a mobile device. Many take further advantage of the digital nature of the technology and allow for the sharing of photos and videos. Nearly all HSLAs allow the information to be filtered by class or whole school while some allow for information to be filtered by individual children.

The current generation of HSLAs also have the potential to overcome some of the tensions between a teacher's desire to personalise the information they disseminate and the time pressure they are usually under. Through simple user interfaces, having all the information, photos and videos on the same devices

and increased functionality, these HSLAs are providing teachers with a simple solution to the tensions cause by personalisation. These applications provide a wide range of foci, with some particularly interested in behaviour (such as Class Dojo) while others prefer to look at learning within classroom (such as Homeroom). These applications are 'controlled' by the class teacher who will be responsible for posting the information on the application for the parents to view in their own time.

Mobile technology in the form of HSLAs may significantly aid schools in overcoming the barriers outlined above. Firstly, a lack of time on the parent's behalf is often cited as the main reason why they fail to engage with their child's school learning (Muscott et al., 2008). However, these applications collate all the relevant information, photos and videos shared by the school and allow the parents to quickly access them at a time convenient to them. Smith, Rudd, & Coghlan (2008) demonstrate how this technology can help sailing communities where parents are away for long periods of time but still wishes to be engaged with their child's learning. Secondly, the multimedia nature of the applications allows the school to at least partially overcome the language barrier. For parents who don't feel comfortable approaching the school due to their own previous experiences (Kim & Schneider, 2005) or feel the teachers are judging them for their lack of social capital (Feiler et al., 2006), these applications provide the parents with an opportunity to engage with their child's learning without having to directly contact the class teacher.

However, this is not to say simply placing a HSLAs within a school environment will certainly revolutionise parental engagement. Currently only 80% of adults in the UK have access to some form of internet (Ofcom, 2015). With parents from lower SES backgrounds generally being the group of parents who fail to engage with schools (Reay & Lucey, 2000; Sacker, Schoon, & Bartley, 2002), they are also the group least likely to have a home internet connection (Pew Research Center, 2015; Warschauer, Knobel, & Stone, 2004).

Since these applications heavily rely on a consistent internet connection, they could consequently fail to engaged the most unengaged group of parents. Finally, the frequent disconnect between teachers' aspirations for the technology and lived reality may prevent teachers from fully adopting the new technology (Convery, 2009; Selwyn, 2007). However, the current attempt at engaging parents has been continuing for the past 20 years with little fundamental change in approach. With schools constantly pursuing traditional methods of engaging parents, the power divide between the school, engaged parents and unengaged parents may be simply widening (Hanafin & Lynch, 2002; Vincent & Martin, 2000).

Furthermore, the assumption that schools, parents and pupils are naturally striving for the same outcomes and are willing to travel along the same road to achieve these is incorrect. Crozier (2001) and more recently, Crozier & Davies (2007) demonstrate that different parents often desire different outcomes for their pupils, let alone all parents striving for the same outcomes as all teachers and pupils. Consequently, it is imperative to know the desires of each interested party, before developing a whole school strategy.

2.7 Conclusion and research questions

Clearly there are academic and social benefits of engaging parents. Yet some parents are still struggling to engage for several reasons. HSLAs provide teachers with a place to store all the information shared for future reference and allow for teachers to share multimedia files in an efficient and safe manner. Furthermore, with sleek user-interfaces and functionality, HSLAs may reduce the amount of time spent on this administrative task. However, while the field of parental engagement is becoming increasingly saturated with research, the field has been unable to keep paces with HSLAs' rapid growth.

Consequently, schools are currently adopting these applications with limited knowledge of how to successfully implement these apps. With HSLAs reaching

huge popularity within the teaching community, there is now an urgent need to understand the factors effecting a successful integration of a HSLA within daily practice. This will help to ensure they are being used in the most effective way and will prevent teachers reaching the same barriers on multiple occasions. Furthermore, this type of study is needed to illuminate what extra pressures come with integrating HSLAs. Integration in this sense encompasses everything from this first idea of implementing HSLAs, to the training teachers receive before using HSLAs and the ways in which teachers begin to use HSLAs within their practice. Secondly, it is important to understand how teachers view these application fitting into their current practice to help the future training they receive, inform school policy on using HSLAs and help further develop HSLAs.

Therefore, this project aims to answer two crucial questions to help further develop the literature on the use and implementation of HSLAs.

Firstly, how do teachers see HSLAs integrating into their daily teaching practice?

Secondly, what do teachers view as the key factors that influence a successful integration of an application within their practice?

It is important to focus on primary education because parental engagement can make an enormous differences at this stage of a child's learning journey. Desforges & Abouchaar (2003:5) share a similar point of view arguing: "In the primary age range the impact caused by different levels of parental involvement is much bigger than differences associated with variations in the quality of schools. The scale of the impact is evident across all social classes and all ethnic groups." Consequently, primary schools were purposively selected as the focus of this study due to prior researching findings suggesting the positive benefits of parental engagement at the age. Furthermore, with schools expecting teachers to use and implement these HSLAs, it is crucial the teachers' voices are heard and better understood to help develop future

parental engagement strategies. In answering these two questions, the study will hopefully shape future strategies for designing and implementing home-school links and allow teachers to anticipate the pressures they may face.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 A qualitative research approach

With both research questions focusing on teachers' perspectives on HSLAs, the research design selected as most appropriate was qualitative interviewing. This research design allowed for the creation of an in-depth understanding of the use of HSLAs in an educational environment. Furthermore, the research approach allowed for the development of a new model to clearly explain and explore all the factors effecting a successful integration of HSLAs.

In-depth qualitative interviews were selected for many reasons. The flexibility of the approach was a significant benefit, as it allows for the investigation of emerging themes within the research (Maxwell, 2013). Further, the qualitative data gathered by interview is rich in detail and enables the provision of a thick description for the reader (Creswell & Hanson, 2007) – here this ensured the research gained a deeper insight into the perspectives of teachers. Although the flexibility gained was important to the project, it must be balanced effectively with some structure (Holloway & Wheeler, 2002) to ensure consistent coverage of the same range of topics across all the interviews.

3.2 Methods

Semi-structured interviews were selected as an appropriate data collection tool as the research questions focused on subjective ideas and their practical applications (Flick, 2009). The subjective views of teachers regarding how HSLAs are being used in the school environment was crucial to providing answers to the proposed research question. A semi-structured interview schedule was devised, creating a set of questions to ensure all participants were

asked roughly the same questions. The structure also allowed for flexibility to explore relevant issues as they emerged (Hoepfl, 1997; Singleton & Straits, 2010). The interview schedules were then pilot tested and consequently revised before being implemented in the main study. Overall, Senior Leadership Team (SLT) members and 12 teachers participated in the final interview. To ensure that the participants' time was used effectively, four of the interviews were conducted face-to-face in local schools while 13 of the interviews were conducted through synchronous online interviews, over Skype.

3.2.1 Synchronous online semi-structured interviews

Synchronous online interviews mimic traditional face-to-face interviews in as far as they allow for real-time responses from participants, with extensive involvement from both parties (James & Busher, 2012). Furthermore, using online interviews in this fashion also allows for spontaneity in answering questions along with the possibility of follow up questions (Chen & Hinton, 1999). This was considered especially important in this study as it preserved the flow of conversation, enabling the research to explore themes that emerged during the data collection.

When conducting interviews, it is important to consider how to develop a relationship with the participant (James & Busher, 2012). This development of a relationship is especially important during online interviews as the online environment may generate a sense of distance between researcher and participant, as well as a more limited ability to accurately perceive social queues from the other party (Orgad, 2005). Consequently, all the interviews were conducted with a live video feed. Furthermore, some of the participants were known to the researcher beforehand, often through a professional relationship developed over several years. Xie (2007) argues that these offline relationships are crucial to deciding whether the online interactions truly represent the participant as an individual. It is hoped that in this study the pre-existing professional and trusting relationship allowed the participants to be

honest and truly reflective about their experiences and thoughts regarding HSLAs.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as they afford the opportunity to fully understand the participants' views toward the subject along with the flexibility desired (Burgess, 1991; Singleton & Straits, 2010). This is critical to being able to answer both research questions, as they are about the participants' views on HSLAs. The choice of semi-structured interviews instead of structured interviews was a clear one. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher the opportunity to reflect on the participant's thoughts throughout the interview and then ask follow up questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Consequently, the flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews was deemed a major advantage. The semi-structured interview schedule also afforded the researcher the opportunity to ensure they did not forget a planned question in any of the interviews (Hoepfl, 1997; Warren, 2002). This function of the interview schedule was especially useful during the first few interviews, when momentary lapses in memory led to a reliance on the schedules. Finally, the predetermined nature of interview schedules coupled with a pilot study allowed for a reflection on the questions' ability to provide the study with the data necessary to answer the research questions.

3.3 Participant selection

Participants were both purposively selected and snowball sampled to take part in the study. Those selected to take part in the study were chosen after having previous professional conversations regarding HSLAs with them and they could provide a detailed insight into HSLA's use and integration. 45 requests for interview were sent with 18 participants responding agreeing to be interviews. Three of these participants were consequently deemed unsuitable as they either could not provide enough time or did not have detailed knowledge of the application being used in the school. Following the

interviews of two candidates, they mentioned that they had colleagues in the school who would be interested in being interviewed and these participants were consequently added into the study. In total, 17 participants were interviewed from a variety of schools, year groups (years 1 to 6) and 8 different local authorities. Six of the participants were selected as they were yet to introduce a HSLAs within their practice. The teachers within this study currently teach at schools with a diverse range of catchment areas. While some school mentioned their large English as an additional language (EAL) catchment area, others currently have a much fewer percentage EAL pupils than the national average. There were teachers from local authority schools, free schools and academies. Nearly all the teachers were teaching in one or two form intake schools although some were teaching in 3 forms or half form schools.

Unless there is significant reason as to why random sampling cannot be used, the technique should be employed even in qualitative studies (Mays & Pope, 1995). Consequently, random sampling was originally considered. However, as schools are difficult to gain access to, random sampling proved impossible as schools and teachers failed to respond to numerous request for participation. Furthermore, having completed the interviews, teachers who were purposively sampled through personal requests provided a high level of in-depth 'insider' information.

There were two different groups of teachers who participated in the study. The first group consisted of teachers yet to integrate a HSLA into their practice while the second group was teachers who had already implement HSLAs. This inclusion of two distinct groups of teachers within the study was a deliberate choice. These two groups provided the study with an enlightening comparison between the aspirations and concerns of those yet to integrate a HSLA, and the perspective of teachers who already had experience of the reality of using an

app and could inform the study whether this concerns had become a reality, or how they might be overcome.

3.4 Pilot study

Due to the replicability of an interview schedule (Graesser & McNamara, 2010; Kvale, 2008), a pilot study was undertaken on two current teachers who were using applications to contact parents. This pilot study was successful in highlighting some of the leading questions originally contained in the interview schedule. For example, the question "tell me about the pressures you have faced" automatically implies to teachers that they have experienced pressure while implementing a HSLA. Foddy, (1994) suggest this is one of the many advantages of conducting a pilot study and one which will automatically encourage a higher standard of trustworthiness in the final research study. The biggest advantage gained from the pilot study however was the ability to hone the questioning style used throughout the study. This helped to develop my self-confidence in questioning, which allowed me to probe further throughout the interviews whilst also remaining objective. It is this ability to be objective will encourage trust in the study and increase the level of academic rigour maintained by the study (Patton, 2015).

Along with the removal of guiding questions, ambiguities in the original questions were discussed with the participating teachers. This pilot study highlighted Treece & Treece (1986) argument that everyone interprets words differently. Consequently, by changing the wording of some of the questions, some of these ambiguities were removed from the study. One clear example of when the term 'marker of success' was interpreted differently or not understood during the pilot studies and the phrase was consequently changed to "how would you know when the application has become successful?" Chenail, (2011) argues that the value of this opportunity to remove any ambiguities cannot be underestimated. Should obvious ambiguities persist,

each participant could interpret the question differently and fail to ask for clarification, consequently providing a variety of different answers depending on their interpretation of the ambiguity. Finally, the pilot study helped ensure that no questions would harm any of the participants, which is ultimately the researcher's biggest responsibility (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

3.5 Data analysis

Combing through the data and coding it is a key part of answering the research question as it provides the researcher with the opportunity for deep reflection on the collected data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). To answer the research question posed, inductive coding was employed as the main method of coding, allowing the participant's voice to be heard throughout the project. Throughout this inductive open coding process, the text was analysed line by line with codes assigned to chunks of text (Saldaña, 2013). This process was completed manually to comprehend and disentangle the major themes from the rest of the data (Saldaña, 2013). By ensuring that each line was read throughout the open coding phase, the chance of missing key parts of data was minimised (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data and codes were then coded for a second time to further explore the relationship between specific participants and their views (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Saldaña, 2013). This second phase of coding, focused on deductive coding where codes from the literature, including Goodall's thinking regarding SLT and pressures, were explicitly sought within this study's data.

