Edinburgh Research Explorer

Enacting home-school partnerships

Enacting Home-School Partnerships: the roles of head-teachers, family-learning practitioners and parents

Abstract
Engaging parents and children in family learning generates collaborative partnerships and can increase children's attainment but headteachers' (HTs) views affect the nature of these Home-School-Partnership (HSPs). This study into family-learning programmes (FLPs) in socio-economically disadvantaged areas in one Scottish city investigates what leads to more inclusive HSPs. Interviews were conducted in 2017 with 5 HTs, 7 family learning practitioners (FLs) and 10 mothers. Previous research has found that if HTs hold a deficit conceptualisation of parents, this had a negative effect on their readiness to engage with the school. Our study found that this negativity could be mitigated by FLs because they fostered parents' own knowledge and realisation that they were important actors in their children's education. It presents an extended typology of HSPs: *nominal*, *traditional* and *authentic* that incorporates the influence of HTs, FLs and parents and shows how more equal HSPs might be developed.

Key Words
Family learning, knowledge, power relationships, home-school partnerships

Introduction
It has long been accepted that working in partnership with parents brings benefits to schools, pupils and the wider community (Tett, 2001; Willemse, Thompson, Vanderlinde & Mutton, 2018) and Epstein (2018, p.402) has argued that 'a comprehensive, goal-linked programme of school, family, and community partnerships is at the core of good school organisation'. Such partnerships are particularly important for families from the most socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds because effective home-school partnerships (HSPs) have been shown to be central to a pupil's educational success (OECD, 2016; Wilder, 2014). One form of partnership between parents and schools is intergenerational family learning programmes (FLPs). These are designed to engage parents in learning with their children and have been shown to generate positive collaborative relationships between schools, parents and their communities as well as leading to increases in children's attainment (Milbourne, 2005; Timmons & Pelletier, 2015). Yet working in these partnerships is challenging because different partners bring differential types of power resulting in some having greater control over the change process (Tett, 2005; Valli, Stefanski & Jacobson, 2014). For example, HTs may see parents as a group that needs to be managed rather than empowered and seek to 'encourage the kind of respectful, supportive parental involvement' (Horvat, Curci & Partlow, 2010, p.703) that schools desire rather than responding to the interests and concerns of parents.

Graham and colleagues argue that effective partnerships between parents, communities and schools are 'characterised by mutual respect, common goals and recognition from each party of the role, skills and challenges of the other' (2019, p.12). However, the values at

the centre of partnerships will depend on how HTs, parents and the family-learning staff that work with them, conceive of their roles. This is because relations between home and school are inevitably affected by the 'power imbalance between educators and families … [especially] with culturally and linguistically diverse parents in terms of how they are viewed and treated' (Auerbach 2010, p.732). These power imbalances will have a strong impact on whether or not partnerships are created that result in more equitable outcomes for disadvantaged parents and their communities (Green, 2017; Wilder, 2014). Such equitable outcomes are unlikely if priority is given to the HT's agenda in ways that emphasise parents' lack of knowledge rather than supporting them to further develop their own expertise as their children's first educators (Cummings, Laing, Law, McLaughlin, Papps, Todd & Woolner, 2012; Gorard, See & Davies, 2012). The result of an approach that embraces these deficit perspectives of parents is that inequalities can be reinforced (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013) because families' home cultures and experiences and parents' strong motivation to help their children have not been built on.

From this literature it is clear that building partnerships is challenging, therefore it is important to investigate how the different roles played by HTs, FLs and parents might contribute to more equal HSPs. In order to do so this paper draws on a small retrospective study of FLPs in socio-economically disadvantaged areas in one city in Scotland. The overall aim of the study was to investigate the impact on parents over time (see Macleod & Tett 2019) as well as provide an opportunity for the HTs and FLs to explain their approaches. This paper will use data from the main study as well as the literature to develop a more nuanced conceptual understanding of HSPs with a particular emphasis on the different contributions of FLs, parents and HTs.

The Scottish context of this study is important because, since the *Scottish Schools Parental Involvement Act* (2006), policy has aimed to welcome parents 'as active participants in the life of the school, and encouraged [them] to express their views on school education and work in partnership with the school' (Scottish Executive, 2006 p.1). The argument is made that parents 'play a vital role at all stages of education' (ibid, p. 5) and so parents' active involvement is seen as a positive asset to the school. More recently policy has focused on the twin aims of 'closing the poverty-related attainment gap' and 'improvements in parental confidence and parenting skills' (Education Scotland, 2016 p.4). Because the policy agenda in Scotland gives equal emphasis to the development of parents, FLPs are delivered by staff with expertise in community engagement. Their role is to negotiate with HTs on the style and scope of the programmes to be delivered in their schools and then develop and deliver an appropriate curriculum in collaboration with parents. This study seeks to investigate how these three key groups of actors - HTs, FLs and parents – might work together to develop more equal partnerships. Whilst we acknowledge the importance of the teacher's role in the daily interactions with parents this is not the focus of our research because the FL staff in this study were clear that the parameters of their work with schools were set by HTs.

In the rest of the paper we first review the literature on parent-school partnerships and the

importance of the role of HTs, explain our methodology and conceptual framework, identify our findings and finally present a typology of partnerships and their relationship to power.

