



Navigating engagement – mothers' narratives of discovery.

TAPESTRY EDUCATION CONFERENCE 24TH
JUNE 2021

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT



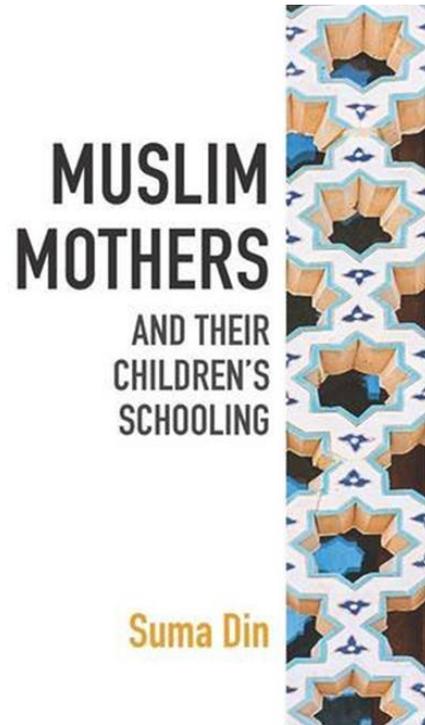
Aims:

- ❖ To share the context for hearing mothers' voices about education
- ❖ **To meet three mothers and hear their narratives about their child's learning in Nursery and Reception**
- ❖ To reflect on the themes their experiences raise
- ❖ To explore ways forward to encourage engagement



Where am
I coming
from...?

Theoretical approach



- 'Maternal Scholarship' & the theoretical positioning of 'mothers'
- Policy framework: The School Standards Framework Act (1988) & Home-School Agreement
- Equalities Act and Public Sector Duty (2011)
- Inclusion and Diversity Policy

Parent engagement – some reflective questions

What assumptions do we have about parents?

What do we know already and what do we *need* to know?

Which stereotypes about groups of parents do we have?

Are we challenging ourselves about these?



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Navigating engagement on the other side of the door...

Questions about 4 areas:

- Their home setting and daily lives
- What do they know about their child's learning & activities at Nursery/Reception?
- What do they think about supporting their child's learning?
- How do they communicate with staff in their child's setting?



Mum A , has two children; 5 yr girl and 2yr boy, lives in Northampton. Runs her own cake business.

Ethnicity: Bengali
second lang: Italian



Nursery setting: Learning

'I had an idea of what she was doing as there were displays and current things put on the notice boards. Because of those I got the gist of what was going on and I could talk about it to Zarah at home.'

'There was an online journal thing. I would log in sometimes – and see stuff from months ago... I didn't know when they'd upload things, some things were from ages ago, I didn't find it that useful. But the same online journal was much more helpful in Reception during lockdown when there was regular posting and the teachers told us to look at it so it helped.'

Reception learning...

‘... no idea what she was doing as there was nothing sent home to tell us that I’m aware of.’

‘During lockdown, when I watched live lessons I saw what they were actually teaching. And I thought, Oh my god, this is what she’s supposed to know. She’s behind then. And that’s when I realised, but it was so stressful as I didn’t know how high the expectations were.’

(continued...)

On home culture and well-being:

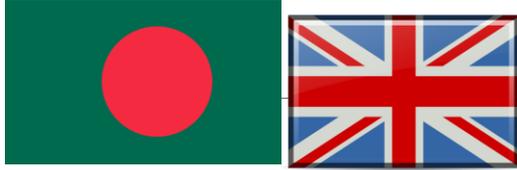
‘I know this sounds stupid, but I didn’t know you could ask about their **well-being**, apart from on a parent’s evening.’

‘Zarah goes to Italian classes as my husband wants her to be fluent as it’s his first language. So she might not be at the right levels for everything they expect at school, but she’s learning so much outside Reception too.

Before the pandemic, we’d go to a newly built mosque regularly as it was child friendly and just a great place to go as a family. Zarah loved it there and it’s an important place where she socialised. We also saw a lot of extended family – that’s a big part of my children’s lives. Even though she’s only 5, she’s gained a lot from the elderly in the family; playing, singing, hearing stories and just doing simple things with them.

