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Partnership with parents in Early Years Learning settings: a comparison of ICT approaches

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MON: Partnership with parents in Early Years Learning settings: a comparison of ICT approaches (Alison Owens)

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Using digital technologies to develop a partnership with parents.

ABSTRACT: Developing a partnership with parents in early years learning settings: a comparison of ICT approaches.

Topic

Over the last decade the requirement for including and engaging with parents has gone from recommendation to legislative requirement, this presentation aims to consider the options available through the use of information, communication technologies (ICT) to develop novel approaches to progressing from the transfer of information to building partnerships with parents.

Rationale

In addition to considering the potential of using ICT to meet legislative requirements, this presentation seeks to examine the advantages and disadvantages of ICT and use a comparison of the options available to inform practice. Following an extensive literature review, there is a lack of information and advice on the subject for practitioners. While some settings are embracing recent advances in open educational resources and social networking, many still rely on printed material and one way communication with parents, this project aims to address this.

Method

Information for this project will be gathered through online research into the various technologies available. In addition, information on current practice will be provided from

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3 January 2017

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practitioners in the sector. This data will be collected through questionnaires distributed by social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Benefits, barriers and risks will be evaluated using a variety of sources such as Barnardo's and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Ireland).

Forthcoming presentation

A PowerPoint presentation will provide an overview of the paper based project examining the above topic as follows:

- · *Introduction*: this deals with the question, "Why is parental inclusion so important?" and considers legislation and the importance of parental involvement on child development.
- · *Barriers to inclusion***:** a look at issues such as lack of time, opportunity and communication problems including language and literacy.
- · *Current methods*: this section describes current methods used by practitioners to engage with parents (based on information from a small sample through questionnaires).
- · *Information, Communication Technology options*: a breakdown of the various ICT options available such as social network sites, twitter, blogging, conferencing, e-mail and packages specifically designed for preschool settings such as Child Diary.
- · *Benefits*: a look at the potential benefits of using various ICT approaches such as reducing costs, reducing time spent on administrative duties and increasing time available for other non-contact time tasks such as observations and curriculum development.
- · *Barriers*: this will consider the barriers to the use of ICT, such as digital literacy, access to technologies and cost of implementation.
- · *Risks*: here we will look at the issues surrounding confidentiality, data protection and child safety, these are extremely important as preschools are working with very young children and practitioners have a duty of care to the children in the setting.
- · *Overcoming barriers and resolving risks*: an examination of how ICT can be used to overcome barriers to inclusion, a look at overcoming the barriers to the use of ICT and how to deal with the risks involved.

Conclusion: a summary of the findings and recommendations for practitioners.

Extra content
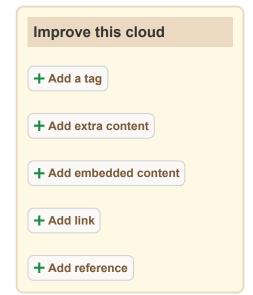
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[Jude Toasland](#)
11:47am 28 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

This is a fascinating topic and one close to my heart as in my work we have also been considering how to communicate effectively with parents. I particularly like the use of exisiting social media, etc that parents are using to educate and inform them, thereby minimising some of the risks around knowledge and costs. I would be very interested in initial feedback from parents if you have been able to capture this in such tight timescales? I also like the presentation structure outlined in your abstract - very clear and succinct. I look forward to the presentation.

[Mary Howell](#)
3:26pm 29 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Alison

Do you think the lack of litereature on this reflects the new and rapidly changing nature of this area Do you think people are only just picking up the possibility of communicating with parents using online tools? I will be interested to see your presentation and get a flavour of the current 'state of play.'

[Alison Brereton](#)
7:23am 31 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jude

The feedback so far is very interesting. A large number of practitioners have suggested the use of social media is 'unprofessional'. Some have also commented issues regarding 'ethics'. I've only received 3 parent questionnaires back so far but I expect a few more later in the week so it will be interesting to compare their views with practitioners.

[Alison Brereton](#)
7:27am 31 January 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Mary

Yes, I think the fact that the area is changing so quickly is a key issue but the responses to questionnaires are so far giving the impression that issues are more about ethics and professionalism. I'm looking forward to getting a more complete picture when all of the questionnaires are returned, however, the questionnaires are leaving considerable gaps in the research and unfortunately I won't have time to carry out interviews prior to the presentation.

jan turner
5:58pm 1 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Alison,   It will be interesting to know if respondents favour some type of social media activity as a way of 'keeping in touch' - major announcements, events and 'reports' - to support later dialogue direct with individual parents. The mix of text and pictures in some social media presents well and looks a lot more welcoming than 1 x A4 at the bottom of the shoe bag/pocket etc. Do you think it can 'pave the way' to something more meaningful? I look forward to your presentation.