Parent-school partnerships
The literature shows that HTs have a pivotal role in conceptualising how partnerships between parents, schools and communities should be enacted (Green, 2017; Leenders, de Jong, Monfrance & Haelermans, 2019). For example, their high professional status, combined with their ability to direct partnership strategies, can lead to parents seeing themselves as more like teachers' assistants rather than people that have in-depth knowledge about their child (Hujala et al., 2009, p.74). As a result, parents may uncritically accept what their children's teachers do in ways that reinforce 'the exclusive right of professionals to pronounce on matters within their domain of expertise' (Swain & Cara, 2019, p.122). Moreover, Leenders and colleagues (2019) show that this type of school culture means that parents cannot have a two-way relationship with teachers and so feel unable to make a contribution to their children's education.

Similarly, the HT's conceptualisation of the role of parents in HSPs will influence the approach that FLPs take (Anderson & Morrison, 2007; Swain, Brooks & Bosley, 2014). If it is assumed that parents should fit into the dominant school culture, school staff are positioned as the experts giving knowledge to parents who are seen 'as objects receiving information from the school rather than as knowledgeable subjects in a mutually beneficial relationship' (Auerbach, 2010, p.738). The focus from this perspective is on FLPs explaining the school curriculum to parents so that children's achievement can be raised and so serves narrowly prescribed purposes. It is a one-way relationship that precludes parents from playing an active role in influencing the school. Moreover, it can, as See and Gorard (2015, p.260) point out, 'place the "blame" for any perceived lack of success on individuals and families rather than the education system or the government that controls it'.

On the other hand, if HTs assume that parents have an equal role to play with teachers in educating their children the focus will be on the resources and practices that parents bring and will build on, rather than denigrate, their expertise. From this perspective, an 'inquiry method of teaching' (González, Moll & Amanti, 2005, p.19) is used in FLPs where participants actively develop their lived experiences which are therefore validated as legitimate sources of knowledge both inside and outside of school. This approach also shifts more agency to parents as meaning-makers rather than receivers of expert instruction. It is a strength-based approach that is framed by a social-contextual perspective, which sees teaching and learning as social acts that use a variety of practices associated with different contexts and recognises that these cultural structures are embedded in relations of power (Timmons & Pelletier, 2015, p.512).

Research (Milbourne 2005; Tett, 2001) has shown that FLs can disrupt these relationships of power by supporting parents in ways that value their knowledge. This is because they

understand the local community and home circumstances and care about parents as people that have a lot to offer the school. They can also act as intermediaries in facilitating effective communication between the home and the school (Timmons & Pelletier, 2015) and can help parents to access other services and demystify information about the services that are available (Milbourne, 2005). The FLPs themselves also act as supportive social spaces where networks can be built, friendships formed and parents' own development can be prioritised (Marandet & Wainwright, 2017). In these ways the FLs can act as bridges in building up the capacity of parents to develop their engagement with the school through exposing them to new ideas and perspectives about the value of their own knowledge. FLs can also help parents to have their voices heard through challenging HTs in ways that are likely to be positively received by them through creating a 'culturally responsive climate' (Auerbach, 2010, p.730) where parents and schools respect the expertise that each brings to the education process.

In summary, the research literature shows that HTs' views have an important impact on the nature of HSPs in general and FLPs in particular. It also shows that FLs can act as bridges between the home and the school and help create more equal partnerships with parents. There is less research, however, on how parents experience different types of partnerships and on the relationship between HTs, FLs and parents. In order to address this gap we posed the following three research questions: what contributions do HTs, FLs and parents make to HSPs? How do FLs mediate between HTs and parents? How can the roles of HTs, FLs and parents in creating more equal HSPs be conceptualised?

Methodology

This study was based in one city in Scotland and focused on five primary schools in socio-economically deprived areas. It was a retrospective study that was based on mothers who had participated in local authority funded FLPs between seven and ten years ago, when they had a child or grandchild transitioning into primary school. The participants were five head-teachers (HTs), seven FLs that had worked in their schools, and ten mothers. Ethical approval for the study was provided by both the host University and the City Council in which the research took place. All six FLs currently working in the local authority, and one who had recently retired, agreed to participate. The FLs identified nine primary schools where they had worked 10 years ago and provided the names of the HTs at that time. Their work in these schools was mostly with pre-school children (aged 4) and their parents (almost always mothers) around transition into school. The overall aim was to provide opportunities for parents to experience success in learning that would enable them to improve their self-confidence and efficacy. While the groups and classes were held on school premises, they ran without any involvement from school staff, so contact between FLs and teachers was minimal. However all programmes had to be agreed with the HT of the school.

Sessions were all held during school hours, and followed one of the following three models.

1) One-off, 1 hour, sessions for parents and pre-school children
e.g. story-telling, puppet-making, preparing for school

2) Short courses (typically 6-8 weeks, 2 hours per week) for parents only
e.g. Raising Children with Confidence.

3) Weekly 1 – 2 hour drop-in groups for parents
e.g. Wednesday group, parenting group.

In addition, the FLs ran community (rather than school) based groups that were attended by many of the same parents and their children. These focused on the co-creation of artwork (e.g. Chinese Dragon, Magic Carpet) or a community resource (e.g. a guide to the local area for families).

A series of local authority service reviews means that while five of the seven FLs interviewed have over 10 years' service in the same authority they have all worked in different posts, in different sections and covered different areas of the city. The seven work closely together, developing and sharing resources and ideas for improving practice, as well as knowledge of the different schools with which they have worked.

Professional networks and internet searches were used to find up-to-date contact information for the HTs. Five out of the 9 HTs participated: two had retired, a third was not traceable and it was not possible to interview the fourth. Two (Andrew and Carolyn) remained in post in the same schools while the three others had moved schools and/or changed role. As a result it is not possible to connect all of the mothers participating in the study directly with individual HTs.

