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## Learning to Learn with Parents: Lessons from Two Research Projects

*Elaine Hall, Kate Wall, Steve Higgins,  
Linda Stephens, Irene Pooley and John Welham*

### Introduction: Learning to Learn

The Learning to Learn Phase 3 Evaluation is a research project funded through the Campaign for Learning and facilitated by the Centre for Learning and Teaching at Newcastle University. This project involves 33 primary and secondary schools in three LEAs, representing a wide range of socio-economic contexts across England (Higgins et al., 2005). All of the schools have implemented interventions under the umbrella term of Learning to Learn. Working definitions of Learning to Learn exist, drawing on ideas of metacognition, thinking skills, self-regulation, self-efficacy and self-esteem (see, for example, Claxton, 2002). However, within this project definitions remain fluid and changing since through the process of research the teachers themselves are creating new understandings of what Learning to Learn is in practice.

This particular article reports on an initiative to share these developing insights with parents.

This project is rooted in the belief that the teacher's voice is paramount, therefore an action research methodology has been used. Moreover this methodology is one in which the teachers can identify their own research focus as well as their own intervention methods. The locus of control is firmly in the teachers' domain rather than academia's. Using Stenhouse's (1981) model of

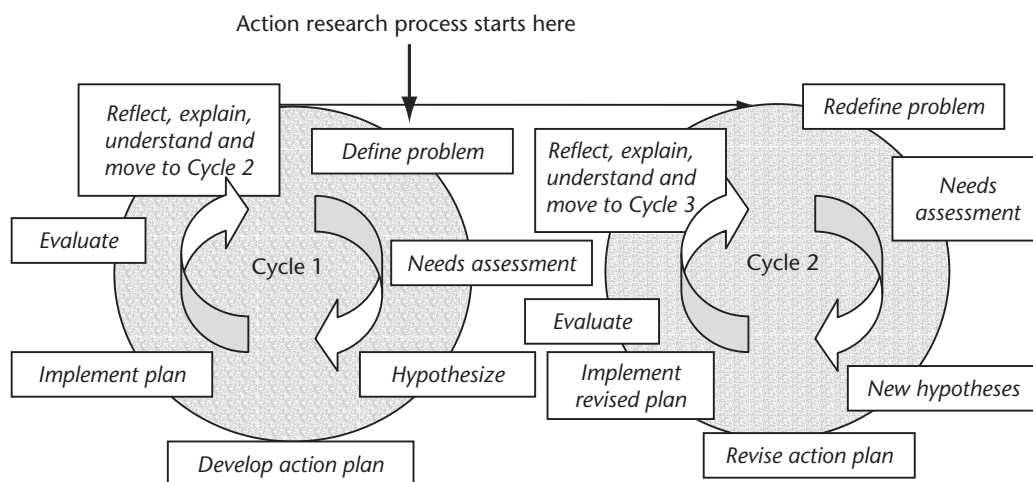
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**Source:** *Improving Schools*, 8(2) (2005): 179–191.

'systematic enquiry made public', the teachers have been encouraged to initiate changes they feel are appropriate, and then the university team support and facilitate their action research, giving advice on research evidence which is likely to be influential and the research processes in terms of collecting data, analysing results and writing up the projects. Support materials are published by way of a password-protected website to which teachers have access and on-line assistance. This philosophy extends, in the initiative reported here, to the relationship between teachers and parents. Unlike many parental involvement projects, involving a one-way transmission of key skills or knowledge, parents participated on an equal basis, contributing to a discussion about how children learn (see Figure 1).

In this way, the project engages with Hammersley's (2004) assertion that action and research in education are conflicting processes. The strategy of working with context-specific, self-identified research questions is emerging as empowering for the teachers and, as a result, is a powerful and effective means to professional development. In addition, on a national scale, as common research tools are introduced to the different action research case studies in schools, then conclusions can also be drawn across the whole sample, thus becoming a persuasive tool for influencing practice and policy makers.