‘It’s a hugely diverse school, children from Poland, Russia, Spain, India, French, mixed heritage families, China and Gypsy and Roma families. As far as I’m aware there’s no diversity in the staff though and the only celebration I’ve heard of is Christmas because they had a party. It would be nice to see other backgrounds acknowledged too. Like instead of ‘dress up like a fairy day’, maybe a day about one of these other cultures the children come from and learn about their traditions.’

Mum B , two children, girl 3yr and younger daughter, 2 yr
Mum was born and raised in East London. Moved to Oxfordshire after marriage
Works part-time in education



Ethnicity Bengali; home language: Bangla/ Sylheti



Nursery Choice and learning

‘I researched where to put my daughter. The nursery near me, well I wasn’t that happy with it. I just didn’t get the vibe that she’d get the best out of it here. There’s some issues too, I read in the Ofsted report.

So I chose the one further away, I like how it’s a bit more structured, they had their themes up to see, and it was rated ‘good’ by Ofsted. It is a bit further away, but it’s worth it as it’s near my in-laws so they help out with pick ups too.’

Nursery Learning: ‘I don’t really get much feedback. Because of Covid it’s difficult, as we can’t talk face to face.’

Learning at home

‘On the one hand I want to support my daughter with extra activities, but on the other hand I don’t know *how* they ‘re teaching her, in terms of methods so I decided to stand back and wasn’t hands on.

Then I did a bit of phonics with her and she said ‘no mummy my teacher does it different.’

I told my husband not to do maths with her as he’ll confuse her using the Asian methods and I had to correct him when he tried doing sounds with her as it wasn’t proper phonics, he used the old saying the alphabet style, like how he learnt.

It would be helpful if the schools and nurseries did little parent sessions on their methods and just show the parents some basics so we do the same as them. Just for literacy and numeracy.’

Communication about learning

'When I wanted to know what they were doing and a term had gone by, I emailed them in January and said I'd like to know how my daughter was doing. They were really good and emailed back about her progress and what they were covering in the curriculum.'

During Lockdown suggested websites to use and some videos to download

I requested any activity, and they started to do story time on zoom and it was brilliant with her teacher reading.'

Sometimes I want to talk to her teacher, now that it's back to normal school, but I hesitate. As I'm working 3 days a week, I don't get the chance anyway. But when I do collect her, I hesitate. I'm confident to talk to them, but still, I think 'leave it', I don't want to pester them and be that busy body mum.'

If they could focus on maybe 2 children a week and give a bit of feedback, that might help parents be in the know a bit more. A lot of parents are confused, like my sister in laws not born here, they don't have a clue what's going on.

Culture and belonging

‘At home, I do reinforce our culture, like our food & language (we speak Sylheti at home with her), we celebrate things like Ramadan and the Eids and she used to see a lot of extended family, cousins and all before the lockdown, she saw so much of them before.’

‘I teach my daughter to respect school events and I want the teachers to treat her the same as everyone else. I don’t want her to stick out because she’s a minority. I don’t think teachers are nasty or anything, they just don’t know and they’ve got stereo types in their head – it’s what they hear.’

‘At Christmas they sent home some key words to learn, that was good. But it would have been nice to have key words for Diwali, Chinese new year & Eid too... it’d help so kids growing up in less diverse areas won’t think it’s weird.’

Belonging and well-being

‘ I don’t know, sometimes I wonder if I should have gone further out to this village school for her, and if it would’ve been better to bring her back to my local school where’s it’s more mixed – like there’s so many different backgrounds in the local school with a nursery in it.

She asked me recently, ‘mummy, why am I brown and everyone else is white?’, so is she already wanting to be different? I don’t know. Maybe I’ll move her, I can’t decide.’

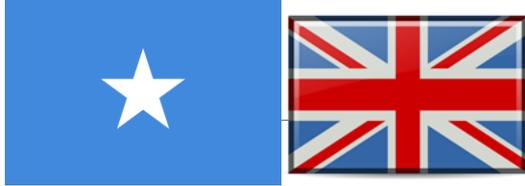
‘I’d like to get involved in the school community, with bazaars & fund-raising, but with the pandemic things are different now. Parents are in clusters, people don’t really mix, that’s why I’d want to get involved, to come together more. It’s a bit difficult in the playground. Even if you’re educated, it’s still not that easy to just mix if you don’t see anyone like you – and that’s me, grown up here, imagine what it’s like for people from overseas.’

