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Privacy, power, and relationship: ethics and the home-school partnership

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ABSTRACT
Research on the ethics of the home-school partnerships in secondary education is scarce. This paper uses data from three case studies to argue: students have a right to privacy which home-school partnerships can circumvent, parents can be used as a resource to leverage compliance from students which undermines young people's privacy, and developing trusting relationships between parents and teachers is complex when considering the power differentials within that relationship. This article concludes that specific areas around privacy that require greater consideration include: the use of parents to leverage behavioural change in students, the sharing of information students may legitimately believe is intimate without consent, and seeking a change in values within the home. We also consider the areas of resistance students have displayed towards an encroachment on their private spheres.

KEYWORDS
Home-school partnerships; ethics; professional boundaries; privacy; secondary school

Introduction

This article uses secondary data to address an overlooked question in the field of home-school partnerships (HSPs): To what extent should secondary age students expect to control the flow of information about themselves between home and school? We will answer this by: arguing that 'children's rights' is an appropriate framework to consider this question; considering the limits of the children's right to privacy in general before using qualitative data from a past project to exemplify possible breaches of privacy; and offering a perspective on a student's right to control information shared between home and school that fundamentally emphasises a young person's right to privacy from state interference in their home life, mediated by their maturity and the potential for tensions with other rights.

The data presented in this article was collected as part of a project to describe 'good practice' in home-school partnerships (Gundarina et al., 2020). However, on analysis, it provoked questions beyond the scope of the methodology, that highlighted an important gap in current research: *Do home-school partnerships violate a student's right to privacy?* As our data were not collected to consider this question the methodology has gaps around demographics of participants and student voices, however we *can* demonstrate the

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importance of this question and present a possible rights-based theoretical framework for future research.

'Home-school partnerships' refer to primary caregivers and educational practitioners working together with a 'shared responsibility for children's learning' (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006, p. 6). The term incorporates a broad range of practices from the traditional formal meeting of parents with their child's teachers, through to parental involvement in homework and exam preparation, and ongoing communication about the child's learning and wellbeing. Using Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) typology, in this article we focus on parental involvement with the school and with schooling as that was the focus of the data, rather than the wider understanding of parental engagement in the education of their children.

Ethical issues in HSPs appear to rarely be reported, with some exceptions. Brain and Reid (2003) investigated the use of government funding in disadvantaged areas to increase parental activities in school and highlight issues of power between teachers and parents where many initiatives are intended to gain compliance from students (see also Graham et al., 2019). Schools, they argue, have four approaches to working with parents: using parents as regulators of child attendance and behaviour; promoters of the school; co-educators of children; and as clients accessing school-provided services. These four models imply different relationships between the schools and the parents – however practices within HSPs that invoke notions of 'compliance' and 'regulation' reinforce the need for protections, particularly with disadvantaged groups, against unjustified state interference in family life. Typically, home-school initiatives attempt to raise educational standards of lower income families. As such they are difficult to construct an argument *against*. However, it is often amongst lower-income families and minorities where the school is seeking to influence home values for the sake of compliance (Sykes, 2001). This intrusion is often justified on grounds of social mobility, 'early intervention', and the creation of citizens able to work within a neoliberal system (Goodall, 2019, p. 6). This discourse serves to 'responsibilise' parents. That is, to blame parents for failures in their child's education. Although it is already widely recognised school-dominated Home-school partnerships are 'not the ideal' (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 403), this article goes further, arguing they could constitute harm to home relationships, a misuse of power, and violate the rights of the child.

Systematic reviews of the research into parental involvement in schools does demonstrate educational benefits across all socio-economic backgrounds (Axford et al., 2019); we would not seek to undermine this. However, this dominant rhetoric of educational benefit appears to have shaped the field to consider areas of inequality (i.e. who is not able to access and benefit from these partnerships?) more than consider the student's right to privacy or appropriate limits of HSPs. Therefore, using empirical data from three case studies we argue ethical issues in secondary-level HSPs are under-theorised, particularly when considering a student's right to privacy. We claim that students have a right to privacy, that some home-school practices can violate that right to privacy, and theorise how the influence of the school in attempting to maximise external measures of success (e.g. exam results) can corrupt the teacher-parent relationship. We do not seek to antagonise proponents of HSPs and ultimately believe they are part of a healthy school culture, however we highlight areas for future research to ensure equitable relationships

for all parties, with clear boundaries between teachers and parents, and teachers and students to negotiate mutually agreed forms of information sharing with parents.