The parents were identified in a variety of ways. All families of pupils in years 1-3 of the secondary schools into which the nine primary schools transitioned were contacted. They were invited to participate if they remembered engaging with FL work when their child started primary school. Other potential participants were identified from names on the 'products' of the FL work.

Below we provide details of the HTs and the schools in which the FLs took place in 2008 when the parents first attended programmes.

Table 1: Head teachers [1]

	Years as a HT	Current Role	School roll 2008	Free School Meal Entitlement 2008* (% of school roll)

---

[1] All names in this paper are pseudonyms

Shirley	15+	Seconded to Government	255	60%
Andrew	10+	Headteacher	148	59%
Gavin	10+	Headteacher (in different local authority)	245	44%
Carolyn	20+	Headteacher	404	36%
Elizabeth	20+	Headteacher	208	41%

*Local authority average for 2008 was 19% (Scottish Government, 2008)

Next we provide details of the FLs and the parents that participated in the programmes.

Table 2: Family Learning Practitioners

	Qualifications	**Years of service**
Katherine	BA; Dip TESOL; PG in Community Education (CE)	17
Kirsty	BEd Primary; MSc in CE	6.5
Louise	BA in CE	10
Morven	MA; PG in CE	20
Semla	BA in CE	2
Tina	BEd Primary	23
Joan	MA; BA in CE	15

Table 3: Mothers

	Ages of Children	**Further engagement with Education /Training**
Majda	12, 5, 3, 3	Women onto Work, English language
Gamal	20, 19, 15, 14, 12, 4	
Agata	15, 13, 10	Short college courses
Pat	16 & 13	Higher National Diploma, BA.
Katy	25 & 20	
Val	14 & 12	Learning Assistant training, BA.
Kim	12, 10, 5, 6 months (grandchildren)	Short college courses
Flora	16 & 13	Women onto work

| **Kelly** | 12 & 8 | |
| **Joyce** | 30, 31, 18, 15 | Language course |

We used qualitative approaches to explore the themes and issues that were salient to the participants and uncover their subjective values, beliefs and experiences from their own perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All were interviewed but in slightly different ways. The FLs first completed a written interview schedule and this was followed up with a short (up to 30 minutes) telephone interview using the same schedule in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their responses. The schedule asked them about their main aim, if it had changed, what their successes and constraints had been, and how they overcame them, and how they assessed their achievements. The HTs were interviewed using a variety of means: face-to-face, Skype and telephone. All interviews followed the same schedule with questions about their views of parental engagement, the purpose of FLPs and their relationship with the FLs, the ideas that underpinned their practice in working with parents and families, and the main policies that shaped their practice. These interviews lasted around one hour with the shortest (by Skype) taking 40 minutes and the longest (face-to-face) taking just under two hours. All the mothers were interviewed face-to-face about their involvement with FLPs, their recollection of any impact FLs had on their activities with their children, their families and on themselves. These interviews also lasted around an hour, with the shortest taking 35 minutes and the longest an hour and a half.

The thematic analysis was jointly undertaken by the two researchers/authors. All interviews were digitally audio recorded, anonymised and then transcribed in full. In addition to the FL interviews we also analysed their responses to the preliminary written questions entering responses into a data-base adding this to the data-set. The resulting data-set, in excess of 120,000 words, was worked through systematically. A 'provisional template' or coding framework was devised to maximise consistency between researchers (King, 2004). Data that did not fit the dominant pattern were examined carefully (Braun & Clarke 2006). Themes were both data-driven and also derived deductively from prior research and conceptual frameworks (Boyatzis, 1998). For example, the thematic analysis highlighted in the data the shaping influence on FLs' practice and mothers' experiences of what they thought were the attitudes of HTs. As a result, we searched the literature for conceptual frameworks to help make sense of these phenomena and carried out further analysis. The authors met regularly throughout the analysis process for the purposes of debriefing, and researcher triangulation (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). These meetings were documented and detailed notes made on emerging themes and the relationships between them. Referential accuracy (Lincoln & Guba 1985) was ensured by repeatedly returning to the raw data to check our emerging conclusions in an iterative process.

Limitations

Our research has a number of limitations that we took steps to mitigate. Our research was retrospective because we were seeking 'accounts of past states that are filtered through current mind-sets' (Scott and Alwin, 1998: p104), and it was this reflection at a distance of the mothers that was of interest, not just what happened in the past but how they made sense of that in the present and understood the place in their life-stories of their engagement with FLPs. This does represent a limitation because how mothers make sense of their views of HTs will have been filtered through the lens of all other engagement with the school system since but this has been taken into account when presenting the data from the mothers. A further limitation of this retrospective approach is that while the mothers were recalling experiences from up to ten years ago, the HTs and FLs were asked primarily about their current views. We mitigated this by asking HTs and FLs if their views on family learning had changed over the last ten years. All reported that FLPs now featured more strongly in policy, but there was no evidence of this policy emphasis having changed their attitudes. A further limitation is that, because the research relies entirely on self-reported data, there is a risk of recall bias. This was minimised through the use of recommended techniques such as standardised data collection instruments across the two researchers/authors, well-structured interview schedules, and ensuring respondents were given enough time to think before answering (Hassan, 2005).

We did not select specific HTs to interview rather we contacted all those that we could. While there was no selection bias, there may be some respondent bias in that all of the HTs interviewed are still working in education, while three of those who did not take part have retired or left education. However, our analysis shows that the approach to partnership of these HTs fits with previous literature and therefore evidences analytic generalisability (Yin, 2014). A final limitation is that the mothers in this study were not necessarily representative of participants in FLPs generally and we can only acknowledge this as an inevitable parameter to our study while, at the same time, highlighting that it is the long-term engagement of these mothers that brings most insight into our understanding of the impact of HSPs.