I used several techniques in the study to ensure there was high levels of reflexivity throughout (Cohen et al., 2011; Walford, 1998). First, below I discuss my position as a researcher and professional, as well as my personal beliefs and values, to allow the reader to understand my prior assumptions on the topic, consider my own subjectivity and enhance the rigor of the study (Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Peshkin, 1988).

Taking Peshkin's (1988) advice, I began to label my own possible subjectivities as 'I's' and noted their potential implications. Upon reflection three main I's were identified. Firstly, the 'Teacher I': having recently qualified as a teacher, I naturally valued their opinions and understood their opinions. On the face of it, this would be a valuable asset for this study. However, this meant I had to be careful to ensure I gave as much weight to the perceptions of the members of SLT featured throughout the study. The second I follows on from the first I which is 'Pressured I'. Having been a teacher, understood the demands from parents, SLT, other teachers and one's self, it was possible that the research focused too heavily on pressures felt by teachers. Finally, 'Technology I' became the third I. Having always been a strong advocate of technology enhancing education, it was imperative to not let these views influence the data analysis and instead ensure the Findings section accurate reflected the views of the participants.

Next, as one of the biggest risks in research is the findings being selectively analysed due to a lack of reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Robson, 2002), all the data was coded in full - ensuring that all potential themes were fully explored across all the data. Finally, a summary of each participant's views was created and given to the participant to ensure that the findings reflected their thoughts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.6 Ensuring quality and rigour

Obviously, for the research conclusions to be accepted as valid, its methodology must be critically assessed for trustworthiness. Ultimately, to uphold any quality and academic rigour any qualitative research project must combine trustworthiness, credibility, confirmability with data dependability (Shenton, 2004). Key to proving these four elements are present within any qualitative research study is demonstrating the study holds high amounts of validity.

Validity on the whole concentrates on the accuracy with which the data within the study has been collected (Walliman & Buckler, 2008). Validity within a study can be split into two main strands: internal validity, which focuses on the degree to which the instruments measure what they set out to measure, and external validity, which centres on the study's ability to generalise its findings and the representativeness of the data (Walliman & Buckler, 2008). Key to ensuring the internal validity of this study revolved around the pilot study, as has been discussed above, and the reflections after these pilots to ensure the interview schedule could gather data which would ultimately answer the research questions. External validity was a little harder to demonstrate throughout this small-scale study but has been clearly shown in two ways. Firstly, through providing copious amounts of thick, verbatim description from participants, the findings truly represent the participant's views (Slevin & Sines, 2000). Secondly, throughout the Discussion section, there is critical engagement with other literature, to clearly demonstrate how these findings, fit in with the wider literature (Sandelowski, 1995). This engagement maintains the external validity of this project by showing that its findings fits well with the conclusions reached by other studies.

High-quality conclusions can only be drawn from a study when reliability has been shown within the study (Yin, 2014). This reliability is solely dependent on being able to answer a single question: could a different author have drawn the same conclusion having conducted the same study, crucially, on the same participants (Yin, 2014)? Furthermore, Cohen et al., (2011:199) adds that reliability refers to "consistency and replicability over time, over instruments and groups of respondents." To achieve this reliability, two key steps were taken. Firstly, an interview schedule was designed to ensure all participants were asked questions around the same topics. Although it should be noted, as semi-structured interviews rely on their conversational nature, some of the phrasing regarding the questions may have differed between participants.

Secondly, through providing a comprehensive methodology section within the study and especially a detailed analysis section, another researcher would be able to follow the logical steps taken during the analysis to create the same themes presented within this study and ultimately reach the same conclusions.

3.7 Ethics

This study only carried a couple of small ethical concerns with regards to the participants. This research project was passed through the university's ethical board before being allowed to commence (Appendix 1). This process revealed a couple of ethical concerned which needed to be considered before commencing the data collection phase. For example, the difference in the power dynamics throughout the data collection phase (Morrow & Richards, 2007).

If the differences in power between myself and the participant had gone unaddressed, it had the potential to affect all the interviews. For example, Mayall (2000) and Fattore & Mason (2005) warn of participants potentially feeling the need to fabricate facts to please the researcher, quickly leading to inaccurate data being collected. This power differential was evident throughout the study with the most common question asked by participants being, "do you need me to give a specific answer to keep your research on track?" Consequently, the existence of a power differential needed to be recognised in the interview design, through providing an opportunity to become flexible and responsive whilst also reminding participant at the start about the nature of the study and there being no 'right' answer (Morrow & Richards, 2007; Pain, Francis, Fuller, O 'brien, & Williams, 2002; Thomas & O'Kane, 1998). Although this allowed for some of the power differential to be dispersed, it did not completely remove the concern and led to a reflection on power throughout the pilot study (Cohen et al., 2011; Luke & Gore, 1992; Morrow & Richards, 1996). To further attempt to prevent participants feeling

pressured to provide a specific answer, information was provided at the beginning of each interview which discussed the study's focus on their genuine perceptions.

Confidentiality and privacy for all participants was another ethical concern from the outset of the project. Consequently, the study assured anonymity for the teachers from the outset, to allow the participants to feel comfortable in sharing their non-public views (Cohen et al., 2011; Miles et al., 2014). Miles et al. (2014) warns that, while researchers aim to create anonymity for their participants, local people can often work out the participants and their views so studies should provide limited identifying features. Therefore, all names and job roles were removed during the coding process, the locations of the participants were not disclosed and gender-neutral pronouns are used throughout. Finally, all the participants were allowed the chance to view any sections which relay their views to raise any anonymity issues (Miles et al., 2014). These techniques aimed to instil confidence from the participants before the data collection began to ensure their true views were collected.

3.8 Limitations

A few limitations were identified throughout the methodology section and attempts made to mitigate them. It is imperative to recognise these limitations to allow the reader to determine the quality of the study. Firstly, James & Busher (2012) raise concerns regarding the complexity of using technology for online interviews. This complexity could dissuade potential participants from taking part in the study. However, technology has moved on a long way in the past eleven years and face-to-face interviewing technology, such as Skype, is now incredibly intuitive and user-friendly. Furthermore, due to the nature of the study focusing on the use of HSLAs, it was assumed, the participants would have a basic understanding of how applications work in general and how to use a video calling application.

Secondly, interview schedules assume everyone interprets language the same way and this could become a limitation throughout the study (Barriball & While, 1994; Treece & Treece, 1986). To mitigate this limitation, two steps were taken. Firstly, ambiguity was checked for throughout the pilot study (Graesser & McNamara, 2010) and the questions which were left open to interpretation were altered. Secondly, all participants were asked at the beginning of each interview if they were unsure on the wording of any question to clarify before providing an answer (Barriball & While, 1994). This happened several times throughout the study. Finally, the conversational style of the interview meant should the interviewee appear to not fully understand the question, there was scope for the researcher to clarify the meaning.

Finally, the over-prescriptive nature of the schedule can quickly become another limitation (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The first draft of the interview schedule provided participants with a list of 25 'closed' questions. This overly prescriptive interview schedule ran the risk of preventing the flow of a natural conversation throughout the interviews (Greeff, 2002). Having revisited the literature and consulted with colleagues, new interview schedules with 6-8 open-ended questions were devised. Achieving this fluid conversational format of interview is the sign of a well thought-through high-quality semi-structured interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Chapter 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Descriptive analysis of demographic

4.1.1 Participants

There were 17 participants in the study, 5 men (29.4%) and 12 women (70.6%). Six participants were newly qualified teachers, and 11 were more experienced. They work across 10 different primary schools. The schools vary in size, from half-form to three form intakes, and in school type: academies, free schools and local authority controlled schools. Participants taught a range of year groups, from one to six, along with a headteacher and deputy headteacher of an expanding two form intake school. The findings are thus divided into a group who will use HSLAs within the next academic year and those who already use HSLAs. This allowed for the exploration of teachers' aspirations for the HLSA prior to the implementation and how these aspirations change and adapt after a HSLA is introduced. Teachers who are currently using an application are identified by a lettering system (e.g. Teacher A); those who are soon to introduce an application are identified by numbers (e.g. Teacher 1).

4.1.2 Types of Application

Schools used a variety of applications to communicate with parents. 5 participants used texted-based apps which sent push notifications, often limited to 140 characters (for example Schoop). 8 participants used an app that allowed teachers to share photos and videos with parents, as well as text (such as Homerooms). 3 participants used an application, such as Class Dojo, which reports to parents on student behaviour as well as work. The teachers who were about to implement a HSLA into their practice were about to use a mixture of Homeroom and ClassDojo. Alongside the use of these applications,

all schools used other methods to communicate with parents, such as letters and newsletters, and 12 teachers said that they still value face-to-face conversations with parents.

4.2 Introduction to findings

Following the data collection phase of the study, I listened to the interview recordings several times and transcribed key quotes. From each interview, I created a document which I coded used inductive and deductive code. Five key themes emerged, which all linked to the theme of integration.

Expectations and aspirations and implementation form the two central pillars of this findings and analysis section. The theme of integration explores what conditions are required for a school to successfully integrate a HSLA along with how the school recognises what has been a successful implementation. SLT deserve a theme of their own as they are omnipresent appearing in every single interview and crucial for developing a clear vision for the app and implementation strategy. Next, the findings section explores the pressure created by this application and links this to the SLT in the school along with how it impacts on the teacher's original expectation of the application. Competition, is then explore and how HSLAs are encouraging teachers to become competitive within the school and adapt and change their teaching practice. Finally, I explore how the applications are allowing teacher to develop relationships with the parents of pupils in their class and how this is replacing fact-to-face conversations.

4.3 Themes

4.3.1 Expectations and aspirations

The first theme brought out by the interviews with the teacher who are yet to implement an application within their practice was their expectations for what the application might help them achieve in their relationship with their

students' parents. They had three main aspirations upon embarking upon use of a HSLA.

The most important expectation was that the app would enable teachers to keep parents informed of their child's learning on a more regular basis. For example, Teacher 1 commented

> "I don't think reports make sense and at the moment, that maybe the only written communication on learning some parents receive. Instead if they are drip fed the information I think parents would understand more of what is happening in the classroom."

Teachers similarly mentioned the ways in which HSLAs would help parents overcome the barriers of time, language and culture when trying to engage with their child's school. Teacher 3 mentioned that "the ability to share pictures will help those parents from different cultures who can't speak fluent English." Teacher 4 observed that "working parents who we don't see a lot would gain more than most from these applications." As Teacher 2 commented, "we need to find a way of engaging parents as the children get older" as those parents are less likely to come to the school gate as the children begin to make their own way to school. These comments indicate that teachers hope to be able to improve communication with these groups of parents that may be otherwise marginalised if schools rely on written communications or face-to-face contact with parents in the playground.

Teachers also expected that the information about learning communicated to parents may also be more varied in subject matter. Some teachers thought that non-core subjects that are "often pushed aside in parents evening and reports" (Teacher 3) might be highlighted using an app. Teacher 3 expanded upon this by saying that "I can see it becoming really important for non-core subject, I mean how useful would this be for P.E. so children can practice a dance at home or music and they can practice a certain skill?" Thus, a significant

expectation of introducing an app is that it may allow greater focus on non-core subject and encourage home practice of skills learnt in the classroom.

Finally, some of the participants hoped to 're-educate' parents through the HSLA to ensure both school and home were "singing from the same hymn sheet." Teacher 3 encapsulated the ideas of many other teachers, saying,

> "For example, the African children are taught a lot of maths at home but in a very different style to the way we teach it here. Parents would be coming in and saying I saw this and that is not how we teach it at home. I hope the application will allow parents to see how things have changed since they were at school."

This view was not in the minority and many participants saw the use of an app as an opportunity to show parents how "education has changed since they were at school" (Teacher 2). These views demonstrate an interesting power dynamic between teachers and parents. Teachers continue to view parents as un-informed and in need of re-education. This starkly contrasts with the aspirations of an open dialogue expressed above, instead demonstrating a desire for a top-down model of communication.