Dr Susan Morris
12:26pm 2 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hello Alison, This is such a worthwhile substantive area to investigate. Bravo!

At the Scottish EYC nursery I am a parent at, Learning Journals is used which not only reports to parents but aso allows parents to communicate achievements by uploading video and photos. The social scientist in me bristles slightly at the social contruction of the entries at times.... but in relation to parental engagement, the Nursery has found it award winning across its activities.

I look forward to your presentation, Susan

Alison Brereton
6:42am 3 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Jan

From the initial responses there is already a clear favourite from parents but with strings attached. I'll reveal all at the presentation. It is proving to be quite a complex area.

Alison Brereton
6:48am 3 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Susan

So far, none of my practitioner respondents to my survey use specific software for engaging with parents, this is based on a sample of 20 from a wide range of areas. I think we are some way behind our UK colleagues when it comes to using digital resources and I'm considering extending the research to include UK participants, however, this will involve putting the final project on hold until the summer. I do think it would be worth the delay.

Pat Townshend
3:09pm 5 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Alison

It's very interesting that we're studying a similar group of students. My experience is of settings in England. Settings use websites for advertising and to provide early information to enquirers. Their website is also the equivalent of the paper based newsletter that used to go home. Paper-based home:setting child diaries started around 2000, to record the two-way dialogue. I think that much of this has migrated to direct two-way email correspondence now.

Sadly, I notice that some settings' websites appear to be untended, with out of date information about long past events still posted. I wonder if these are settings where the keen person who set up the website has left and no-one else feels able to pick it up. It gives a very bad impression, and really needs hiding from sight.

In my research I've picked up some students' reservations about specific social networking sites. I think this may be based on their own unpleasant personal experiences while using them. Facebook seems to be fairly ubiquitous as I think it is the one most widely used. Individuals and small social groups seem to have developed their own views on the main purposes of the moresuccessful SN sites, e.g. Facebook is for fun, twitter is for politics. It's interesting that the small group of students I am studying chose WhatsApp a) because none of them objected to using it, or held any negative views about it, and b) because they all liked the interface. I think ease of use is very important. To keep in contact with the majority of people I think having sites that can be viewed easily on mobile phones is also important. Sometimes a smart phone is the nearest to a computer that people can afford.

At educational and childcare sector fairs and conferences there is now a very strong showing from software manufacturers selling systems that will help manage the business side of the operation, keep chidlren's progress records and managed promotion and communications. Have these businesses started selling in Ireland yet?

I'm really looking forward to hearing about your project. Best of luck!

Alison Brereton
7:43am 6 February 2017 Permalink

Hi Pat

Software manufacturers are trying to sell over here but from the small sample of participants that I looked for information from 18 out of 19 respondents don't use software. On my survey of social networking use 50% of parents had a problem using Facebook for preschool due to issues around privacy though all of them use it personally.

I hope I can have all the data in and ready before the presentation.

Julie Skeats
7:53pm 6 February 2017 Permalink

Hi Alison I am really interested in this topic, as engaging with parents is really important in secondary education as well. I will be interested in your findings. Good luck with your presentation.

Alison Brereton
5:17pm 8 February 2017 Permalink

Thanks Julie, it will be interesting to see if there are any similarities/overlaps.

[Dr Simon Ball](#)
10:42am 14 February 2017 [Permalink](#)

Hi Alison
Please find below the main questions and comments from your live presentation. It's up to you how to answer them, whether you wish to group them, or whether you wish to point to an answer already given above, for example.
Best wishes
Simon

- Would the use of ICT also create a record, so that parents/carers can consult this aferwards. So they don't forgetor can show others at home.
- I am surpised re the lack of use of Twitter
- you spoke about practioner concerns and one of the concerns was low wages, could you clarify what is meant by this, thanks
- I have seen how much parents can value a pictorial record of what their children are doing - they keep them like photo albums.
- Similar situation here in England Alison (re low wages and extra work)
- Very interesting idea Alison, our local school do use a facebook page to share information

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