Improving Parental Engagement for Disadvantaged Students

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A Research & Development Project

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Contents

Chapter 1 - The Purpose of the Action Research Project. 5

The Aim of the Action Research 6

Chapter 2 – Consulting the Literature Surrounding Parental Engagement 9

The Landscape of the Literature 9

Refining the literature – Investigating the Tenets of Parental Engagement 14

Communicating with Parents 15

Supervising or Checking Homework 18

School-Based Parental Engagement 20

Additional barriers to parental engagement in the education of disadvantaged students 22

Methods Schools Use to Engage Parents 23

Classes for parents 23

The Individualised Education Plans 25

Family Learning Activities 26

A Potential Gap in the Literature 28

Questions emerging from the research 30

Chapter 3 – Making the impact 30

Methodology design and data 30

Research tools 35

The Parent Pilot Interviews 35

Student survey 37

Grade Round Data 38

The intervention: Improving ATL – Students, Parents, Teachers 40

Intervention with students 40

Meeting parents 41

Informing the subject teacher 43

Post session interview with students and parents 43

Evaluating cycle one 44

Limitations of action research cycles 45

Ethics 46

Changes in data collection due to Covid 19 48

Chapter 4 – Data 48

What is the nature of parental engagement in School A? 49

Can parental engagement be increased with the parents of disadvantaged students to better engage students in School A? 50

Are there existing parenting practices which are associated with positive school outcomes? 55

Is communication between School A and parents of disadvantaged students supporting these families in engaging in school? 57

Chapter 5 - Discussions, limitations and future directions 58

The Importance of Relationship 58

Promoting Parental Engagement 60

The Future of the Project 61

General conclusions 63

Appendix 1 – Typical example of a Pastoral Support Programme 69

Appendix 2 - Student survey questions 70

Appendix 3 – Central University Research Ethics Committee - Approval 71

Appendix 4 – information sheet for parents 81

Appendix 5 - Pilot interviews with parents 82

Appendix 6 - Evaluative interviews with Teacher Researchers 83

Abstract

Engaging the parents of secondary school students in the educational lives of these young people is a major challenge for most secondary schools. The objectives of this action research project were to: explore the specific types of parental engagement that can be beneficial to learners, to investigate the extent to which students in school A experience the types of parental engagement that have been identified as beneficial, and ascertain whether promoting parental engagement is an effective way to better engage students and parents in education. This project sought to explore these aspects with the families of disadvantaged students, specifically. Whilst data collection was significantly limited by the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, partial data allowed for the tentative conclusions that a robust relationship between school staff, parents, and students is crucial in supporting students engage more readily in school and that this relationship is best promoted by high-quality and regular communication between school staff and the parents of disadvantaged students.

Chapter 1 - The Purpose of the Action Research Project.

The focus of this action research project has been the natural evolution of the exploration that I conducted for part 2 of the MSc in Learning and Teaching. Investigating the impact that parental engagement can have on the learning of students yielded fascinating results as *types* of parental engagement with *specific* subjects can positively impact upon the lasting learning of students; this research also suggested that the impact that parental engagement can have may vary wildly between families and contexts and therefore

recognised the need for further research into the manner and extent to which parents engage with their children's learning, and whether this engagement can be promoted and supported by schools.

The practice of engaging with academic research also encourages one to turn this critical attention to the different facets of one's professional life. As an Assistant Head Teacher responsible for the pastoral wellbeing of the upper school, I have the unique opportunity to witness a vast array of different relationships between students and their parents; parents that engage heavily in their children's education and parents that are only distantly engaging in the educational lives of their children. Events such as information evenings and parental consultation evenings offer an anecdotal perspective as to the students who can rely on the support of their parents and it is often the students found on the absence list for these events that struggle the most to consistently engage with learning within school. Whilst anecdotal glimpses such as these lack the academic reliability needed to draw meaningful conclusions, they certainly offer a starting point for practitioner-researchers such as myself to ask the questions of research to guide and develop my practice in a way that can best support my students and their families in engaging in education to better the life choices of the younger generation.

The Aim of the Action Research

The vocabulary at the centre of any discussion focused on education is critical if research is to explore discrete areas of interest and then share these findings with others. For this reason, the verb 'engage' has been carefully chosen to capture the emotional and intellectual investment needed for parents to engage, to any extent, in their children's learning (Harris and Goodall, 2007). Obscuring the process of this engagement is the reality of parents' capacity to engage in the academia of their children; whilst some parents may not

have the time or willingness to engage in the educational lives of their children, some parents may not have the proclivity to do so. Therefore, throughout this research piece, great consideration has been given to ensure that engagement is interpreted as widely as possible and without judgement. Furthermore, in the context of School A, the hurdles of engaging parents seem to be exacerbated when the parents are those of the students that we have identified as disadvantaged students; when compared with the rest of the school cohort. This is most clearly recognised in School A during events which require parental attendance such as consultation evenings or curriculum enrichment events. Furthermore, one of the long-standing targets of School A is to improve the academic outcomes for the students that have been identified as disadvantaged. Therefore, the impact that parental engagement may have on these academic outcomes is one which the leadership team is keen to explore.

Furthermore, School A has experienced this dichotomy as parents evening attendance for the families of disadvantaged students is consistently lower than the attendance of the rest of the school cohort (Table 1). Whilst it would be presumptuous to draw the conclusion that all of the parents of disadvantaged students face the same challenge in attending these events, the statistical pattern represented in Table .1 suggests an area that the school needs to consider carefully to ensure that this target sub-group of parents are engaging to the same extent as the rest of the parent cohort.

Table.1

Parents' evening attendance 2018/19		
Year Group	Whole Cohort parental attendance	%PP Parental attendance
Year 7	95%	82%
Year 8	87%	81%
Year 9	85%	72%
Year 10	88%	78%
Year 11	93%	83%

Moreover, the way in which School A currently delivers consultation evenings may present further hurdles for the disadvantaged families attempting to engage in their children's education as these evenings begin at 14:00 and typically finish at 19:00. Families with low socio-economic status may well face additional barriers in attending such events as they may not be in a position to take the time off work to attend the event or cover the costs in travelling to and from the event itself.

Consequently, following on from the research conducted in the second year of the MSc for Learning and Teaching, this action research seeks to explore the specific types of parental engagement that can be beneficial to learners whilst investigating what schools can do to promote these types of engagement. Furthermore, this study will investigate the extent to which learners in School A experience the types of parental engagement that have been identified as beneficial. Lastly, this project will seek to ascertain whether promoting the identified types of parental engagement may suggest a significant benefit for the disadvantaged students in School A. Therefore, the components that make up the aim of this project are general in nature, but give the forthcoming literature review scope to uncover the central tenets of what beneficial parental engagement means.

Chapter 2 – Consulting the Literature Surrounding Parental Engagement

The Landscape of the Literature

"…For many schools parental engagement seems to be the worst problem and the best solution" (Harris and Goodall, 2008)

Research exploring the degree to which parents engage with their children's education typically share the consensus that "Parent Engagement…refers to parents' participation in supporting their child's learning (academic attainment, related learning outcomes and behaviour), whether at home, in school or via home-school connections and wider community collaborations"(Harris and Goodall, 2007). Put in this manner; the role that we, as parents, play in the attitudes that our children develop towards education is brought into sharp and profound focus. In a guidance report commissioned by the Education Endowment Foundation, Poortvliet, et al, (2019) explain that it is widely acknowledged that parental engagement may have significant benefits for wide ranging aspects of children's lives, such as "improvements in literacy and maths skills" (Voorhis et al., 2013) and school attendance (McConnell and Kubina, 2014). Furthermore, previous studies have concluded that "the impact on achievement caused by parental involvement was larger than the differences associated with variations in the quality of schools" (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

However, whilst compelling, studies such as these show the incredibly divergent influence of context as they have predominantly focused their attention on the primary phases of education that the participants were drawn from. As explored in the findings of my project for the second year of the MSc research, studies drawing participants from the

secondary phase of education are somewhat lacking. Findings from studies that have sought to determine if the influence of parental engagement in secondary school are consistent with that of younger students have tended to focus on specific sub-sets of students, such as "African and European American" (Wang et al, 2014) students from the United States of America and focus on very specific parental parenting styles; such as "parental warmth" (Wang et al, 2014). Whilst these studies were able to successfully conclude that "…parental warmth moderated the associations between providing structure at home and adolescent grade point average and problem behaviour" (Wang et al, 2014), further research must provide some indication as to whether findings such as these can be replicated in contexts that differ from the large state of Maryland, United States of America.

Limitations such as these are often well-recognised by the researchers in this field as they acknowledge that there is a "significant increase in diversity [relative to the context Maryland] among the American school aged population" (Wang et al, 2014, p15). These limitations significantly highlight the need for studies such as these to be replicated, insofar as is possible, in differing contexts in order to improve the reliability of any findings relating to the impact of parental engagement in their children's education. When reviewing literature that has been developed within the United Kingdom, the extent to which parental engagement has been explored is evidently very limited in itself; whilst some studies may seek to explore the way parents engage in education when choosing the most suitable secondary school (Furlong et al , 2009), or the relationship between a parents own education and that achievement of their children's academic performance (Sabates et al, 2011), very little has been explored in relation to the impact that parental engagement may have on the students immersed in the school system within the United Kingdom today. Although not expressly stated by Poortvliet et al, (2019) this inconsistency of research focus may have been part of the motivation behind the guidance report itself.

Nevertheless, it is increasingly clear that Parental Engagement in their children's learning has a profound impact on the long-term educational performance of these children. Poortvliet et al (2019) allude to the necessity for the any literature pertaining to Parental Engagement to be increasingly specific when they explain that there is evidence to suggest that the "Home Learning Environment [provided before school age, has a] continuing effect on educational performance in primary and secondary school" (Poortvliet et al, 2019, p6). However, Poortvliet et al (2019) also advise caution when interpreting these results as "the effects are net of predictors such as income, family socio-economic status and parents' own qualification levels"(Poortvliet et al, 2019, p6). Therefore, extrapolating the strands of information relating to these discrete areas is essential if we are to better understand the role that parental engagement plays in students' education at all stages of their school career.

Nonetheless, observations of the relationship between socio-economic status and the learning outcomes of children are not unique or new (Poortvliet, et al 2019). Evidence from in-depth case studies allowed Harris and Goodall (2007) too boldly suggest that "parental engagement increases with social status, income and parents' level of education"(Harris and Goodall, 2007, p.11). Observations such as these are important to consider in relation to this action research project as the academic outcomes of those students from a low socio-economic household are the group that are significantly under-achieving in recent years. Conversely, Harris and Goodall (2007) acknowledge that "research concerning the impact of parental engagement on achievement is complex due to the interaction and influence of many variables" and so implicitly state how essential it is that any research relating to parental engagement must define the specific tenets of the *type* of engagement that they are investigating.

Exploring the notion of socio-economic status further, in relation to parental engagement, Nechyba et al (2005) argue that families with low socio-economic status face one or all of three barriers when attempting to engage in their children's education. Firstly,

that families of low socio-economic status may develop or inherit a “culture of poverty” (Nechyba et al, 2005, p66) which may lead to them attributing more value on aspects of life and work that are different from education. Secondly, there is the suggestion that these families may lack the “Social Capital” (Nechyba et al, 2005, p66) which may restrict the extent to which they are able to effectively access the literature and mechanisms by which schools and families communicate. Lastly, Nechyba et al (2005) explain that schools themselves are middle-class institutions that have values and policies that may be at odds with the values of these families. However, it is important to note that each of the three barriers reported by Nechyba et al (2005) may impact, albeit to a lesser or greater degree, all families on the socio-economic scale; this does not detract from the essence of this argument, nevertheless, as families of low socio-economic status may well have to contend with the combined impact of these barriers during the time in which their children are at school.

From a slightly different perspective, Kelly et al (2011) explored the relationship between family socio-economic status and socio-emotional difficulties in a study involving over fifteen thousand students between the ages of 3 and 5 years old. This study suggests that “Children in the highest income group were less likely to have socio-emotional difficulties compared with those in the lowest income groups” (Kelly et al., 2011, p835). Clearly, the age of the students in this study conducted by Kelly et al (2011) makes it very difficult to draw any confident parallels to any context involving children of secondary school age; however, the contention here is that if children are included in, and habitually engaging with, home learning activities at a younger age, they are less likely to display the behaviours that prohibit learning later in their lives. A noteworthy limitation of the study conducted by Kelly et al (2011) is the methodology used to collect the data regarding home learning environment. Kelly et al (2011) explain that “data on socio-emotional difficulties were only available from a parent report and it has been shown elsewhere that multi-

informant measures are more reliable for clinical identification of problem behaviours". (Kelly *et al.*, 2011, p5). This is extremely pertinent to this action research project as it suggests that data will become far more reliable if behaviours of interest are reported by students themselves, their parents, and staff that work closely with the students.

Moreover, the link between student behaviour and parental engagement is also supported by Wang, et al (2014) as they suggest that "parents' increased preventative communication, providing structure at home, and linking education to future success were associated with decreased problem behaviours for adolescents" (Wang et al, 2014 p.12). Therefore, between the two studies cited above, there is some consensus as to the impact that parental engagement can have on the behaviour of students across the age ranges, however, the caveat remains regarding the differing contexts of the studies and the multi-stranded activities that Wang et al (2014) are describing as 'parental engagement'.

Encouragingly, research suggests that the level of parental engagement from disadvantaged families can be improved, but caution needs to be heeded with activities that parents and families are encouraged to take part in (Voorhis et al., 2013). Like much of the literature surrounding parental engagement in children's education, Voorhis, et al (2013) acknowledges that "strong experimental studies will be needed to clarify questions about which family involvement activities are optimal for improving child outcomes" (Voorhis et al., 2013, p102). Interestingly too, Voorhis et al (2013) warn that many intervention studies may have "small to moderate effects on students' learning…[but that] effects can be *cumulative* across age and grade levels if interventions and good practices are sustained over time" (Voorhis et al., 2013, p102). Statements such as these make intuitive sense as interventions take time to become learning habits, and learning habits take time to yield results for students. However, the extent to which any intervention is deemed to be 'good practice' and the time frame which constitutes this practice being 'sustained 'is open to many and varying interpretations.