Conceptual framework

The main conceptual framework that guides this analysis is focused on the underpinning attitude of HTs to HSPs. We are focusing on the HTs, both because the literature shows their importance in influencing the school's culture in general, and because our case study focuses on FLPs that were agreed between the FLs and the HTs and did not involve the children's teachers. Our framework brings together Auerbach's (2010) tripartite conceptualisation of *nominal*, *traditional* and *authentic* partnerships with Green's (2017) analysis of the impact of HTs' epistemological assumptions on their strategies and goals. This typology is set out here:

- *Nominal partnerships*: lead to home-school relations that are one-way, with educators positioned as the givers of knowledge whereas parents are seen as objects receiving information from the school rather than as knowledgeable subjects

(Auerbach 2010, p.738). From this perspective, reality and truth are regarded as objective and the 'existing asymmetrical power structures in place between schools, communities, parents, and students' (Green 2017, p.374) are unquestioned.

- *Traditional partnerships*: HTs lead by example to model respect for parents in schools and value 'cooperation, dialogue, interaction, and democratic practices' (ibid. 376). However, they operate on the assumption that the school is at the centre of the partnership and do not have strategic planning structures in place nor do 'they develop teacher capacity to work with parents' (Auerbach, 2010, p.740).

- *Authentic partnerships*: are empowerment-oriented because parents are viewed through a strengths-based perspective as allies, advocates, and leaders and deficit models are rejected. Opportunities to enact participatory approaches to families are sought (Auerbach 2010, p.750). This approach is based on an analysis of unequal power relations and concerned with 'advancing equity and reshaping unequal power relationships among school–community actors, contexts, and institutions' (Green 2017, p.378).

This framework provides a way of investigating the role of HTs but we are also seeking to understand the impact of these conceptualisations on parents and the role of FL practitioners in meditating these home-school relationships. We will therefore use our findings to further develop this conceptual framework to create an extended typology that encapsulates the ways in which all three groups of actors influence home-school relationships.

Findings

Headteachers
In this section we discuss the different understandings the five HTs we interviewed had of an appropriate role and purpose for FLPs using the partnership framework outlined earlier.

Andrew's view of partnerships was firmly in the *nominal* category. He did not think that FLPs were sufficiently focused on 'encouraging the parents to understand … how they can best support their children, at any stage in this school'. He regarded himself as the expert and considered that the FL 'didn't even understand basically how schools work'. His view was that the FL should be doing work that was solely 'linked to the school improvement plan' because he assumed that schools were the primary influences on children's learning. He viewed HSPs as advantageous only in their potential to improve the pupil outcomes that were prioritized by the school. He was concerned about finding the most efficient home–school relations' model that was going to deliver on the school's priorities, especially in raising children's attainment.

Carolyn was less negative about the FL than Andrew and valued her role in 'bringing in families, and showing them how to … be less frightened of coming into school…[so] the parents will come in and support their child in social events'. However she was very concerned about 'the families who won't even bother … and aren't aware of their rights and responsibilities as a parent'. She contrasted this type of parent with those 'that are now working in school with us, running clubs and things'. Carolyn implied that it was the lack of good parenting that was the cause of low pupil attainment rather than the impact of the teachers. She also appeared to see the teacher's role as focused only on learning as she argued that teachers didn't have the time 'to get to know the parents'. Instead she suggested that the FL had an important role in coming up with 'some project that would make parents want to come into the school in the first place'. She contrasted this role with the school's 'core job of teaching literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing'. Carolyn's view of HSP is clearly *nominal* and is focused on 'keeping the existing asymmetrical power structures in place' (Green 2017, p.374).

Gavin came from the *traditional* position and regarded the best approach to HSPs as taking the local context into account. To achieve this he organized many activities 'to try and get parental engagement' and was committed to 'a really open door policy for everybody'. He was motivated to involve parents because he saw the school as 'just a very small cog in the wheel of a child's learning'. He was aware of the importance of responding to the context in which parents operated so, for example, he changed the times of parents' evenings to the afternoon because that was when most were free. He also found ways in which 'people from different religions and cultures could work together' through organising a cooking group using ethnic cuisines. Gavin saw himself as central in developing community relationships by 'being out in the playground, talking to parents, talking to kids…' He reported that 'attainment went through the roof' as a result of all these activities and the efforts he made to 'not compartmentalize teaching and learning from the other aspects of the child'.

Gavin considered that his role was much more important than that of the FL because he made the wider community connections whilst she oversaw the more day-to-day activities of working with parents. He clearly created 'robust connections between schools and communities' (Green 2017, p.377) but his overall model of school-community relations was focused on developing collaboration with the wider community so that their needs could be met *within* the school. This meant that the direction of this relationship was one-way *from* the school *to* the home and did not recognise the unequal relationships of power experienced by parents.

Elizabeth's approach to FLPs was mainly from the *traditional* position but there were also elements of the *authentic* approach. As a traditionalist she argued that the school should make it clear to parents 'that we want them involved in their child's learning … and that they not only come in and get the opportunity to find out what is going on, but they feel they can ask for any additional support that they might need'. Elizabeth's focus was mainly on parents rather than the wider school community because she saw parents as 'the main

educators' and so she worked on ways of convincing them 'that we really believe that'. The main way of doing this was to work with the FL on engaging parents 'in some of the work of the school' because the FL knew the parents well and so would be able to identify ways 'that they could contribute to school life'.