Children's right to privacy

We focussed on rights as the guiding principle in this article for three reasons. Firstly, because rights are already a dominant discourse within society and therefore have a sense of legitimacy. Secondly, many schools already sign up to protect rights of the child; this discussion into privacy is one example of how that could be manifest. Thirdly, a key part of the argument in this article is that (recognising young people's relative maturity) learning to control their own information is in their 'best interests' but the landscape around privacy from parents is contested: framing this as a conflict between competing rights draws out that complexity. Therefore, although other ethical frameworks may provide an interesting perspective on young people's privacy, utilising the rights of the child appears to be an appropriate method to consider this both academically and in practice.

Article 16 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) can be summarised as: 'Every child has the right to privacy. The law should protect the child's private, family and home life, including protecting children from unlawful attacks that harm their reputation.' (UNCRC 1989). Privacy is a broad concept with myriad definitions, but in this context we are particularly interested in privacy as 'constituting control over information about oneself' (Hanafin et al., 2010, p. 143). The UNCRC dictates that children should be free from 'arbitrary' interference with their privacy; though 'arbitrary' is not well defined (UNCRC, 1989) it does mean the kinds of information that are permissible to share are limited to those things genuinely important or meaningful, and arbitrarily sharing information without due cause is inappropriate. However, the general assumption is that parents (as gatekeepers of their children's privacy) are exempt from these limits of information sharing (Blecher-Prigat, 2018).

A young person may believe they have legitimate control over information about themselves even with reference to their parents, and that could include anything that may embarrass them in front of their parents or cause harm in their home lives, including: romantic relationships and friendships (when these are not a genuine safeguarding concern), changes in religious outlook or any other culturally sensitive change that may negatively affect relationships at home, and behavioural issues in school that do not constitute a safeguarding issue but may negatively affect relationships at home. Young people may also have an expectation that schools do not seek unsolicited influence on practices and values at home nor seek to upset the cultural norms of their communities. The extent to which these are legitimate expectations borne up by their rights will be discussed below.

Davis (2001) argues that *if* human beings do possess a right to privacy (by no means a given, though is generally assumed in western discourses to be true) then children should also possess it. He argues that a child's right to privacy *should* influence teaching practices, although he acknowledges there can be other moral considerations which may influence this, such as if the child has or is likely to come to harm. However, discourses on sharing student data assume parents should have access to all information about their children, without a consideration of the right of the child to privacy (e.g. Guidera, 2015).

Although less is written about privacy in HSPs, there are significant concerns about young people's privacy in other fora. Firstly, dominant research and discourses around children's privacy focus on increased control and surveillance at school (Bracy, 2011, Dowty, 2008). Research around the surveillance of children either focusses on the normalising of this invasion of privacy (Birnhack et al., 2018; Perry-Hazan et al., 2018) or the perceived importance in using a range of 'soft' information gathering techniques for multi-agency information sharing to better 'protect' or 'safeguard' children. Therefore, arguments around children's privacy are often set against a false dichotomy between privacy and safeguarding (Wrennall, 2010), which can overstate the risks children face, and fail to challenge that a lack of privacy can present a risk to children's wellbeing – both current, and in terms of protecting their future. In fact, these arguments fail to acknowledge that a lack of boundaries and learning to control information about themselves is against a child's best interests, and may itself lead to future safeguarding issues.

Secondly, the collecting and sharing of children's data online is widely discussed (Blecher-Prigat, 2018, p. 364; Brosch, 2018). Research around online information sharing assumes that children need protection from corporate interests who seek to monetise their data (Blecher-Prigat, 2018), however 'sharenting' (the act of parents providing a large amount of information, or particular intimate details, of their children in public or semi-public online fora) is generally assumed to be a parental right (Brosch, 2018).

Children's privacy at school

We contend that children do have a right to privacy at school beyond concerns about surveillence referred to above (commensurate with age, maturity and seriousness of genuine safeguarding concerns). We argue for this in three ways: children and families have a right to a private life away from state control and coercion, teachers and parents should respect the autonomy of children and young people, and young people should develop the skills to protect themselves from excessive curiosity of others into their private lives.