4.3.2 Integration

Figure 1 demonstrating the two-way link between Practice and Implementation
Direction of the arrows shows the direction of the effect.

Integration is the second theme at the core of the interviews. Here, I will explore how to integrate HSLA and how teachers define a successful implementation. This theme is central as teachers felt that, without successful integration, there is no need to discuss the impacts of HSLAs as their use has had no effect. For example, when asked about the importance of ensuring a smooth transition into using applications, Teacher A commented

> "because we didn't introduce the application to staff or parents enough, I don't think anyone outside of staff look at the application and so it doesn't actually matter what I post, the quality of what I post or how often I post."

Teachers who were yet to implement an app shared a mixture of excitement and concerns about the use of an app. They had some high expectations. But also, many concerns about implementation and how a successful integration should be defined. Time management and ensuring the app was in regular use were often mentioned. Teacher 1 stated that "remembering would be a problem. Once it becomes a routine then fine but it would be a challenge to be consistent in the first introduction phase." These concerns were raised by a range of participants. Headteacher 1 commented that "We live in an instant culture and people want it done now and teaching is not always like that." This concern meant that the school were worried parents would expect the information posted as soon as they asked for it or as soon as it happened in the classroom and this is not always possible. Consequently, Headteacher 1 suggested that "clear guidelines and expectations would have to be set out from the start in order that parents knew when to expect the information and to protect teachers' work life balances." This was considered important for the future integration of a HSLA.

Amongst those who already use an app, there were mixed opinions. Teacher I mentioned that "the ability to message all my parents in one go and pre-set

these messages to go out now ready for the end of term is great!" However, for others, remembering to keep the app up-to-date regularly was still a problem. Teacher A, who had used the application for a year, said that

> "this is simply a second thought at the moment and therefore I forget all the time. If I forget to do it my headteacher will email me but often this is the only way I will remember as it is always the last thing on my mind."

These quotes indicate that finding a means to ensure regularity of updates is a significant factor in a successful integration.

There were several key markers of success for teachers who were yet to implement an application. Firstly, instead of simply knowing how many people were accessing the application, teachers aspired to know "who is seeing our posts so that we can target those who aren't seeing our post" (Teacher 1).

Secondly, teachers desired to have follow-up conversations with parents to allow them to check who was accessing, reading, and understanding the information shared on the HSLA. Similarly, further conversations would allow teachers to discuss and clarify the information with parents. Teacher 2 summed this point up, commenting,

> "A successful parental engagement would require parents to acknowledge the information. Parents talking about what their children are learning, with pupils and the school, what the school is up to and parents coming the teachers and ask questions or just commenting they feel they know what learning going on in the school."

However, Teacher 3 commented that they already had this kind of conversation with parents and they did not want this to change after introducing the application: "Parents are coming up to you and saying thanks for doing that, we are doing this at home now. This is exactly the conversation

which should happen and I don't want these conversations to stop when we switch to an application." This idea of using face-to-face conversations as a marker of success is in direct contrast to aspirations of teachers stated above. Teachers above commented on HSLAs' ability to overcome barriers to engagement including time. However, their insistence on using face-to-face conversations as a marker of success will not allow them to see if the HSLA has overcome these barriers. Instead, teachers run the risk of simply measuring success through the communication with parents they would have spoken to anyway.

On the other hand, schools that have already implemented the application often wanted a more quantitative measurement for the success of implementations. Many of the teachers mentioned the school hoping to increase the parental engagement scores for Ofsted surveys along with the number of posts made by teachers with pressure coming from SLT when the regularity of use dropped. Teacher D summed this up, stating "I guess the SLT are looking at how often we post to determine if it is being successful or not. We are also due another Ofsted, fingers crossed not this year, but I guess that will show us if the parents think more of this way of communicating. Therefore, SLT will judge if it is successful by how well the parents respond." In other interviews, it was clear that they teacher and their SLT only cared about the viewing figure, rather than being interested in which parents were viewing the app. To highlight this, Teacher A claimed, "My headteacher ensures we always update certain sections of the application as they can tell that is where the most traffic is coming from."

Furthermore, while teachers wished for parents to come and speak to them about what they were posting on the application, sadly this aspiration was very rarely realised. Teacher 1 recounted that

> "I never get any feedback from parents and that can be really disheartening. I don't recall any backlash from parents regarding things which are posted but I just don't think parents care that much. Has it sparked a conversation between me and the parents? No, it really hasn't."

This experience was far from an isolated experience. None of the teachers currently using a HSLA reported parents coming to ask them about anything that was posted on the application. Instead one teacher (Teacher B) commented on getting more feedback about learning which is given verbally daily, saying, "parents never look at the application so why would they come and speak to me about it? Instead I meet with them in the playground, they ask the questions they have there and then and I can target specific parents."

4.3.3 Senior Leadership Team and Implementation

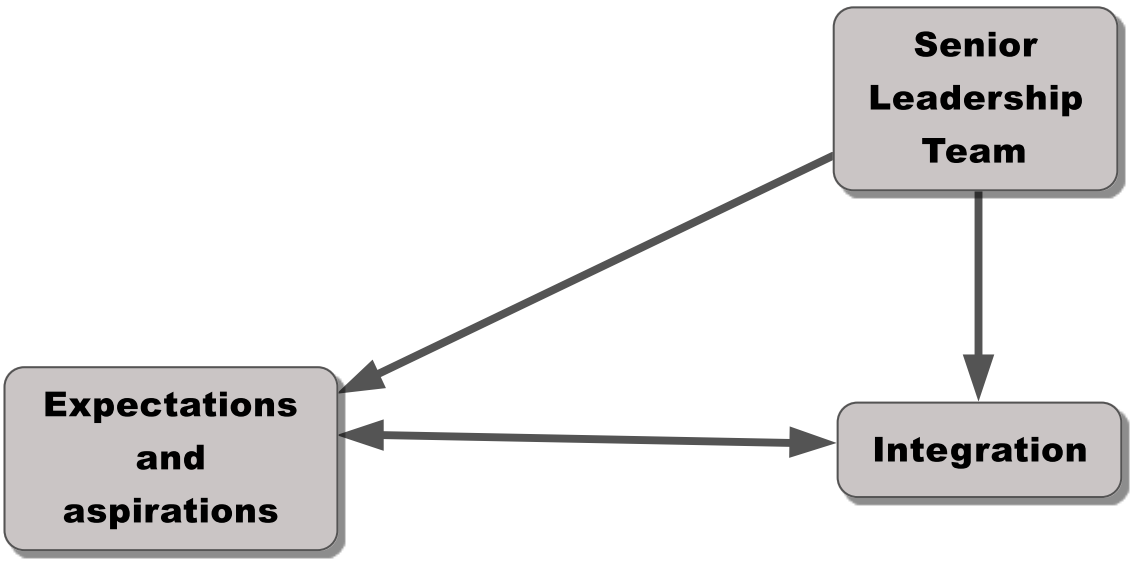

Figure 2 demonstrating how Senior Leadership have significant links to both practice and implementation.
Direction of the arrows shows the direction of the effect.

Every single participant discussed the imperative role SLT play in the school's use of HSLAs. This influence was present in the introductory stages and even more crucial for the continuing using of the application. This view was not only shared by teachers but SLT also had a very strong sense of how important their role was in shaping the use of the app. When asked "how much oversight do you believe the Senior Leadership Team must give when teachers are using a HSLA?" Headteacher 1 replied, "We need to, as a SLT, understand the ways we are communicating, know how to do it and the messages which are being sent…. I am finding out information from parents and that just makes the school look unorganised and non-communicative internally."

There was a clear feeling amongst teachers that these applications were always effectively implemented through a strong leadership within SLT. Should this clear vision not be present within the SLT team and instead the use of HSLAs be an optional 'extra' then incorporating applications within regular teaching practice rarely happens. Teacher B highlights this issue well, commenting,

> "Who knows when the last time it updated though there has been no pressure from the SLT the have much bigger problems in the school. SLT didn't care what I said or even if I said anything at all and that is probably why I and many other teachers never changed our practice."

Several teachers discussed training led by SLT to use the application and how to converse. This issue was a significant concern for teachers already using an app and those who were anticipating its introduction. The training extended beyond how to use the application. Teacher 1 spoke about the need for clear boundaries for teachers regarding the amount of usage and topics which should not be discussed through HSLAs. Teacher 1 stated that "During the training there would need to be examples and script so people can stay in a boundary. Clarity and specific rules." Furthermore, as Teacher 2 argued, "this would allow SLT to monitor and moderate our communications rather than

have to agree to every communication." Along similar lines, teachers look to SLT for expectations around a successful implementation and guidelines. As Teacher 4 commented, "We are going to need a really strong expectation especially around this time of year when data is due my head is just everywhere." Teachers overall expected two sets of guidance: firstly, around the regularity of posting and secondly clear guidelines of how to communicate through the app. However, teachers were also concerned around training for parents, claiming, "making sure parents know how to access these application is really important" (Teacher 4). This idea appeared to be particularly prominent as without parents using the application teachers would, rightly, consider it a waste of time.

SLT were not only important in the initial implementation but also in ensuring teachers maintain motivation to keep regularly posting on the application. Having introduced a HSLA at the start on the school year, Teacher A was beginning to feel no one was paying attention to the work posted on the application. When asked about the drive behind the continuation of posting, despite the lack of acknowledgement of the learning displayed on the application, Teacher A stated,

> "Part of me hopes it is being looked at although there is no indication that it is. It is really just an NQT hoping the head will acknowledge I am doing something they (SLT) have introduced and earn some brownie points."

However, the drive of SLT was more important that simply encouraging teachers to earn "brownie points." Teacher A also demonstrated the importance of a strong vision and direction from SLT to ensure the continuing use of an application, commenting, "The Headteacher is not so hot on it recently as she has other priorities and because she isn't reminding us we aren't doing it as often as I know she would like us to." This was a key theme

throughout the interview in which SLT would be heavily involved in the implementation stage of using an application and once their priorities had switched focus, teachers would almost immediately stop using the application either completely or at least update it with much less regularity.

4.3.4 Pressure

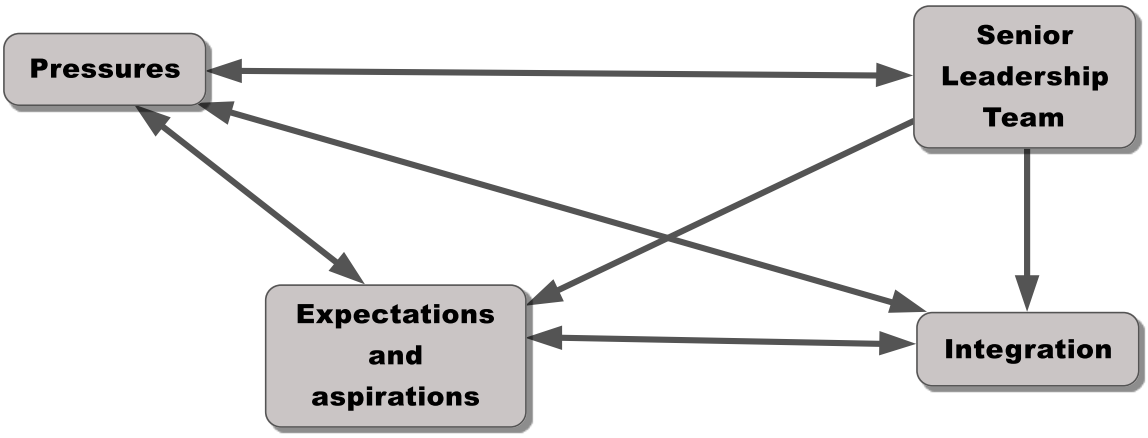

Figure 3 demonstrating the links Senior Leadership impose on pressures felt by teachers and the links between pressures and practice and pressures and implementation.
Direction of the arrows shows the direction of the effect.

Whilst teachers clearly expect strong input from SLT during the implementation stage, SLT are also considered key with respect to the amount of pressure to use an application felt by teachers. Furthermore, the link between pressure and implementation is two-fold. While time pressure and SLT pressure affect how much the application will be implemented into the teacher's practice, how well the application is implemented also affects the pressures felt by teachers.

There was a divide between schools as to the amount of oversight needed by headteachers throughout the school's use of the application. Headteacher 1 commented, “Currently, all messages that are coming from the school need oversight, it is such a formal thing going out. Things need to be checked and agreed. I find out about things from parents, that makes me and the school

look unorganised." NQTs were generally in agreeance with this stance who found SLT "useful" and "a clear learning opportunity as they can comment on the best way to 'pitch' something" (Teacher D). However, this view was not shared by everyone, especially more experienced teachers.

