

## 4.2 Parents as learning aides

### Homework assistance – the possibilities of and barriers to parental involvement

Children are expected to benefit from homework, which provides practice and an opportunity to consolidate learning.

The setting of homework is also recognised as a valuable way of involving parents in their children's schoolwork.

Parents who do not speak English or are not literate in English clearly need to know how to support their child, and wherever possible, the teacher should structure tasks in such a way that parents are able to understand what is expected and how they can help.

This module aims at looking at ways teachers can ensure parents understand how to support their children's homework.

The module will also look at any barriers there may be to parental involvement in homework.

#### Target group

The module is aimed at student teachers and teachers in primary or secondary schools

#### Aims

- To look at any barriers there may be to parental involvement of bilingual parents in their child's education and the life of the school
- To look at how parents can support their child's homework
- To look at the limitations on the support bilingual parents can give to their child

## Sessions in practice

### Session 1: Barriers to involvement in the life of the school

- To consider some of the barriers some bilingual parents experience when trying to be involved in their child's education
- To identify ways of developing support for bilingual families

#### Participants

A group of up to 30 students

#### Step 1: Prepare sets of 'Barriers to Involvement' cards

Prepare sets of 'Barriers to Involvement' (see material 1).

Split the participants into groups of 4-5.

Ask each group to consider some of the barriers to involvement that bilingual parents may experience when their children come to school.

*Show the 'Barriers to Involvement' cards on a slide.*

Explain that each group must select nine factors that they consider to be the most important barriers.

Then they should arrange and rank the barriers cards in a 'Diamond' formation with the most important factors towards the top, and the least important towards the bottom.

*Show example of Diamond 9 on a slide.*

Give each group a set of cards and allow them time to do the activity.

Bring the groups together and discuss the cards they have chosen and why.

Write up the 9 points chosen by most people.

The main points of the discussion may be:

- The parents are unable to communicate in English
- There may be no information available in the parents' language
- The school may not be well informed about the families' culture
- There may not be an effective system in the school for welcoming new bilingual families
- The parents may be unfamiliar with the UK education system
- They may come from a culture where there is no tradition or expectation of parental involvement
- There may be young children in the family so the parents are unable to come into school for parent workshops or meetings
- The parents may be unaware of the school's policy on homework
- The parents' own experience of school may have been a negative one

Ask each student to think of one way a school could try to break down one of these barriers.

Write the most common points up.

*Watch a DVD – Shared Futures Chapter 9. Involving parents and carers.*

Discuss how the schools have involved the parents and have they have broken down some of the barriers we have discussed.

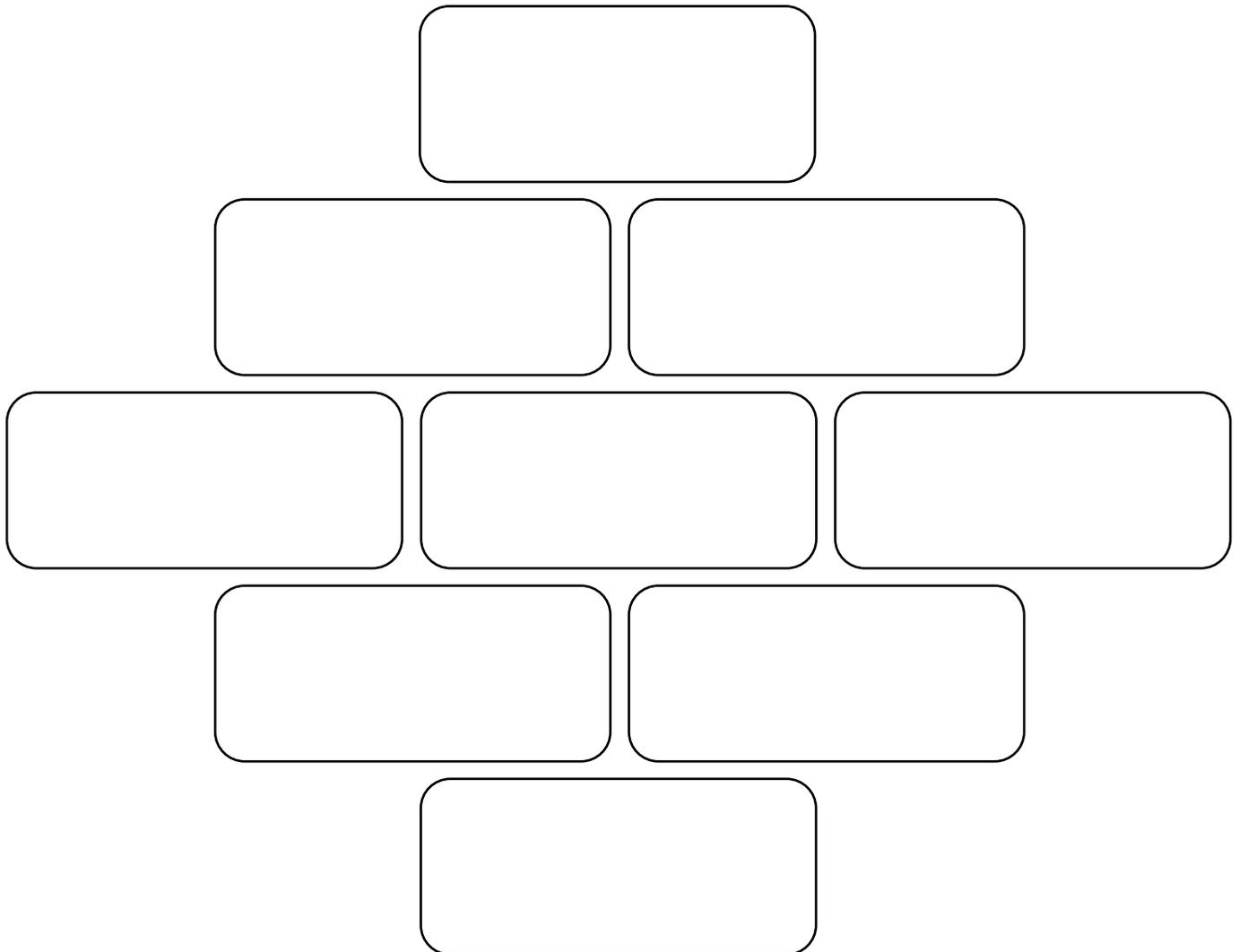
Write up points raised.