State control and coercion

State intervention in family life opposes the modern liberal preoccupation with demarking private and public spaces (Archard, 2018; Walker, 2018). Lockwood (1977) presents three reasons why schools, as agents of the state, provoke particular concerns for privacy: attendance is compulsory, therefore children and families have little opportunity to escape from privacy violations; teachers hold significant power over students and the potential for excessive coercion and control by the state through the values and practices of the school. That is, a central tenet of liberalism is state neutrality around values – there is no singular 'good life' to which the state encourages all to aspire, but rather the state is constructed to allow self-determination and freedom (with certain parameters around preventing harm). Allowing the state to present notions of a 'good life' that may seek to replace or undermine family cultures is exacerbated in a relationship with a large power differential between the agent of the state (teachers) and citizens (students).

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) echo some of these concerns by demonstrating that we can expect school staff to dominate the home-school relationship, with the school

controlling the flow of information (see also Gibson, 2013; Goodall, 2018). In fact, Goodall (2019, p. 10) has already asked 'how private is the private sphere?' when schools seek access to information about students' homes. We contend the same question could be asked of student's school-lives, and the flow of information towards the home.

While situations of abuse or neglect will cause the state to intervene in family life, the intervention by schools into family life beyond safeguarding concerns is more difficult to defend. However, the landscape is complex. Archard (2004), for example, talks at length as to the form and extent of privacy families can expect from external institutions, claiming that in many ways the family is not the private sphere modern liberals often claim. Feminism, for example, has made public the 'private' power dynamics within families that can be harmful to women and children, and typically this is welcomed (see also Plummer, 2003). Parents should have, he says, 'autonomy and privacy' where privacy is the 'absence of unconsented intrusion upon the family's domain' (p. 154) but a child's right to privacy from their parents is not considered here. However, by the same logic Archard presents, students should be protected from unconsented intrusions by the state into their relationships that could rightly be considered 'intimate'.

Therefore, appealing to the idea of neutrality within a liberal democratic state, we can argue that we would not expect the state to seek to coerce changes in values or behaviours within families unless harmful, or unless seeking to make public those practices and values that subjugate the marginalised. Information sharing about most young people, most of the time, would not fall under one of these caveats.

Respecting autonomy

Secondly, acknowledging privacy is demonstrating respect for autonomy, including the decisions that students make about the information to which they are privy. Davis (2001) argues students should be protected from other people attempting to access their personal life, leading to questions about whether a parent should assume a right to information about their school life and whether a teacher should divulge that information without the consent of the student. If we respect student autonomy, then we respect the control they maintain over their own information. If we seek (through coercion of the student or circumventing the student) to gain access to that information without genuine consent then we no longer respect the student as an autonomous agent.

'Sharenting' is one example of parents assuming they should control all information about their child without consent (Nottingham, 2019). The notion that parents *should not* assume access to information about their adolescent child is, perhaps, counter-cultural. However, information sharing without young people's consent inadvertently fails to acknowledge young people as autonomous social agents and rights-bearers, distinct from their parents (Jones & Walker, 2011). Children's right to privacy specifically includes, according to Jones and Walker (2011), the right to remain uncommunicative about their experiences at school – seeking to circumvent that reflects adult perspectives on the rights and abilities of the child to make autonomous choices.

Excess of curiosity

Our third defence of students' privacy is highlighted by Hanafin et al. (2010, p. 150):

> breaches of children's privacy have the potential to make schools dangerous places for children who have not yet learned, as many adults must do at some time in their lives, to avoid the excesses of others' curiosity.

In protected relationships this is the norm (Huss et al., 2008). For example, within a school councillor setting in the US privacy is acknowledged, though this causes conflict: 'the demands of parents to be informed of the specific content of counselling sessions often overshadow the child's right to privacy' (Huss et al., 2008, p. 362). However Morgan and Banks (2010) extend this expectation beyond clearly identified protected relationships to almost any professional relationship, as they construct confidential information as any information a professional gleans about a client's private life, including observed behaviours. While other parties may be curious about the content of interactions in areas of life they may not have immediate access to, young people should be able to develop their own boundaries that can protect them from potentially malicious or unhealthy curiosities of others.