Time pressures were at the forefront of Teacher E's concerns. They stated that "There is always time pressure when using the application, I know everyone says it takes five minutes but it never does." They felt this was discouraging them from fully integrating the application into their practice due to the time pressures that come with it. Furthermore, Teacher F commented, "if it was implemented so that TAs could do it while we dismiss the class that would have been better, it would have saved me so much time." Teacher B said, "it is just another thing on my ever growing to do list." Meanwhile Teacher 5 shared a similar concern to that of Teacher E before even starting to use the application, saying, "it is never just going to be five minutes." Consequently, time pressure was a major concern for many teachers both using the application and those about to commence using the application.

Time pressure clearly affects the teachers' practice and is a concern of those who are yet to use an application. Furthermore, SLT are key to the effective practice and implementation of the application and yet they appear to lack the ability to reduce pressure felt by teachers and instead appear to increase the pressure felt by new teachers. Teacher A who has qualified within the last year spoke about the pressure felt by themselves placed on them by SLT, stating,

> "There is definite pressure knowing that SLT are expecting this and are going to look at it they really care, when I do remember to do it I know it will keep SLT off my case for another day and that is a massive relief."

Teacher A was not alone in speaking of the pressure created by SLT. Teacher C also spoke about pressure, however this time they commented on the

mounting pressure to ensure the communication always demonstrated perfect grammar and high levels of presentation, saying,

> "there has always been pressure to make sure communication with parents is perfect but now we do it daily - mistakes are always going to happen and it is like SLT have forgotten that."

While the amount of time using the application appears to have little impact on the pressure felt by teachers, those teachers who had been practicing longer tended to feel less pressure overall from SLT. Teacher F spoke about not feeling pressure from SLT to ensure the posts on the application were of a certain standard, commenting, "I know SLT look at everything but that doesn't create a lot of pressure for me personally." Similar views were shared by teachers who had been practicing for a couple of years but were yet to introduce the application within their practice. When talking around the pressure felt by SLT, Teacher 5, who had been teaching 5 years, stated "I would feel absolutely fine about SLT being able to see my communication with parents." While Teacher 3 saw SLT oversight as a learning opportunity rather than extra pressure,

> "I expect everything we send out will have to be check by SLT even if it is just checking that something makes sense. Everyone here is about getting better and improving and if SLT can do that then great."

This view was prevalent throughout the study and the only view which did not split between those who are already using the application and those who don't currently use the application. It potentially changes the nature of the communication through HSLAs. Suddenly, rather than focusing on personalised messages between individuals, it allows the school to develop a corporate identity and how this corporate entity communicates with parents. These views were never aired as aspirations yet teachers and SLT appear to adopt them once a HSLA has been introduced.

SLT and teachers in schools were SLT insisted one of them saw every single communication with parents before being sent, even through the application, found there was also a significant increase in time pressure for SLT after the introduction or worried this would become the case. Headteacher 1 for example commented, “I am fully aware I will become a bottleneck for communication and we need to find an alternative method to ensure SLT are kept in the loop but can manage work load.” Furthermore, Teacher 4 was already predicting the pressure which would be felt by SLT commenting, “if they (SLT) think they will be able to check every message sent nothing else will get done, there must be another way.” Those who had already implemented the application discussed similar concerns during the implementation phase but SLT quickly decided it was not possible to check every piece of communication. Teacher H encapsulated this idea shared by many participants, commenting, “at first SLT wanted to see everything written but this quickly became over bearing and the rule sort of fizzled out although never officially.” Clearly while SLT place a lot of pressures on staff to ensure the applications are being used in teaching practice in a certain manner, they quickly overcame the concerns of pressures being felt by the SLT themselves.

4.3.5 *Continuing Professional Development*

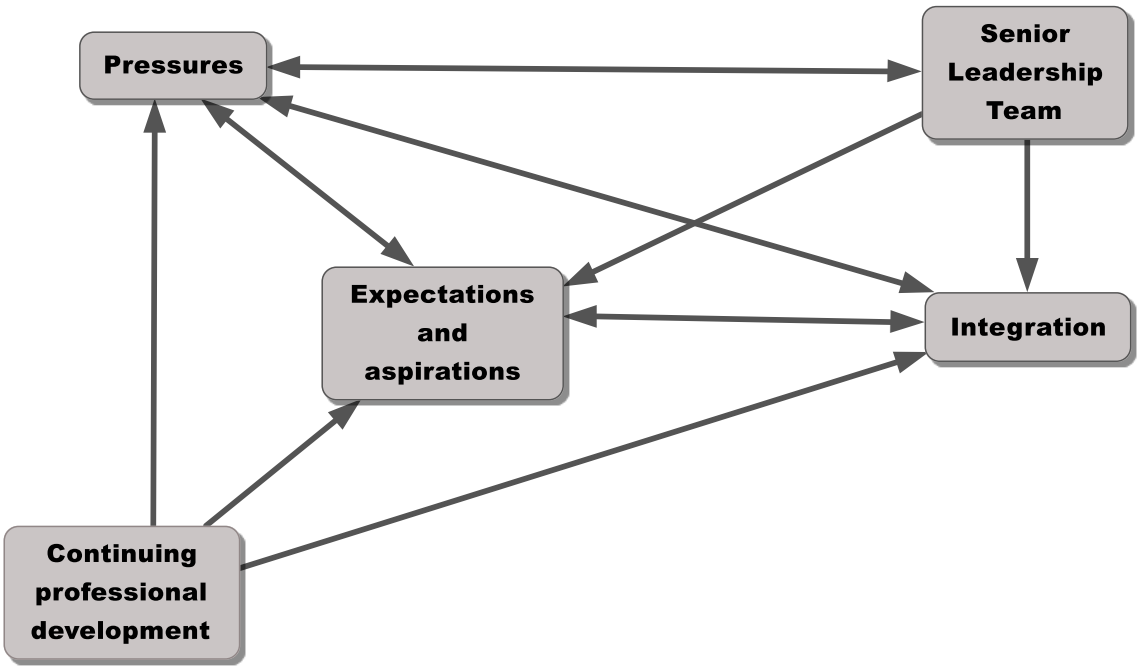

Figure 4 demonstrating the links between competition and practice and competition and pressures. Direction of the arrows shows the direction of the effect.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is a major theme that arose in the interviews. The theme of CPD outlines the feelings between teachers who look at each other's posts on an application and change their day-to-day teaching practice because of the competition that was felt by staff. While this sense of competition develops practice, and was widely acknowledged to add pressure for teachers, this pressure was generally felt to be appropriate as it would raise standards. This sense of competition was expected by teachers who had not yet implemented the application as they related it to previous experiences and felt it would develop their practice. Both Teacher 4 and Teacher 5 shared this view. As Teacher 5 commented, "it will keep the standards high but this will be a good thing. I am already always jealous of looking at other people's newsletters, it inspired me to change and develop my practice." Furthermore,

SLT predicted this sense of competition happening between teachers once an application was introduced. For example, Headteacher 1 argued that

> "teachers are always putting pressure on themselves and want to be seen to be doing well, when one teacher starts doing something they will all follow and I can't see this application being any different."

While this sense of competition was predicted by some of the teachers, nearly all the teachers who had already implemented the application spoke about changing their practice after seeing other teacher's work. To highlight this, Teacher F commented,

> "it effects both my use of the application and my teaching. I recall looking at another classes page and thought 'ahh this looks so cool' so instantly went to my page and updated it to look amazing it took all night. Then when I see amazing outdoor learning I start to reconsider my lessons for the next day… this application provides me with an unexpected spark of motivation towards my lessons."

However, some concerns were raised about the ability of the posts to reflect day-to-day teaching practice. Teachers already using the application admitted that "There is pressure from SLT but also from other teachers. I only put the more creative lessons on the applications for parents to see" (Teacher D). While those who had not already started using the application stated, "Of course I will only put up work and lessons of a certain standard, this application will reflect my ability as a teacher" (Teacher 2). These comments serve to highlight a more common theme discussed amongst several of the participants. They demonstrate how one cannot take what is posted on the applications as a true reflection of the actual day-to-day teaching happening within the classroom.

Clearly, HSLAs are not the only form of technological social CPD teachers use, instead teachers are increasingly turning to social media to develop their

teaching practice. However, throughout this study, teachers raised two major concerns with using social media in this way, with many admitting they don't currently have social media account. Firstly, both sets of teachers were concerned around the openness of social media and this stopped them from posting. Teacher 4 cited the lack of control and openness of social media as off-putting: "I literally have no interest in social media for posting but I also can't control what other people write and post. I mean I don't have anything dodgy but weird things happen on social media." However, the Teacher 4 also commented that "if we are using a HSLA I would feel comfortable knowing only certain people could see it and post things back to me." This view was not uncommon with Teachers G, D and J all commenting that they feel more comfortable posting on HSLAs than social media as HSLAs provide a smaller, more trusted network of parents and professionals. Secondly, some teachers already using HSLAs felt these apps better reflected them as a professional. Teacher F summed up the thoughts of many teachers already using the application, commenting "my Twitter account is me from 5 years ago, if parents found it I would be mortified. Instead I spend hours making sure my application reflects me as a professional and shows parents how I am with their child."

4.3.6 Developing relationships

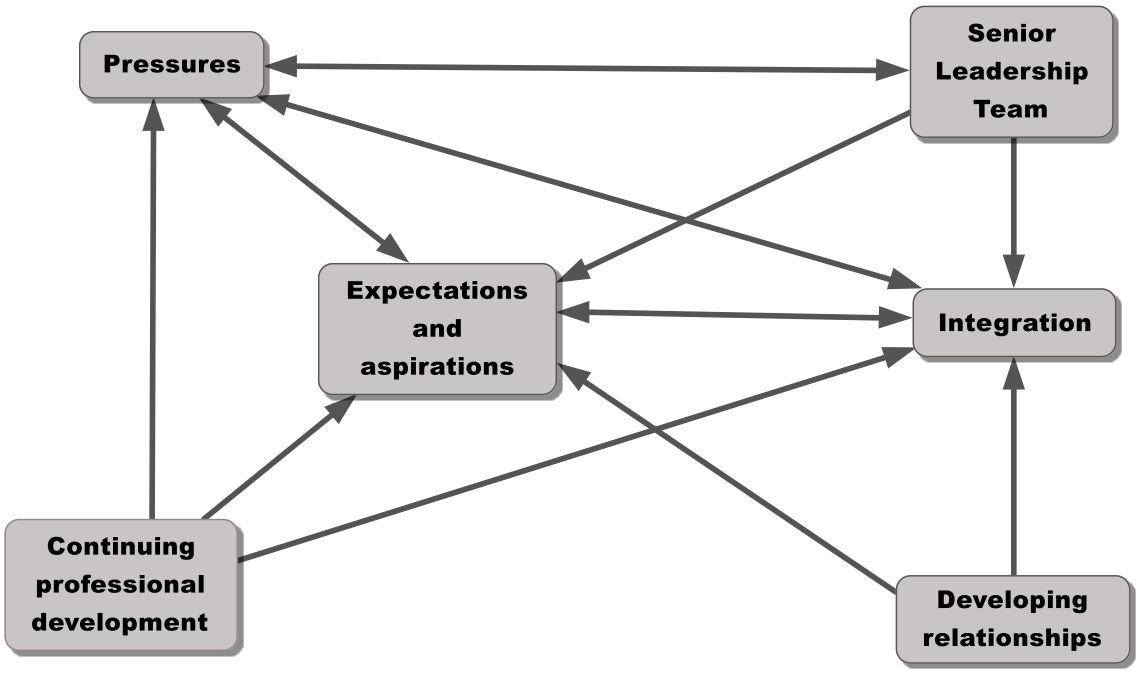

Figure 5 demonstrating developing a relationships links with practice and implementation. Direction of the arrows shows the direction of the effect.

This theme emerged as teachers had contrasting views over whether this application should replace face-to-face conversation and whether this is a good thing. This theme clearly links to implementation as a teacher's view on the ideal way to communicate with parents will influence how they use the app. Furthermore, new teachers appeared to relish the opportunity to replace face-to-face conversation using applications while those who had been teaching slightly longer were concerned about the quality of relationship they could develop with parents over an application. These contrasting views only add to the apparent confusion over the purpose of a HSLA amongst staff. While some staff saw HSLAs as a way of replacing face-to-face conversation in order to overcome engagement barriers, other viewed HSLAs as a method of generating more meaningful face-to-face interactions.

