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**Parent and pupil perceptions about their involvement in a
school engagement project 'Our Future':
A Qualitative Study**

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ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY OF TERMS

AEP	Association of Educational Psychologists
AFT	Association of Family Therapists
BPS	British Psychological Society
CYP	Children and Young People
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
DCSF	Department for Children Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EP	Educational Psychologist
FT	Family Therapy
FTSP	Family Therapy and Systemic Practice
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
LA	Local Authority
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
'OF'	'Our Future' Project
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SMT	Senior Management Team
SP	Systemic Practice
ST	Systemic Thinking
TAF	Team Around the Family

Participant references:

Whether Parent or Pupil they are referred to by number, for example P1, P2.

Transcript references: Transcript references are identified by number followed by page reference then line reference for example, T1 5 6:08 refers to, Transcript 1; Page 5 Line 6:08.

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*Satish Kumar, (2012).

**Dr Wendy Hewitt, an insight, during one of our many discussions.

ABSTRACT

Aim and objective

The aim of this study was to explore the lived experiences of young people and their parents in relation to their engagement in a school designed intervention, called 'Our Future'. The objective was to find out whether or not, and how these experiences might be improved, in particular, through more positive social engagement between school and family.

Methods

Qualitative methods were used including in-depth interviews with parents and young people from three families. The families were identified by the school as including young people who needed further motivation to overcome underachievement; build confidence; increase attendance; and engage more fully in the school community.

Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the data following the guidelines of Smith, Flowers and Larkin, (2009).

Results

Three superordinate themes emerged from the data. Two themes, 'Value of Support' and 'Legacy of Enjoyment' were shared by both the parent and pupil participants. The third superordinate theme 'Sense of Belonging' was drawn from the pupil data.

Conclusion

The research concludes that it is more constructive to promote a solution-focused rather than a problem saturated approach. In schools where this occurs it is more likely to encourage school staff to 'think outside of the box' and to lead to more positive experiences for the pupils. When the perspectives of vulnerable, complex or challenging young people and their families change it is likely to lead to difference in narrative.

Recommendations for future best practice include the Educational Psychologist to work with schools and families in solution-focused ways. It is also hoped that the findings of this study will contribute towards answering broad and open questions posed by professionals concerned with promoting engagement between schools, families and young people.

Key words:

vulnerable pupils, challenging pupils, school-parent engagement, systemic theory and practice, interpretative phenomenological analysis,

Chapter One

Introduction

The overall purpose of this thesis was to find out whether or not and how positive academic engagement between school and families depends upon the type of social relationships between school staff, young people and parents. An investigation of a school project 'Our Future', which was designed to engage and motivate the young people both academically and socially, the aim was to capture the views and perspectives of both young people and their parents themselves, as they tried to navigate the school system. The importance of gaining the specific views of families rather than staff, within the context of unequal power-relationships (with the school holding the most power), has long been acknowledged by previous writers. For example, Stalker, (1997) argued that 'service users' (in this case families) are the experts about their own feelings, opinions and experiences and Simons, Booth and Booth, (1989 p.9) stated that their views '*constitute a valid perspective comparable with but distinct from the perspectives of the other actors involved*' such as school staff, managers and '*even researchers*'. Despite this acknowledgement, Emerson and Hatton (1994 p.3) proposed that '*it is somewhat surprising that such a low proportion of students, have sought to elicit the views of service users*' This critique of research is still valid today (Malli and Forrester-Jones, 2016). This study sought to redress this critique.

The term 'school' in this study refers to the overall ethos and culture of a particular school, which was reflected by staff, and experienced by parents and pupils who took part in an educational initiative organised by the school, called 'Our Future' (described in 1.2).

It is unequivocally suggested, throughout the literature, that where parental involvement is evident, outcomes are improved in terms of attendance, behaviour and achievement (Harris and Goodall, 2007).

This research study sought to examine the experiences and perspectives of parents and pupils who were recognised by one school as lacking in motivation and 'hard to engage'.

The following broad research question guided the study:

‘What can be learned about engagement between families and school from the experiences of parents and pupils involved in a school initiative, the ‘Our Future’ Project?’

¹ In order to reduce confusion between the school initiative and this research study the school initiative, ‘Our Future’ Project is referred to as (The) ‘Our Future’ Project, ‘OF’ or ‘The Project’ throughout this study.

¹¹ This research study is distinctly referred to as ‘research study’, ‘the study’ or ‘this research’.