Two of the strongest counter-arguments to a child's right to privacy appear to be an appeal to Article 3 of the UNCRC (UNCRC, 1989), the 'best interests of the child', and Articles 12 and 16 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948) that could be summarised as 'the right to a family life'. Firstly, we would contend that 'privacy' and 'best interests of the child' are not mutually exclusive. Learning to maintain boundaries with others, particularly those in power, is part of the 'best interests' of the child so that children can learn to identify and protect themselves from malicious actors who may misuse private information. Equally, if the sharing of behaviours or friendships deemed problematic by teachers is designed to pressure students into compliance instead of dealing with fundamental systemic issues within education that make schooling uninspiring and unengaging for some, then the best interest of the child would be served by improving the system rather than blaming the child. Secondly, the right to a family life does not equate to a right to know everything about every member of the family. There may be some direct conflicts (for example, a child's right to express their sexuality within a heavily conservative household) that mean a child should have a right to privacy to protect other freedoms. A child's right to participate in decisions about themselves would also challenge an adult's assumption of unilateral control about information pertaining to a child.

Therefore it is reasonable to ask 'what safeguards are in place to protect young people from an excess of teacher and parent curiosity?' Privacy serves to maintain psychological wellbeing of individuals who need time to reflect on their own, without interference from others, on the information they are privy to (Lockwood, 1977). Lockwood goes on to argue that soliciting information about a student's peers and peer relationships, their behaviour, emotional state, and 'world views' directly threaten the privacy rights of the students. Passing on this information to others can lead to ridicule, unfair treatment, or excessive discipline at home. Therefore, the sharing of this kind of information could lead to harm.

Of course, there are practical reasons for curtailing a student's right to privacy. For example, if a student is coming to harm at school or their behaviour is indicative of a safeguarding issue. However, as we see in the data below, the kinds of information being shared from teachers to parents does not always trigger a reasonable exception based on harm befalling the young person. Rather the dominant reason is to seek to

coerce particular behaviours from students, often with an explicit aim of improving exam results. Some may argue that a lower exam grade does constitute harm, however the prevailing neoliberal culture is more likely to construct a lower exam grade as harm befalling the reputation of the school, and will potentially sacrifice a student's rights and wellbeing to achieve higher grades. This is not to say that there are some situations in which keeping things 'secret' could realistically lead to harm, and we may think of hypothetical situations in which maintaining privacy could threaten the fabric of an otherwise appropriate family life. However, as we will describe through the data, the majority of privacy violations do not reasonably fit into these categories.

In this section we have articulated the complexity of student privacy – however we have argued that, as autonomous agents who have a vested interest in creating boundaries around the curiosity of others and maintaining a private life free from state interference, most young people, most of the time, would legitimately expect to maintain control over information about themselves. However, we recognise significant caveats around genuine safeguarding concerns, or when making public the 'private' prevents abuse or allows the subjugation of the marginalised to be recognised and treated.

Therefore, we construct privacy as the students' control of information about themselves including behaviours observed by others, mediated by their age, maturity, and the likelihood that maintaining confidentiality will lead to harm. However, recognising the school as an agent of the state with significant power over the student, and the potential of the state to seek compliance through coercion, particularly with already-disadvantaged students, the balance of privacy should err in favour of the student. In this section, we have described a framework through which we will interrogate our data to highlight an important gap in research. Specifically, we will consider:

- Respect for students' autonomy, through acknowledging their right to privacy
- Overstepping of school in seeking to influence (non-harmful) home practices and values
- Breaches of privacy framed as boundary violations, though we recognise boundaries require interpretation and operationalising and may not be as rigid as implied (Hart, 2016).

Methodology

The data were originally collected to identify strategies for forging strong home-school partnerships in secondary education in the UK.

It was assumed in this design that home-school partnerships were broadly positive, as is reflected in the literature. The findings of the thematic analysis of this data are reported in Gundarina et al. (2020) and Hart et al. (2022). However, after answering these initial research questions, there remained questions of ethics alluded to in the data we had not originally intended to answer. Therefore, the analysis presented here follows a post-hoc design, seeking to answer these questions:

- What evidence of is there of privacy issues in home-school partnerships?
- What future research is required to better understand these privacy issues?