The teachers who were in favour of replacing face-to-face conversation focused most of their conversation around specific parents who took up most of their

time and resources and their training had inadequately prepared them to develop these relationships. Teacher A spoke about this, saying,

> "There are certain parents that are tricky and it is not because I am scared of what they might say or think that are tricky because they take up a lot of time and they don't stop talking. I don't feel my training prepared me for this. Using the application is just better at keeping them at arm's reach."

However, some of the teachers took this idea of keeping specific parents out further. They started to judge some parents' ability to parent and as a result, got frustrated when those parents came to discuss messages and learning placed on the app. Teacher C highlights this pointing when they comment on their parents' intelligence saying,

> "this application stops a lot of face-to-face conversation which is good but some parents are so annoying and come in and ask questions, why not just accept the original post? You worry sometimes about the parents not being smart enough to raise a child!"

This quote once again highlights the power dynamics that HSLAs foster. As is explored above, while teachers aspire to create a collaborative way of communicating with parents, this quote demonstrates how some teachers are using HSLAs to continue to develop a power structure between teachers and parents.

Other reasoning for allowing the application to replace face-to-face conversation stemmed from the few parents who misuse the application and "send messages constantly and at 3am." Teacher H spoke of parents misusing the ability to speak to teacher at any point, stating, "Face-to-face conversations and direct messaging through the application are kept to a minimum as some parents always misuse the privilege." Finally, some of the teachers saw this ability to replace face-to-face conversation as a major advantage for the parents

who didn't have time at the school gates. Teacher J summed up the general feelings around this topic, saying,

> "This application is starting to replace face-to-face conversations and that might be an inherently good thing. It allows parents to not feel guilty about leaving their children in after school club and means we don't have to deal with awkward parents as much."

While all these teachers were in favour of allowing the application to remove face-to-face conversation with parents, some did note this method of communication "was not as personal." However, they still considered the benefits of using the application to outweigh this concern.

This view was not without its critics: all teachers who had been teaching more than a year were outraged at the suggestion that replacing face-to-face conversation could ever be a good thing. Many teachers (Teacher B, Teacher, 2, Teacher 3, Teacher 4, Teacher 5, and Headteacher 1), including both those who have been using the application for a while and those who are yet to start implementing the application, shared reservations about the application's ability to develop teacher-parent relationships. For example, Teacher 5 clearly stated that "Face-to-face conversations are always best and they allow you to read the other person and clear up any ambiguities." Teacher B argued that "face-to-face is really important as it creates that bond with parents which is just so important. It means when something goes wrong, parents trust you". Teacher 4 shared an almost identical view. Other teachers, like Teacher 3, were more positive that maintaining the application would simply "add an extra layer to their communication rather than replace face-to-face conversations." However, this is not to say that more experienced teachers were afraid of change or failed to recognise a potential need for change. A sceptical Teacher 4 also commented that "I accept things need to change and move online but that shouldn't be to the detriment of the relationship with the

parents who do come to the school gate." Consequently, these teachers wished to see a "balanced" approach to implementing the application in their daily practice where both posting online and face-to-face conversations were encouraged by Senior Leadership.

4.4 Conclusion

This section has explored the major themes to come out of the 17 semi-structured interviews. While some themes - such as pressure and SLT - are more prevalent or have a bigger impact than others upon practice and implementation, the key for teachers using or implementing HSLAs is balancing the factors highlighted in each of the key themes which either affect the use of HSLA within an educational setting or are effected by the HSLA.

SLT have a significant impact on the successful implementation and the continuing use of an application within a school. This point was highlighted very clearly by teacher A, who stated,

> "this is simply a second thought at the moment and therefore I forget all the time. If I forget to do it my headteacher will email me but often this is the only way I will remember as it is always the last thing on my mind."

To achieve successful implementation, there must be a clear vision and boundaries set out by SLT for teachers to follow. However, this leadership must be balanced by SLT as they risk exerting too much pressure on teachers throughout persistent oversight. The most interesting findings revolved around the element of competition between teachers' post-implementation and the feelings towards this competition from those who were yet to implement the application. While the teachers should be careful of the pressures which comes with competition, most saw this type of competition as an "unexpected source of motivation". Teachers who were yet to implement the application welcomed the element of competition seeing it as a method of

driving up standards within teaching practice. Finally, the views around the applications' ability to develop effective parent-teacher relationships divided the participants. NQTs overall agreed that HSLA are effective in removing face-to-face conversation and thought this was a more time-effective way of communicating with parents. However, more experienced teachers raised concerns around HSLAs' "abilities to foster relationships with parents." This group of teachers agreed that their concern over parent-teacher relationships would affect the way they implement a HLSA within their practice, seeing the app as an extra layer of communication rather than the sole way of communicating with parents.

The following Discussion chapter will focus on discussing the reasoning behind the themes explored throughout the findings, their place within the current literature and how they impact the educational environment. This is to develop a comprehensive answer to research questions posed along with a well-rounded theoretical frame work as to the factors effecting the implementation of HSLA along with the teachers' aspirations and expectations of using HLSA. Furthermore, the themes which are affected by the implementation of HSLAs along with the teachers' aspirations and expectations of using HLSA will also be explored.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

As outlined above, 6 themes emerged from the interviews with participants: integration, expectations and aspirations, Continuing Professional Development, pressures, the Senior Leadership Team and views on developing parental relationships. I have developed a model to explain how the latter four factors impact upon the integration of HSLAs in schools. The aim of this chapter is to discuss these themes in more detail, add depth to their consideration by exploring the current literature related to them, and suggest some implications of each theme for future implementation of HSLAs. While the themes of integration and expectations and aspirations do not have their own sections within this discussion they are overarching themes in every section. These two themes are more explicitly discussed throughout the future practice sections of this chapter.

5.2 Senior Leadership Team

The relationship between SLT and staff is complicated but a strong vision and ethos led by SLT and disseminated to staff is necessary for the integration of a HSLA. The Senior Leadership Team played an undeniably significant role throughout the pre-implementation, implementation and implemented stage of introducing HSLA as is demonstrated in the findings above. Staff who were yet to implement a HSLA wanted SLT to produce a strong ethos and a clear vision in how to integrate and use a HSLA within their practice. Furthermore, there was an expectation that SLT would provide adequate training on how to use HSLAs.

However, this relationship appeared to change post-integration into a more authoritarian relationship between SLT and staff. Once a HSLA had been implemented, the participants mentioned the motivation for continuing use coming from pressure from SLT rather than from self-drive and internal motivation. This role of merely ensuring everyone is posting regularly and to a certain standard is a considerably different to the supportive visionary role originally wanted by staff and demonstrated by SLT prior to implementation. The overriding point to be taken away with regard to SLT is that they need to balance this authoritarian role with a supportive visionary role to ensure a successful integration of a HSLA within the school.

5.2.1 Vision

Most participants spoke of the need for a strong vision from SLT to push forward the integration of a HSLA. The vision must include which style of HSLA is needed, what they want to achieve through using a HSLA, how to integrate a HSLA and to know when the HSLA has been successfully implemented. These points were raised by both SLT and teachers as imperative for SLT to consider and share with the teaching staff so the whole school is striving to achieve one common goal. Goodall (2015) and Egerdorff (2010) share similar views, suggesting that a school's vision towards its parental engagement approach is ultimately down to the SLT within the school and must be laid out from the outset of a parental engagement strategy for it to become successful. This was evident throughout this study: teachers who already implemented a HSLA speaking positively of the application when they understood what SLT were trying to achieve through the application. However, Teacher B demonstrates that when SLT fail to share their vision, staff end up confused about the use of HSLA and view them as an unnecessary extra task.

However, the simple creation of a vision is not enough to inspire a school. Instead the vision must consider the school's wider values and ethos

(Campbell, 2011). This study's findings are in line with this idea, as SLT and teachers mentioned a wider school value of community and love meant that parental engagement was key to achieving these wider school values. While simply providing teachers with the tools to engage parents is a good start, if these are then not adapted to fit with the overall ethos of the school, then these strategies will do very little to aid parental engagement (Goodall, 2015).

5.2.2 Support and exemplars

The idea of SLT providing support to teachers throughout the introduction and implementation of HSLA was not all surprising, especially with the applications being rooted is relatively new technology. However, teachers who were about to begin using the application desired for even more oversight from SLT than those who had already implemented the application. These teachers who were yet to implement a HSLA requested stock phrases to be supplied so they would be able to reply to parents simply and effectively while ensuring the 'stick to the party line'. This is an interesting idea. Teachers are already regularly communicating face-to-face with parents or via emails etc without having a script provided by SLT. Teachers appeared to be concerned that what they say to parents through the HSLA could be looked back on to prove them right or wrong. While teachers who already use the application talk of the reverse - being able to prove parents wrong. This nervousness around how to phrase things on HSLA was clearly caused by worries around their online professional identity and trackability. Interestingly though, teachers did not share this concern when communicating through email. Clearly, there is some discernible difference between email or text messaging and a HSLA, which was viewed more as a social media.

For some teachers, simply providing sample scripts was not enough - they instead wanted a full training session from SLT on how to use HSLAs. This desire for adequate training is documented throughout the literature. For

example, Dyson, Beresford, & Splawnyk (2007) argue that teachers regularly require extensive training around the implementation of parental engagement strategies. Teachers clearly feel no different when integrating HSLAs into their practice.

5.2.3 Authoritarian

Teachers who had already integrated an application into their practice clearly took a different view of the relationship between SLT and teachers. Teachers were quite open about the drive and rules from SLT becoming the only thing that kept them posting. This significantly changed the role SLT played in the whole process, along with the relationship between teachers and SLT. Rather than viewing SLT as allies and able to provide support and training, SLT became seen as the 'powers that be' and someone to apply rules about the amount of posting. Perhaps part of the problem was caused by the teachers' desire to see how many and which parents were accessing the HSLA to feel as if it was making a difference. While many of the teachers knew SLT that could see this information and consequently pushed SLT to ensure teachers were posting, this information was rarely passed on to teachers. Furthermore, teachers within this study did not share the same vision and drive as SLT and failed to see HSLA as the sole answer to engaging parents. Consequently, to ensure a successful implementation, SLT must ensure a robust and holistic approach to parental engagement is undertaken. Goodall et al. (2011) share a similar view, contending that SLT should take a holistic approach to implement parental engagement strategies. While Barr & Saltmarsh (2014) demonstrate that it is not just teachers that need this vision - instead parents view the headteacher as the leader in a school and vital for setting out and realising the whole schools' vision.

5.2.4 Future practice

When considering future practice, SLT must commence the whole process of implementing HSLAs by considering their values and ethos as a school. Furthermore, these values and ethos must be clearly communicated to both the staff and the parents as Goodall (2015) and Barr & Saltmarsh (2014) suggest. Furthermore, as Goodall et al. (2011) argue, along with the teachers in this study, SLT are imperative in supporting teachers' implementation of parental engagement strategies and HSLA should be considered no different. Consequently, adequate training for all staff should be undertaken prior to implementation and, as the participants here suggest, it is at this point expectations and wording guidance needs to be discussed. Teachers have suggested these expectations should include: regularity of posting, scrutiny of posts from SLT and types of conversations to have via HSLAs. However, this is by no means an exhaustive list of expectations. Instead this should be viewed as a starting point upon which to build. For example, covering other methods of communication and safeguarding around photos could also be included when setting expectations. Finally, these expectations should be communicated to parents, as teachers within this study suggest, to ensure that every member of the school community shares the same vision, aspirations and expectations.

5.3 Pressures

The integration of HSLAs into a teacher's practice creates a different pressure on teachers than the expected time pressure. One of the biggest concerns share by every teacher throughout this study focused around the pressures associated with the implementation of HSLAs. Whether the school was yet to implement the application or not simply dictated the type of pressure the teachers felt rather than alleviating any of the pressure. Teachers who were yet to implement a HSLA were concern around the extra feeling of time pressure

HSLA would impose on them. However, this pressure did not come to fruition as teachers currently using HSLA teachers felt increase in time pressure was negligible. Instead teachers currently using HSLA felt pressure from SLT. Teachers feeling pressure is not unique to the integration of HSLA. Rather, it follows the current general trend in education of teachers feeling more professional pressure.