She moved more to the *authentic* model in her approach to seeing schools as potential sites of empowerment. She said that many of the parents in her school 'just need time, the opportunity to learn more about themselves, and the time to reflect on what they already know'. This emphasis on parents' knowledge and a desire to develop their assets meant that she saw possibilities for changing the school into a more equitable institution. Elizabeth saw this as a long-term effort because it was about 'changing children's trajectories possibly over two generations' but nevertheless she viewed parents and families as 'change agents' (Green 2017, p.379)

Shirley was the most committed to *authenticity* because she argued that 'the parent is the educator of the child for their life … so teachers absolutely have to value the family as the main educator of the child'. Her experience, however, had been that teachers often had a deficit approach and could be very 'judgemental about families, and write them off' and she had on occasions to remind them that the Parental Involvement Act[2] made it their duty to work with parents. She thought that the reason for these attitudes was that teachers 'weren't local people and didn't really understand local culture' and so could be very negative about what parents could contribute. One way that she and the FL found to overcome some of this negativity was through family social events. These included parent/child ceilidhs and Halloween parties that involved parents and teachers working together and these were very popular 'because there were few safe places to go and socialise as families there'. Another way was through the FL undertaking home visits and briefing the teacher about the families' circumstances which 'was enabling for the teachers…and they would come back and say "when I said why don't they do their homework, now I get it"'. Shirley contrasted two types of FL - one where they saw their role as helping parents and children to adjust to the school and the other was 'a more emancipatory family learning based on Freire and much more empowering of parents'. She favoured the latter approach 'because it is about taking an assets-based approach and giving parents the agency to make changes'. From this perspective she argued it was important to 'build up the capacity of every single parent' so that they felt able to discuss their child's problems on an equal footing with the teacher. Teachers also had to be educated to understand that 'a child's attainment and wellbeing is not only about cognitive abilities' but also about the affective domain. Overall Shirley argued that the 'most important thing for headteachers is to be asking themselves about … how much power they are giving parents'. Shirley worked *with* communities not *on* communities on concerns that they collectively identified (Green, 2017) in her relationships with parents.

---

[2] Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006

The stances adopted by these HTs reflects the conflict that some perceived between the aim of raising children's attainment on the one hand and that of improving parents' engagement in the life of the school on the other. As we pointed out earlier, Scottish policy views these aims as compatible because boosting parents' confidence results in greater engagement in their children's education and potentially increased attainment. When attainment and parental engagement were perceived as dichotomous it had an impact on how the role of parents and FLs were perceived. HTs' conceptualisations of HSPs therefore ranged from seeing parents as receivers of expert instruction *from* the school to contributors of knowledge and understanding *to* the school. However, partnerships are two-way relationships so we now examine the impact of the HTs' approaches on parents and the role of FLs as mediators in this process.

Mothers and Family Learning Practitioners
First we show how mothers perceived the school and the HT and how this contrasted with the way they felt the FL regarded them. Then we consider how the FLs were able to meditate these home-school relationships.

Mothers' views
Whilst our data do not allow us to map individual HTs on to each mother's experiences we can identify the three types of partnership approaches and the impact these have on the mothers' attitudes towards the school. For example, many of the mothers were negative about their relationship with the HT. One aspect of this was being talked down to because the HT 'was coming out with these big words … and I was [thinking] do I say anything here or do I just sit back' (Joyce). This meant that Joyce's knowledge of her child was ignored and so she felt unable to contribute. Another aspect was that mothers felt 'kind of stupid. I think [the HT] forgets you are an adult sometimes' (Kim) because they were treated only in relation to their role as mothers. This was especially the case when mothers' experiences of their own teachers were not positive which meant that they 'were probably a bit scary' (Kelly). Kelly had a particularly negative view of one HT whose approach to parents she described as 'all about ticking boxes, … he doesn't like parents, doesn't like children'. The mothers were also aware of how little time teachers had so 'that interaction with the teacher and the parent was kind of missing' (Pat). Val thought that the lack of interaction was partly to do with 'us thinking of ourselves as "just mums"', which meant that the HT was seen as holding 'a position of authority over us as parents'.

Many contrasted the approach of the HT with that of the FLs. Joyce said that the FL 'encouraged you to do things' and that speaking to her 'was just like talking to a pal' whilst Kim thought her FL spoke to her 'like I was a person'. Kim also talked about how the FL had taken account of the needs of the group unlike the HT who had arbitrarily moved the time of a class. Kelly referred to how her FL 'gave [her] confidence' because she recognised her expertise in craftwork and encouraged her to take responsibility for one of the sessions. This responsibility also facilitated Kelly's relationship with her son's teacher because she could talk things through with the FL first and then 'I could refer back to the things that we had done…as an example.' Katy emphasised the relationship between

confidence and being listened to because her FL 'doesn't necessarily say much but she can just draw people out' and so everyone had their say. Gamal also talked about how her FL had become 'a friend that I can discuss anything with' who made sure that the sessions were arranged around the mothers' availability. For Majda the key role of the FL was that they were responsive so they would 'just sit and chat if we needed that, or could give a bit of advice … such as what is normal for my child to do … and facilitate a bit of peer support as well'. The importance of the FL for Pat was that 'she knew the kids really well. … They weren't just child A, child B. She was interested in every single child and they all knew her'. Joyce also commented on the time that the FL had to spend with both parents and children and this led to her being 'taken out of my shell …because she just made you feel like one of the family'. Finally, Val reported that after her involvement in FL she 'began to realise for myself that teachers are human' who may have too many responsibilities to be able to see children 'as individuals'. Nevertheless, she felt strongly that 'teachers need to respect what parents know about their children'.