Participants and procedure

We conducted interviews from December 2018 through March 2019, comprising three Senior Leadership Team interviews, eight teacher interviews, and nine parent interviews. We observed and audio recorded three parents' evenings with multiple parents in which students were present.

We utilised criterion and convenience sampling (Yin, 2014, p. 28), identifying secondary schools with a reputation for excellent HSPs through searching websites for home-school activities and consulting teachers. In total we found 145 schools to approach by letter to take part, where eight responded. We chose four schools, however it proved impossible to arrange times to meet stakeholders in one school. All three schools were relatively large (1200–1600 students on roll). School one (S1) had a large proportion of children who had English as an additional language (79.5%, national average 17.8% in 2021; Department for Education, 2022) and an expected level of children on free school meals (21.1%, national average 20.2% in 2021). School two (S2) had a much lower level of English as an additional language (4.2%) and free school meals (12.8%), while school three (S3) was about average with EAL (20.8%) and below average with free school meals (13.8%).

Each school had at least one parent/teacher evening observed, interviews with at least three parents and three teachers (see Table 1), which included a mix of students from Year 7 to Year 11 (11 to 16 years old). Members of the Senior Leadership Team were asked to invite three parents and teachers willing to talk about home-school partnerships in their school.

The variety of data collected, including interviews and observations from multiple types of participants, allowed for the triangulation of findings and enabled the inclusion of first-hand experiences of school culture. It also supported the initial stages of analysis within a more descriptive purpose (Wolcott, 1990). The observations made use of naturally occurring conversations; that is, the kind of dialogue that occurs within a natural setting rather than the more artificial, researcher-guided interview setting. This complemented the data collected through the interviews and allowed for a more naturalistic set of data.

We conducted an exploratory qualitative thematic analysis, drawing themes from the data following the procedures by King and Horrocks (2010) and Bazeley (2009). We also conducted a content analysis (Cohen et al., 2007) to articulate descriptive summaries of the data. Here, a cross-case thematic presentation of the findings is produced to demonstrate important gaps in knowledge (Yin, 2015) while also being sensitive to the voices of stakeholders (Yin, 2015). This was of particular importance in the attempt to give equal voice to both parents and teaching staff.

Table 1. Project participants.

School (anonymous coding system in brackets)	Interview with SLT	Teacher interviews	Parent interviews	Recorded parent/teacher evenings
School 1 (S1)	Head teacher (HT)	4 (T1,T2,T3,T4)	3 (P1,P2,P3)	1
School 2 (S2)	Assistant Head (AH)	2	3	1
School 3 (S3)	Assistant Head (AH)	2	3	1

The researchers started the analysis with the individual inductive coding of two interview transcripts and one set of field notes. This coding was then compared to allow for adjustments that enable coding consistency. After the initial coding, we used a peer debriefing validation strategy, whereby the analysis was checked by a member of the team that had not coded data.

Ethics

The research received approval from the University of Leeds ethics committee. We were aware of power imbalances between teachers and parents/students, and ensured all participants were comfortable with taking part through conversation alongside formal methods of signed consent forms. Where students were present, they were invited to consent to a member of the research team sitting in on the meeting with parents. Teachers, however, were gatekeepers to access and chose the participants – thereby reducing the risk of a researcher sitting in on any meetings that may have been awkward or embarrassing to the student. Alongside verbal and written consent, the researcher remained aware of the student's body language and general enthusiasm for the taking part.

Anonymity is preserved, and data stored securely on university servers. Before consenting, parents and teachers were made aware that the anonymised data from the project may be made available via repositories for use in other projects, which would include its repurposing here.

Privacy issues in our data

Our original thematic analysis (Gundarina et al., 2020; Hart et al., 2022) highlighted various aspects of effective home-school partnerships: developing opportunities to support student learning at home; ensuring inclusive and accessible schools; creating space for parent voices; developing inclusive IT communication opportunities; developing links with the wider community; focusing on regular and honest communication with parents; and seeking to improve the home-school partnership. Invariably, seeking academic improvement and behavioural change from students were the aims of these partnerships. However an imbalance of power in the partnerships, combined with an awareness of a lack of student voice, led us to 'problematise' these findings (Hart et al., 2022) by considering the power dynamics and lack of articulated boundaries within these relationships; the school's reach into the values and practices of the home; the direction of information being predominantly from school to home; the subjugation of student voice in these partnerships; the impact of austerity on HSPs; and the right of the student to control information about themselves. Although this small-scale study was not able to speak to all those areas, this post-hoc interrogation of the data did provide ample examples of, and evidence for, young people's right to privacy. Below, we highlight two key areas of potential privacy violations: using the HSP to leverage change at home or at school, and issues of boundaries and surveillance. We also demonstrate areas of student resistance, which with the lack of student voice may indicate a preference for privacy.