The schools in this project are enthusiastic problem-solving pioneers with all the concomitant belief and fervour: they are not representative of 'all teachers', nor are the results here likely to be replicated by a programme 'rolled out' across the country. The experiences and lessons here are about ownership of the process, particular solutions to individual problems, carried out by teachers balancing their commitment with intellectual rigour. The schools we have worked with in the wider project are, as a group, broadly typical of England (Wall and Woolner, forthcoming) and we have included as much demographic information as possible, to allow the reader to assess how far they can take these 'situated generalisations' (Simons et al., 2003: 347)



**Figure 1:** Action research in Learning to Learn (adapted from Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988)

into different contexts. This article has been written as a collaboration between the university and the schools: the Learning to Learn project has a commitment to the teachers' voices, so their accounts appear largely unedited. The thematic comments from the university team have been discussed and validated with the teachers.

## School Contexts

St Meriadoc is a two-form-entry nursery and infant school situated in an area of high unemployment and poverty. It is part of an education action zone (EAZ). Out of the 104 children at Key Stage 1, 20 per cent are on the special needs register and of the 89 Foundation Stage pupils, 30 per cent are of concern to the teacher for various reasons and 18 per cent of the children are eligible for free school meals. The catchment area of the school is one where academic aspirations and attainment have traditionally been perceived as very low.

Camborne Science and Community College is an 11–18 mixed comprehensive school in Cornwall. It is on the edge of the town (population 18,000) and on the western extremity of Cornwall's only conurbation (population 45,000). The area is economically and socially depressed. Tin and copper mining and related engineering, which constituted the staple industry of the town, ceased within the past 10 years and there is little industry in the area to replace it. Of the students there, 21 per cent are eligible for free school meals. Indicative of the level of deprivation in the area is the fact that the school is one of three secondary and 30 primary schools in the Camborne Pool Redruth (CPR) Success Zone and EAZ. The school has 1450 students on role, 15 per cent of whom have Special Educational Needs and 5.4 per cent of whom have a statement of educational needs (well above the national average).

## Involvement in Learning to Learn

At St Meriadoc, all year groups including the nursery took part as they felt that it is important for parents to become involved as soon as their children start school. The school was invited to become part of the project due to its past involvement with educational research and interest in the latest developments in teaching and learning. All teachers have had training in using Assessment for Learning and four teachers are involved with Cornwall's research into Formative Assessment and have travelled to the US as part of this. The teachers believe that our children deserve the best education available and are capable of high achievements and this belief drives our research into the best approaches to use.

Camborne became involved in Campaign for Learning (CfL) research in Phase One, at the invitation of the Campaign, following the publication of some action research into teaching and learning on the Internet. The school's work on multiple intelligences in the classroom and the impact of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) as an education coaching tool has been written up in two CfL booklets. For the past four years the school has had a Learning Coordinator, charged with the responsibility of intervening in teaching and learning across the school, to raise standards of attainment and engagement.

The Learning Coordinator is an Advanced Skills Teacher who conducts outreach work across the county on teaching and learning. The school was the first in Cornwall to become involved in the work of the University of the First Age (UFA) and plays a leading role in its activities in the county.

## Individual School Projects

St Meriadoc

Does involving parents and introducing them to various Learning to Learn approaches help to develop their children's self-esteem and resilience as learners and so raise standards?

We chose to investigate whether explaining Learning to Learn approaches to parents would have a positive impact on their children's learning because we feel that children spend more time under the influence of their families than their teacher. We feel that much of how a child performs in school has to do with confidence, self-esteem and self-belief and that for the most part parents have a greater influence in these areas than we do. We felt that people living in this area have low self-esteem and aspirations when it comes to academic achievement and that this is reflected in the way their children perform in school.

It was our aim to talk to parents about the importance of self-esteem, self-awareness and perseverance when stuck and to give them strategies to help them and their children to become better learners. We hope in the long term to aid the development of children who are resilient and resourceful in their learning and who will go on to become lifelong learners. In the short term, success criteria include improved performance in school and greater parental involvement and support.