1.1 i Aims and Objectives

The aims of this research study were to:

1. Gain insight into parents and young people's experiences of their relationship with a school through a school initiative called the 'Our Future' Project (OF)
2. Demonstrate the effectiveness of the initiative, from parent and pupil perspectives, by identifying key themes which were important to them in relation to their engagement with the school.

The key objectives of the research were to:

1. Identify themes to inform future engagement with parents of vulnerable or challenging pupils.
2. Reflect on how the themes stand alongside the educational literature around hard to engage families, detecting thematic transferability to similar contexts.
3. Consider how Educational Psychologists might support schools in their engagement with families in the future

The study explored the development of an intervention that aimed to provide a framework for working with families towards improved outcomes for their children. An underlying premise of the study was that securing parental involvement in any school initiative is the greatest challenge to its success; previous researchers arguing that "personalised provision" (Harris and Goodall, 2007, p. 281) and "bespoke forms of support" (Day, 2013, p.52) are key. Journeying with a high school as they attempted to create a 'bespoke' initiative provided the researcher with a study context in which the stories of young people and their parents could be told and heard. The role of the educational psychologist in this process and the unique contribution that can be made in drawing on key psychological approaches based in systemic practice was also considered.

1.1ii The 'Our Future' Project

The focus school in this study had been described in their Ofsted Report (2011) as having a demographic of pupils lower than the national average on the free school meals indicator (www.gov.uk). The school desired to make a difference to a group of twenty-six pupils, who, in an educational context in which achievement was regarded generally as 'good', were shown to be working significantly below their target grades. Attendance, behaviour and punctuality of the pupils were described as concerns. The pupils were highlighted by staff as having low self-confidence and well-being. They were all also felt by teachers to be rapidly disengaging with school. The twenty-six pupils were identified by form tutors and pastoral staff for participation in the 'OF' project to raise their well-being and self-confidence, and to renew their enthusiasm for engagement with school.

The project was designed to give an opportunity for pupils to:

1. Experience new and different experiences
2. Learn new skills
3. Promote their engagement with school
4. Raise their well-being and confidence
5. Raise their achievement, attendance and punctuality
6. Promote positive behaviour of the pupils.

The project was also designed to promote engagement with the families (i.e. parents) of these pupils. In particular, it was hoped that communication and relationships between families and the school would be developed and/or strengthened. Such family-school relationships were regarded as 'key' to ongoing engagement of the pupils with school once the project had finished.

The project was led by a senior staff member. One male and five female staff members volunteered to participate in the initiative. Their involvement was voluntary and they had all expressed a desire to participate in the 'Our Future' Project. They were also regarded by the senior management team to have the requisite skills for the project. The senior member of staff was also the point of contact for myself, in terms of my usual role as the school Educational Psychologist, in their availability for coordinating the OF Project, and as 'gate keeper' for the research process.

In addition to the day-to-day communication with the families, the project entailed working with pupils to provide them with skills and experiences. A 'conference' (see

section 1.1iii below) was held over two days in the summer term ending with a 'Come Dine with Me' experience adapted from a popular television programme. The students invited their family members as guests to the non-residential conference which was held in a local hotel.

The project was therefore an experience provided for a group of twenty-six students from years nine and ten who met the criteria regarding underachievement and disengagement with school. The participating staff did not know the students well before the project began since one of the aims was for new staff-pupil relationships to develop which were unhindered by any knowledge or experience of previous histories as regards challenging behaviour, learning difficulties, or social concerns. Each staff member was assigned to one or two families. Whilst the school already had a policy of open access for parental communication, the renewed focus on these students provided a fresh impetus for relationship building with these young people and their parents. Staff reported informally that they found they needed to be proactive in their interest in the students, looking out for them around school, or if late or absent, following them up. They were also told to read behaviour logs or work of the students in order to check their progress; this information forming the basis for non-judgemental conversations.

Staff found that some parents were proactive in contacting them around issues related to their son/daughter, for example if the young person was reluctant to come into school or if there had been an issue with homework. Others contacted staff about funding for resources such as PE kit.

1.1iii The Conference

Day one of the conference involved team building and bonding activities. Ideas around opportunities that the development of life skills such as team work and consideration for others would foster were discussed to motivate pupils to think about future aspirations. Classroom based learning around life skills were 'put into practice' through dining in the hotel. I was invited in my role as EP to mingle with the students and support their activities as well as to input a session about promoting student well-being. This session entailed drawing attention to the possibilities offered by pupil's own social networks of family, friends, school staff and other people in their lives.