Using the private sphere of the family to leverage change at school

We argue below that 'leverage' reflects much of the ethos of our data, where teachers assumed parents were a resource they could use to facilitate change in students. For example:

> Quite often the teacher will talk directly to the students and they'll say, 'This is where you need to make more effort', or, 'this is where you've fallen behind, this is where you're doing well'. And I wonder whether by saying that in front of the parent, the child takes it in a bit more, maybe than if they would have told it in the classroom. (S2P2)

Sometimes this sharing of information about the student was for the explicit purpose of pursuing higher exam grades (S3P3). Although we need to recognise that the internal purposes for which a teacher is seeking a higher exam grade is not known in these data, it is plausible within a high-pressured exam-driven culture of schooling that is prevalent within the UK (Ball, 2003) that the pursuit of the grade itself can become more important than the wellbeing of the student. These missing data are important; a teacher sharing information for the purpose of improving the grade-average of the school or to make student (rather than the teacher) responsible for 'falling behind' is qualitatively different from a teacher sharing information because they believe 'falling behind' is a symptom of another issue affecting the student's wellbeing that they are seeking to support.

Our data further demonstrated the HSP was an attempt to monitor and influence the behaviour of students. A teacher reflected communication with home can stop 'bad habits' (S1T3); another explained understanding the home situation of students improves their pastoral care:

> Working out why is a particular child behaving the way that he's behaving, and just getting to know them a little bit better. When you speak to their parents and then you can put two and two together and think . . . he might need a little more extra support. (S1T2)

This was also referred to as being part of the 'wider community' (S2AH). Although the goal of providing increased pastoral support is laudable, generally this relationship is presumed to influence students to gain compliance to behavioural standards:

> From a professional point of view, it's being able to have those honest conversations with the parents that can have more leverage with the students. (S2T1)

Several other teachers also refer to being 'honest' in their communications with parents, which meant they were using information about the school day to leverage compliant behaviour from the child rather than (for example) being honest about the fallibility of the school to provide adequately for the students' needs. This one-sided assumption of change avoids systemic issues in school that may be causing the behaviours deemed undesirable (Goodall, 2019; Slee, 2019).

Boundaries between home and school; private and public

There was evidence of using a relationship to introduce sanctions at home, triggering our second concern about privacy: overstepping a boundary between the state and the home. The purpose of generating trust was to engender active support from parents to influence the work or behaviour of children:

> If there's that trust then teachers can get more support from the parents to talk to their child, 'I trust your teacher and we're working together, so I want to see you work harder', so without that, if we were like at loggerheads then the child wouldn't get the best out of them, so that relationship is really important for the teachers. (S1T1)

The imparting of values from school to home demonstrates an imbalance of power camouflaged by the idea of 'partnerships' (Harrison et al., 2018). Parents' passivity in this relationship is assumed (Brooker, 2010) but notions of partnership in unequal power relationships often invoke concern (Sykes, 2001) as language of partnership tends to hide, rather than challenge, power structures (Todd & Higgins, 1998). Typically, power resides with the school, as it is difficult for parents to initiate a home-school partnership if the school is unwilling (Sykes, 2001). This moved from imparting values to influencing behaviours and included encouraging greater surveillance at home, even when sometimes relatively mundane activities were shared:

> *Teacher: She is working really well. Any questions?*
>
> *Mother: Anything we can do?*
>
> *Teacher: Any reading outside of the classroom? Challenging texts?*
>
> *Father: She is reading Harry Potter.*
>
> *Teacher: Reading should be [for] pleasure. Just keep one eye on what she reads. (S3O)*

Tensions can exist if parents challenge classroom practices, and the power of where parents are capable of exercising influence resides with the school. Information sharing often assumes parents and teachers will share values and agree what is best for the student (Todd & Higgins, 1998) and the schools in our study aimed to demonstrate to the students that teachers and parents were 'working in the same direction' (S2P3). However, partnerships can colonise the home through the school (Edwards & Warin, 1999). To reinforce this, in our exemplars of good practice (Gundarina et al., 2020), there was significant variety in the opportunities to engage in HSPs but little support for diversity of values or priorities.