5.3.1 Expected pressure

Before teachers integrated HSLA into their practice, participants were seriously concerned about the amount of time pressure it would generate for teachers, compared to the amount of reward for parents. This is partially because teachers already feel pressured for time at work. The teaching community is renowned for suffering high-levels of stress (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Stress in the teaching profession is directly linked to a lack of resources provided to complete the amount of new work demanded by SLT, which over time simply becomes expected practice (Hakanen et al., 2006; Pelletier & Sharp, 2009). The introduction of a HSLA was simply another demand made by parents or SLT and teachers failed to see where the resources to cope with these demands would be supplied from. However, teachers who had already implemented HSLA in their practice suggested that time pressure is not a big concern for them after the initial implementation stage. While some teachers found the extra administrative task an annoyance, this was not an overriding theme, with many finding ways of saving time elsewhere within their practice. For example, some started to talk less face-to-face with parents and consequently, time pressures quickly become less of a concern.

5.3.2 SLT

Although teachers were not concerned about the time pressures caused by HSLA as expected before implementation, the pressures caused by SLT were a significant concern throughout the study. This pressure appears to stem from a

lack of autonomy over their own teaching practice coupled with the inability of SLT to support the teaching staff in the use of HSLAs. These two factors are shown in wider research to be the leading causes of stress for teachers (Fernet, Guay, Senécal, & Austin, 2012; Hakanen et al., 2006). The lack of autonomy stemmed from being told how often to post, being constantly reminded to post and SLT overseeing everything which is posted on HSLAs. This led to teachers feeling their professional judgement was in question which added to their stress. With SLT only ever engaging with staff around the HSLA when a posting deadline has been missed, staff did not feel supported in their use of HSLAs. Instead, the stress of staff will simply increase as they feel unsupported and still need to ensure the post is done by the given deadline. These added pressures placed on teachers are incredibly important to consider before implementing any new practice into the classroom as research demonstrates that persistent stress is linked to poor quality teaching (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001).

5.3.3 Future Practice

In terms of future practice, it is imperative that the extra pressure is alleviated before, during and after implementation. While some teachers throughout this study suggested teachers should be given time off to post or be allowed to simply ask teaching assistants to post on their behalf, teachers who have already implemented the application within the practice have demonstrated throughout this study this is not necessary. Instead providing teachers with real-life, similar context case studies, focusing on the amount of time used by these HSLAs, throughout the staffs training would minimise some of the concerns around time pressures. SLT highlighting outstanding practice seen on the HSLA could also encourage staff, and mean they do not see SLT as only having a negative role regarding the app. Also, ensuring SLT show staff that they are available to support them throughout the implementation and beyond

was important to most of the participants and should be encouraged in the future.

5.4 Continuing Professional Development

The quotes outlined in the Findings section demonstrate that introducing a HSLA allows for teachers to learn from one another through the competition HSLAs create. This is a novel, ad-hoc and informal form of CPD and an unexpected consequence of introducing a HSLA. Teachers view each other's posts and discuss the practice that the posts demonstrate face-to-face with their colleagues or simply adapt their future lesson plans, inspired by ideas from other teachers' posts. As CPD is imperative to maintaining good teaching practice, this unexpected consequence of the use of HSLAs is very welcome by teachers and SLT.

The follow sections will outline the explanations behind the use of HLSAs as a method of CPD whilst also using the applications to communicate with parents. This explanation will focus on the informal nature of the CPD, the small, trusted community built through HSLAs and allowing teachers to view other's practice without leaving the classroom. Next, the impacts on future practice will be explored. Finally, future research needed around the use of HSLA for CPD will be commented on.

5.4.1 A smaller-trusted community

HSLAs offer teachers the unique opportunity to build a small, trusted community of fellow professionals in the same school to learn and develop from viewing each other's practice. Recently, teachers have been turning to social media to build a professional network capable of sustaining the level of social interaction required for consistent CPD (Forte, Humphreys, & Park, 2012). Teachers are using these networks to discuss daily issues and share ideas for practice, leading to professional development (Forte et al., 2012). However,

HSLAs provide the ability to build a trusted community of teachers, who teach children in the same location, with whom they can communicate and share ideas with regularly. This interaction replaces the need for teachers to turn to social media and may explain why teachers are using the HSLA as an effective way of developing a professional learning network.

A further explanatory factor may be that teachers see communication around HSLAs as a more secure way of learning and sharing than conventional social media outlets, where CPD may otherwise take place. Many of the participants commented that they have not created a social media presence due to their concerns about privacy. As many HSLAs are closed networks, allowing only those with permission to view the content posted, teachers can feel more confident posting their classroom practice. Furthermore, as the specific purpose of HSLAs is sharing classroom practice (albeit with parents rather than teachers), the chances of someone sharing an unprofessional post is unlikely. This privacy once again may be convincing teachers concerned around the openness of social media to use their HSLA as a tool for CPD.

5.4.2 Informality, self-motivating and self-regulating

The informal nature of the CPD provided by HSLAs could be a significant reason for teachers adopting this practice. Although teachers can now regularly view one another's practice, the inter-teacher competition created using HSLAs is not viewed by teachers as a negative, conflict-generating form of competition. Similarly, the teachers do not perceive it as placing an extra pressure on them. Instead, this research suggests that teachers embrace the informality of the CPD. The use of informal, self-regulated and self-driven CPD has been increasing within education with the rise of social media (Smith, Salaway, Caruso, & Katz, 2010; Solomon & Schrum, 2007). HSLAs share many of these characteristics with social media but teachers are already using HSLAs within their daily practice, making them a more convenient option than social

media. Furthermore, there does not appear to be any pressure from SLT to learn and share in this way and it relies on teachers being internally motivated to start conversations with others around the information shared on HSLAs which often generates the most effective CPD.

5.4.3 Benefits

Finally, the regular ability to see other teacher's practice without having to take time away from your own classroom is a major advantage of using a HSLA for CPD. As Stigler & Stevenson (1991) and Fernandez (2002) note, the explanation behind the success of Asian education systems is due to the constant watching of other professionals' lessons. There are two key points within this sentence when applying this to HSLA. Firstly, HSLAs offer opportunities to view other teachers' classrooms rather than teachers just reflecting on their own practice. Secondly, the term 'constantly' is imperative for CPD and can be offered through HSLAs as teachers usually upload daily or weekly. This is much more convenient and realistic than a teacher finding time every day to go and visit other classrooms. Obviously, these HSLAs only provide a small insight into the practices of other teachers but the information gained from HSLAs can always be followed up. This opportunity to regularly 'see inside' other teacher's classrooms is unique to applications as a form of parental engagement, as other forms – such as emails or text messages – do not allow teachers to easily access each other's' practice. Furthermore, teachers are provided with a genuine and relevant context for their CPD through the use of HSLAs. Instead of simply reading about these practices online in an abstract context, teachers can see the lessons prior and after as well as being able to follow up with questions. This context is important for teachers to truly develop their practice (Miller & Silvernail, 1994).

5.4.4 Future practice

How can this exposition of an alternative function of HSLAs be useful in the future? Whilst the focus of a HSLA should clearly remain on bolstering and supporting parental engagement with their children's learning, the implementation of an app in a school could take this CPD element into account and incorporate it into the school's modes of professional development. For example, the Senior Leadership might informally encourage conversations about teaching practice to develop between their members of staff around the app. To instil this method of learning and sharing, examples of excellent teaching practice that have been showcased through the application might be highlighted and explored in staff meetings periodically, creating an opportunity for more deliberate professional learning and a channel for communication between teachers regarding their ideas and possible improvements to their own practice. On a different note, the designers of the applications might think about how to expand on and cater for this additional function that the apps appear to play in schools. For example, there might be a 'Teachers' Area' of the app where they can outline in more detail what their lesson entailed, it's outcomes, their own learning experience in planning and teaching the lesson and how they might further improve it in the future. This would allow teachers to share information and learn far more about the practice of others, well beyond what could be communicated in a 140-character tweet or a series of photos of the classroom.

5.5 Relationships

Experienced teachers desire to have a more personal relationship with parents than HSLAs can provide. However, NQTs view HSLAs as a positive way of detaching themselves from the parents. Rather than splitting those who had already implemented a HSLA and those who had not, this theme varies depending upon a teacher's level of experience. Experienced teachers enjoyed

talking to parents face-to-face and inviting them into the classroom, while viewing 'uncomfortable' conversations as part of the job. Furthermore, the experienced teachers viewed developing these relationships with parents early in the academic year as crucial. On the other hand, NQTs viewed HSLAs as a method of efficiently contacting all parents while avoiding confrontation with some parents.

5.5.1 NQTs

The justification behind this split in views is clear throughout this research and supported by the wider literature. NQTs feel under-prepared and under-qualified to develop relationships with parents and would rather keep them at arm's length. Throughout this study, NQTs mentioned the dread when they knew a difficult conversation was coming and the amount of their time specific parents within their class take up. Consequently, using HSLAs provided them with a crutch: it maintained communication but without follow up conversations and with the assumption that parents couldn't discuss difficult topics through HSLAs. This caution and inability to develop relationships within the early years of teaching practice was also noted by Meister & Jenks (2000) and Melnick & Meister (2008) who, in their research, noted both the concerns raise by NQTs within this study. The authors commented that newly qualified teachers are concerned both about the time taken to build a relationship with parents and the lack of training on how to raise concerns with parents. Consequently, rather than dealing with this concern by seeking training, NQTs viewed HSLAs as a method of engaging parents without having to see them face-to-face.

5.5.2 Experienced teachers

On the other hand, experienced teacher valued the opportunity to develop their relationships with parents face-to-face and at most viewed HSLA as an extra method of communicating, rather than the only method. Teachers in this

study had clearly valued these deeply personal relationships in the past and viewed them as important for the development of the child. Furthermore, as teachers grow in experiences and confidence, the fear of speaking to parents has been shown to diminish over time (Tye & O'Brien, 2002). Experienced teachers within this study were also generally more self-aware of their own skills and this consequently allowed them to become more confident when dealing with uncomfortable conversations with parents. This ability to become more aware of personal abilities has also been shown in Melnick & Meister (2008:51). The authors suggest that "Experienced teachers feel better prepared to communicate with parents when conflicts arise, send more frequent reports home to parents about their child's progress, and utilize multiple methods of communication with parents." Therefore, clearly these skills in communicating with parents could either be something that develops over time or a skill that is already present but requires an inner confidence NQTs do not yet prosses. Either way, this clearly explains the reasoning for the divide between groups teachers when considering the application as a method of developing relationships with parents.

5.5.3 Parental judgement

Despite the initial optimism that applications might allow parents to develop a relationship with teachers from afar and consequently remove the negative judgements on specific groups of parents, as Feiler et al. (2006) discuss, the findings presented above demonstrate that this is not the case. This inability to overcome the judgement may come down to a lack of social capital which could not be levelled through HSLAs. Feiler et al. (2006) argues that specific groups of parents fail to raise enough social capital when conversing with the teacher to prevent them being judged by the teachers. Although not conversing face-to-face all the time, parents are still having conversations beyond the HSLA. One example of this was shown through Teacher C who questioned a parent's ability to parent after they basic raised questions about

messages posted on the HSLA. Despite the HSLA meaning that they received the information, their lack of social capital allowed them to still be judged by the teacher after the event. Furthermore, HSLA take away time for parents and teachers to bond face-to-face - something which Lawson & Alameda-Lawson (2012) suggest is imperative to level the social capital between the two groups. As shown through the literature above, this judgement can dissuade parents from engaging with the school community.

5.5.4 Future Practice

In terms of embedding HSLAs deeper into future practice, both sets of teachers must view HSLA as another weapon in an ever-increasing armoury of parental engagement methods. While experienced teachers value face-to-face relationships with parents, they must also accept that not all parents can engage with the teacher on this level for a variety of reasons. On the other hand, those who are simply using the application to save time and avoid awkward conversation should reflect on the value of face-to-face conversation and critically consider how becoming more personal with parents could significantly help their pupils.

5.6 Conclusion

Four clear themes have been explored throughout this section, with the overarching theme of integration and expectation running throughout all the themes. The complicated and dynamic relationship teachers have with SLT highlighted the need for a strong vision from SLT to ensure and maintain a successful integration of a HSLA. Furthermore, the pressures teacher expected to experience and those they did experience highlighted why there should be careful consideration from all parties before integrating HSLAs. Another key theme throughout this section was the rise in CPD and competition HSLAs can create. Both elements were unexpected benefits that teachers saw when integrating HSLAs into their practice. Finally, the controversial issue of

developing relationships with parents through HSLAs was explored. This inability to develop face-to-face relationships with parents was viewed in both a positive and negative light depending on the teachers experience and consequently play a major role in the integration of HSLAs.