Several mothers were very happy with the school. For example, Flora didn't find any barriers between herself and the school because 'it was an amazingly inclusive, friendly school'. She added that there were other parents that 'needed help to get that link [through the FL] where they felt confident with the school' but she felt confident enough not to need this support. Val characterised her HT as 'very open to the community … being involved in the school and family learning coming in'. Agata was positive about the 'great cooperation between family learning and the school'. This had centred on the FL introducing some stories and rhymes from other countries, starting with the Polish community, into the FL curriculum. Then the FL and one of the teachers worked together to embed this approach to drawing on stories and rhymes from other cultures into the first year of the Primary classroom resulting in a more inclusive approach.

The FL was also valued for her role in understanding the education system because they had connections within the council and so they knew 'who we should go to… if we had a problem with the school' (Val). Val thought that the FL could be 'a little bit subversive in … trying to encourage parents not to be intimidated by teachers'. The FLs also introduced the parents to experiences that they might not have considered including 'going to libraries and museums and [other] places that I might not have known about' (Katy).

In summary, Joyce, Kim and Kelly focused on the negative aspects of the HT whereas Gamal, Katy, Pat and Majda were more concerned to talk about their positive interactions with the FL. Finally for Flora, Val and Agata their experience of both the school and the FL was generally positive. Overall, the mothers considered that the FLs related to them as people rather than 'just mums' and this had given them the confidence to realise that they had important knowledge and understanding to contribute to the school. The FLs also acted as mediators between the school and the home through translating and interpreting school knowledge in ways that encouraged mothers to gain the confidence to think about themselves and teachers as both having important roles to play in their children's development.

Family learning practitioners
The FLs were committed to 'breaking down the barriers between the home and the school' (Katherine). In contrast to some of the HTs, they were focused on ensuring that 'parents' needs and interests are central to the learning process' (Kirsty). Louise pointed out how important it was to see 'the parents as a resource, rather than people that need to be informed about what the school is doing'. Morven was aware that it 'always takes longer to negotiate the curriculum' but taking this approach resulted in a programme that was owned by the participants. This method created 'a very different atmosphere because the parents know that they have had their say' (Kirsty). FLs said that they started by finding out from parents what they would like to cover and also what skills they had to offer. This involved 'showing parents that there are lots of ways in which they support their children and that what happens in the home is important' (Tina). Working with parents in this way could be difficult because some schools were hostile to a parent-centred curriculum. In these cases the FL would start with 'something that focuses more directly on the school curriculum' (Louise). However, 'sometimes schools are very prescriptive about how things should be done especially in supporting reading' (Semla) so this limited the ways in which the FLs could work.

An important role of the FLs was to develop connections and build social capital especially the *bridging,* (connections between heterogeneous groups who are dissimilar in a demonstrable fashion, such as age, socio-economic status, race/ethnicity and education, Leonard, 2004; Woolcock, 1998) and *linking* (the extent to which relationships can be built between individuals and the institutions that have relative power over them e.g. to provide access to services or resources, Hawkins & Maurer, 2010; Lin 2001) forms of social capital. These types of social capital enabled them to build bridges between HTs and parents through the deployment of a range of strategies including engaging with the HTs so that they were persuaded about the value of working with parents. If the HT was hostile, then Katherine tended to 'prioritise the schools where the parents are hardest to reach and also those schools that are willing to work with me'. Others found teachers who were allies and then 'they can help you find a way into the school and once parents are engaged then the headteacher will come round' (Morven). Semla found that 'parents are motivated by going into the school as they are keen to see what their child is doing so I provide these opportunities and then the headteacher can see it is helpful'.

In terms of linking social capital the FLs built relationships with schools through taking part in a variety of strategic groups particularly in-service training events where they promoted examples of good practice in working with parents. Katherine thought that 'all these events have enabled us to help staff to understand the way that we work especially in thinking about the parent's perspective rather than that of the school'. Others had co-taught sessions with teachers and the result had been that 'they realise that we have different skill sets that enable us to engage with parents in a more effective way' (Morven). Joan summarised the FLs' role as 'educating the headteachers so they no longer tell parents what to do but are more likely to respect their knowledge as the child's first educator' and she

thought that their work had succeeded over time in that parents' views were now more valued. An aspect of this education also involved recognising that 'parents need support and confidence building themselves' (Kirsty) so building partnerships involved paying attention to the whole family unit.

The FLs' deployed linking social capital through enabling parents to build capacity over common understandings of ways of engaging with the school such as identifying the right person to talk to about their child that were likely to be positively received and utilised. In addition they provided access to more creative, risk-taking educational opportunities through their negotiation of the FLP with the mothers. They exposed schools (teachers and HTs) to new ideas about the role of parents as educators and also built parents' capacity to find new ways of engaging with the school that valued their own knowledge of their children. For both groups this led to the development of different ideas about what it means to be an 'expert' in understanding and engaging with children. FLs also provided access and connection to power structures for parents especially in those schools where HTs espoused a nominal form of partnership. These included: building parents' confidence to enable them to challenge the school's negative perception of them and their children; and disrupting the school-centric focus of staff by demonstrating the importance of parents' views.