By offering parents the chance to engage in lifelong learning, we hoped to create better opportunities for their children. We arranged for the best speakers we could get in various Learning to Learn areas (for example, Mind Mapping) to talk to the parents for approximately an hour a fortnight.

We decided to hold a series of nine sessions for parents. These were held in the school hall every fortnight starting in October and continuing into the Spring Term. We agreed that the best time to hold the meetings was in the evenings so that more people would have a chance of attending and also because some of the speakers were not available during the day. This proved to be a good choice as, although some people said that they could not attend due to childcare problems, most parents managed to find babysitters and in some cases both parents were able to come. We were very encouraged by the very positive response we got and many parents asked if we could perhaps do the sessions again as they were unable to make that particular evening.

An initial invitation was sent out which included a paragraph about our involvement in the Campaign for Learning Research Project. We made it clear that although it was not necessary to attend all sessions we would be keeping a register of parents so that we could see whether regular attendance had more effect than just coming to one or two talks. We set out to be as welcoming and friendly as possible as many parents still have a hesitant or even negative attitude towards school and teachers. We also aimed to keep each session light hearted and fun, as well as imparting knowledge. At each session we offered tea, coffee and biscuits and there was time for a chat before we started. The sessions lasted for an hour although sometimes overran.

The first session was led by the school's teaching and learning co-ordinator and provided an overview of Learning to Learn. The school purchased a CHAMPS CD and this was used on an interactive whiteboard to introduce the ideas of brain-based learning. For subsequent sessions we enlisted the help of LEA advisors, advanced skills teachers and independent consultants, all of whom were known to be experts in their field and were good speakers.

The topics covered were:

1. Seeing yourself as a learner, which included self-talk and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP);
2. Three main ways to learn: Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic (brain gym);
3. Overcoming barriers to learning by raising self-esteem;
4. Memory skills and techniques to aid memory;
5. Visual learning including Mind Maps;
6. The different ways of being intelligent, a brief overview of all of the intelligences;
7. Thinking skills, various ways of promoting thinking, for example, by odd one out puzzles, mysteries, fortune lines;
8. The importance of talk, in particular using a Philosophy for Children approach;
9. Formative Assessment and reflecting on your own learning.

At the end of each session parents were encouraged to note down anything that they felt they had learnt from that particular session or general comments about how they thought it had gone. Although we originally planned to have nine sessions, parents requested more, especially in the area of NLP. The teachers involved were very enthusiastic about all of the approaches talked about and as the sessions progressed became increasingly aware of a sense of belonging amongst the parents who attended regularly. Both parents and teachers looked forward to the sessions for the camaraderie as well as the learning opportunities. Everyone came away feeling that they had learnt something worthwhile.

The older children (those children in Years 1 and 2) of parents who attended the sessions have completed the online questionnaire organized by Newcastle University. This questionnaire captures attitudes to school and learning and is used across the project, providing comparative data on engagement and motivation. Children involved in Learning to Learn complete the questionnaire during each academic year. Parents were encouraged to make written comments and feedback after each session and also to report on any successes they'd had implementing the Learning to Learn techniques which they had experienced. At the end of the series of talks parents were issued with a questionnaire to determine how they felt their attendance would benefit their children's learning. Much of our evidence has come from the parents themselves as this research project focused primarily on educating the parents, and through them, the children.

We have also looked at the children's reading tests and, where relevant, SAT results, in order to see if any improvement in performance is discernible at this early stage. As we hope to raise children's confidence in their own learning, class teachers were asked if they could detect any increase in children's self-esteem and confidence in their own learning ability.

## **Camborne**

Does getting parents directly involved in helping students with GCSE coursework have a significant impact on attainment?

During 2002–3 the school appointed an Advanced Skills Teacher as Community Coordinator. We believe this to be a unique post, the purpose of which is to raise ambition and attainment through greater involvement of the community in the work of the school. In particular, the role of parents was identified as being of central importance, the challenge being to engage parents more actively in the work and motivation of their children. It was felt that, in an area of marked social inertia, in which many of the parent body were former pupils of the school in the 1960s and 1970s, it was necessary to break down barriers that many of them felt when becoming involved in the school's work.