Refining the literature – Investigating the Tenets of Parental Engagement

When exploring the extent to which parents engage in their children's education, it is essential that the discrete activities or behaviours that amount to 'parental engagement' in children's education are clearly set out. For instance, a parent supporting their child with their art homework may, understandably, be perceived as the parent taking an interest in the child and their learning; however, this same interaction could be perceived as an adult taking an interest in art and therefore drawing on their child as an individual with a mutual interest. Observations and inferences from such an interaction may well yield similar conclusions, but the intention of the observation clearly influences any perceived results.

Moreover, it is argued that parents typically engage in their children's education through very distinct behaviours; namely through "communicating with children, supervising or checking homework, attending school activities, communicating with the school over school decisions and creating a positive home learning environment"(Poortvliet et al, 2019, p.9). Contrastingly, Wang et al (2014) suggest that parental engagement is most effectively studied using the terms ""home- strategies and school-strategies" (Wang et al, 2014, p11) to separate the contexts in which parents may engage with their children's education. Although seemingly minor, the process of separating the engagement at home or at school is extremely significant due to the clear differences between the home environment of the families and the relatively formal environment of school. Therefore, it stands to reason that any intervention designed to promote parental engagement in the education of children should seek to connect the two key areas of the children's lives.

Clearly, each of these areas of parental engagement are still very broad in nature and have clear potential to overlap with one another; primarily as each fall into either the social sphere of the student at home or at school. Nevertheless, this overlap is to be completely

anticipated as these behaviours act as the bridge of collaboration or communication between the two main stakeholders in the vast majority of students' lives. However, the meta-analytical nature of the report by Poortvliet et al (2019) limits the specificity of each of these behaviours; for example, "communicating with the school" (Poortvliet et all, 2019, p.9) could take the shape of "preventative communication" (Wang et al, 2014, p6) in a bid to improve declining results or behaviour through a phone call or letter, or could allude to the termly grade round that the majority of schools send home to keep parents up to date with their child's academic progress. It is therefore essential that the strands of parental engagement are brought together to ensure that research pertaining to parental engagement are indeed exploring, insofar as is possible, the same social interactions and behaviours.

Consequently, in what follows, this section of this literature review will look to define each of these engagement activities and explore how the relevant literature has viewed its impact on the education of students. However, it is clearly evident that all research looking to draw conclusions relating to the impact of these behaviours should do so tentatively due to the seemingly complex relationships between each behaviour and the school and home contexts of the students.

Communicating with Parents

Communication between school staff and the parents of the students is clearly paramount in ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all students within the school. Furthermore, the positive impact that communication between parents and school can have is clearly evident in academic research, government literature, and school policies alike. Wang et al (2014) claim that communication between school staff and the parents of students "were associated with decreased problem behaviours for adolescents" (Wang et al, 2014, p.11) which resulted in better academic outcomes for the students. Whilst an exploration into

the impact that the problem behaviour of adolescents has upon academic progress is beyond the scope of this piece, it seems reasonable to suggest that this type of behaviour would impact negatively upon student grades; especially considering government literature such as the White Paper for Education (2010) and the subsequent review of best practice to "reinforce the need to involve parents in education and to create a good home learning environment" (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011, p.3) whilst making student behaviour a significant focus in their strategy. It is exactly this type of consequential impact that research should seek to explore through being more specific about the interaction between school staff and the parents of students.

This focus on the effectiveness of communication between schools and parents is also evident in the survey that Ofsted requests that parents complete during the inspection period of a school (Ofsted, 2020) as four of the fourteen questions asked specifically relate to the quality of communication from the school. However, it is certainly noteworthy that whilst the Ofsted inspectors have a "statutory duty to have regard of the views of parents…" (Department of Education, 2019), there is no specific reference to whether the inspection team should look to evaluate the quality of communication between the school and the parents. It would stand to reason therefore, that if schools were aware of the requirement to justify the quality of their communication with parents, then this may lead to a renewed emphasis on ensuring that this communication is of quality; especially as academic research too suggests that parental communication declines when students enter secondary school (Simpkins et al, 2015) whilst acknowledging that "establishing lines of communication between home and school is so challenging in secondary schools" (Wang, et al, 2014, p44) due to the added independence of the students as they grow older and the increased number and difficulty of subjects being studied.

Publicly available school-based literature also suggests a willingness and desire to effectively communicate with parents regarding "Information Evenings" (School A, 2020)

amid parent consultation evenings and termly progress reports for students. However, evaluating the impact of measures such as these, aside from the anecdotal feedback from attendees, may prove beneficial in ensuring that the communication that is already taking place between school staff and parents is effective in supporting the students in the desired way.

Therefore, it would appear that there is consensus amongst the literature surrounding the significant impact that communication between school staff and parents can have on the students' academic outcomes. Schools certainly need to prioritise making this communication as clear as possible in identifying barriers to learning and linking communication with the future hopes and aspirations of the students, where possible. As discussed earlier, the socio-economic status of families may also act as a significant barrier to academic progress. Research further suggests that "socio-economic status mediates both parental involvement and students achievement" (Harris and Goodall, 2007, p.27) and that many schools identify a number of the parents of disadvantaged students as "hard to reach" (Harris and Goodall, 2008, p.285). This clearly indicates an issue with the effectiveness of the communication between the schools and some of the families that they are seeking to engage. Moreover, as argued by Nechyba et al (2005) the middle class nature of the school institution may have methods of communication that are simply at odds with the methods in which families of low socio-economic status communicate. Although beyond the scope of this paper, schools may need to consider the methods of communication they use more carefully to ensure that parents and families across the socio-economic spectrum are encouraged to engage with the school.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, Harris and Goodall (2008) advise that focusing exclusively on the parents that are hard to engage may result in effectively neglecting the parents that willingly communicate with the school. Harris and Goodall (2008) make the contention that spending a disproportionate amount of resources in a bid to encourage some parents to

simply speak to the school may be fruitless, especially as “the data show this group rarely moves beyond this stage” (Harris and Goodall, 2008, P.286).

Supervising or Checking Homework

Unsurprisingly, the studies exploring the extent to which parents involve themselves in their children’s homework have arrived at differing conclusions as to the impact that this can have on students’ attainment. Wang et al, (2014) identify this facet of parental engagement as “providing structure at home” (Wang et al, 2014, p8) and specifically asked parent participants in their study “how regularly [they] enforce the family rules or expectations for our child about doing homework?” Wang, et al (2014) argue that providing structure at home is one of the few manners of parental engagement that does not decline as children grow older and make their way through secondary school. Helpfully, this study also makes the distinction between parents engaging with their children’s homework by either “scaffolding independence” (Wang, et al, 2014, p6) whereby parents encourage their children to complete their homework with as much independence as possible, whilst remaining present in the event of the child needing help. Differently, Wang, et al (2014) argue that some parents may also, or instead, put more emphasis on providing the structure at home through timetables and allocated revision schedules for the child to follow to ensure the homework is complete.

However, it is noteworthy that Wang, et al (2014) did not offer any discussion over the specific impact of providing structure at home; instead this strand of parental engagement was discussed alongside “academic socialization” (Wang, et al, 2014 p.8), a term that these researchers use to describe the practice of discussing education in relation to future aspirations.

Therefore, the emerging observation noted earlier in this literature review seems to continue as research exploring parental engagement may need to further refine the specific actions that constitute a *type* of parental engagement that is under scrutiny in a given piece of research. Furthermore, although not explicitly covered in the discussion by Wang et al (2014), this research also shares the limitation of gathering data by self-report as discussed in relation to Kelly *et al.* (2011). Furthermore, this limitation is exactly the pitfall of ethogenic approach that Menzel (1978) warns of as there are a "multiplicity of meanings that may be held for the same behaviour" (1978, cited in Cohen et al, 2007, p453). Taken in the context of parental engagement through providing structure at home, the meaning resting behind any parent's motivation to enforce the aforementioned structures may be vastly differing to the research aim of a particular study. Nevertheless, observations based on the behaviour itself may offer some insight into the impact on the student's learning, regardless of this lack of motivational understanding. Moreover, whilst not strictly related to checking or supervising homework, the notion of "academic socialization" (Wang et al, 2014, p.8) is certainly one which could be developed alongside homework to promote students skills in "competence, autonomy, and relatedness" (Wang et al, 2014,p.8).

Contrary to the argument of Wang et al, (2014), some research seems to suggest that the impact of parental involvement in homework has a "negligible or negative relationship with achievement" (Patall et al, 2008 , p1041); a contention which finds consensus with the discussions of previous studies (Epstein, 1988). Encouragingly, some research has gone to great lengths to explore the tenets of this very specific type of parental engagement that both support or may prohibit students' achievement. Patall et al (2008) argue that habit and routine-forming behaviours such as "goal setting, planning…and management of time, materials, attentiveness, and emotions" (Patall, et al, 2008, p.5) may prove to significantly influence long-term achievement of students; especially amongst younger students who may lack the internally driven skills of self-management. However, Patall et al (2008) also argue

that the emotional toil experienced by parents that attempt to support their children with homework, but lack the necessary skills or knowledge to do so effectively, may cause tension between the families and even damage existing positive perceptions of education. Input such as this raise a compelling argument about the ethical trade-off which is inherent in the educational system itself. To one degree or another, all families will have a threshold up to which school and homework hold its value, relative to the mental health and relationships within the family. This raises an incredibly interesting ethical consideration as we as educators clearly need to temper our own academic expectations of students while they are at home against our collective knowledge of the context that students are completing this homework within.

Nevertheless, research does suggest that academic progress can be supported by parental engagement in homework whilst also promoting positive perceptions of school and learning (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). In considering perceptions of homework, it is also important to acknowledge that parents may also harbour, and therefore model, home-learning habits that are either detrimental or beneficial to the academic progress of their children. Interestingly, Cooper et al (2000) discuss the possibility that parents may simply provide their children with the answers. Whilst the motivation for potentially damaging behaviour such as this would only be speculative at this stage, it seems inevitable that existing family perceptions of school and homework would play a role in driving these behaviours.

School-Based Parental Engagement

The other significant type of parental engagement that schools aim to promote amongst the parents of their students is the attendance and participation at events held at the school site. From experience, it seems as though this type of engagement; although commonplace during

the primary school phase of students' education, declines significantly as students enter the secondary phase of their school career. This contention is shared with some of the literature as Wang, et al (2014) explain that "many aspects of school-based [parental] involvement are less effective and more difficult to implement in secondary school.". However, whilst many parents may not readily engage with, or volunteer to help with, the school events; parent attendance at the parents' evening and events organised for school leavers is often very encouraging. Furthermore, this positive attendance figure is completely polarised within the main school of school A; the parent attendance at Year 7 and Year 11 attendance is frequently 90%, whilst the middle school years often gain a parent attendance of 80% (Table 1). It's clear that parents value these years as they may feel they are crucial in setting up the relationship with the school and ensuring students are on course to meet the requirements to move to their next desired destination, respectively for Year 7 and Year 11. Interestingly, this argument is in line with the "academic socialization" (Wang et al, 2014 p.8) discussed earlier whereby motivation to engage with school is improved when future career aspirations are linked to current goals.

However, there is some evidence to suggest that this type of school-based parental engagement has little or no impact on the achievement of the individual student. Based on a study including 70 schools, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) argue that the number of hours spent by parents volunteering at these schools had no significant impact on student achievement. Furthermore, this study adjusted for the weaknesses of using self-reporting to collect data by having researchers observe the volunteer work that the parents were carrying out. However, despite this robust sample size and the clear consideration that Desforges and Abouchaar lent to the structure of the research, there still remains some considerable disparities between the results observed and the seemingly sweeping conclusion that that this parental engagement has little impact on achievement. Firstly, Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) based the post intervention attainment measure of the student solely on the

"mathematics test scores" (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003, p.30). Whilst student attainment in maths is arguably the most suitable subject in which to generalise across a broad range of contexts; owing to the fact that the vast majority of students across the world study maths as part of their compulsory education, this still seems like a very narrow evidence base on which to assert that this engagement has does not impact upon student achievement. Furthermore, the study itself drew students from a disproportionate number of elementary schools (N=50) than high schools (N=8) which further reduces the reliability of these results.

Additional barriers to parental engagement in the education of disadvantaged students

As alluded to earlier in this literature review, the barriers to parental engagement can be as subtle and as complex as defining what parental engagement is itself. Government guidance (DfE, 2010) and reviews (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011) suggest that there may be barriers to parental engagement that are consistent across those families that struggle to engage in their children's learning; particularly in relation to students that come from a family with low socio-economic status.

Goodall and Vorhaus, (2011) argue that the most significant barriers to parental engagement stem from difficulties associated with "cost, time and transport" (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011, p.5). This fits clearly with the notion that parents of students who have been identified as being disadvantaged because of their family's socio-economic status may struggle to engage in school to the same degree as those families that do not face these challenges.

Methods Schools Use to Engage Parents

The methods that schools employ to attempt to engage the parents of the students will clearly be a contingent part of any study seeking to explore the impact that this engagement will have upon the educational experience and performance of these students. However, whilst researchers may conclude that strategies such as Parental Classes (Voorhis et al., 2013; Carbonero *et al.*, 2017), "Individualised Educational Plans" (IEP) (Axford *et al.*, 2019, p40) agreed by the student, their parents and teachers, and family learning activities (Higgins and Katsipataki, 2015) may promote parental engagement, the lack of consistent agreement as to what constitutes each of these methods precisely may impact the reliability of any conclusions drawn about the impact these methods may have on the ultimate educational experience of the students involved.

Classes for parents

In keeping with the methods of engagement explored above, there is mounting evidence to suggest that there are some initiatives and interventions that schools can implement to improve the engagement of the parents of their students. Many of the initiatives focused on delivering sessions to support and educate parents in the skills of parenting itself. Onc such study sought to support parents by inviting them to "Parents' school" (Carbonero et al., 2017, p.6) whereby the sessions would focus on the developing attitudes of habits relating to improving individuals' sense of responsibility over their actions; this in turn was intended to cascade down to the perceptions and behaviours of the children of these parents.