Discussion

Our findings illustrate that if HTs' conceptualisations of the purpose of FLPs are focused solely on the school's agenda then this makes HSPs difficult to achieve. However, we have also shown that FLs can mitigate some of these adverse impacts on parents and this means that the views of all three groups – HTs, parents and FLs – need to be considered when investigating how partnerships are enacted. One way in which this mitigation is achieved is through FLs using bridging and linking social capital to strengthen the relationship between the home and the school through supporting parents to assert their agency (Graham, Truscott, O'Byrne, Considine, Hampshire, Creagh & Western, 2019). Because FLPs have been developed with parents they are less subject to school control and that has led to more creative, risk-taking work that has disrupted some of the prescription and inflexibility emanating from the school (Marandet & Wainwright, 2017). FLs have also impacted on the HTs through helping them to recognize that what parents bring to children's home and community environment is also valuable to the school (Auerbach 2010, p.750) through their contributions to in-service training and co-teaching. Clearly when HTs and FLs are able to engage with each other and work out a common purpose they can work in partnership in ways that accept that, although they may have differing priorities, both parties understand what they are each trying to achieve. These understandings then have the potential to lead to more authentically participatory approaches to families especially those that do not share the dominant culture of the school.

We now draw on our findings to extend Auerbach's (2010) tripartite conceptualisation of partnerships in order to encapsulate the ways in which the three groups of actors influence

HSPs and their different roles in creating more equal relationships between educators and families.

Nominal HSPs

Here the HT conceptualises the role of FLPs as engaging parents in the life of the school so that they can support its agenda. It is acknowledged that involving parents is beneficial but only as long as they contribute to helping the school increase pupils' attainment. The focus is on the 'good' parent who does not intervene in the teaching and learning activities at the core of the school but enhances its social life by, for example, running clubs. As a result of these attitudes parents can feel alienated because they are not seen as people that have valued knowledge about their children's learning to offer and so they are reluctant to engage with the school. The FLs can mitigate this hostile environment to some extent through creating friendly social spaces in which to build parents' self-belief in their ability to act as experts in relation to their children and help them move from the periphery of the school. However, the power of the HT means that the FLs may have to work in ways that do not overtly challenge the school's agenda (Green, 2017). This means that the school does not benefit from the positive collaborative relationships that parental involvement can create and existing inequalities might be exacerbated rather than mitigated (See & Gorard, 2015).

Traditional HSPs

Here the school is seen to be at the centre of the partnership and so the direction of the relationship is one-way from the school to the parents and community. The HT conceptualises the role of FLPs as helping to create a relationship from the school to the parents by reaching out in ways that encourage involvement in the school. The parents are seen as playing a useful role in their children's education but their knowledge is still defined by what they lack and there is little recognition of the unequal relationships of power that parents experience (Auerbach, 2010). Parents may feel involved in the school but, because they have little influence on what happens there, their experience is not seen as legitimate knowledge (Swain & Cara, 2019). It is in these circumstances that the FLs can mobilise linking social capital through building parents' capacity to find new ways of engaging with the school. They can act as bridges both through encouraging parents to challenge teachers' views about their children and developing staff capacity to work with parents through in-service courses and co-working. However, the relations of power between those whose cultural norms are different to those expected in the school remain unchallenged (See & Gorard, 2015).

Authentic HSPs

Here the HT conceptualises the role of FLPs as helping to empower parents to have an impact on the school based on a perspective that sees parents as allies, advocates, and leaders (Auerbach, 2010). Unlike the traditional partnership, deficit models of parents are rejected and they are seen instead as having knowledge that is equally valuable to that held by the school staff. This means that parents are seen as a resource, rather than people that simply need to be informed about what the school is doing. This approach creates an

environment where parents feel that they have more agency by having some of their own cultural practices recognised through, for example, incorporating their stories and rhymes into the first year of the Primary school curriculum. The FLs promote this more socially just approach through encouraging school staff to take these creative risks and offering activities attuned to the parents' interests in a culturally responsive way. This means that parents are seen as change agents who, through acting together, are able to name and collectively transform their reality (Green, 2017). FLs can also help parents to feel confident enough to approach staff from the position of co-educators and when schools are responsive to these advocacy efforts opportunities are opened up for parents to be heard and to influence professional agendas (Graham et al., 2019). This can disrupt positions of disadvantage through demonstrating how cultural structures are embedded in relations of power and acting to transform them (Timmons & Pelletier, 2015).

Conclusion

In this paper we have demonstrated that HSPs are influenced by parents and FLs rather than only by HTs as much of the literature assumes. We have extended Auerbach's (2010) tripartite analysis of partnerships to show the effect of the conceptualisations of HTs on parents and how FLs can mitigate some negative impacts through their creation of bridging and linking social capital. We have confirmed the importance of HTs' epistemological assumptions (Green, 2017) but added to this to show how they can be challenged by FLs different assumptions so that a strength-based approach to parents' knowledge can be prioritised. Our research also provides some empirical evidence for Auerbach's (2010, p.750) assertion that inclusive partnerships for social justice 'are above all a matter of intention and moral commitment, as followed by a seeking out of opportunities to enact that commitment'. This leads us to conclude that if HTs and FLs are able to engage with each other and work out a common purpose then both parties will understand what they are each trying to achieve. In these circumstances HTs, FLs and parents will all value the different knowledges that each brings leading to a much greater chance that they will be able to understand their different roles and how they can seek to mitigate the power relationships that operate between them. As a result, HSPs can operate in ways that could lead to more equal partnerships with parents.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

References
Anderson, J. & Morrison, F. (2007). 'A Great Program... for Me as a Gramma': Caregivers Evaluate a Family Literacy Initiative. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *30*(1), 68–89.
Auerbach, S. (2010). Beyond coffee with the principal: Toward leadership for authentic school–family partnerships. *Journal of School Leadership*, 20, (6) 728–757.
Baquedano-López, P., Alexander, R.A., & Hernandez, S.J. (2013). Equity issues in parental and community involvement in schools: What teacher educators need to know. *Review of Research in Education*, 37, 149–182. doi:10.3102/00917 32X12459718.