The post of Advanced Skills Teacher for the Community puts the relationship between parent and school at the centre of an intervention aimed at raising achievement.

We needed to know if the intervention had the effect we hoped for. We wanted to know whether the expenditure of time and money is worthwhile. Is this a valid, cost-effective intervention? If more students and curriculum areas were to take part, would it have a measurable effect? And, if this intervention is effective, which aspects of it are the most valuable?

Parents were invited to join their children and the Design and Technology (D&T) teachers for two introductory sessions. At the first, which was held after school, they were given the outline of the course and a breakdown of the coursework assignments. They were then introduced to five things that the staff promised to do and five things that students would need to do, before being given a list of five things they could do that would help their children to complete the coursework successfully. This included simple suggestions such as talking to their child about the coursework assignment; making time each week to review their progress; contacting school if they had any concerns; agreeing to support their children's attendance at out of hours sessions. Parents were then shown an exhibition of selected (successful) samples of the previous year's coursework and the breakdown of the grades for those pieces of coursework. The parents of just over 80 per cent of the students involved in the project attended this first session.

The next stage was to invite these parents to a D&T lesson during school time. They attended a special session, with their children, which modelled the coursework process and helped them to understand how their children were expected to work. The whole lesson was designed as a challenge. Working in mixed adult/parent/student groups, they had to design and construct a tower made of paper that would support an egg. The challenge was broken down into stages that reflected how coursework was to be approached:

1. Design time: initial thoughts, brainstormed/thought-showered by the group.
2. Research time: the group had to look at research papers containing examples of previous work on such a project, from which they gathered information.
3. The groups returned to their designs and tweaked them, informed by their new knowledge.
4. Making phase.
5. Trial phase.
6. Final making phase.

The approach to coursework in D&T was modelled this way because, in D&T course work, a common problem is that students are impatient to get on and start making things, without the necessary planning and research.



Many students find the planning and research section of the work challenging, because it is not 'practical' or 'kinaesthetic'. Through this parents' session, the hope was that students and parents alike would understand that initial good ideas, followed by careful development, backed-up by research, leading to adaptations of the original design would lead to greater success with the final product.

The next phase of the project was a series of after school sessions twice a week throughout the year, plus two two-day, half-term workshops, during which the D&T area was open and staffed, so that students could go in and work. Although not invited to attend these sessions, parents did encourage their children to stay after school and attend during half term. Parents were kept in touch with the coursework by regular contact by phone/letter. D&T staff and the Community teacher, who was also the Year Head, regularly updated them on how their children's coursework was going, with the underlying principle that any such contact with parents had to be as positive as possible, always focusing on how well the children were doing and what was needed for the coursework to be made even better. Parents were welcome to come in during the year as the coursework was done, and many did this. Finally, there was a celebration of coursework evening, open to the whole school community, to which the parents and students were invited. The final products of the coursework were on display and, over a glass of wine/juice, teachers, parents and their children were able to look back over the whole process.

Before and after the intervention, data about student performance was collected, including GCSE coursework scores in DT from previous years, GCSE coursework scores and completion rates. One group (Class 5) did not take part in the intervention and this in effect became a control group. Colleagues were interviewed as a follow-up measure, while parents and students were interviewed throughout the life of the project and when the coursework was completed.

## Results

### St Meriadoc

From the point of view of getting parents more involved with their children's learning, the evenings can be deemed to have been a great success. Not only did we have a quarter of our pupils represented but of those parents who attended 44 per cent attended all nine sessions and 80 per cent attended half or more. We have collected data from these parents via a questionnaire and feedback session. We have had 23 completed questionnaires, which represents around half of attendees, but where both parents attended only one questionnaire was completed, so the views of a larger proportion are probably represented.

One of our research aims was to discover whether involving parents in Learning to Learn approaches would develop their children's self-esteem and resilience as learners. It is easier for parents to do this if they themselves have good self-esteem. Around two-thirds of parents questioned rated their own ability as average before starting the course but all said that their confidence in their own ability had increased after attending the sessions. One parent remarked:

Before attending this course I felt I could not learn any more than I already knew but by attending this course I feel if I want to learn something I can.