Relative to the control group, researchers concluded that parents in the experimental group in this study "show that an open parental style, both from the mother and the father, [which]

positively correlates with improvements in personal and social responsibility" (Carbonero *et al.*, 2017, p.9). However, whilst this is an encouraging conclusion in relation to the positive impact of parental involvement, the limitation remains that data was collected through self-report. Carbonero *et al* (2017) note that factoring in the report from the tutor delivering the session in the "Parent School" " (Carbonero *et al.*, 2017, p.6) would strengthen these findings significantly.

Furthermore, Carbonero *et al* (2017) recognise that repeating the process of the workshops may help to establish these attitudes of social responsibility as habits within the students; this approach would be entirely in keeping with one of the central strengths of using action research when exploring education as this approach "combines diagnosis, action and reflection" (McNiff, 2002: 15 cited in Cohen et al, 2007). Therefore, when considered alongside literature explored earlier in this review from Voorhis et al (2013), which suggested that effects of parental engagement may be *cumulative* over a sustained period of time; it becomes overwhelmingly clear that any potential research project would expect the most meaningful results to come on the back of a sustained programme of intervention for parents and students which is evaluated at regular intervals. The cyclinical nature of this, particularly, would allow the project to adapt and adjust for the individual contexts of the families who make up the participant cohort. Morevover, perhaps this is exactly the reason that it is argued that:

> "Action research is concerned equally with changing individuals, on the one hand, on the other the culture of the groups, institutions and societies to hich they belong." (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1992: 16, cited in Cohen et al, 2007)

Therefore, it comes as no surprise that action research has become a popular research model in education due its flexibility in design and delivery; staggering too is the fact that Kirt Lewin's foundation-laying work in the structure of action research "…was

deliberately intended to change the life chances of disadvantaged groups in terms of housing, employment, prejudice, socialization and training" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p344). It certianly seems apt that decades later, action research may be a reliable research model to improve the education of disadvantaged students in the education system today.

The Individualised Education Plans

Another frequently used strategy used by schools to engage the parents of their students in their education is the Individualised Education Plan (Appendix 1). Often used following an exclusion and concurrently with a school report, the Individualised Education Plan is designed to set a series of clear goals for the student which can be supported by parents and school staff. The effectiveness of the Individualised Education Plan sits within its capacity to unite three of the most significant elements the student's life; the students, the parents and the school. The fixed-term exclusions for disadvantaged students in School A are approximately relative to the proportion of disadvantaged students that make up the student body; 15% and 15.5% respectively. However, the proportion of disadvantaged students in receipt of a fixed-term exclusion in a national context are alarmingly higher than the students considered to be non-disadvantaged. This is clear in government literature that explains that the fixed term exclusion rate for the most deprived areas in England are "…7.1 per cent…" (Department of Education and National Statistics, 2019, p.6) compared with the "…3.41 per cent…" (Department of Education and National Statistics, 2019, p.6) of the students who received fixed-term exclusions in the least deprived areas. Therefore, if effective, the Individualised Education Plan may be a crucial tool in the collective bid to improve the engagement of the parents of the most disadvantaged students in our schools today.

However, the research focusing on the effectiveness of Individual Education Plans in engaging parents in their children's education is somewhat inconsistent. For example in the recent meta-review of best practice for engaging parents in their children's education, (Poortvliet et al, 2019) all of the reviews measured parental participation in Individual Education Plans meetings and found "no evidence of a statistically significant effect" (Poortvliet et al., 2019, p.40) of this type of engagement. However, the reasons that the authors offer for this seemingly low impact seems speculative as they explain that "The diversity of children included in the studies may partially account for this [lack of significant effect]"(Poortvliet et al., 2019, p40). It's certainly evident that more robust investigation is needed into the *elements* of the Individualised Education Plan that may be of some use, in particular contexts, in understanding the support that parents and students may need to improve parental engagement. Furthermore, the sheer number of schools that seem to use the Individualised Education Plan; from the evidence provided here and my anecdotal perspective as a school leader, suggest that there is some inherent value in using the Individualised Education Plan itself. However, Poortvliet et al *(*2019) also make the argument that involving the parents in the education of their parents is a legal requirement and therefore an Individualised Education Plan allows schools to ensure that they are clearly compliant. Whilst the notion of schools holding meetings for the sole reason of ensuring compliance may be unsettling, it is clear that that the benefits and drawbacks of such meetings need careful consideration by the professionals that are suggesting and holding them.

Family Learning Activities

Another approach that schools have available to them in their bid in engaging the parents in the learning of their children involves the use of targeted academic interventions to be

completed over the summer break or at evenings and weekends. Interestingly, following a meta-analysis focusing on three areas of parental involvement Higgins and Katsipataki (2015) argue that "there is consistent evidence" about the positive "impact of… general approaches…home and family literacy programmes… and targeted interventions focused on individual or specific family need."(Higgins and Katsipataki, 2015, p.2) Whilst Higgins and Katsipataki (2015) argue that general approaches and specifically tailored interventions to support in parental engagement may improve student and family literacy levels from anywhere between "two…[to] eight months" (Higgins and Katsipataki, 2015, p.2), the individual studies included in the meta-analysis raise some questions around the degree to which these results can be generalised. For example, many of the studies involved the families with children that were aged between 2 and 10 and lived in North America. Whilst it can be argued that results from studies based in these different contexts can be expected to be replicated in with different age groups in different nations; the context of a North American primary school seems somewhat too different to align with any findings from contexts such as a British secondary school.

The "umbrella review" (Higgins Katsipataki, 2015) explored above also raises an interesting question about the reliability of meta-analyses, let alone reviews such as these that seek to combine multiple meta-analyses. A specific concern is the effect of the "arrow of time" (Prigogine and Stengers, 1985. cited in Cohen et al, 2007, p341) which explains that social situations and contexts are continuously evolving and that comparing the effect of these numerous findings run the risk of stagnating the results by "holding time and situations constant"(Cohen et al, 2007, p341). Nevertheless, these findings from Higgins and Katsipataki (2015) provide some bedrock on which to begin to build empirical evidence related to the impact that these types of interventions can have on parental engagement; however, in keeping with the recurrent notion in this literature review, it seems that

researchers and professionals alike need to be specific about *how* parents are engaging with their children's education, if meaningful interpretations are to be forthcoming.

A Potential Gap in the Literature

The lack of reported interventions aimed specifically at students of secondary school age, relative to interventions aimed at the younger age groups, begs the question regarding whether interventions are going ahead, or whether schools are not engaging with the research relating to parental engagement. In a review of the interventions that schools implement to increase parental engagement, Gorard and See (2013) argue that secondary schools may not run interventions to promote parental engagement because "of the wide spread belief that earlier interventions will be more effective" (Gorard and See, 2013, p7). More damningly, this review focused on six studies that did specifically focus on the secondary phase of education and concluded that each of the studies "were of low quality" (Gorard and See, 2013, p7) due to the small sample sizes and ambiguity over what the results actually suggested. Moreover, it would appear that the issue facing schools that are trying to improve parental engagement may well be a systemic lack of faith in the capacity to engage parents or even the perceived benefit of doing so. The challenge for schools therefore, needs to be primarily focused on determining *whether* parental engagement will impact on the education of their children *in any way*, before blindly attempting to promote it amongst its students and families.

Despite the reported short-comings of the parental engagement studies that focused on the secondary phase of education, some were able to suggest factors that may impact upon the degree of parental engagement and some possible strategies that could improve this engagement itself. Firstly, it was argued that the level of prior attainment of students was key to outcomes in the level of parental engagement (Gorard and See, 2013) However, as Gorard

and See (2013) explain “if this [were] true, it means we cannot trust any studies that either do not take prior attainment into account, or that fail to have large randomly allocated groups” to control for the impact of prior attainment. Certainly, more investigation and evidence is needed relating to the role that prior attainment plays in the degree to which parents ultimately engage with their children’s education.

Nevertheless, Gorard and See, (2013) did suggest that some interventions resulted in an increase in parental engagement in these studies. Firstly, it was argued that a “family-focused programme to reduce problems associated with transition” (Gorard and See, 2013, p7) allowed parents and children to develop their “mutual understanding, enjoyment and communication” (Gorard and See, 2013, p7). Although limited in compass, results such as these offer a starting point at which to begin examining whether improving these relationships, in these ways, may ultimately lead to more favourable outcomes for the students. Moreover, it stands to reason that parents that are enjoying being engaged in the interventions will convey a positive attitude towards school and schooling to their children. Furthermore, Gorard and See (2013) further explain that this study managed to conclude that the increase in communication between school and parents and the discussion of future goals contributed to the positive outcomes for these families. Interestingly, the notion of aligning discussion between students, school staff and parents with future goals and desires is in complete harmony with the research by Wang, et al, (2014) explored earlier in this literature review in relation to improving student motivation. Once again, whilst there is a clear need for development in this area, the research gives some encouragement that students, parents and school, may witness increases in parental engagement and student motivation if the future aspirations are linked to the relevant contexts of students and families.

Questions emerging from the research

In completing the literature review, it became abundantly clear that there are many distinct areas of parental engagement that need substantial research if we are to better understand the very complex nature of the relationship between students, school staff and parents. However, a series of questions emerged which compliment the aim of the current action research project and may provide valuable insights into the contextual difficulties in engaging the parents of the disadvantaged students in School A. Henceforth, the methodology design and subsequent data collection will continue with the following research questions:

- What is the nature of parental engagement in School A?
- Is communication between School A and parents of disadvantaged students supporting these students in managing their attitude to school?
- Can parental engagement be increased with the parents of disadvantaged students to better engage students in School A?

Chapter 3 – Making the impact

Methodology design and data

At the outset of designing this study, it had to be at the forefront of thought that the purpose was to change, for better, the way in which parents engage in the educational lives of their children. It was for this very reason that it was decided that action research was the model in which this piece of practitioner research would be based upon. However, whilst the principle of perpetually adapting the design of research through discrete cycles is so fitting in the sector of education, there are facets of the design that need to be carefully considered if the very sensitive topic of parental engagement is to be meaningfully explored; this

sensitivity is only exacerbated by the added element that families in focus in this project are those that have been identified as having low socio-economic status. Furthermore, socio-economic status takes on further relevance in this study when considered alongside the discussions in the literature review whereby it is described as one of the "net predictors" (Poortvliet et al, 2019, p.6) of the academic performance of the students themselves and that students may have to contend with a "culture of poverty" (Nechyba etal, 2005, p.66) that may be present in the families of disadvantaged students.

Moreover, Winter (2010) asserts that action research is so readily applied to research in education because of six very specific qualities. Firstly, the process of "reflexive critique" (Winter, 2010, p.9), whereby researchers become increasingly aware of their perceptual bias, is incredibly relevant as teachers conducting practitioner research as the vocational nature of the profession itself may encourage teachers to be guided by their own perceptions of their impact, rather than any data generated. Therefore, this project will ensure that the teachers that take part in gathering the data and evaluating the process are drawn from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines. This approach should encourage the process of reflexive critique and therefore lead to the increase in internal validity as the action research continues through the cycles.

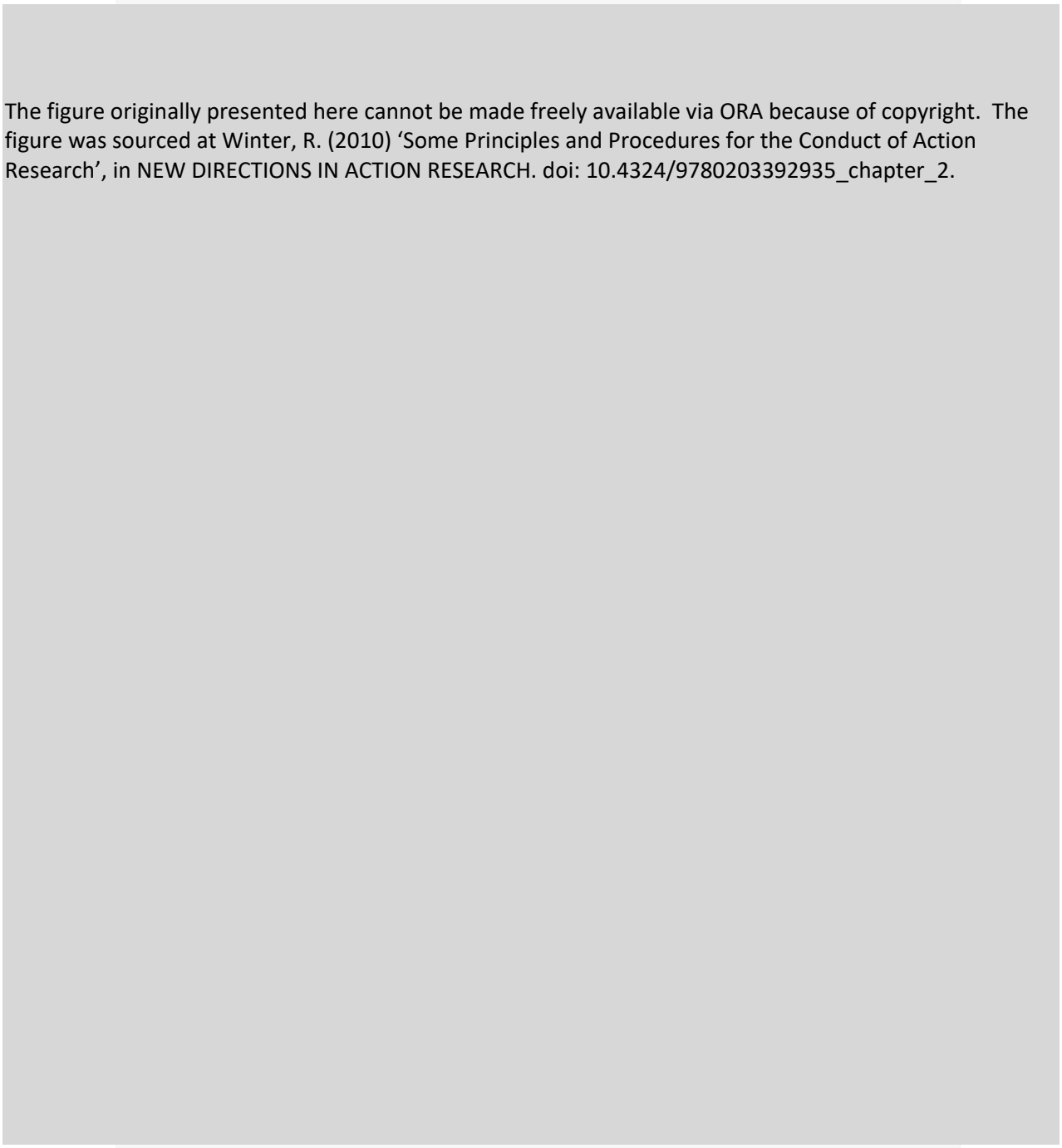
Furthermore, as explored in the literature review for this project, the impact of context seems incredibly profound in the specific area of parental engagement and this seems to be particularly important when focusing on the engagement of the parents of disadvantaged students (Nechyba et al, 2005). This is supported by the concept of "dialectic critique" (Winter, 2010, P.9) whereby the relationship between the specific elements of context that combine to make up the given phenomena. Therefore, the project has been designed to glean data from students, parents and teachers to ensure that the context that each student is living is understood in as much depth as possible. Additionally, the added

motivation to include these multiple perspectives arises from the contribution from the literature review (Kelly et al 2011) that reliability was greatly increased in parental engagement studies when data was collected from other sources than solely self-report. Although knowledge of this context may not impact on the results directly, placing the results in the similar or differing contexts of students should allow the discussion to begin to highlight areas of research which may prove fruitful in the future.