I’m pleased to talk to you as people think because I’m a teacher, I should know it all. But in terms of supporting in the Early years, sometimes I’m just as confused as other parents.’

Mum C, three children, boys 5 yr and 4 yr, daughter, 1 yr

Mum is about to start a course in HE from September, moved to West London from Denmark

Ethnicity: Somali



Nursery and Reception experience:

Older son in Reception

Younger son in Nursery

‘When my son was in nursery, I’d ask him what he did, and he wouldn’t tell me much. I wanted to do the things he was doing, as I think it’s part of what I should do. If he did tell me anything, like we did this game, I’d look things up and do something like that.

When he went to Reception, I looked at the school website and saw what the Reception curriculum was there – that was helpful. We don’t get information coming home, so I look on the website.’

‘I’m not sure how to approach the teachers about how he’s doing, so I’m waiting for Parents’ Evening. We don’t get emails or that kind of thing to say what’s happening.’

Learning during lockdown

‘During Lockdown #1, they were having classes for Reception on literacy for half an hour, then a break, then story time, then a longer break, then half an hour numeracy. I found it helpful ‘cos I could see how they’re teaching him. It was just the right amount and I got to understand how their method is.’

‘Apart from seeing their methods in lockdown, there’s nothing else we’re told on how to support them. There is a book though in his book bag and the teacher puts a comment for each new book, and I write in that too.’

‘My younger son’s nursery uses this thing online, they take pictures and I login and see what he’s done. It’s ok.’

Well-being and learning

‘This Reception class is his second one, and here there is a bit more face to face interaction when the school opened back. The teachers are much better, they’re more interested and they’ll ask me about the baby and things like that. You can feel it. Like you can feel they want to talk to you and sometimes we talk about the homework he gets on a Friday – things like that.

But the old school, last year, his first Reception class was different. He was being picked on, like this stomach punched, and the kids telling other kids not to play with him, he’s only five years old. And it got bad when his behaviour was changed and so I told the teachers. They took notice for a week and then I don’t think they were bothered. But my son got worse, so I moved him.

The new schools much better, much more multi cultural, the old school was only Asian and Somali and he was really unhappy there. We couldn’t really talk to the teachers there either, they didn’t want to have a conversation – they were all Asian.

I’m glad I moved him, he’s happier now and learning.’

Home learning & culture

‘At home we speak Somali and the children understand everything. And it’s our culture in the house, with food and occasions we have. On Eid at the first school they wore their Eid clothes in the next day, that was nice and a newsletter went out to say it was Eid.

‘I’m new to this second school, so I don’t know yet, but so far nothing’s come home about different cultures that I know about.

‘I’d like to get involved with school life if we can, like we could be allowed to come in on sports day but they’re not sure yet.

‘The main thing for me and other mums – especially the newer ones to this country is communication. If there’s a way to talk to mums about their children’s learning that will make all the difference. So many mums from my community don’t really understand what their children are doing all day.

But when the teachers share it helps a lot. Like when my son was going to Reception they talked a lot about ‘big school’ and so did I at home, and he was fine settling down after the first two weeks. ‘

Main themes:
What did they
navigate?
And what did
they discover?

- Sources of information about the curriculum
- Which platforms are used
- learning and child's well-being relationship
- wanting home and nursery/Reception learning to be aligned
- Minoritized mothers experiences affect their interactions at all levels and school choice.

Ways forward:

- ❖ Valuing cultural capitals that exist in the home learning environment
- ❖ Asking parents about culture and festivals.
- ❖ Parent – parent opportunities
- ❖ Training opportunities on an institutional level
- ❖ As a mum - our relationship with our children's Nursery/Reception teacher – Mr J 😊

For more information:

<http://muslimmothers.org/>

<https://www.ucl-ioe-press.com/books/faith-in-education/muslim-mothers-and-their-childrens-schooling/>

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