Even after just the first session one parent reported that her realization that both she and her son were capable of learning anything had had a positive effect on him.

I told him that I know that he can do it even if at present he is finding it hard. He is now asking to do his homework and is delighted to realize he can do it right. I feel I am building up his self-esteem.

We were particularly pleased to note this parent's comment about the child being able to 'do it' even if at the present he is finding it hard as this is fostering the child's resilience. It is obviously outside the capability of this research to determine whether children of parents attending this course will gain long-lasting learning resilience but, given the evidence that parental attitudes and input have a significant effect on a child (for example, Schweinhart et al., 1993; Stevenson and Baker, 1987), then we feel that it is fair to assume that introducing Learning to Learn techniques to parents of children who are just starting out in their school career will have a beneficial effect on their self-belief and performance as learners.

All but one of the parents who filled in the questionnaire believed that their attendance at these sessions would be of benefit to their child. The one who was unsure had only attended three sessions. Also 92 per cent felt their confidence in their ability to help their child had increased. The remaining 8 per cent already had a high self-belief, which had stayed the same.

I have learnt a lot of different ways of learning and by making learning fun, my children look forward and are more willing to learn and feel able to talk to me about their school work.

If one form of teaching your child doesn't work I now know how to find a better way of learning.

We have already used mind mapping to learn left from right. Also we have taught our child many letters of the alphabet. All the techniques we've used have been learnt on this course.

There are many different ways to teach, everyone is different. Learning can and should be fun. Less pressure really helps. Everything is possible, be positive. We can do it! Everyone can!

These quotations, coming from parents in an area of traditionally low self-esteem and expectations, represent quite a shift in attitude and it is this 'can do' atmosphere at home that in our opinion will ultimately have the most effect on raising standards in our school. However, this will be difficult to quantify until children have been tracked over a number of years.

We have looked at the 2003–4 Key Stage 1 SAT results and can say that out of the children whose parents attended Learning to Learn sessions, 66 per cent achieved higher than average grades. However, it is of course impossible to draw any conclusions from this as it could be argued that these children would have performed at this level anyway.

What is striking about our school's performance over the last two years (2002–4) is the correlation between the introduction of Learning to Learn approaches in Year 2 and also to parents and the rise in our national performance (PANDA) grades. Last year was the first year we really concentrated on the Learning to Learn approaches of building resilient, independent and confident learners, and our average grades rose from E to A in both reading and writing and from D to A\* in maths. This year (2003–4) we have also introduced parents to these ideas and although the PANDA report hasn't been completed yet and results still have to be finalized, we are confident that we have maintained the higher standards achieved last year.

On an individual level we can definitely say that involving parents in Learning to Learn approaches has led to an increase in standards for some children. This parent attended all sessions and has been very enthusiastic and appreciative of all of the approaches he has learnt:

I have found the new approach to homework has had an amazing effect – it is fun and we both look forward to it. My child has come on in leaps and bounds and has gained in confidence. Mrs Paige (his teacher) has also found this.

He photocopied and highlighted his child's spellings for the term, tracking the child's progression from getting all spellings wrong to getting them consistently all correct and he felt that this directly correlated to his attendance at the meetings. He wrote on the spelling sheet:

Jim's attitude to homework has totally changed and so has mine – with the help of this course/speakers/teaching we all look forward to doing the maths and other work. A calm relaxing atmosphere – the introduction of colour, music and fun when doing homework – limiting the amount of time spent into small chunks has really worked and Jim's dramatic progress, I believe, is a result of a total change of attitude by my wife and I.

## Camborne

In order to evaluate the effect of parental involvement we carried out a series of follow-up interviews with colleagues, with students and with parents.