Furthermore, action research draws its strength from the process of collaboration the differing viewpoints allows researchers to gather a more detailed understanding of a given situation (Armstrong and Moore, 2004; Rose and Grosvenor, 2013). Therefore, collaboration in this project will not be limited collaboration amongst teachers, but will extend to the collaboration with parents to evaluate and develop the cycles as the research moves forward. This focus on collaboration and context leads suitably into Winter's notion of "risking disturbance" (Winter, 2010, p8) whereby the typical processes of practitioners are inevitably put under scrutiny. As explained in the literature review, the pertinency of this process was clear when reflecting on the structure of the school parents' evening and information events. As a contingent part of the project, the existing strategies of student grade rounds and interviews with staff and students will be submitted to critique in an attempt ascertain which elements of these procedures provide measurable support; particularly in relation to the extent to which these processes support and promote parental engagement in their student's education. This further extends to the notion of "creating plural structures" (Winter, 2010, p.8) by developing a variety of accounts and interpretations of the situation in focus (Kelly et al., 2011). In this project, the inclusion of the colleagues and parents in the design and adaption of the action research project will allow these plural structures to influence development of the research cycles the eventual conclusions of the discussions.

The final benefit of action research, as explained by Winter (2010) relates to the oscillation between theory and practice. Perhaps more significantly than the other promising features of action research, Winter (2010) argues that this style of research manages to arrive at the point whereby "theory and practice [is] internalised, which is seeing theory and practice as two interdependent yet complimentary phases of the change process" (Winter, 2010, p.8). Therefore, the practice of assimilating this piece of action research within the usual process of the grade rounds in school and the subsequent conversations between staff and students will allow the usual practice of the school to be subject to academic scrutiny and so develop this practice with the best interests of the disadvantaged students in mind. Consequently, the structure of this piece of Action research has taken on the structure as depicted in Fig 1 to ensure that every opportunity is given to reflect and adjust the process through the feedback of the professionals collaborating on the project.

Figure 1


The figure originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. The figure was sourced at Winter, R. (2010) 'Some Principles and Procedures for the Conduct of Action Research', in NEW DIRECTIONS IN ACTION RESEARCH. doi: 10.4324/9780203392935_chapter_2.

Research tools

The justification of the use of action research above allows for the successful application of both quantitative and qualitative research. However, great effort has been made to ensure that the selection of the mixed methods in used in this investigation ensure that it can benefit from "methodological triangulation" (Cohen et al, 2007, p.196) insofar is possible. Cohen et al (2007) explain that methodological triangulation refers to research that the same method of data collection at different moments in the research or different methods of data collection on the same focus of study. Therefore, to achieve this methodological triangulation, this investigation will use a mixed methods approach to gather data from students, parent and teachers. However, despite the seemingly powerful results that a mixed-methods approach can yield, there is some criticism from Lincoln and Guba that the "search for theory and methodological triangulation is epistemologically incoherent and empirically empty" (Cited in Cohen et al, 2007, p.197) as Lincoln and Guba argue that gaining the comprehensive picture of knowledge to offer a "complete explanation of the phenomenon being researched" (Cohen et al, 2007, p197) will not find agreement between any two theories.

Nevertheless, the type of data gained through the different research tools in this piece of practitioner research may give different, but invaluable, insights into the different relationships sitting behind the degree of parental engagement in a given student's education. As explored in the literature review, this contextual understanding may prove to be crucial in beginning to understand and impact that this engagement may have upon any individual student's attitude towards their education of specific subjects.

The Parent Pilot Interviews

The initial steps of the data gathering procedure of this action research project involves a series of pilot interviews with the parents of the students in receipt of the Pupil

Premium Grant (PPG). The rationale behind these interviews, procedurally speaking, is two-fold. Firstly, pilot interviews will provide a unique insight in the specific contextual factors that may impact upon the participants in this study; this insight is particularly important given the sensitive nature of the decision to draw participants from families that are form a low socio-economic background. Whilst perhaps not common practice in educational research, pilot interviews such as these have been useful in gleaning these contextual details whilst also allowing researchers to rehearse the questions and questioning styles before the wider project commences (Majid *et al.*, 2017). It is this second strength of pilot interviews that makes the use of them in this action research so valuable.

Furthermore, Cohen et al (2007) explain that the process of "researching powerless people is also highly sensitive [as]…powerless people are easily negatively stereotyped"(Cohen et al, 2007, p175). Whilst the ethical considerations of the action research project will be explored in more detail later in this paper, is it important to acknowledge these here as they formed a major part of the research design in this particular project. Moreover, introducing parents to enquiry-based nature of the research was crucial if parents are to participate fully, comfortable in the knowledge that their reason for inclusion in the research is well intended and completely non-judgmental. It is for these reasons that the pilot interviews with parents will be semi-structured, as to allow parents to offer the contextual details of the factors that they feel impact upon their engagement with their child's education. Following on from the outcomes of the literature review, initial questions will focus on the areas of communication with the school, linking school to chosen career opportunities (for students) and removing barriers to parental engagement in education. During these pilot interviews it will be explained to parents that they may not necessarily be involved in the project itself, as this will be subject to the student survey, but their unique perspectives will allow for the action research to adapt to the needs of the participants where suitable and necessary.

Student survey

Following from the pilot interviews with the parents, students will be asked to complete a survey to attempt to ascertain the degree to which they feel their parents engage with their education. To ensure that students or their parents do not feel as though the project is being critical of any perceived engagement, students will be asked more generally about how others engage in their education. It will also be clearly explained to students that they are not obligated to answer any or all of the questions in the survey itself. As explained by Docherty and Sandelowski (1999), children are often considered to be "the best sources of information about themselves" (cited in Cohen et al, 2007. p.433). Paradoxes such as these make clear the need to draw children in to speaking about their own experiences in life and, in relation to this action research, their education. Therefore, the perceptions gathered during this survey should give an accurate account of the level of engagement that these children *perceive* their parents to engage with their education. As, after all, human behaviour is so heavily based on what we perceive, there may well be a discrepancy between what these children perceive and what the other participants perceive in relation to parental engagement. Whilst discrepancies, or lack of discrepancies, such as these may offer little evidence of parental engagement *per se*, they may point the way for further research investigating the impact of students and parent perceptions.

Therefore, the student survey (Appendix 2) will consist of 8 reverse-scaled questions. Reverse scaling is important in this circumstance as it controls for the eventuality of students completing the survey at random. Recent studies (Kuru and Pasek, 2016) have suggested that whilst reverse scaling does not mitigate the risk of acquiescence bias altogether, it provides the researcher some basis on which to interpret any outliers in data sets meaningfully. The survey will be a 5-point scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree" to ensure that students who are unsure or who feel uncomfortable

sharing information pertaining to their relationship with their parents can elect to “neither agree or disagree”. The questions which therefore make up the student survey will also be carefully linked to the findings from the literature view; namely related to communication between parents and school, perceived parental engagement with school activities, and how students feel their studies link to their future goals and aspirations. Moreover, the full student cohort of year 10 will be invited to take part in the survey in an attempt to reduce any feelings of stigmatization amongst the focus group of disadvantaged students; this will also allow for some degree of comparison between the perceived level of parental engagement between the disadvantaged students and the rest of the student body, relative to the year 10 cohort. Finally, allowing the students to complete the survey anonymously may have allowed students to complete the survey more truthfully as they may worry about their potentially sensitive answers. On balance however, it seemed more important to be in a position whereby the survey responses can be considered alongside the qualitative data that will be collected later in the action research cycle. However, it will be explained to every student that participation is completely optional and that results will be anonymised at the conclusion of the data collection.

Grade Round Data

In conjunction with the student survey, the school’s policy of having the second-grade round of the year in term 3 (Fig.2) will provide invaluable data relating to each student’s “Attitude to Learning” in specific subjects. Whilst caution will be taken in making direction comparisons between this ATL and the and results from the survey, the collective data picture form these sources will feed into the intervention with the students to best them in developing the role that their parent has in the student’s education. Whilst the term “ATL” has specific connotations in its use within school A, it is essentially an indicator as to how

well an individual student is engaging in their own learning. Whilst there is clearly a separate literature here pertaining to the vocabulary and theory of the term "ATL", it is used in this sense as a general indicator engaged a student is in their own learning. Similarly, the report records the quality of homework for each student and whether this homework is regularly on time which may prove to be insightful when interpreting the similarities of differences between this report and the perceptions of the student, as gleaned from the student survey.

Figure 2.

KS3 Term 3 Report 2020

8Y

Attendance
Possible Sessions: 196 **Attendance:** **89.8%**

Subject	Class Teacher	Homework		Current Grade	Target	Attitude to Learning
		Regularly On time	Quality			
Art		Yes	1	2b		1
Computer Science		Yes	1	1c	6	1
Dance		No	3	1b		2
Drama		Yes	2	2c		3
DT		Yes	2	1a		2
English		Yes	3	2b	5	3
French		Yes	2	1a	5	3
Geography		Yes	2	1a	6	2
History		No	2	1b	6	2
Maths		Yes	2	1a	6	2
Music		Yes	2	2b		3
PE				2b		2
Science		Yes	2	2c	6-5	2
World Views		Yes	3	1a		2

Homework Quality		Attitude to Learning	
1	Outstanding	1	Outstanding
2	Good	2	Good
3	Requires Improvement	3	Requires Improvement
4	Unacceptable	4	Unacceptable
5	Unable to comment. This may be due to staff or student absence.		

The intervention: Improving ATL – Students, Parents, Teachers

Intervention with students

Using the student surveys and the and the grade rounds concurrently, three colleagues will each identify one student to work with for their intervention. At this stage, its would be expected that these students would have an ATL that either "requires improvement" (3) or is "unacceptable" (4). The teacher researcher will then meet with the student to discuss the reasons that the students feels that their ATL may have been marked as needing attention. Using the "Improving ATL" worksheet, the teacher researcher will guide the student through the thought process related to engaging their parents in the subject that that has been agreed upon by the teacher and student. The worksheet itself (Fig.2) has been carefully designed to target the areas of parental engagement that the literature review suggested could improve the degree and manner in which parents engage in their children's education. For example, as explained in the literature review (Wang et al, 2014), (Harris and Goodall, 2008) parental engagement has been observed to increase when future aspirations and goals are linked to current learning goals for students. Therefore, part of the intervention is specifically focused on discussing how the subject in which the student is struggling in could relate to their future career. However, it well may be that any struggle with ATL in a specific lesson may not be associated to any degree with the student's future aspirations. Therefore, the intervention has been designed in such a way that the teacher researcher can uncover the contextual reason for this low ATL. This is incredibly important as the overwhelming outcome from the literature review related to the notion that contextual factors had a significant influence over the degree and manner in which parents engaged in their children's education.

Figure 2

Improving attitude to learning – Student, Teachers, Parents

Getting a "3" for your "Attitude to Learning" (ATL) in your recent grade round does not necessarily mean that your behaviour in that specific subject is terrible or disruptive. However, your ATL is perhaps the most important factor in making sure that you succeed in these subjects to your full potential. The best way to improve our attitudes towards any activities is to identify the reasons driving this attitude and then discuss these reasons with the people that are looking to help us.

Step 1 – Identifying the problem



In which lesson(s) does your ATL require improvement?

Which behaviours do you feel impact upon your ATL in this subject?

What do you think you can do to address this behaviour?

How could this problem link to your chosen career/interests?

Step 2 – Discussing and adjusting our ideas (Make any adjustments in a different Colour pen, above!)



When will you speak to your teacher about the reasons behind your ATL?

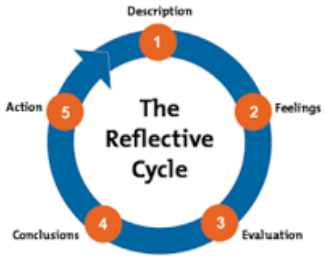
When will you speak to your parents about the reasons behind your ATL?

Evaluating the process –

Do you think you ATL has improved in the subject(s) that you highlighted?

Did discussing the reasons behind your ATL with teachers help you address this in lesson? Why/Why not?

Did discussing the reasons behind your ATL with parents help you address this in lesson? Why/ Why not?