Overall, while HSLAs clearly offer another aspect to engaging parents through their multi-media capability, their ability to allow teachers to save time by contacting many parents simultaneously and allowing parents to receive information when they are ready the introduction of HSLAs should not be undertaken without serious consideration of the issues raised within this project. A measured approach to adopting HSLAs should be undertaken as part of a wider parental engagement strategy.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

The research set out here is important for practitioners who are about to integrate a HSLA into their practice and researchers within the field of parental engagement who are interested in finding 21st century solutions to encourage parental engagement in the education sector. The timing of the study – just as schools are turning to HSLAs to engage with their parents – and the focus on teachers' perspectives on apps lends the study a great deal of relevance and utility. The themes discovered in this study will allow schools to better understand the process of integration and ensure that the ongoing use of the app is effective and beneficial for all parties. Existing studies have investigated parents' view but this study provides a new insight into the underrepresented teachers' perspectives upon the integration of HSLAs in their practice. By exposing their concerns and relaying their aspirations, this study gives SLTs and researchers the information they need to design strategies that may overcome these concerns and to highlight the benefits that may encourage thorough integration of the HSLA.

The theme regarding Continuing Professional Development was not anticipated before the study, however, teachers viewed it as a crucial element of the way that HSLAs influence their practice. The ability to form a trusted community provided teachers with the opportunity to feel free to share their best lessons and teachers could follow these ideas up with conversation outside the HSLA. While this was an unexpected benefit of the HSLAs it clearly shows how teachers are using the application in alternative ways within their practice. The inability to form relationships with parents was also at the forefront of teachers' comments when considering HSLAs fitting in to their practice. This research clearly shows, Experienced teachers viewed HSLAs as

stifling their ability to develop effective relationship with parents. While NQTs agree with this statement, they value the ability to distance themselves from parents using the app. Teachers are clearly enterprising when it comes to integrating HSLAs into their practice, using the various applications for different purposes rather than simply engaging parents. While many worried about some aspects of placing HSLA into their practice, all could see some way of placing these applications into their practice.

When considering the other factors influencing a successful integration, teachers' views depended upon whether they had already implemented a HSLA or not. Before integration, teachers considered the time pressure and the training they would receive to be the two biggest factors influencing a successful integration. These factors changed once teachers had integrated HSLA into their practice, with enthusiasm from SLT being considered the biggest factor effecting a successful integration. Furthermore, SLT were shown to have a complex and dynamic relationship with teachers throughout the integration of HSLAs. Overall, the factors effecting a successful integration are complex and intertwined with one another. Consequently, it is imperative teacher's voices are heard throughout the integration phase and beyond. Furthermore, HSLAs must been viewed as a single method in a much wider arsenal of parental engagement strategies.

As was discussed throughout the methodology, with a relatively small sample, this research was never intended to provide a causal link between two factors. Instead the study combated this limitation through providing thick, rich description (Geertz, 1973) to explore the different factors influencing a strategy. Consequently, there is still scope for some further research within the field. Firstly, anyone one of the four themes explored throughout this study could be selected in isolation for future research. For example, it would be interesting to explore the consequences of formalising this form of CPD through introducing

an application which can both link the school and home environment and offer teachers the opportunity to formally learn from one another through the app itself. Furthermore, considering how this would change the power dynamics as teachers are suddenly viewed within the school or academy as 'more exciting' or 'better practitioners' would add of further depth to this research. Finally, providing a voice to parents and pupils around the use of HSLAs could provide a valuable insight into the factors of a successful integration. Through allowing parents' and pupils' voices to be heard, the picture of a 'successful integration' may change and new factors in achieving it may be exposed.

While the research in this study is well placed and timed to contribute to the field, the study has ultimately been a dissertation and a project from which I have learned. The research has taken place at a point in my career when I am about to start implementing the knowledge that I have learnt in my studies. Two lessons have had impact upon me as I prepare to take the next step. First, my ability to critically assess the existing literature, and their data and conclusions, has considerably developed whilst working on this project. This ability will crucial in my upcoming role as Head of Research within my next school, as I will be able to engage with studies effectively and acknowledge their value and limitations before implementing them in the school. Second, this research has shown the complex and diverse range of factors which affect each intervention and strategy implemented within the education environment. Some were very unexpected, and demonstrate the need to engage with those responsible for or engaged in the implementation of a new proposed strategy beforehand. Before commencing on this project, I would not have hesitated to harness the power of technology within a school. Now I would be more careful and conscientious in my approach, consulting with those whose practice would ultimately be affected by the change. Both these lessons are ones I will value as I begin my journey in the world of education.

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Appendix 1

CUREC

The University of Oxford places a high value on the knowledge, expertise, and integrity of its members and their ability to conduct research to high standards of scholarship and ethics. The research ethics clearance procedures have been established to ensure that the University is meeting its obligations as a responsible institution.

They start from the presumption that all members of the University will take their responsibilities and obligations seriously and will ensure that their research on human subjects is conducted according to the established principles and good practice in their fields and in accordance, where appropriate, with legal requirements. Since the requirements of research ethics review will vary from field to field and from project to project, the University accepts that different guidelines and procedures will be appropriate.

- Please check the **CUREC flowchart and NHS flowchart** first to see if you need ethics approval.
- Please complete this form using a word processor and email it, together with your supporting documents, to your **Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) (if applicable**). If you don't have a DREC please email this form to **ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk** using your official **ox.ac.uk email** address. **Only emailed applications will be accepted.**

WHAT THIS CHECKLIST IS DESIGNED FOR

This **CUREC 1A checklist** is designed largely for research that falls within the Divisions of Social Sciences and Humanities where ethical issues are relatively few and straightforward. Interviews, field work and oral history are also included in the CUREC process.

The **full CUREC 2 application** is only required where certain project characteristics (e.g. type of participants, or procedures) result in a more complex set of ethical issues. It is expected that only in a limited number of cases will it be necessary for researchers to complete a CUREC 2 application. The checklist below will direct you to a CUREC 2 application if needed.

WHAT THIS CHECKLIST WILL NOT ASSESS

This checklist does not cover research governance, satisfactory methodology, or compliance with the requirements of publishers when administering their tests or questionnaires. As principal researcher, it is your responsibility to ensure that requirements in these areas are met.

CUREC does not review studies classed as **audit** (see Glossary and Decision Flowchart for CUREC on our website).

If your study involves **NHS patients, NHS staff / data / facilities, or human tissue**, please check the Decision Flowchart for NHS approval and contact the Clinical Trials and Research Governance (CTRG) team in the first instance.

Further information on the University's research ethics procedures is available from the CUREC website: www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec.

SECTION A: Filter for CUREC2 application This section determines whether your study raises more complex issues which require the completion of a full application for ethical review, known as the CUREC 2 application. **(Please mark 'X' in the Yes/No column as appropriate to indicate your response.)**		
1. Are research participants classed as **people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question**? (This may include those under 18 (though see "competent youths" in **FAQ C12**), prisoners, or adults "at risk".) Your attention is drawn to the University's **Safeguarding Code of Practice** and its implications for researchers involving children or adults at risk, including the need for the work to be risk assessed and for researchers to undertake related training. (**Note**: If any of your participants are aged 16 or under, please answer 'Yes' here **and** also answer question 5 below.)	Yes **X**	No
2. By taking part in the research, will participants be at serious risk of criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?	Yes	No **X**
3. Does the research involve the **deception** of participants?	Yes	No **X**
4. Does your research raise issues relevant to the **Counter-Terrorism and Security Act** (**the Prevent duty**), which seeks to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism? Please see advice on this on our **Best Practice Guidance web page**.	Yes	No **X**

If you have answered 'No' to all of the questions above please go to **Section B**. If you have answered 'Yes' to any question above continue to question 5 below.		
5. Is your project covered by a CUREC **approved procedure** (formerly known as "CUREC Protocols")?	Yes **X**	No
If yes, please give research procedure number(s): 25		
If you answered '**Yes**' to **ANY** of questions **1-4**, **and** answered '**No**' to question **5**, **please stop completing this checklist and do not submit it for ethical review**. Instead, please complete the CUREC 2 application form from the CUREC website. Then submit the CUREC 2 form for ethical review. If you answered 'Yes' to ANY of questions 1-3, **and** answered 'Yes' to question 5, please go on to **Section B**.		
SECTION B: Contact details and project description (NB: must be typed not handwritten)		
Contact details:		
1. **Principal researcher**/supervisor (title and name) (if student research):	[redacted]	
2. Name of student (if student research):	[redacted]	
3. Degree programme, e.g. DPhil, BA, MPhil, BSc, MSc (if student research):	MSc	
4. Department or Institute name:	Department of Education	
5. Address for correspondence (if different from above):		
6. University e-mail (**not** private email) and	[redacted]	

telephone:	
7. Name and status of others taking part in the project, e.g. third year undergraduate; postdoctoral research assistant:	None

SECTION B continued	
Project description:	
8. Title of research project:	Home-school link app: the factors effecting a successful implementation and how the use of these apps are perceived by all interested parties. A case study in a large British primary school.
9. List of location(s) where project will be conducted:	[redacted]
10. If your research involves overseas travel or fieldwork, by the time the research starts, will you have completed and returned a travel risk assessment form? (This has to be approved by your department before you travel. If you are travelling overseas, you are strongly advised to take out University travel insurance.)	Yes No N/A **X**
11. Anticipated duration of research project overall:	6 months

12. Anticipated start and end dates of the research project involving human participants:	From: (01/04/17) To: (15/08/17) Please note that you will need ethics approval **before** you start your research. CUREC1As may take up to 30 days to process.
13. External organisation funding the research (if applicable): None	
14. Title and very brief and simple lay description of **research** (about 150 words), plus description (about 200 words) of the nature of participants.	
a) Title, brief lay description of research (150 words). When describing the research, please include your methodology, how you are applying professional guidelines, and the use to which results/data will be put. **Please also declare any conflicts of interest here.**	
This project will use a qualitative case study approach in order to investigate what a successful implementation of home-school link apps looks like within a school, taking into account the perspective of all four interested parties (head teachers, teachers, parents and pupils). Through semi-structured interviews and semi-structured observations, the study will investigate how teachers and parents are now communicating and whether/how this has changed with the introduction of the app. There will be two main methods of data collection throughout the project. Firstly, semi-structured observations focusing on the teachers' use of the app. Following from the observations, semi-structured interview will take place with the head teacher, teachers, parents and pupils. These interviews will be audio recorded. Data will be used only for this research project and will not be shared with any third	

parties. The data will be anonymised, protocol 25 will be followed during all the data collection and all work will be undertaken in line with BERA's ethical guidance.

As far as I am aware I personally have no conflicts of interest within this research project.

SECTION B continued

b) Description of participants and **obtaining informed consent** (200 words). When describing participants, please include

- criteria for inclusion/exclusion
- method of recruitment
- processes for consent to participate

Please ensure you attach as separate documents (if applicable, in English translation):

- your recruitment and advertisement material e.g. a poster or brief invitation letter/ email
- information for participants to read (or hear) before they agree to take part e.g. written information sheets or (only if applicable) oral information scripts.
- a document to record informed consent. Templates for written consent forms and/or oral consent scripts (in case of an oral consent process) are available from the CUREC website
- a guide to interview questions (this may be a list of questions to be asked, or a preliminary scope of questions), or a sample of other instruments (such as a sample questionnaire)
- (if relevant) debriefing document after participants have taken part

The case will be purposively selected, focused on a school which has recently introduced a home-school link app in order to support parent-teacher communication.

Observations

Two classes will be observed, focusing on the teachers use of the app within the classroom environment and content posted on the app. These will be selected based on a participatory approach, working with the leadership team. The teachers' consent will explicitly obtained. The children's participation in the observations will be consented to

on an opt-out basis in line with proctol 25.

Interviews

There will be four distinct groups of participants within this research, the head teacher, teachers, parents and pupils, all of which will be interviewed.

The school has currently set up a working group of teachers and parents to implement the app. All members of this group will be invited to take part in interviews. Further interviews from a wider selection of parents and teachers will be undertaken using a snowball sampling strategy. Written consent will be obtained for all participants.

Pupils will be recruited after the observations and invited to take part in an interview. In accordance with protocol 25, written consent for pupils to take part will be collect from parents. Following this the research will be verbally explained and written assent obtained from the pupils.

15. What are the ethical issues connected with your research and what steps have you taken to address them? Please do not answer 'none'. The committee needs to see evidence that you have identified potential ethical issues with respect to your research and have taken steps to address them. These issues could relate to:

- your own physical and psychological safety as a researcher (please see the University's and Social Science Division's Safety in Fieldwork guidance
- participant burdens and/or risks, and
- data protection/ confidentiality.