Home-school partnerships have also been constructed as a form of surveillance by the state (e.g. Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Crozier, 1998). In our data here (and below) we see examples of schools collecting information about home life that may trigger interventions, and while these can be based around material need and welfare, some evidence in our data suggests this is also about influencing values within the home, prioritising the attributes required to do well within a neoliberal education system (Archard, 2018).

Due to these potential intrusions of institutional values on the home, trusted professional relationships typically have 'boundaries': the limits of acceptable behaviour within that relationship. Boundary issues are offered in all schools, although not formulated as such by teachers. For example:

> I have a few children who were at the start of the year misbehaving. I built a relationship over time with the parents. The parents said to me what would I like them to do, and I said 'remove the PlayStation, remove the mobile phone'. Those were removed. The children knew that it was because of the contact with me. Their behaviour improved drastically, and then I was able to call the parents back and let them know, yep, their behaviour's much better, we can give back a couple of things, but we're going to continue monitoring. (S1T4)

A key question in these kind of interactions is, we believe, 'are these interactions occurring instead of the more difficult work of relationship building and institutional change within the school?'

The imbalance of power coupled can mean the HSP is at risk of being utilised to advance the cause of the school at the expense of the wellbeing of the students or parents. In our data, when conflict *did* arise, parents and teachers were assumed to be united against their children through applying an appropriate amount of 'pressure' (S1P3) on the student at home. In the data, parents could be seen as a 'tool' or resource used by schools to achieve their own ends. Though some schools were aware the ideal is a partnership built on mutual dialogue between all three parties, in practice this seemed difficult to achieve. Therefore, HSPs can politicise parenthood; moving it from the private to the public. The 'intimate and close relationship' (Archard, 2018, p. 123) of the home can become a disciplinarian relationship on behalf of the school.

Student resistance

Young people can show resistance at this intrusion in their private lives. For example, some students intercept letters from schools (S2T1):

> If they're [parents] not getting letters sent to them, there's no point giving letters to the children to take them home, we can actually post them out... We've got a franking machine and that franks the school name on. So if students are getting home before their parents get home, they see it's a letter from school, the letter goes... It's a case of just getting ordinary stamps on, post the stamp on and get them posted that way to try and get over those things as well [laughs].

Teachers in our data suggest young people are attempting to maintain their own boundaries through disrupting the flow of information between school and home. It is likely students use other mechanisms to maintain boundaries (see Hart, 2016; Todd & Higgins, 1998) we were unable to capture in our data. In this research, student voices were either subdued or silenced during the observations, however other research suggests young people in a secondary setting are looking for greater opportunities for privacy and autonomy (e.g. Wyness, 2014).

In our post-hoc analysis of the data, following our awareness of ethical issues during the initial thematic analysis, we have shown how there are demonstrable concerns around establishing and maintaining a student's right to privacy. We hypothesise that the school's influence can create a culture that corrupts the relationship between teachers and parents into one where teachers seek opportunities to leverage changes in behaviour and attitudes from students that is plausibly more to do with school reputation and coercing compliance rather than the genuine best interests of the child.

Conclusion

Research into home-school partnerships in secondary education is rare. What seems missing entirely is an exploration into the privacy of students in these partnerships, which are assumed to predict positive student outcomes. This is particularly important

as young people are increasingly expecting privacy and may reasonably expect teachers to maintain some level of confidentiality. We have concerns that dominant narratives around inclusion and educational attainment using HSPs obstruct issues of privacy, particularly around: state control of minoritised groups through the imposition of neo-liberal values; institutional influence on home life that prioritises the needs of the school over the wellbeing of the student; the disrespecting of students' autonomy; and the use of personal information about the student to leverage compliant behaviour, implying that the family rather than the school is responsible for a lack of educational attainment. In this conclusion we consider practice and research implications from four aspects of our discussion.