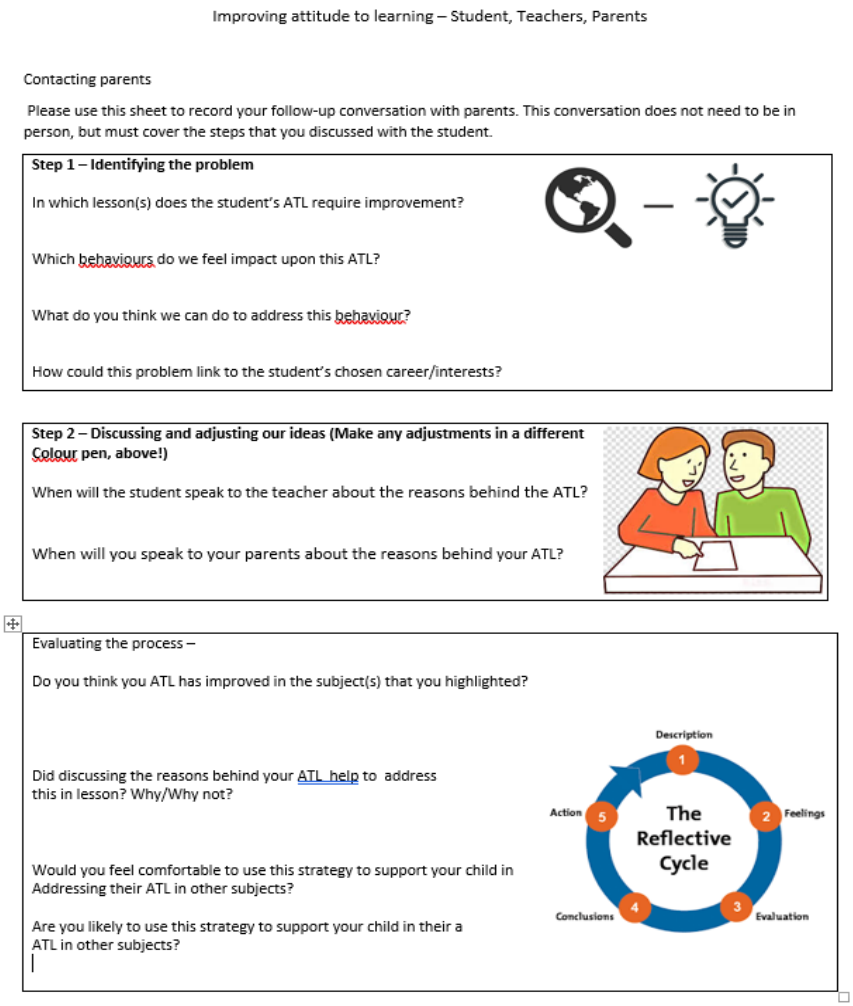


Meeting parents

The contextual focus above leads neatly on to the next step in the action research cycle; the discussion with the parent. The other resounding outcome from the literature (Wang etal, 2014; Poortvliet et al., 2019) related to the quality of communication between

school and the parents of the students. Therefore, it will be crucial to add an element of communication into the intervention to attempt to link the key people into the problem-solving process and improve the quality of this communication in a targeted manner. In the busy context of a school, it would be impractical to insist that teacher researchers invite parents in to school following the student interview. Therefore, teacher researchers will be asked to either meet *or* telephone the parents of the students they have been working with. Fig (3), below, shows the suggested structure for this discussion as it corresponds to the intervention initially conducted with the student.

Figure 3



Informing the subject teacher

The final stage of the intervention itself concerns the subject teacher of the lesson in which the student is improving their ATL. Whilst the primary focus of this research is the parental engagement in their child's education, the role of the specific subject teacher cannot be underestimated. Therefore, the colleague working with the student in question will notify the subject teacher of the identified reasons for the poor ATL and the agreed actions to improve this. Whilst it may seem that including the subject teacher in this way detracts from focus of parental engagement, McTaggart (1992) reminds us that action research "involves people in making *critical analyses* of the situations in which they work" (Cohen et al, 2007, p.347). Therefore, stimulating this inquisitive quality amongst the teaching staff may prove to be fundamental in adding to the collective "*systemic learning practice"* (Cohen et al, 2007p.346) that has the potential to take place in the school. The manner in which the teacher-researcher feeds-back the intervention sheet to the subject teacher will be entirely at their discretion, but will form an important part of the ongoing evaluative process of the action research cycles.

Post session interview with students and parents

The final stage of the action research cycle for this project involves a post-intervention discussion between the student, the parent and the teacher-researcher. This session will take place two weeks after the intervention itself; a timeframe decided upon as this fits in with a full revolution of the students' timetable. This should allow sufficient time for the student to act upon the strategies suggested in the interventions whilst drawing support from their parents and teachers. At the post session interview, the teacher researcher will collect the perspectives of the student and parent to ascertain whether the session has been effective in improving the ATL in this subject. Ultimately, the aim will be for the

student and parent to regulate any further concerns with the student's ATL on their own, however, a situation may arise whereby a student and parent will need to take part in the second action research cycle to fully assimilate the strategies explored in the intervention; any continued inclusion in the project will be discussed during the evaluation of the first cycle of the action research project.

Evaluating cycle one

Central to the aim and structure of this project is the quality of reflection and adjustment. Therefore it is crucial that the three teacher-researchers meet to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the action research cycle one and prepare action research cycle two. Cohen et al, (2007) explain that action research "…starts with *small* cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting, which can help to define issues, ideas and assumptions more clearly so that those involved can define more *power questions* for themselves as their work progresses" (Cohen et al, 2007, p.347) Therefore, in evaluating the action research cycle, teacher-researchers will ensure that the original research questions are closely considered alongside any observations or wider discussion points. Furthermore, discussion surrounding the future steps of the second action cycle will be formative in nature as the "definition of the problem, the aims and methodology may alter during the process of action research." (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p346).

Limitations of action research cycles

Despite the widely agreed (Cohen et al, 2007)and long standing (Stringer, 2010) consensus regarding the benefits of actions research, limitations exist in its application to educational research that must be acknowledged and adjusted for where possible.

Cohen et al(2007) warn of the "hierarchal… formal…[and] bureaucratic" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007, p.359) aspects of conducting action research in schools. In the context of this action research investigation, these aspects present themselves through the hierarchal positions of the teacher-researchers involved in the data collection and in the whole-school targets relating to the academic achievement of the disadvantaged students, relative to the rest of the student cohorts. Moreover, the three teacher researchers involved in this project all have a clear incentive for the project to succeed in improving the ATL of the disadvantaged students as all of their roles in the school bestow on them some accountability for the progress of this student group; whilst I am the assistant head teacher responsible for the pastoral wellbeing of the upper school, the other two teacher researchers "Pupil-Premium coordinators", tasked with devising and reviewing provisions to support the Pupil premium students in improving their academic outcomes. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that colleagues may feel an added sense of pressure to engage with this action research project due to my inclusion in the Senior Leadership Team. Therefore, when approaching these colleagues to ask them if they would be interested in taking part of the project, I explained to them that they were in no way obligated to take part and that any perceived results would not impact upon their roles in the school. Whilst these were colleagues had an existing academic interest in exploring and reviewing interventions, it was also explained to them that much can be learnt from any discovered short-comings or limitations in the project.

The second aspect that may have an impact on any intervention seeking to improve the academic outcomes of disadvantages students is the whole-school target of trying to improve the outcomes for these students, specifically. Therefore, when explaining the research project to the Senior Leadership Team and the rest of the staff body, I made it explicitly clear that whilst the project itself may ultimately signpost some areas that we can focus on to support the engagement of disadvantaged students and parents, there should be no expectation that results will be immediately positive in relation to the academic performance of the students involved.

A final noteworthy limitation of the action research project is the use of interviews as the primary tool for data collection. Whilst Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2007) list the five unavoidable features of interviews that are problematic, the summarising point that “”no matter how hard and interviewer may try to be systematic and objective, the constraints of everyday life” (Cohen et al, 2007, p410) will be a significant part of any resulting transactions. This limitation is clearly applicable to all interviewees in this action research project to one degree or another as students and their parents will have existing perceptions, or even working relationships, with the teachers that ultimately conduct a given interview. It does not seem reasonable to expect limitations such as this to be adjusted for by merely explaining this to the interviewees and imploring them to be honest, therefore, results will clearly need to be interpreted with this contextual limitation in mind.

Ethics

Ethical considerations for any school based action research will grapple with the added consideration that one has to give when working with children; this project has the added ethical facet of the subject of this study being those students that are considered to be disadvantaged, relative to the wider school student population. Therefore, to ensure that the

initial design of the action research project had been subject to ethical scrutiny and any potential risks identified, approval was granted by the Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC) (Appendix 3).

Furthermore, Cohen et al (2007) offer specific conditions and guarantees that should be put forward in school-based research to further ensure that every reasonable ethical detail has been considered. Whilst there can be "no rigid rules…[and] it will be a case of formulating and abiding by one's own situated ethics" (Cohen et al, 2007, p.83), using such accepted conditions allows one to consider the most important ethical considerations. Cohen et al (2007) cite the six ethical conditions stated by Bell (1991) as:

1. All participants must be given the chance to remain anonymous
2. All data must be given strict confidentiality
3. Interviewees should have the chance to verify statements at the stage of drafting the report (respondent validation)
4. Participants should be given a copy of the final report
5. Permission for publication must be gained from the participants
6. If possible, the research report should be of benefit to the school and participants

Therefore, the current action research project will anonymise all participant names and any details relating to the school in which the research is being conducted. Moreover, all research data will securely stored and will be destroyed 6- months after completion of the project in line with guidance from the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2019). Interviewees will also been given the chance to validate any of the statements that they make following the interviews with the teacher-researcher; this will be particularly important in circumstances whereby students may disclose details about their family situation or relationship with parents. As with any school-based interventions with children, there is also the potential for students to make safeguarding disclosure; in the event of disclosures such as these, local safeguarding procedures will be adhered to (DfE, 2018; Her Majesty's Government, 2018). At the conclusion of the project, copies of the project will be

shared will all collaborators and participants; at this stage, permission for publication will be sought if necessary. Finally, all results will be shared with the Senior Leadership Team at the school and if appropriate, the school board at the conclusion of the project.

Changes in data collection due to Covid 19

Due to the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, collection of the data for this action research project was significantly impacted upon. While I managed to conduct the pilot interviews with parents of the Pupil Premium students, the social distancing measures imposed before the school closures meant that the student data was not collected. Whilst consideration was given to continuing with the project using a digital platform, it did not seem appropriate to explore the nature and manner in which parents engage with their children's education at time when parents were doing their upmost to take responsibility for their children's education at home.

Therefore, I decided to conduct remote interviews with the other teacher-researchers to gather their perspectives of the potential of the project, including any expected limitations, with a view to run the intervention in the next academic year. With this in mind, I have put the results from the pilot interviews and the evaluative meetings with the teacher-researchers in the following section.

Chapter 4 – Data

Although data was limited, the partial data collected offered some tentative initial responses to the research questions and certainly suggested discrete areas that will be of interest to School A in attempting to better engage the parents of disadvantaged students in the education of their children. Furthermore, this limited data also suggests some clear areas

that practitioner researchers may delve further into in an attempt to better understand the impact that parental engagement can have on the lives of all students.

What is the nature of parental engagement in School A?

Firstly, the pilot interviews with parents and the interviews with professionals managed to offer some insight into the way in which parents at School A engage with the education of their children. Parent A explained that she perceived education as a balance between "academics and wellbeing" as nobody can engage with anything if "[they] are not happy". Parent A supplemented this with an explanation of a time whereby she engaged with the school through the "student support" team and found this to be very stressful for her and her daughter. This experience was clearly important in the relationship forming for this parent and the school as Parent A felt that there was no "mutual respect" between the school and the family which made Parent A reluctant to contact School A as she felt that the "damage [had been] done". Moreover, Parent A felt that this incident hampered their relationship with her child's education as she felt she had "one foot in the parent pool where I want to support the school and one foot in the pool where I want to be a supportive parent". Through this discussion with Parent A, it is clear that the institutional values of School A and the familial values of Parent A and her daughter were somewhat in contrast. Evidence from the literature review (Nechyba,et al, 2005) suggests that this dissonance is to be expected when exploring the relationship between the school and the families with low socio-economic status, more specific discussion with the underlying values that guide the students and parents to arrive a these conclusions are clearly needed in order to draw any confident conclusions about the specific relationships between these values and the attitudes towards certain situations in school.

Parent B also offered an interesting viewpoint relating to the way in which she engaged with their child's education as she explained that she attended every parents' evening and form tutor meeting but had "never received any follow-up" from the school subsequently. This issue was compounded by the fact that the child of Parent B was "very quiet" and this meant all communication between Parent B and school was driven by the parent herself; communication that was impacted by the fact that they "never heard anything back". Evidence from the literature review suggested that preventative communication from school may strengthen relationships between school staff and parents when school staff have perceived poor behaviour in students (Wang et al, 2014). Therefore, a tentative conclusion may be drawn in respect of Parent A's displeasure with the lack of communication as this contact from the school may have supported this student and parent with addressing the goals and challenges that arose from the meetings that they described. However, the speculative nature of this conclusion is all too clear and further empirical evidence would certainly be needed to ultimately support this contention. Nevertheless, findings such as this are in harmony with the contentions of researchers discussed in the literature review for this project as they shared the argument that early and effective communication between parents and school staff promote positive engagement from the perspective of the student (Nechyba et al, 2005; Poortvliet et al, 2019).

Can parental engagement be increased with the parents of disadvantaged students to better engage students in School A?

All interviewees also suggested that parental engagement can be successfully promoted through a variety of approaches in secondary school. Firstly, Parent A showed a willingness to engage in parental consultation evenings as they suggested that School A could improve these events by not "rely[ing] on students making appointments" However, it

was clear that Parent A felt that parental engagement was obstructed when communication was ineffective between the school and parents as she was “shocked” when she didn’t know that her daughter would be on report following an internal sanction. Therefore, once again the literature explored suggests that quality communication from School A may have prevented the confusion experienced by the student and parent and may have strengthened the relationship between the School A and this particular family (Nechyba et al, , 2005).

Parent B felt that at times School A can “often [be] quite vague” when offering support for homework in some subjects and this vagueness, together with perceived lack of return contact from School A may negatively impact on Parent B’s motivation to engage with the school. Whilst the form of communication explained by Parent B was not entirely in keeping with the “preventative communication” described by (Nechyba et al, 2005, p12), the sentiment regarding the disappointment in the lack of communication *per se* resonates with the earlier discussion that communication may provide a clear basis to improve parent-school relations.