For more guidance on ethical issues, please see www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/resources/.

Research involving children can sometimes pose specific ethical issues throughout a project. Having carried out a thorough review process of the potential ethical issues which may arise throughout the duration of the study, some minor issues were identified and considered.

The first ethical issue which will be encountered in this project is the issue of consent for children under the age of 16. The European rights of the child stipulate that children should be fully informed of all research for which they are a participant and have the right to withdraw from any study at any point. Consequently, a child friendly version of the research proposal will be read to all children who participate in the study. All participants will also have the opportunity to ask any questions about the study and will have the right to withdraw from the study at any point. Furthermore, written assent from the child along with written consent from their legal guardian will be gained before commencing the study.

Confidentiality of all participants, throughout the study could also become an ethical problem. Teachers are probably the participants most at risk from a breach in confidentiality. Should they have negative view of the use of the app, they may experience professional harm if these are eventually leaked to the head teacher. Consequently, it is imperative not only for the results of the study but also for the teachers that confidentiality is taken seriously throughout the study. Therefore, all the names and identifying features of all participants in the study will be removed from the data before it is published. The school's key identifying features will also be removed, making it difficult for external readers to identify it. Children will need the term confidentiality explained to them before they begin to participate in the research. This will be done by the lead researcher and will cover what will and will not be kept confidential.

Safeguarding does not pose a significant risk within this project, but there is always some risk that sensitive issues may emerge when working with children. The researcher currently holds an enhanced DBS which covers him for all schools as well as having recently completed a safeguarding children course. Furthermore, the safe guarding lead

will be identified before any research takes place in the school and the safeguarding lead and researcher will discuss any concerns about specific participants or generally about the research beforehand.

The researcher does not foresee any particularly potential risky topics being discussed in the semi-structured interviews with the parents or pupils. However, once again there is a small risk some of the questions about home-life may trigger some bad memories. Although, unlikely this topic has been thought about. Should the child become upset by any of the topics discussed in the interview, the researcher will stop the interview and raise a concern for the child with the safeguarding lead of the school.

Due to several factors, all interviews throughout the process will have to be recorded. In order to limit the ethical concerns around recording the interviews, the interviews will be voice recorded only rather than video recorded. This data will be kept securely and anonymised before being written up.

Despite the potential ethical concerns highlighted above, having thoroughly read protocol 25, Research on Teachers and Teaching in Educational Setting for Typically-Developing Students, there are no significant risks associated with this research.

Section B continued		
16. Will you obtain informed consent according to CUREC guidelines and good practice in your discipline before participation?	Yes **X**	No
If you have marked '**No**', please give a brief explanation and justification for this decision here:		

17. Will your research involve discussing sensitive issues? This could be information relating to race or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, physical/mental health, trade union membership, sexual life or criminal activities.	Yes	No **X**
If you have marked '**Yes**', please make sure that you have included some **supporting information** (as directed in question 14 of this section) showing the range of questions covering these issues.		
18. Will you ensure that **personal data** collected directly from participants or via a **third party** is held and processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act?	Yes **X**	No
19. How will you ensure that any personal and/or sensitive data are captured, transferred and stored securely? In particular if data are to be captured electronically, please consult with the University's research data team (**researchdata@ox.ac.uk**) and your local IT department and, with respect to University IT security policies, please comment on how you will capture such data in the first instance, how you will transfer them over networks or via portable media and how, where and how long data will be stored. For more information please see the University's web pages on research data management: http://researchdata.ox.ac.uk/university-of-oxford-policy-on-the-management-of-research-data-and-records/		

The interviews will be recorded on a voice recorder. This data will then be transferred onto a personal laptop and backed up to a secure portable hard drive, both of which will be password protected. This will mean that personal data is not stored on the cloud, while still being backed up in order to comply with the universities policy of keeping data for a minimum of three years. As Curec's guidance policy (protocol 25) suggests, voice recordings make it incredibly difficult to accurately identify people's identity increasing the data's security.

SECTION C: Methods and procedures to be used

Method used: Please ensure you have addressed any potential ethical issues related to these methods in Section 14 and in your Participant Information Sheet	**Please mark 'X'**
1. Analysis of existing records	
2. Snowball sampling (recruiting through contacts of existing participants)	**X**
3. Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters	
4. Participant observation	
5. Covert observation	
6. Observation of specific organisational practices	**X**
7. Participant completes questionnaire in hard copy	
8. Participant completes online questionnaire or other online task	
9. Using social media	
10. Participant performs paper and pencil task	
11. Participant performs verbal or aural task (e.g. for linguistic study)	
12. Focus group	
13. Interview	**X**

14. Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	**X**
15. Video recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	
16. Photography of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	
17. Others (please specify):	

SECTION D: Professional guidelines and training		
In this section, please mark 'X' against at least one of the following professional guidelines you aim to adhere to. You should use the principles listed in your chosen guideline(s) in conducting your own research. **Note**: this is not an exhaustive list.		**Please mark 'X'**
Research specialism/ methodology	**Association and guidance document**	
Anthropology	Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth	
Criminology	British Society of Criminology: Code of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology	
Education	British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research	**X**
Geography	Association of American Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics Royal Geographical Society: Research Ethics and Code of Practice	
History	Oral History Society of the UK Ethical Guidelines	
Internet-based Research	British Psychological Society: Conducting Research on the Internet Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Guide Also see our Best Practice Guidance on internet-based research	
Law (Socio-Legal)	Socio-Legal Studies Association: Statement of Principles of Ethical Research	

Management	Academy of Management's Professional Code of Ethics	
Political Science	American Political Science Association (APSA) Guide to Professional Ethics in Political Science	
Politics	Political Studies Association. Guidelines for Good Professional Conduct	
Psychology	British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct British Psychological Society: Conducting Research on the Internet Also see "Internet-based Research" guidance above	
Social Research	Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines	
Sociology	The British Sociological Association: Statement of Ethical Practice	
Visual Research	ESRC National Centre for Research Methods Review Paper: Visual Ethics: Ethical Issues in Visual Research	
Other professional guidelines. Please specify the other guidelines used here:		

Please indicate what training in research ethics the researchers involved with this study have received, e.g. the title of the course and date completed (online training available at www.admin.ox.ac.uk/curec/training). If no formal training has been undertaken, please indicate any discussions of research methodology between researchers and supervisors here.
I have received extensive research training though the MSc Education, taking two term-long modules: Foundations of Educational Research 1 and Foundations of Educational Research 2

I have discussed with [redacted], how best to collect the data required for this research project with observations and semi-structured interviews being decided on as the best option. Furthermore, I presented my current research ideas within a group of 8 people with [redacted] present. The discussion which then followed this presentation has since helped shape the research project.

SECTION E: Signatures • 'Electronic signatures' sent as email confirmations from a University of Oxford email address can be accepted. Separate emails should come from each of the relevant signatories as outlined below, indicating acceptance of the relevant responsibilities. • If you have obtained handwritten (wet-ink) signatures, please scan them and the rest of the checklist pages to create a single PDF document and email through.	
Please ensure this checklist is signed by:	
For staff research:	**For student research**:
1. **Principal researcher**	1. **Principal researcher (project supervisor)**
2. **Head of Department (or nominee)**	2. **Head of Department (or nominee)**
	3. **Student researcher**

1. **Principal researcher signature/supervisor signature (if student research)**

I understand my responsibilities as **principal researcher** as outlined in the CUREC glossary and guidance on the CUREC website.

I declare that the answers above accurately describe the research as presently designed, and that a new checklist will be submitted should the research design change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of CUREC 2 (involving full scrutiny by an IDREC). I will inform the relevant IDREC if I cease to be the

principal researcher on this project and supply the name and contact details of my successor if appropriate.

Signature: [redacted]

Print name (block capitals): [redacted] **Date**: 5/3/2017

2. Departmental endorsement signature

I have read the research project application named above. On the basis of the information available to me, I:

(i) consider the principal researcher to be aware of her/his ethical responsibilities in regard to this research;
(ii) consider that any ethical issues raised have been satisfactorily resolved or are covered by relevant professional guidelines and/or CUREC approved procedures, and that it is appropriate for the research to proceed (noting the principal researcher's obligation to report should the design of the research change in a way which would alter any of the above responses so as to require completion of a CUREC 2 full application);
(iii) am satisfied that: the proposed project design and scientific methodology is sound; the project has been/will be subject to appropriate **peer review**; and is likely to contribute to existing knowledge and/or to the education and training of the researcher(s) and that it is in the **public interest**.

Signed by Head of Department or nominee *(example nominees for student research include the Director of Graduate Studies/ Director of Undergraduate Studies)*:

Signature:

.....

Print name (block capitals): **Date**: .....

.....

3. **Student signature** **(if student research)**

I understand the questions and answers that have been entered above describing the research, and I will ensure that my practice in this research complies with these answers, subject to any modifications made by the principal researcher properly authorised by the CUREC system.

Signed by student: [redacted].....

Date: .....01/03/17.....

Print name (block capitals): ... [redacted]

.....

SECTION F: SUBMITTING THE COMPLETED CHECKLIST	Please mark 'X'
1. Check you have completed all sections (A-E)	x
2. Ensure your application is signed by you, your supervisor (if student) and department	x
3. **Please attach all supporting documents (see section B, question 14b for details).** If the appropriate supporting documentation is not included with your application, you will then be asked to provide this separately. **This may well delay the ethical review process, and thus the start of your research.**	x x x
4. Ensure you have declared conflicts of interest (if any) in Section B, question 14a.	x
5. If your department has a Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC), submit this checklist and supporting information to the appropriate departmental officer.	x
6. If your department does not have a DREC, submit the checklist and supporting information to the SSH IDREC (email ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk).	
7. Applications must be sent by email from your official ox.ac.uk email account. Please do not send applications by post.	

Appendix 2

CUREC APPROVAL

Date 20th March 2017

Dear [redacted]

Application Approval

Title: Home-school link app: the factors effecting a successful implementation and how the use of these apps are perceived by all interested parties. A case study in a large British primary school

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to DREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly, approval has been granted.

If your research involves participants whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question (this includes those under 18 and vulnerable adults), then it is advisable to read the following NSPCC professional reporting requirements for cases of suspected abuse

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/questions/reporting_child_abuse_wda74908.html

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application you should submit details to research.office@education.ox.ac.uk for consideration.

Good luck with your research study.

Yours sincerely,

Jenni Ingram

Member of DREC

Appendix 3

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

Dear X,

Thank you for taking the time to read about the possibility that I might be able to carry out some with you. l. This research will form a significant part of my MSc in Learning and Technology and stems from an idea that I had during my second and third teaching placements of my teacher training.

In the course of my second teaching placement, I became increasingly aware that some parents had no regular contact with the class teacher. In contrast, the school in which I completed my third teaching placement introduced an app throughout Key Stage 1 to encourage greater parental engagement. Through informally observing the teachers and parents use this app in the classroom, there appeared to be some initial advantages and challenges to using this kind of technology in a classroom environment.

I drew on this experience to frame my current research project. My research focuses on how you view homes-school link applications integrating into your current practice and the factors effecting this integration.

Consequently, I am currently looking for teacher, in the local area, who have either recently implemented a home-school link app or would be willing to start using such an app within the next couple of months.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor with any other questions or queries about this study.

Thank you,

University of Oxford

Appendix 4

CONSENT FORMS

		Please initial each box
1	I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	☐
2	I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences or academic penalty.	☐
3	I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by designated individuals from the University of Oxford where it is relevant to my taking part in this study. I give permission for these individuals to access my data.	☐
4	I understand that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee.	☐
5	I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.	☐
6	I understand how this research will be written up and published.	☐
7	I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.	☐

8	I consent to being audio recorded	☐
9	I understand how audio recordings will be used in research outputs	☐
10	I agree to take part in the above study.	☐

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

CUREC Approval Reference:

Home-school link apps: a qualitative case study into their implementation, use and how they are perceived by head teachers, teachers, parents and pupils.

Purpose of Study: A range of digital applications are increasingly being appropriated in primary schools in the UK to increase and improve communication between parents and teachers. However, in this relatively new field there is an urgent need to understanding how these apps are being implemented into British primary schools along with what head teachers, teachers, parents and pupils are hoping to achieve through introducing such an app. Therefore, this project will use a qualitative approach to explore the factors effecting a successful integration of Home-school link apps.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Date	Signature