Discuss which they thought were the most effective.

## Material 1 'Barriers to Involvement' cards

They may be unable to communicate in English.	They may be unfamiliar with the education systems in the UK.
They may come from a culture where there is no tradition or expectation of parental involvement.	They may not have been consulted about their needs.
They may feel anxious about trusting people.	They may be unaware of the school policy on homework.
There may be no information available in their own language.	The parents' own experience of school may have been a negative one.
There may not be an effective system in the school for welcoming families who are new arrivals.	They may be worried about other issues such as money, health, housing and employment.
The school or other setting may not be well informed about their culture and experiences.	They may have young children and be unable to come into school for parents' workshops or meetings.
The school may not be aware of local agencies and services that can help.	The work and activities at school may be unfamiliar to some parents.

**Copy master: The most common points**



A pyramid-shaped diagram consisting of 10 empty rounded rectangular boxes. The boxes are arranged in five rows: the top row has one box, the second row has two boxes, the third row has three boxes, the fourth row has two boxes, and the bottom row has one box.

**Example: The most common points**

They may be unable to communicate in English.

There may not be an effective system in the school for welcoming families who are new arrivals.

There may be no information available in their own language.

They may be unfamiliar with the education system in the UK.

They may have young children and be unable to come into school for Parents' Workshops or meetings.

The work and activities at school may be unfamiliar to some parents.

They may be unaware of the school policy on homework.

They may come from a culture where there is no tradition or expectation of parental involvement.

The school may not be well informed about their culture and experiences.

## Session 2: How bilingual parents can support their child’s homework

- To look at how bilingual parents can support their children’s literacy in their first years at primary school
- To look at how bilingual parents can support their children with homework

### Participants

A group of up to 30 students

### Step 1

Split the students into small groups. Give each student a sheet with 4 discussion questions and ask them to discuss the questions then note down their answers.

#### Points for discussion

- What are your own experiences of trying to read/write in another language? If it was difficult, why was this the case?
- What would make it easier?
- How does this relate to the experiences of young bilingual children in our schools?
- What could make it easier for them?

Bring the groups together and note their answers to the questions.

#### Main points to consider:

When reading in another language we often:

- Do not have enough vocabulary to understand
- Spend so much effort decoding that we cannot concentrate on grasping meaning at the same time
- Can be put off, embarrassed and disheartened by these facts

When writing in another language we often:

- Know what to write but can’t think how to say it in the new language
- Are so concerned about accuracy that we dare not put it on paper
- Try to compose in the new language and can’t think what to write because of a lack of knowledge of structures/vocabulary
- Do not write what we want to write because we think the reader will not share our social/cultural background and therefore will not understand

What would make it easier :

- Using supportive visual material to explain the content of written text
- Making time for discussion before reading, to introduce topic/vocabulary
- Creating a welcoming ethos in the classrooms that bilingual pupils feel confident about writing about experiences in their own lives
- Give examples of structures / vocabulary to expand children’s writing
- Use of appropriate writing frames
- Acquiring resources in the children’s languages or dual –language books
- Sharing parents’ and children’s experiences with the school by using photographs, talks or demonstrations

## Step 2

What can schools do to help families of bilingual children support their literacy?  
Give out Activity Sheet.