The interviews with professionals also offered some fruitful data as Teacher A felt that the planned intervention would “take the focus away from just the negative behaviour and show that we, as a school, care more about all of the aspects that are impacting our students” and felt that sharing the students ambitions and life goals with their parents would “really help bring all three parties (Students/parents/school staff) together”. Encouragingly, this viewpoint finds support in the literature explored earlier in this paper as Wang et al (2014) claimed that this focus on future goals enabled students and parents to better visualise the steps necessary for students to achieve their desires. However, Teacher A felt that parental engagement would be better promoted amongst the parents of disadvantaged students in school A if it were delivered to specific students when needed as the “different families will face different challenges as different times”. This emphasis on understanding

the individual circumstance of the students and families that work with the school is in complete harmony with the researchers such as Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) who argue that the contextual details of each student and family has a significant bearing on their likelihood that the parents will engage meaningfully with the school.

Furthermore, Teacher A felt that promoting the parental engagement of students in the lower school would be more impactful and yield longer-lasting results. Interestingly, Teacher A felt that the intervention itself would be successful in promoting parental engagement in their student's education, but that this may need a "few revolutions" to show the potential benefits. Research explored in the literature review also supported this argument as Voorhis *et al* (2013) advocated the cumulative impact that parental engagement can have on the educational performance of the students involved in such an intervention. Taken on their own, findings such as this are limited in their reliability and validity; however, these cautious conclusions offer a clear sign post as to the areas of parental engagement that may be of benefit to students.

Teacher B also offered similar speculation as they felt that parental engagement is best supported through praise and that "communication is absolutely vital" promoting positivity in parents. Teacher B then went on to offer an anecdote whereby positive phone calls home "re-engaged" a parent that previously "wouldn't answer the phone [and who was] completely shocked, but overjoyed to receive a positive call from the school". Teacher B elaborated on this and explained that when there were issues in the class with this student, this newly developed positive relationship meant that the parents were very keen to support this teacher in addressing the poor behaviour. Once again, evidence from the literature review was in harmony with the contribution of Teacher B as Wang et al (2014) also argue that this type of preventative communication from the teacher can better support students that struggle with their own poor attitude to education.

Teacher B felt that the element of the intervention requiring students to specify a time in which they would speak to their parents about their targets would "really develop the link between parents, student and teacher". However, in contrast to Teacher A, Teacher B felt that the intervention would be best targeted at GCSE year groups as "poor ATL needs to be addressed fairly quickly" and that parental engagement would be readily promoted if students "witnessed the positive relationship between home and school".

The amendment of interviewing a primary school colleague in relation to the proposed project resulted in an interesting perspective about the difference between the way in which primary and secondary school staff engage with the parents of their students. In this interview, Primary School Teacher A explained that when students move into secondary school "students and parents learn that "mums and dads can't be there for every problem or success". Moreover, Primary Teacher A explained that they see a decline in the parental engagement as students come towards the end of their primary phase; particularly as older students are given certain privileges, such as being "allowed to walk home" alone. The comments from Primary School Teacher A echo the thoughts of Poortvliet et al (2019) as they too suggest that as children grow older, the extent to which their parents involve themselves in the educational lives of these students diminishes.

Furthermore, Primary School Teacher A explained that engaging parents in the education of their child is vital in primary school "even if this means that one family received a lot more contact than others in the same class". Primary School Teacher A explained that the relationship between the family and school staff is paramount and that "even small successes will be reported home to ensure that we're using every opportunity to build the relationship with the family. Seemingly, this strong relationship between schools and parents is particularly beneficial when the teacher needs support in addressing poor behaviour. Interestingly, Primary Teacher A also explained that "gate time", whereby

parents wait for their children on the gate at the end of the day, is an excellent time in which to maintain this relationship and acts as a point in the day where regular, contact can be made between school and parents. This notion of creating and maintaining positive relationships with parents has been well evidenced in the literature review for this project (Harris and Goodall, 2007; Nechyba et al, 2005; Wang et al , 2014) and suggests that a key focus area for School A in coming months and years may be encouraging and maintaining this positive relationship between school staff and the parents of the students that attend the school; regardless as to whether this is limitation in School A, or whether this is a limitation in secondary schools in general.

In contrast to promoting parental engagement, Primary Teacher A explained that, from their perspective, there are certain differences between primary and secondary school which mean parents are less engaged by the time students finish their first year at secondary school. Primary Teacher A explained that they often speak to parents about the "lack of communication" that parents felt they received from the child's secondary school, relative to the regular contact they received from their primary school teacher. Primary Teacher A expanded on this by speculating that the proposed action research would "really help the year 7 students and their parents manage the different levels of communication between primary and secondary school". Importantly, Primary Teacher A shared that this perspective came from talking to parents that had siblings in both primary and secondary phases of education and was not a criticism levied at a specific school, but an acknowledgement that families need to be prepared and supported through this process as students become more independent. Therefore, the consensus amongst the Teachers interviewed from School A and Primary Teacher A suggests that effective and early communication from school staff to parents is essential in promoting and maintaining the relationship between home and school; a relationship which may better support students in wide range of areas in their educational

lives. However, as is the case with many of the conclusions drawn in this discussion, far more specific research must be conducted to confidently assert what effective and meaningful communication between school staff and parents specifically means.

Are there existing parenting practices which are associated with positive school outcomes?

When exploring the parenting practices that may link to positive school outcomes, the pilot interviews with parents offered some insightful perspectives into the strategies that some parents may adopt to engage meaningfully in their children's education. Firstly, Parent A explained that they would ensure that they sat down with their children and discussed the progress reports from the school. Parent A explained that they felt that allowed them to get the finer details of what the teachers had said. Parent A elaborated by explaining that this strategy was helped somewhat by the fact that their children are generally honest and upfront about any struggles or issues in school. Parent A also shared that this process became more difficult as their children moved from the primary to secondary phase as each child moved from "being your baby to being a grumpy teenager". Responses such as these have some links to the notion of classes for parents as discussed in the literature review (Voorhis et al., 2013; Carbonero et al., 2017) as there may be some scope for schools and parents to work collaboratively to identify and promote the strategies that best support students in their educational lives. Clearly, the limitation remains about the validity of such a contention, however, discussions such as these may allow some progress towards identifying the broad areas of interest that parental engagement studies should aim to explore.

However, whilst Parent A felt that their engagement with their children's education was important for their future development, they felt that their own parental expectations of their children had little bearing upon what their children actually achieved. Parent A

supported this contention by explaining that her twin daughter had achieved completely different things in their lives, but that she as their parent had "not shared [her] expectations with either of them". Developing this, Parent A felt that "individual student character is far more important than any adult's opinion when it comes to students' achievement in anything". Similarly, Parent B revealed a similar perspective to that of Parent A insofar as they believed that parents should nurture independence when students reach secondary school age. Specifically, Parent B links this to problem solving later in life and claimed that "it is important that students' get on with the work on their own as they need to solve issues in their own life anyway. Parent B explained that this strategy has been "hugely beneficial" in developing independence with their son; this is was illustrated well to Parent B when she observed friends who she perceived to be "pushy parents that have had a catastrophe when their children did not reach [these] heights.

Parent B also explained that they adopted a strategy towards supporting their children with homework which involved supervising them in doing the work at a specific time each day and ensuring that time was spent in this routine manner. Furthermore, Parent B claimed that the reasoning for this approach was two-fold. Firstly, Parent B explained that this strategy promotes independence when problem solving. Secondly, Parent B felt that a lot of the content and skills that her school was learning in secondary school were beyond her own level of education. Fascinatingly, this feeling that the level of challenge for the school work is beyond the capability of the parent was also described anecdotally by Teacher Researcher A when she reflected on her own upbringing as her father would not get involved in homework as he felt he "didn't know enough".

Is communication between School A and parents of disadvantaged students supporting these families in engaging in school?

Although the intervention planned within the action research project did not go ahead, the pilot interviews with the parents of disadvantaged students offered some insight into the extent to which the communication between the school and these parents impacted upon the engagement of these parents. Parent B shared that she felt that the year 11 form tutor events, where the parents meet their child's form tutor, are of very little use in developing the relationship between the school. Parent B explained that these meeting the form tutors was of little use as the form tutors "never got back" to her when queries were raised and that Parent B felt "in the dark" about a lot of things that were discussed as there wasn't any follow-up communication form the school. However, Parent B explained that the digital communication from the school was very positive as the grades and effort was clearly presented, however, the lack of specific detail behind her child's attitude to learning was "very sparse" and this led so some confusion over what Parent B could to support their child. Parent B added that she felt there was a "huge lack of communication when it comes to the specific parts of our childrens' education".

Teacher Researcher B also contributed to the quality of communication between school and parents as she explained that parents may become disheartened by repeated negative communication from school regarding behaviour. As discussed earlier in this data, Parent B added that positive communication from the school may benefit the relationship between the school, the student, and the parents.

Chapter 5 - Discussions, limitations and future directions

Although data collection was significantly restricted due to the coronavirus pandemic of 2020, evidence collected through the pilot interviews with parents and the amended interviews with professionals allows for some very tentative discussion in response to the initial facets of parental engagement that this action research proposed to explore. Perhaps more importantly, this partial data may signpost the areas of future practitioner research which may yield robust conclusions.

The Importance of Relationship

One of the recurrent themes emerging through the partial data was the importance of a positive relationship between the school and the families of the students. Interestingly, whilst a principle aims of this action research to explore the *types* of parental engagement that can benefit initial indications from data collected suggests that the *quality* of this relationship plays a crucial role in engaging parents more effectively in their children's education. Whilst the data from the parental interviews seemed to support the findings from the literature (Poortvliet et al., 2019; Nechyba et al, 2005) that parents of disadvantaged students face specific barriers in engaging with their children's education, the reasons behind this lesser engagement differed significantly. Nechyba et al (2005) claimed that barriers to engagement for these parents may be "social capital…a culture of poverty…[or a disconnect between the] institutions [of home and school]", however, Parent A clearly felt that that the principle issue relating to her engagement in school was the feeling that she was "in the dark" about the finer details of her child's attitude and progress in school. Therefore, this suggests that schools would clearly benefit from exploring ways to offer the more specific information that sits behind the effort and progress grades given to parents at various points

in the year. However, this finding may lack reliability to the small sample size and may well be an observation applicable to School A exclusively. Nevertheless, pursuing this as a line of research enquiry may prove significant for any potential project exploring the impact of parental engagement.

Similarly, the responses from Parent B did not harmonise with the barriers claimed by Nechyba et al (2005), however, some of Parent B's responses about the relationship with School A offered some insight into the contextual barriers faced by some parents of the students at School A. Specifically, Parent B's feeling that there was a lack of "mutual respect" between the her daughter and School A suggested that there were "institutional differences" (Nechyba, et al, 2005, p5) in the conflict resolution processes between School A and the home environment of this student. Whilst speculative too, this finding suggests that schools, students and parents will benefit from clear explanations and expectations surrounding the process of sanctions for perceived poor behaviour. Furthermore, perhaps findings such as this suggest that schools need to be more aware of their institutional expectations and how this may be at odds with the expectations of the families of its students. Further research is evidently required, but the direction this research provides may offer interesting conclusions if the way in which negative behaviour of students and the subsequent sanctions are communicated to parents and families is explored. As previously argued by Kelly (2011), future research would also benefit from gaining this data through methods other than self-report. A second limiting factor with these results stems from the fact that the quantitative data comes from the self-reports of individuals. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the viewpoints are balanced between the parent pilot interviews and the interviews with the professional colleges, personal or professional bias seems inevitable and therefore impacts the reliability of the data collected.

Promoting Parental Engagement

Another principle facet that this action research project sought to explore focused on the strategies that school have at their disposal to attempt to raise the level of parental engagement. The literature review for this action research project heavily suggested that effective communication between school staff and parents was paramount in engaging parents in the education of their children (Harris and Goodall, 2008) and that making specific factors prominent, such as linking discussion to future career prospects (Wang et al, 2014), further supported parents with this engagement.

The data from the pilot parental interviews seems to support the contention that high-quality communication between school and parents is an important factor in successfully engaging parents in the education of their children. Parent B explained that some staff from School A "never got back" to her regarding specific issues with her child's education and that issues were only raised when it came to parents evenings. This perceived lack of communication resulted in parent A feeling that she didn't "have any negatives at the school, but wouldn't say that [their relationship with the school] was overly positive. Therefore, it seems that the quality of communication from School A went some way in engaging Parent B in her child's education, but that this engagement was hampered by a lack of consistency. Therefore, it would seem that school A and any other school looking at ways to better engage the parents of their students may benefit from focusing on the way in which staff communicate and the consistency of this approach across the school.

The second major theme in the partial data collection supported the contention that "preventive communication" (Wang, et al, 2014, p12) from school, aimed at strengthening parent-school relationships, significantly supported students in their attitude to learning; this seems to be of most benefit in situations whereby school staff perceive a student's attitude to

require improvement. Interestingly, this notion was best supported through the anecdotal contribution of Teacher B, who explained that a positive phone call home left the parent "overjoyed" at receiving this positive news as they had only had negative calls from the school beforehand. Furthermore, Teacher B explained that when she then experienced an issue with this student's behaviour, parents where keen to support and well-engaged in resolving the issue. Moreover, the data collected from the Primary School Teacher seemed to add further support for being pro-active in this relationship forming with parents as she explained that the school will "keep parents on board…[by] reporting even small successes" home and thereby building a foundation of positive contact between home and school that allows this to be drawn upon if there are any issues arising with their child in the future. Therefore, in addition to the positive relationships that schools should seek to build with parents, it would seem that the quality of the communication from school is incredibly important in forming and maintaining these relationships. Future research may therefore investigate the typical ways in which schools communicate with their parents and which methods and style of communication are most effective in engaging parents for the betterment of students.