The Head of the Design and Technology department emphasized that GCSE A\*–C attainment has improved this year (2003–4) in D&T classes by 11 per cent; 88 per cent of the group of students studying Graphic Products achieved grades A\*–C this year, more than double the whole-school figure of 37 per cent of students achieving these grades (though the classes were partially set by ability and did not reflect the total ability range). These improvements, including close to 100 per cent coursework completion, were not sparked by changes in the curriculum or in the delivery, since the D&T department felt that they had not changed their teaching style, other than by including parents. An added bonus appears to be that D&T is retaining more students beyond GCSE level, a five-fold improvement from four students studying at AS to 20 in the last year.

The interview with the Community teacher responsible for the intervention emphasized that attendance of parents at the launch evening for the coursework was in excess of 80 per cent and informal feedback from parents was, throughout the project, overwhelmingly positive. Involvement of parents in the half term holiday coursework sessions (October 2003/February 2004) was significant. At least half of the students used this facility, usually accompanied for some of the time by a parent. The success of the intervention was helped by the fact that the Community teacher was also Year Head for this cohort of students and had a well-established relationship with the parent body, making it easier to contact, encourage and cajole.

The Head teacher felt that:

The atmosphere created by the project was remarkable. A real buzz in the department at both the launch and celebration events; the place was alive with activity during the half-term holidays and parents really were engaged with helping their children ... I am convinced that this has had a marked impact on attainment and on how students and parents feel about GCSE and coursework in particular. It is something we need to replicate across the school in other subjects.

Students were interviewed throughout the life of the project and when the coursework was completed. They were almost universally pleased with their results and felt that this intervention had made a significant difference to their coursework.

Twenty students of the cohort have continued with DT Product Design as an AS level. When questioned, 18 of them felt they had done better at GCSE in part because their parents understood what they had to do and were more

involved in their work. Over half of the AS group decided to continue with DT post-16 as a result of their excellent GCSE scores, which were in part aided by the intervention.

It was great because Dad understood what I had to do and gave me lots of encouragement. He didn't do the project with me or for me, but just knowing he was interested and ready to talk about it was a great help.

It was good because, in other subjects, Mum didn't really know what pressure I was under but because she came to school to see what we had to do in DT, it made her more understanding and helpful.

Parents were interviewed throughout the life of the project and especially at the final Coursework Celebration evening, when they were able to see the results of their children's efforts. The comments gathered at the final Coursework Celebration were all positive, about the quality of the work produced and the value of being involved throughout.

The launch evening for the coursework made everything much clearer to both my son and myself. It definitely helped him to focus and he knew that I could give him help and support more easily because I understood what he had to do.

It made a great difference to the way she and I felt about the project. I am sure she's done better in her exams because of it. She has decided to take AS DT next year, which I don't think she would have done before.

In addition to interviews, we looked at GCSE results for 2004 (see Table 1). The GCSE results suggest:

1. that students involved in the intervention were more likely to complete their coursework, compared to only three-quarters of the non-intervention group; and
2. that the intervention helps the students to produce better quality work, since in three of the four intervention classes, coursework marks were significantly better and exam marks were better than the national average scores for these exams.

Several interesting outcomes are emerging as a result of the project. One is a growing interest from other departments to do the same sort of programme next year (2005–6). Another is the enthusiasm of parents to get involved like this. It is as if many have been impatient for the chance to get involved and offer support but before have not been encouraged to or have lacked the school's endorsement or even the vocabulary necessary. Other local schools involved with us through the University of the First Age have been monitoring this project and are keen to replicate it in the coming year.

**Table 1:** Camborne GCSE results

<i>Class</i>	<i>Intervention by AST community?</i>	<i>Number of students in class</i>	<i>Teacher</i>	<i>Written paper national mean score (max. 140)</i>	<i>Written paper mean score for group (max. 140)</i>	<i>Coursework paper national mean score (max. 210)</i>	<i>Coursework paper mean score for group (max. 210)</i>	<i>Completion rate of coursework assignment for group</i>
1	Yes	29	A	89.0	90.8	164.8	182.5	100%
2	Yes	8	A	63.8	51.6	104.3	93.8	100%
3	Yes	17	B	82.1	83.6	164.6	175.6	100%
4	Yes	25	B	63.3	78.6	105.0	160.0	100%
5	No	34	C	81.9	79.9	110.0	76.0	74%

It is also interesting that the Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) involved has found it more difficult to work with parents on a similar project in the year below (Year 10), because with those parents she has not had an established relationship (she was the Year Head for the Year 11 cohort and knew many of the parents well). This suggests that, in the drive to improve attainment, a long-term, focused relationship with parents bears dividends. It may be that one additional consequence of this project for school is that we need to examine the traditional work and role of Year Heads, who are, because of their relationship with parents, uniquely placed to carry out this kind of curriculum intervention.