On day two, the pupils were introduced to the idea of providing the 'Come Dine with Me' experience for their families. They were asked to plan the event in groups including designing menus, shopping lists, the venue environment and dress code.

The 'Come Dine with Me' event was held in school a few weeks after the conference. Nearer the event, the students shopped and cooked, decorated the environment and created the ambience. The event took place over two evenings to allow the students to wait on each other and clear up while the others cooked for, ate with, and enjoyed relaxing with their guests. A group of sixth-form students provided musical entertainment. The 'buzz' for the event continued beyond the conference and back into school.

The nature of the school project provided a systemic approach designed to elicit change for the pupils. It was an opportunity for the young people to relate to each other, the school staff and pupils to build their relationships, and, as a means for the school to engage with the families of these pupils. The 'Our Future' Project was a means by which this school aimed to build its partnership with parents and pupils in a framework aimed to reverse problem saturated narratives.

A timeline is provided in order for the reader to gain a sense of coherence of the systemic perspective, process and context for the 'Our Future' Project and the research study. The timeline is presented in Table One.

Table One: The ‘Our Future’ Project and Research Timeline

Date	School Staff Involvement	Pupils Involvement	Parents / Carers Involvement	My Involvement in the ‘Our Future’ Project Intervention and the Research
<p>Autumn Term 2012-Summer Term 2013 Family Workshops took place co-authored and delivered to a group of schools by a colleague and myself (Gerrard and Melville, Appendix One) following training on the Intermediate Course in Family Therapy and Systemic Practice – (Birmingham 2011-2012).</p>	<p>Staff Member from the School that ran the ‘Our Future’ Project participated in the Family Workshops. In her Student Support and Family liaison role this member of staff had an informal relationship with students and their families some of whom would become part of the ‘Our Future’ Project.</p>	<p>Some pupils who would later be a part of the ‘Our Future’ Project would be supported by the staff member.</p>	<p>Some parents/ carers who would later be a part of the ‘Our Future’ Project would liaise with the staff member.</p>	<p>Context to the ‘Our Future’ Project: I liaised regularly in my role as EP for the school with this member of staff in her Student Support and Family liaison role. Reflective conversations about her work with pupils and their parents and her use of systemic tools and techniques from workshops such as use of genograms, solution focused approaches and group consultation.</p> <p>None of the pupils or families were known to me in another capacity in my work as EP or the school.</p>

<p>Autumn Term 2013</p>	<p>Senior Member of Staff began to discuss the idea of the ‘Our Future Project’ to colleagues.</p> <p>Staff were asked indicate their interest in being part of a project to promote engagement with families and pupils who were identified by form tutors and pastoral staff in order to raise their well-being and self-confidence and to renew their enthusiasm for engagement with school.</p>			
<p>Spring Term 2014</p>	<p>Six members of staff, 1 male, 5 females indicated their interest and met with the Senior Member of Staff.</p>			
<p>Jan – February</p>	<p>Staff made contact with the families that they had been designated. Twenty-six families who met the criteria had been identified by Form-Tutors and Pastoral Staff.</p>	<p>Pupils met at identified times with their assigned staff member</p>	<p>Parents/carers contacted the staff member about a variety of matters such as the practicalities of equipment needed to concerns about their son / daughter.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family Liaison Staff Member discussed the intervention with me. 2. Meeting with Senior Staff Member. 3. Meeting with staff involved in the project regarding the Conference days. Systemic Tool Burnham Quadrant used to formulate the discussion (Appendix 2).
<p>Spring Term 2014 February - April</p>	<p>Staff met individually with the Pupils and then contacted their family. Time was taken to build relationship with the pupils and their parents/ carers.</p>			<p>Reflective Discussions continued throughout with the Family Liaison Staff Member.</p>

<p>Summer Term 2014 April - May</p>	<p>Individual staff members invited their assigned pupils and parents/ carers to a meeting to take place in the first half of the summer term about a 'Conference' due to take place later in the summer term.</p> <p>Staff who had been involved with their assigned pupils and parents/ carers to build relationships with them attended the meeting led by the Senior Staff Member. The Family Liaison Staff Member also attended.</p>	<p>Pupils with their Parent/s Carers were invited to a meeting outside of school time to introduce them to the two focus days of the intervention, 'The Conference'.</p>	<p>Parents / Carers were invited to school for an informal meeting outside of school time to introduce them to the two focus days of the intervention, 'The Conference'.</p> <p>The Parents/ Carers had heard something about a two-day Conference already from their children.</p>	
<p>Summer Term 2014 June - July</p>	<p>Two-day conference introduced to the pupils</p> <p>Two-day Conference held in hotel.</p> <p>Staff members providing group activities designed to develop skills to promote collaboration, to motivate and inspire.</p>	<p>Participation in conference 2 days in hotel.</p> <p>Day One: Participation in collaborative skills development activities.</p> <p>Day Two: Preparation activities for the 'Come Dine with Me' experience.</p>		<p>Day One:</p> <p>I was introduced to the young people, supported the day and activities and provided a session about promoting our well-being through the relationships that we have with others, our networks and the people who support us.</p>