The Future of the Project

Whilst the project was unable to gather the intended data in the academic year 2019/20, the process of planning the project, conducting the pilot interviews, conducting the virtual interviews with colleagues and receiving the feedback from the digital poster conference provided a solid bedrock on which to build a school-based action research team for coming years. When discussing the project with the colleagues form School A, Teacher A suggested that the project would be of great benefit to the school and its students because it "would take the focus away from just the negative" behaviour of the students. However, in

keeping with (Voorhis *et al.*, 2013) Teacher A suggested that interventions such as this may be most impactful for students and families if we have adhere to the cycles and have "a few revolutions" of the project to significantly improve the relationship between school and families. Similarly, Teacher B suggested that the project may benefit from running in line with the date for the parents evening for the students that have been identified as this would a useful opportunity to explain the purpose of the process to the parents. Furthermore, feedback from the MSc Digital Poster Conference suggested that this project may observe the most significant results by focusing on year 7 students and attempting to maintain the level of parental engagement that has been found between primary schools and their parent cohort. Therefore, a hugely significant achievement of the project is the sense of collaboration that has been instilled in the professionals in School A that are committed to working together to engage the parents of disadvantaged students for the ultimate benefit of those students that are in most need of this engagement. Whilst the project of the academic year 2020/21 may not be reported in the same manner, it is clear that the students and families involved will benefit from the lessons learnt in this difficult time and will take advantage of the way in which this process has allowed the project to identify the elements of parental engagement that are most influential in improving the outcomes for disadvantages students. Therefore, it is anticipated that the project of 2020/21 will strengthen the relationship between School A and the parents of their students whilst developing the quality of the preventative communication that currently exists between school staff and the parents.

General Conclusions

It was always intended that the impact of this project would be measured by difference, or lack of difference, between the way in which parents engaged in their child's education before and after the action research cycles. However, as has been the running story for the entirety of the MSc, the learning has been abundant, but not predictable in the slightest. Whilst the limited data produced lacked the reliability that was hoped for at the outset, the perspectives of the parents interviewed and the colleagues involved in the planning and reviewing of the project showed a clear willingness to improve the circumstances in the school for the betterment of the students.

This project made it starkly clear that communication between the parents and the staff of school A is essential if we are to even begin to improve parental engagement in those parents that find it most difficult to engage in their child's school life. Furthermore, it has been made clear through this project that communication between school staff and parents needs to be of quality and swift in initiating and responding to contact from parents. Moreover, this renewed focus on improving the communication between school staff and parents is now clearly visible in the colleagues that took part in this collaborative project. Therefore, if action research is indeed to provide the impetus to change in the contexts in which it is taken up, it is truly exciting to consider the changes that School A may make in the coming months and years to better engage parents in their children's learning. Finally, grappling with the disappointment of not being able to collect the data as I'd intended forced me to consider the enquiry-led nature of the MSc and that the most important outcome from the programme itself is the habit of questioning our own practice and habits to provide a richer and more meaningful education for the students that we are responsible for.

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Appendix 1 – Typical example of a Pastoral Support Programme

INDIVIDUALISED SUPPORT PROGRAMME

NAME	GENDER	ETHNIC ORIGIN	DOB	SEN SUPPORT/ CiC/EHCP	UPN

SCHOOL	CLASS / TEACHER	START DATE OF PSP	CO-ORDINATED BY

PSP TIME LIMIT AND REVIEW DATES WEEKLY PLAN	HOW WILL THE PUPIL KNOW THAT THEY ARE 'ON TRACK'? (ongoing recognition of weekly success)

PUPIL PROFILE	
WHAT IS GOING WELL?	WHAT IS NOT GOING WELL

PUPIL COMMITMENT	PARENTAL COMMITMENT
Signed.....	Signed.....

SCHOOL SUPPORT AND STRATEGIES	SUPPORT FROM OUTSIDE AGENCIES
Signed.....	Signed.....

Appendix 2 - Student survey questions

Q1	I explain to my parents how my school work will link to my goals in the future
Q2	My parents make sure that I complete my homework
Q3	As far as I know, my parents and school contact each other frequently
Q4	My parents are keen to attend school events
Q5	I don't talk to my parents about my future goals
Q6	My parents allow me to get on with my homework on my own
Q7	My parents and school hardly contact each other
Q8	School events are not my parents biggest priority

Appendix 3 – Central University Research Ethics Committee - Approval

CENTRAL UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (CUREC)

Form CUREC 1A Checklist for the Social Sciences and Humanities

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 the University is meeting its obligations as a responsible institution. They start from the presumption that all members of the University take their responsibilities and obligations seriously and will ensure that their research involving human participants 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 **"Where and how to apply for ethical review"** and the **CUREC 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 type-written, emailed applications will be accepted.**

SECTION A: Filter for CUREC 2 application

This section determines whether your study raises more complex issues requiring the completion of a full application for ethical review, known as the CUREC 2 application. **(Please mark 'X' in the Yes/No column.)**

1.	Are research participants classed as **people whose ability to give free and informed consent is in question**? (This may include under 18s (although see "competent youths"), 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. This includes 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, answer 'Yes' here **and** also answer question 5 below.)	Yes ☒	No ☐
2.	By taking part in the research, will participants be at risk of criminal prosecution (e.g. by providing information on drug abuse or child abuse)?	Yes ☐	No ☒
3.	Does the research involve the **deception** of participants?	Yes ☐	No ☒
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 ☒

If you answered 'No' to all the questions above, go to **Section B**. If you 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 ☒	No ☐
	If yes, give the specific Approved Procedure number(s): MSc modus0 operandi		

If you answered '**Yes'** to **ANY** of questions **1-4**, **and** answered '**No'** to question **5**, **stop completing this checklist and do not submit it for ethical review**. Instead, complete the CUREC 2 application form from the CUREC website, then submit that for ethical review.
If you answered '**Yes'** to ANY of questions 1-3, **and** answered '**Yes'** to question 5, go on to **Section B**.

SECTION B: Contact details and project description	
Contact details:	
1. **Principal investigator** OR supervisor (if student research) (give title and full name)	Nigel Fancourt
2. Name of student (if student research)	Daniel Sargent
3. Degree programme (if student research), e.g. BA, BSc, MSc, MPhil, DPhil	MSc
4. Department or Institute name	Department of Education
5. Address for correspondence (if different from above)	12a Well Street, Loose, Maidstone, ME15 0EJ
6. University (**not** private) e-mail address and telephone number	Daniel.sargent@education.ox.ac.uk
7. Name and status of others taking part in the project (e.g. third year undergraduate; postdoctoral research assistant)	

Project description:	
8. Title of research project	Supporting parental engagement with Pupil Premium students
9. List of location(s) where project will be conducted	Valley Park School
10. If your research involves overseas fieldwork or travel and your department requires a travel risk assessment, will you have completed and returned a risk assessment form beforehand? (This must be approved by your department before you travel. If you are travelling overseas, you are strongly advised to take out University travel insurance.) Please also address any physical or psychological risks for Oxford researchers and local fieldworkers in Section 16 below and discuss with your safety officer.	Yes ☐ No ☒ Not required in this instance ☒
11. Anticipated duration of overall research project	9 months or years (maximum 5)
12.a) Anticipated start and end dates of the part of the research project involving human participants and/or personal data	From: (01/01/2020) To: (18/09/2020) **Note**: You will need ethics approval **before** you start your research. CUREC 1As may take up to 30 days to process. **Retrospective ethics approval cannot be granted.**
12. b) In the case of international or collaborative research, will you submit or have you submitted this project for ethical review or consideration elsewhere (e.g. collaborator's/local ethics committee, or other local approval)?	Yes ☐ No ☒ If 'Yes', please attach ethics or other approvals and give more details below. If 'No', please explain your reasons below. Please also refer to the Best Practice Guidance on Ethical Review

	of social-sciences based research conducted outside the UK (BPG 16), which includes an Ethics Issues Checklist for International Research (Appendix A)
13. **External** organisation funding the research (if applicable)	

14. a) Title and brief description of **research** (about 150 words) in lay language.
When describing the research, 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.**

Supporting parental engagement with Pupil Premium students.

I plan to explore and support the level of parental engagement in the educational lives of students that are economically dissadvantaged (Pupil Premium Students).

I aim to meet with the parents of PP students and share some of the current research surrounding cognitive load (CL) and the methods that we can use to reduce CL for ourselves and others. From here I wish to encourage parents to support their children in their homework tasks using the methods and skills discussed at our meeting.

I will collect data using a self-rated questionaaire pertaining to how the PP students percieve the difficulty of a given task both before and after the intervention that I run with parents. I will also collect data through a semi-structured interview with students and teachers, to supplement my intervention data.

I will acquire informed consent from the parents and ensure that they are made aware of their right to with draw at any time. I will also gain written consent from the headteacher of the school to confirm that I can conduct the research within the parameters of my role within the school.

14.b) Description of participants and how you will **obtain informed consent** to take part in the research (about 200 words in total)

1. Description of participants **and** your criteria for inclusion/exclusion

   Year 10 students from differing ability sets. I've chosen this range in an attempt to account for the impact that ability may have on the results observed. I will also be working with the parents of these students (explained above).

2. Your method(s) of recruitment

   Only students in receipt of the Pupil Premium Grant will be taking part in this project.

3. Your processes for obtaining consent from participants

   Students – Through the Modus Operandi. Parents- Through informed consent.

Please **attach separate supporting documents (in Word)** if appropriate for your research (English language versions only). Tick those you are submitting below. If appropriate supporting documents are not submitted, you will be asked to provide these separately, which may delay the ethical review process.

- ☐ Recruitment and advertisement material (e.g. a poster, social media recruitment text, or brief invitation letter/ email)
- ☐ Information for participants to read (or hear) before they agree to take part (e.g. written information or, if applicable, an outline oral information script).
- ☒ A document to record informed consent. Templates for written consent forms and/or oral information scripts (in case of an oral consent process) are available from the CUREC website

☒ Questions to be asked of participants (e.g. interview questions, or a preliminary scope of questions, or a sample questionnaire)

☐ (If relevant) debriefing document after participants have taken part

☐ If you feel the above approaches are not appropriate for your study, provide details on how you will obtain consent from participants

☐ Please complete section 15 if you cannot obtain informed consent

Please add any further details here.

15. If you cannot obtain informed consent from participants according to CUREC guidelines and good practice in your discipline, please give a brief explanation and justification of this decision below.

16. What are the ethical issues connected with your research and what steps have you taken to address them? **Please do not answer 'none'.** We need to see evidence that you have identified potential ethical issues with respect to your research and have taken steps to address them. If applicable, please address:

- Participant burdens and/or risks

  Students and parents will be aware that they are included in this research because of their PP status and that this status is determined by their current or previous financial situation.

  My approach to this potential hurdle is through openness and honesty. The progress figures for PP students in my school, year-by-year, is significantly lower than that of the rest of the cohort. Therefore, if parents or students question their inclusion in this investigation on the basis on their pupil premium status, I will sensitively explain this rationale. Parents may also consider the intervention itself to a tacit criticism of their current level of engagement. Similarly, I will explain that the investigation is not looking to criticise or appoint blame, but looking to support students and families in achieving the best that they can from school.

  Ultimately, the PP gap in attainment is one that cannot be addressed unless it is investigated conscientiously.

- Your own physical and psychological safety as a researcher or of fieldworkers you may employ (see the University's and Social Science Division's Safety in Fieldwork guidance)

  I will be conducting my research through my role as teacher and senior leader. Therefore, the investigation poses no additional risks to my current roles.

- Data protection/ confidentiality (also see Section 18).

  I will anonymise the names of all participants in this study.

For more guidance on ethical issues, please see
http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/governance/ethics/resources

Discuss other ethical issues 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 ☒

If you answered 'Yes', make sure you include some supporting information (as directed in Section 14 b.) above, showing the range of questions covering these issues.

This investigate will not ask any sensitive questions, but there may be an opportunity for a families' economic status to be raised, please see section 16.

18. Management and handling of personal and other research data

For the purpose of completing this section, all information provided by participants is considered **research data**. Any research data from which participants can be identified is known as *personal data*; any personal data which is sensitive is considered *special category data*.

Management of **personal data** and **special category data** of human participants, either directly or via a third party, must comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018, as set out in the University's Guidance on Data Protection and Research. In answering the questions below, please also consider the points raised in the Data Protection Checklist. For advice on research data management and security, please consult with the University's Research Data Team (researchdata@ox.ac.uk) and/or your local IT department, and the University's web pages on research data management.

a.) **Please mark 'X' against the data you will collect for your research**

Consent records (written consent forms, audio-recorded consent, assent forms (for research involving minors) including participant name	☒
Online consent (may be anonymous)	☐
Opt-out forms	☐

Contact details for research purposes only (destroyed when no longer needed for this research)	☐
Contact details kept for future studies	☐
Audio recordings (preferably using PIN-protected audio recorder and stored on device's hard drive)	☒
Video recordings	☐
Transcript of audio/video recordings	☒
Photographs	☒
Task results (e.g. paper/online tasks, diary completion)	☒
Questionnaire answers	☒
Field notes	☒
Other (please specify below)	☐

b.) For **each** of the types of data selected above, state how this will be physically transferred from where it is collected to a local secure storage site (and backed up as necessary). This includes paper records and data captured electronically.

Consent records will be kept in a locked cabinet.

Audio recording will be collected and stored on a pin-locked device.

Once transcribes, audio recordings will be kept on a pin-locked device.

Photographs of student work will be kept on a pin locked device.

Task results will be kept in a locked cabinet and then transferred to a pin locked device.

Questionnaire answers will be kept in a locked cabinet and then transferred to a pin locked device.

Field notes will be kept in a locked cabinet and then transferred to a pin locked device.

c.) How and where will **each type of data** be stored during the research (until the end of all participant involvement)? Describe the arrangements for ensuring confidentiality, i.e. location of storage (e.g. Nexus 365 OneDrive for Business, SharePoint), security arrangements and de-identification of such data. Do not store unencrypted data in freely available cloud services or unprotected USB drives.

Physical data will be kept in a locked cabinet in my office.

Electronic data will be kept in a password-secured folder on my PC.

d.) Will you use a unique participant number on research data instead of a participant name?

If **yes,** state whether or not you will retain a list of participant names against numbers (i.e. pseudonymisation via a linkage list). Where will the list be stored, and when will it be destroyed?