### Activity 1

1. List the literacy activities children in your school do at school. 2. Then watch the film and consider what advice you could give to a bilingual family on how to support these activities and literacy development in general. Don't forget to consider the benefit of using the home language to develop literacy.

School-based activity	Advice to parents for supporting this at home

Watch the video and fill in the sheet individually.

### Activity 2

Discuss everyone's 'advice to parents'.  
How/When would teachers give this advice to parents?  
Discuss this and write up suggestions.

Main points to bring out:

- Parents can help with reading either in English or in their home language
- Parents can help with writing either in English or the home language

- Parents can help with number work either in English or in the home language
- Parents should show an interest what their children are doing at school and should encourage their children to talk about what they do at school
- Parents should ask their children to explain things they do not understand
- Parents should listen to their children
- Parents should give praise and acknowledge success
- Parents should encourage children to do the work for themselves, not do it for them when they are having difficulty
- Try not to compare children negatively to others- either siblings or other children in the class
- Encourage children to have other interests outside school
- How/When would teachers give this advice to parents?
- Parents' meeting to explain the school's policy on homework.
- May also provide a booklet on this in the parents' home language
- Run parents' workshops to show parents how to help their children with their homework.
- Provide a booklet on how parents' can help in the parents' home language.
- School could provide a homework club after school which the parents can come to in order to help their children and to learn more about the work their children are doing in school.
- If the school has a Family Support Worker he/she could explain the school policy on homework and help the parents to be involved
- If English classes are provided for parents then one topic discussed could be how to help their children or how to ask the school about homework

## Session 3: Deciding on how parents can help bilingual pupils with homework and what the limitations are

**Participants:** up to 30

### Activity 1

Split the participants into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group a case study to look at. Also give each group a sheet to write how parents can help with homework and what the limitations might be (see material 1).

### Case Studies

**1.** Nicky was born in Hong Kong and started Primary 1 with no English. His family own the Chinese restaurant in the High Street near the school. In his P1 report he made steady progress during the first year in most areas of the curriculum although he did not speak for the first few months of school.

Since he started P2 the class teacher has become concerned that he is not reaching his potential. He appears to understand instructions but is reluctant to speak to his peers. His written work is neat but limited. At the last parents' evening Nicky's parents did not attend.

Nicky has individual reading sessions with the classroom assistant every day but she is finding it difficult to engage with him on a one-to-one basis.

The head teacher has suggested contacting the parents and asking them to speak English to Nicky at home.

How can his parents help with homework and what are the limitations to their help?

**2.** A Pakistani family came from Pakistan to a small town in Scotland. The family consisted of a mother, a father, a five year old girl, a two-year-old boy and the father's brother who was aged 11. The father and his brother, Hussain, spoke some English but the mother and younger children did not.

There were no other Pakistani pupils in the school. After an initial assessment it was evident that Hussain could read and write some English so he was placed in P7.

How can the parents help Hussain with his homework and what are the limitations?

**3.** Turkish parents had lived in a small town in Scotland for 5 years. The father spoke a little English the mother understood some English but did not speak it.

Their two sons, Thomas, aged 12 and John, aged 13 came over from Turkey. The boys did not speak any English. There were no other Turkish pupils in the school.

How can the parents help Thomas and John with their homework and what are the limitations?

**4.** Anna was a 12-year-old girl who came to Scotland from the Philippines. Her mother was Filipino and her step-father was Scottish. Anna spoke Tagalog and English. She had been taught all her subjects through English in the Philippines. However, her level of knowledge in subjects was below that of her peers.

How can Anna's parents help her with her homework and what are the limitations?

### Activity 2

After 10 minutes let the groups exchange case studies.

When each group has looked at 3 case studies, bring the group back together and write up the main points they have noted for each case study.

**Material 1**  
**Work sheet - Case Studies**

<b>How parents can help</b>	<b>Limitations</b>

## Session 4: Evaluation

### Questionnaire

1. List three things you have learned.

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2. Give an example of one idea you feel you could put into practice.

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3. Do you feel you would benefit from further training on any part of this course?

Yes  No

If yes, what further training would be helpful?

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4. How would you rate?

- The content of the course

Excellent  Very good  Good  Fair  Poor

- The pace of the course

Excellent  Very good  Good  Fair  Poor

Comment:

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