Boyatzis, R. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77–101.

Creswell, J.W., and Poth, C.N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: choosing among five approaches*. 4th Edition, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cummings, C., Laing, K., Law, J., McLaughlin, J., Papps, I., Todd, L. & Woolner, P. (2012). *Can changing aspirations and attitudes impact on educational attainment?:A review of interventions*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Retrieved from: https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migrated/files/education-attainment-interventions-full.pdf

Education Scotland (2016). *Review of Family Learning: supporting excellence and equity*, Scottish Government

Epstein, J. (2018) School, family, and community partnerships in teachers' professional work. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 44 (3), 397–406.

González, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gorard, S., See, B.H. & Davies, P. (2012). *The impact of attitudes and aspirations on educational attainment and participation,* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Retrieved from: https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/impact-attitudes-and-aspirations-educational

Graham, A., Truscott, J., O'Byrne, C., Considine, G., Hampshire, A., Creagh S., and Western, M. (2019). Disadvantaged families' experiences of HSPs: navigating agency, expectations and stigma. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, doi: 10.1080/13603116.2019.1607913

Green T.L. (2017). From positivism to critical theory: school-community relations toward community equity literacy, *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 30 (4), 370–387.

Hawkins, R.L. & Maurer K. (2010). Social Capital in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina *British Journal of Social Work,* 40, 1777–1793.

Hassan, E. (2005). Recall Bias can be a Threat to Retrospective and Prospective Research Designs. *The Internet Journal of Epidemiology*. 3 (2).

Horvat, E., Curci, J., & Partlow, M. (2010). Parents, principals and power: A historical case study of "managing" parental involvement. *Journal of School Leadership*, 26(6), 702–727.

Hujala, E., Turja, L., Filomena, M., Gaspar, F., Veisson, M. & Waniganayake, M. (2009) Perspectives of early childhood teachers on parent–teacher partnerships in five European countries. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 17(1), 57–76.

King, N. (2004). Using templates in the thematic analysis of text. In C. Cassell & G. Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research* (pp. 257–270). London: Sage.

Leenders, H., de Jong, J., Monfrance, M. & Haelermans, C. (2019). Building strong parent–teacher relationships in primary education: the challenge of two-way communication, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, doi:10.1080/0305764X.2019.1566442

Leonard, M. (2004). Bonding and bridging social capital: Reflections from Belfast.

Sociology, 38(5), 927–944.

Lin, N. (2001). *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lincoln, Y. &Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Macleod, G. & Tett, L. (2019): 'I had some additional angel wings': parents positioned as experts in their children's education, *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, DOI: 10.1080/02601370.2019.1574922

Marandet E. & Wainwright E. (2017). Geographies of Education: Families, Parenting, and Schools. In: Skelton T., Abebe T., Waters J. (Eds.) *Laboring and Learning: Geographies of Children and Young People* (45-63), Volume 10. Springer, Singapore.

Milbourne, L. (2005). Children, families and inter-agency work: experiences of partnership work in primary education settings. *British Educational Research Journal*, 31(6), 675–695.

See B.H. & Gorard, S. (2015). Does intervening to enhance parental involvement in education lead to better academic results for children? An extended review. *Journal of Children's Services*, 10(3), 252–264.

Nowell, L.S., Norris, J.M., White, D.E., & Moules, N.J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16, 1–13.

OECD. (2016). *Low-Performing Students: Why They Fall Behind and How to Help Them Succeed*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Scott, J. & Alwin, D. (1998). 'Retrospective versus Prospective Measurement of Life Histories in Longitudinal Research', Chapter 5 (pp. 98 – 127) in Giele, J. Z., & Elder, G. H., Jr. (Eds.). (1998). *Methods of life course research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.

Scottish Executive (2006) *Scottish Schools (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 Guidance*, available online at https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/Documents/parental-involvement-act-guidance.pdf

Scottish Government (2008). *School meals dataset, February 2008,* available online at https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/SchMeals2008

Swain, J., Brooks, G. & Bosley, S. (2014). The benefits of family literacy provision for parents in England. *Journal of Early Childhood Research,* 12(1), 77–91.

Swain J. & Cara, O. (2019) The role of family literacy classes in demystifying school literacies and developing closer parent–school relations. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 49 (1), 111–131.

Tett, L. (2001) 'Parents as problems or parents as people? Parental involvement programmes, schools and adult educators', *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 20 (3) pp. 188-198.

Tett, L. (2005) 'Partnerships, community groups and social inclusion' in *Studies in Continuing Education*, 27 (1), pp. 1-15

Timmons, K. & Pelletier, J. (2015). Understanding the importance of parent learning in a school-based family literacy programme. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 15(4), 510–532.

Valli, L., Stefanski, A., & Jacobson, R. (2014). Typologizing school–community partnerships a framework for analysis and action. *Urban Education*, 51(7), 719–747

Wilder, S. (2014). Effects of Parental Involvement on Academic Achievement: A Meta Synthesis. *Educational Review,* 66(3), 377–397.

Willemse, T.M., Thompson, I., Vanderlinde, R. & Mutton, T. (2018) Family-school partnerships: a challenge for teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 44(3), 252–257.

Woolcock, M. (1998), Social Capital and economic development: toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 27, 151-208.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case Study Research Design and Methods* (5th ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.