Yes. All participants will be anonymised and the data will be destroyed after 3 years.

e.) Who will have access to the research data?

Myself, my Oxford supervisor and colleagues from Oxford who mark my final project.

f.) If research data is to be shared with another organisation, how will it be transferred / disclosed securely?		
Data will not be shared with any other organisation.		
g.) When and how will identifiable data (including audio/video recordings & photos) be destroyed or deleted? **Note:** Records of consent should be retained for a **minimum of three years after publication or public release**. Some funders may require longer periods (see http://www.dcc.ac.uk/resources/policy-and-legal/overview-funders-data-policies). If you wish to retain contact details in order to re-approach participants about future studies, you must detail this in information provided to them and obtain specific consent for this.		
I will permanently delete all electronic data from my PC within 3 years after the completion of the MSc. I will shred all physical data in the same timeframe.		
h.) Please confirm that you will store **other research data** safely for at least 3 years after final publication or public release and adhere to any additional research funder policies. For more information about the University policies, please see the University's web pages on research data management.	Yes ☒	No ☐
If '**Yes'**, please give details of who will store the data and on storage format, location and security. Note that open science is encouraged. If **'No',** please provide further details below.		
I will be the only person storing this data.		
i.) Does your research involve the use of secondary (i.e. previously collected) data? Common sources of secondary data include censuses, information collected by government departments, organisational records and data that was originally collected for other research purposes (If "**No**", please go to section **19**.)	Yes ☐	No ☒
j.) Do you have data access agreements for the use of this secondary data? (If so, please attach these.)	Yes ☐	No ☐
k.) Is your use of this secondary data compatible with what data subjects/participants agreed that their data should be used for?	Yes ☐	No ☐
l.) Could this data be linked back to an individual or individuals? If yes, address how securely any personally identifiable data will be transferred to you, and where and for how long it will be stored during or after the research. Who will have access to it?	Yes ☐	No ☐
19. Publication and dissemination of research data		
How will you disseminate and feedback project outcomes at the end of the research?	**I will disseminate the findings of this research to the senior leadership team at my school.**	

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)	☐
3. Use of casual or local workers e.g. interpreters	☐
4. Participant observation	☐
5. Covert observation	☐
6. Observation of specific organisational practices	☐
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	☒
14. Audio recording of participant (you will generally need specific consent from participants for this)	☒
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 below)	☐
Students will be completeting subject-specific tasks. Completion and/or the quality of the produced answers will be studied to add to research findings.	

SECTION D: Professional guidelines and training		
1. 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	☐
Computer Sciences	ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct	☐
Criminology	http://www.britsoccrim.org/ethics/	☐
Education	British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research	☒
Geography	Association of American Geographers Statement on Professional Ethics	☐
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 ACM Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct 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	☐
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*:*		☐
2. Please indicate what training in research ethics (or research methodology) the researchers involved with this study have received, e.g. the title of the course and date completed (online training available at http://researchsupport.admin.ox.ac.uk/support/training/ethics), or discussions between researchers and supervisors, if applicable.		
I've successfully completed part 1 & part 2 of the MSc in Learning and Teaching. I have also discussed this project with my supervisor, Nigel Fancourt, and others students from the MSc course.		

SECTION E: Signatures or email endorsements (The SSH IDREC Secretariat accepts either option below. If you have a DREC, check which signature option it prefers.)

- **Option 1:** 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. **Pasted images of signatures cannot be accepted.**
- **Option 2:** Handwritten (wet-ink) signatures. Please scan them and the rest of the checklist pages to create a single PDF document and email to us.

Please ensure this checklist is signed by:

For staff research:	**For student research**:
1. **Principal investigator**	1. **Principal investigator (project supervisor)**
2. **Head of Department (or nominee)**	2. **Head of Department (or nominee)**
	3. **Student researcher**

1. Principal Investigator signature/supervisor signature (if student research)

I understand my responsibilities as **principal investigator** 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 investigator on this project and supply the name and contact details of my successor if appropriate.

Signature (or email endorsement using the above declaration): ……..

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

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 investigator 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 investigator'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 (or email endorsement using the above declaration): ……

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 investigator properly authorised by the CUREC system.

Signature by student (or email endorsement using the above declaration): ……..

Print name (block capitals): …DANIEL SAREGENT..... **Date**: ……31/10/19……..

Appendix 4 – information sheet for parents

Information sheet for Investigation into supporting parental engagement

Mr D Sargent

University of Oxford

Investigation: Supporting parental engagement with Pupil Premium students

The research will take place with over the course of this academic year and will focus primarily on some of the families who have been identified as a being in receipt of the Pupil Premium Grant. I am developing ways in which to engage parents in their children's learning activities to determine if this has an impact on the student's ability to reduce the cognitive load inherent in a given task.

By participating in the research, the school would be contributing to a project that will deepen our understanding of the role that parental engagement plays in the learning experience of the students within our educational context. This research should also contribute to our awareness of parental involvement more widely and the methods that we can use to draw on the supportive power of parents.

I hope to conduct this research between 01/01/2020 and 18/09/2020. I will be interviewing students and colleagues as part of this research under my role as AHT at the school. I will also be meeting with parents to discuss the methods available to reduce cognitive load; for this I will be gaining informed consent from parents before I commence the interviews.

Oxford University has strict ethical procedures on conducting ethical research, consistent with current British Educational Research Association guidelines. The University also recognises, however, that my study is a piece of practitioner research, and that schools already operate with the highest ethical standards. Therefore, only your formal consent as headteacher is necessary, and not that of individual parents or staff. However, throughout the research, students and other teachers will be able to refuse to participate in any research activities at any time.

All participants, including students, teacher and the school, would be made anonymous in all research reports. The data collected would be kept strictly confidential, available only to my supervisor [nigel.fancourt@education.ox.ac.uk] and me, and only used for academic purposes. It will be kept for as long as it has academic value.

Appendix 5 - Pilot interviews with parents

	Parent A	Parent B
Q1 – How do you think Student A is doing in school at the moment?	In response to this question, parent A mentioned two general areas of schooling; which they referred to as "academics" and "wellbeing". Parent A had twins girls who attended the school and explained that "of main focus is whether the girls are happy, but that this closely followed by her subjects. Parent A also explained that "like anything in life…. You can't engage in anything if you are not happy"	Parent B explained that student B has always been quiet and this has really impacted upon his grades. Parent B elaborated by stating that they have never received any follow up from teachers after they (the teachers) mention student B's tendency to be quiet. Parent B said she would like to have had some feedback on how this confidence is willingness to speak up in lesson could be developed. Parent B then went on to explain that they feel that "all kids are different and some are just more outgoing and some are quieter". Parent B then mentioned that feedback from school is often quite vague and make reference to websites that are often not very motivating for [her] child". Parent B then shared that she felt that the year form tutor consultation days are of very little use in developing the relationship between the school and her as the "form tutor said they would email the teachers that we (Student B and parent B) need, but we never heard anything back". Parent B explained that this had been the case at "every parents evening since year 7". Parent B then explained that once they had left the parents evening room they were "back in the dark".
Q2 – Do you feel that the communication from the school allows you to engage in your child's education?	Parent A spoke openly about the massive changes in communication between when they were at school and how they now communicate with the school for in relation to their daughters. Parent A also explains that the electronic system of the school "can be	Parent B stated that she felt that the "general information shared by [the school] was very useful" but that "any information about your child specifically is very sparse" and there is "no information in between parents' evenings". Parent B also shared that they had found out that their child had fallen behind in

	very difficult" and can lead to them" giving up". Parent A also claimed that parents evenings could be better organised as they need to "rely on the students making appointments" to get to see all of the teachers for each child. Student A then also explained some real difficulty in printing some of the forms that the schools sends through. However, parent A acknowledges that they may not be the only parent in this position. Parent A displayed a clear preference to compare the physical copy of the "grade rounds" that the schools send home after term 3.	certain subjects and wondered why the teachers waited until parents evening to raise this. Supplementary question

Appendix 6 - Evaluative interviews with Teacher Researchers

In the absence of the action research cycles, both Teacher-Researchers were met with via Zoom to discuss the action research project and the potential benefits and limitations. To begin with, I reminded them of the intended structure of the project and the intervention sessions, before gathering their thoughts and opinions

Question	Teacher A	Teacher B	Primary School Teacher
What do you think are the barriers to parental engagement in their children's education, especially in relation to Pupil Premium students?	TRA felt that one of the common barrier's to parental engagement in their children's education was the "great number of	TRB explained that "two things come to mind instantly…although I'm generalising here. Firstly, TRB felt that amongst	PST acknowledged that the relationship between a primary school and their parents will is "entirely different" to that of the

	students" in some of the families as this can often lead to less attention for each child in the family". TRA elaborated on this and explained that "money was also a major factor stopping some pupil-premium parents engaging with school as they [the parents] need to work and so can't often attend school events".	some of the parental cohort there is "this attitude that school doesn't matter and that other parts of life are more important and this slowly moves into an opinion shared by the family". More widely, TRB explained that that it was necessary to understand that some of the "students who have received a 3 or worse in the grade round ATL will be students that have struggled with their behaviour for their whole school career and parents may just be sick and tired of hearing the same issues over and over again.. and may just switch off as all they hear is a negative".	secondary school and their relationship with the parents of the students. PST argued that this difference is "crucial as students and parents and students learn that mums and dads can't be there for every minor problem or success". However, in specific reference to the parents of disadvantages students PST explained that "generally speaking, the parent of PP students show less engagement in year 6 as they [the students] are allowed to walk home". PST also explained that the "attendance at parents evenings for the parents of year six PP students are typically lower than that of the rest of the cohort".
Do you think that the planned "Improving ATL for disadvantaged students" intervention would encourage parental involvement in their children's education?	TRA felt that the intervention would improve the engagement of the parents of pupil-premium students as "it would take the focus away from just the negative behaviour	Supplementary question – if we do find that parents are disengaged with school because of this repeated pattern of hearing about poor behaviour, do you think there is a way that we can support	Do you think that the planned "Improving ATL for disadvantaged students" intervention would encourage parental involvement in their children's education?

	and show that we as a school care more about all of the aspects that are impacting our students". TRA added to this by explaining that "some parents may not even know what their children want to do with their lives and so a project such as this could really help with bringing all three parties together with a common focus". TRA also explained that they feel that "the first time we do it [the intervention] it may not be massively impactful, but may need a few revolutions to show students and parents that we're [the school] committed and not only about securing good grades for students."	them in addressing this? TRB felt that these parents and students "…can be supported through praise…[and that] communication is absolutely vital in relaying this positivity to parents. Too often the only contact that our parents get from [School A] are from student support and I think it's vital that this because wider practice in the school…". TRB then went on to reference a specific student whereby persistent positive phone calls home "re-engaged" a parent that previously "wouldn't answer the phone [and who was] completely shocked, but overjoyed to receive a positive call from the school". TRB elaborated on this and explained that when there were issues in the class with this student, this newly developed positive relationship meant that the parents was very keen to support this teacher in addressing the poor behaviour. TRB also then explained that they felt that School A is "really good at the sanction side of things [but that] School A would	Whilst the primary school that PST works at do not have the same format for grade rounds as School A, PST explained that "we know who the unengaged students are and know to ensure that we keep those parents on-board, even if this means more contact that you might for the other students. PST then elaborated by explaining that "even small successes will be reported home to ensure that we're using every opportunity to build the relationship with the family, in case we need to draw on this if the student is not behaving appropriately". PST also acknowledged that they feel this may be harder to carry out in the context of secondary school as parents don't have "gate time" whereby the parents involve themselves in the school day by "catching up with teachers and other parents at the school gate". Furthermore, PST also added that "some of the

		really benefit from much better relationship between teachers and staff if the practice of phoning home was more widespread in the school". TRB then went on to explain that they were really pleased with the plan in the intervention that meant students would "specify a time in which to speak to the parents as this would really develop this link between parents, students, and teacher". TRB also went on to explain that this strategy would be a great way of seeing, amongst the whole student cohort, which parents were engaged and which may need support.	parents that have siblings of students that have [the primary school] left to attend a secondary school have said that they were shocked by the lack of communication from the secondary school, after they [the parents] had got used to the level of contact from
How do you think the intervention could be improved?	In response to improving the intervention TRA felt that the success of an intervention to support any specific family would come down to the "individual circumstance of the family at a given time in the year, as different families will face different challenges at different times. TRA also felt that the intervention	TRB explained that she felt the intervention may have been "really useful to have in the build up to parents evening for specific students" as it meant that we would have time to effectively "launch" our involvement with parents. During the course of the interview, TRB also suggested the interventions could "ow be something	Firstly, PST explained that a project such as this "would really help the year 7 students and their parents manage the different levels of communication between primary and secondary school" as the difference in communication will "vary dramatically between primary schools

	would benefit from a "continued role of mediation from the school staff once the research cycle had finished as this would allow the school to keep up the momentum of the improved relationship with parents". TRA added that this strategy may be "more successful with the younger students". TRA shared that they thought that the "virtual learning shift during the lockdown has actually improved parental engagement as [this teacher] has seen more engagement from the parents than they have ever seen before". Lastly, as the interview was brought to a conclusion, TRA shared a personal experience about their own family and suggested that "like [their] own father, some parents may be reluctant to engage fully with their children's education because they feel that they do not know enough about school and	that we launch ahead of every parents evening for each year group as we could use the most recent grade rounds to determine which students and parents to work with". TRB also felt that interventions such as the planned work would be really useful in 'older, examination years where poor ATL needs to be addressed fairly quickly". TRB also felt that it would really helpful for students to have a direction for students to "take responsibility to ensure that the ATL remains improved through a final question in the intervention itself". TRB felt that putting the responsibility of maintaining the improvement on the student may be more successful once the student has witnessed a "positive relationship with open and clear communication between their parents and teachers."	themselves". This led PST to further conjecture that a project such as this "would also give School A clearer idea of the students and parents whereby parental engagement may need some focus in the future". However, PST felt that this would need to be something that was done :very early on in year 7 or even as part of the transition work before the summer holidays as relationships between school and some parents can be very delicate; especially when the reasons for communication could be perceived as negative".

	education to be able to contribute meaningfully".		