One additional set of data that, in retrospect, it would have been useful to collect would have been to look at shifts in attitude to D&T in the minds of both parents and students between the beginning and end of the course. We could have conducted a simple questionnaire to assess how the project impacted on perceptions of the subject, coursework and the school. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some students who were motivated by this intervention became more conscientious in other subjects. A broader collection of data might be used to test this causal hypothesis.

### Common Themes from the Projects

There are a complex set of relationships between school and parents which can operate to promote learning or which can set up additional barriers to participation. Parents create, in Bronfenbrenner's terms (1979), the micro-system of the family in which the earliest learning experiences take place and the style and content of these experiences are socially and culturally differentiated (see, for example, Brooker, 2003), producing greater or lesser degrees of 'match' with the learning experiences of the (meso-system) school, which itself operates within a series of limitations and expectations imposed by the government (macro-system). For the individual family, interactions with the school involve a change of 'field', a move into unfamiliar territory,

and the degree to which they can successfully negotiate this depends upon the amount of social and cultural capital they can bring to this encounter (Bourdieu, 1999). Parental involvement programmes have traditionally attempted to teach parents key skills, relating in particular to early reading or mathematics acquisition, to 'compensate' for the lack of appropriate knowledge in the home (Lareau, 1989, Sonnenschein et al., 1997, Standing, 1999). Parental involvement which operates in this one-way paradigm has had limited effect (Gewirtz, 2001; Hannon, 1999), since the transmission of a single 'skill set' is limited to that context and does not tap in to the personal learning which underpins the flexibility and developmental nature of Learning to Learn (Rawson, 2000).

Learning to Learn is a project that aims to make explicit the processes that underpin learning and teaching, so that teachers, students and their families can work together to promote more successful lifelong learning. The results from these two projects suggest that there are common elements which have led to changes in the interactions between home and school. The first common element is the development of a common language between parents and schools to discuss learning. Research on student autonomy and motivation (Ecclestone, 2002) suggests that learners need a common vocabulary about the process elements of learning in order to gain early confidence and control of the management of their learning, and this procedural autonomy underpins the development of critical autonomy and long-term motivation and engagement in study. In addition, having the tools for discussion about learning appears to be an important element in encouraging reflection on the more nebulous elements of learning: self-regulation and metacognition (Hall and Moseley, 2005).

Parental involvement is universally recommended in policy discourse, and it is often pushed as a potential cure for many educational ills (Standing, 1999). Nevertheless, working with parents is problematic, time consuming and variable in outcome (David, 1998). It is our contention that in order for the risks for both parties to be overcome, parental involvement needs to nest within a school culture that encourages experimentation and welcomes failure as opportunity for new, better questions. These characteristics are central, though not unique, to the Learning to Learn approach.

Parents from both projects reported an increased understanding of the processes in schools as a result of the Learning to Learn intervention. This familiarity tends to work towards the breaking down of barriers, allowing parents and teachers to have more mutuality in terms of the tacit knowledge that supports each interaction. The process of building relationships is dependent on comfort, and, as the sense that 'there is something I don't know that I am supposed to know ...' (Laing, 1970) becomes less pressing on each party, the possibility of openly admitting 'not-knowing' becomes less risky for parents and teachers alike. Dealing with risk-taking in the context of working with parents is made easier by the central awareness of Learning to Learn that there are a variety of possible approaches to learning.

Not having to have the right answer to hand, or to get it right first time, takes the pressure off both teacher and learner and encourages an experimental approach to learning opportunities which can be more inclusive and more successful.

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