In our post-hoc design, the internal reasoning that teachers have for engaging in home-school partnerships are impossible to access. However, the dominant evidence in the data shows parent partnerships are directed by the school to improve grades through academic study and reduce instances of 'problematic' behaviour by students at school – though several respondents also referred to pastoral care of the family and the holistic development of the student. There was also a desire to use the partnership to raise aspirations for the students. Our research was not able to demonstrate the difference the home-school partnership had on diverse families, and so greater consideration is required on the disproportionate effects of the pursuit of compliance on less advantaged families that may not share school values. Where schools are explicit in seeking to influence home values with an increased individualising of social issues, greater understanding on how this affects families; their narratives of inclusion and exclusion with these processes; and recognising sites of resistance to this dominant neoliberal narrative, would improve discourses on home-school practices.

Using our data we considered evidence for the respect of a student's autonomy, particularly over 'intimate' information about them and their relationships. Throughout our data there was no acknowledgement of a student's right to privacy, and one of the reasons we had limited examples of student voice is because they were silent (or silenced) during our observations. The assumption that information sharing between home and school should be promoted was not questioned. Again, this may be a flaw in relying on a post-hoc design, however we would have expected *some* indication of the student's right to privacy through our interviews with teachers and school leaders. Future research could invoke the student voice to understand their perspectives on HSPs.

We also considered the overstepping of boundaries in schools seeking to influence practices and values in the home. While the school is often considered a neutral institution, an awareness must exist of its own aims held in tension with the aims of teaching and the wellbeing of the student. We saw evidence that teachers were seeking to influence practices within the home (including disciplinary practices), and the only evidence of boundary setting was from the students seeking to disrupt the flow of information. However, we acknowledge that some parents set boundaries by failing to engage with any home-school activities, and the voices of those families are not present in our data. Documentary analysis of policies governing HSPs may be important here, however a piece of participatory action research in which boundaries are co-created between students, parents and teachers may uncover transferable sets of safeguards to allow for more egalitarian relationships.

Finally, breaches of privacy should be framed as boundary violations if we accept young people deserve a right to privacy. However, we saw multiple examples where teachers are expected to use parents to leverage change in their children. There is little awareness demonstrated of how this form of cooperation to coerce change from students affects the relationships at home or at school, but if trust in teachers diminishes then we can expect students' education will suffer.

Implications for practice

While we would encourage greater research, some implications for practice from our theorising so far are presented below. Consultation and transparency about the purpose of home-school activities are key, so practitioners can consider their actions against the values of teaching. Trusting practitioners to make decisions about forms of home-school partnership might be beneficial (Moore, et al., 2014), and we should ensure pro-social teachers, who will prioritise the needs of the home, are chosen for this work. Teachers should think hard before sharing low-level behavioural issues that place blame on the child as opposed to the institutional environment (Slee, 2019), or may accidentally give away information a child deems personal. Ultimately, we argue a greater sense of respect for privacy between teacher and student may improve the learning relationship.

We believe that, at times, young people's privacy is being violated to produce quick fixes to longstanding systemic issues within schools. Young people are sometimes portrayed as a problem to be circumvented through communication home; however, assuming that direct communication with young people is a better option would improve young people's participation and build confidence around maintaining their own boundaries. Schools could maintain greater responsibility for student behaviours and engage in greater dialogue to ensure needs were being met in the classroom, while also supporting students' independence. Teachers could ask consent before sending information home, modelling the expected behaviour of other organisations as young people grow, and normalise young people as controllers of their own information.

Greater thought and research are required here, however should a code of practice for home-school partnerships be developed, we recommend it includes:

- A commitment to the privacy of students and a clear, transparent understanding of what information will be shared with parents, with a default position of maintaining confidentiality.
- Empowering students to maintain their own boundaries between their public (school) and private (home) life.
- Addressing how power imbalances will be dealt with. This may include increasing the areas of influence parents have within the school to ensure that their children are not being disadvantaged through policy decisions designed to improve particular grades or measurements by which the school is rated.
- How student voice will be heard with regard to home-school partnerships.
- Guidelines on maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- Explicit terms for sharing information between school and home without the consent of the student.

Educational professionals engaged in home-school partnerships should be trained to identify ethical issues and imbalances of power. In particular, what constitutes invasion of privacy and private lives.

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