<p>Summer Term 2014 June - July</p>	<p>Family liaison staff member contacted the 26 families individually to talk about the research interviews.</p>	<p>In school 'Come Dine With Me' experience took place.</p>	<p>Participation in 'Come Dine with Me' event held in school.</p>	<p>Ethical Approval for research – University of Sheffield (Appendix Four) Pilot - Chapter 4:4.1.</p>
<p>Autumn Term 2014 September - October</p>		<p>Pupils invited to respond to take part in interviews about their experience of the 'Our Future' Project.</p>	<p>Parents / Carers invited to respond to take part in interviews about their experience of the 'Our Future' Project.</p>	<p>Contact with interested parents/ carers and pupils. Five families were initially positive about participation. Interviews were arranged and consent agreed.</p>
<p>Autumn Term 2014 October – December</p>		<p>Participation in the interviews.</p>	<p>Participation in the interviews.</p>	<p>Interviews completed with three families The data for the research was processed.</p>
<p>January 2015</p>				<p>Feedback from the research findings presented to school Staff (Appendix Seven).</p>
<p>February 2015</p>				<p>Presentation of research to colleagues from my EP Service.</p>
<p>October 2015</p>				<p>Workshop Presentation about engagement between school staff, pupils and families conducted as part of the North – West EP CPD Conference</p>
<p>December 2015 January 2016 - July 2017</p>				<p>Research submitted, Viva and completed Thesis.</p>

1.2 Systemic Principles

Roffey (2013) proposes that engagement between schools and families can be difficult because they are bound to have very different belief systems and perceptions within which they operate. In order to provide schools with ways in which constructive conversations with families can take place, there are many models which, historically, education professionals have drawn upon. Such models include joint systems work (Dowling and Osborne, 1994); ecosystemic approaches (Upton and Cooper, 1990) and soft systems methods (Frederickson, 1990).

Negativity can often arise and interactions between school and family can become confrontational. In the author's personal experience as an Educational Psychologist, a main part of a consultation can be about working through conversational barriers between schools and families in order to identify common ground. Usually, the outcome brings to the fore that schools, and those in parental roles, want the same outcomes for their children, 'the best' (DCSF, 2008) which can then be the starting point for engagement (Day, 2013). If the home-school partnership can be considered by school staff, pupils and parents to be a positive relationship it has the potential to elicit change for improved outcomes for children and young people. Pianta and Walsh (1996), for example, identified a contextual systems model which provides an illustration of how perspectives and expectations can become embedded between schools and families and from which it was concluded that relationships have the greatest potential for change. Rivett and Street (2009, p.xii) suggest that, "relationships are constituents of problems and only by working with relationships can these problems be healed". Studies also suggest that there is a perpetuation of presenting emotional, behavioural or mental health difficulties with frustrated and disappointed teaching staff, as they feel at a loss as to how to create change effectively for those young people (Dawson and Mc Hugh, 2012), although processes such as the Team Around the Family (TAF) have, in recent times, come a long way in addressing communication and routes of support for families (Children's Trust, 2012).

The current climate of schools seeking to skill themselves in approaches 'to care for the whole child', and demands for improved standards and 'think family' (Children

Act, 2004; Cabinet Office, 2007, 2008; DCSF, 2007), has led to priorities for effective evidence-based initiatives for working with families. The Government initiative of Multi Systemic Therapy (MST) and evidence base for Functional Family Therapy (FFT) (DfE, 2012) with the most 'hard to reach' families has challenged thinking about the ways in which professionals relate to families. It challenges "first order thinking of the expert position in favour of a collaborative position" (Pellegrini, 2009, p.273). Therefore, it can be argued that principles from Family Therapy and Systemic Practice have a helpful part to play in the ways schools interface and engage with families of these populations before it becomes critical and the highly specialist and intense support of MST and FFT is subsequently required. At the heart of home-school relationships is the overall, "welcome and care parents receive when they do come into school" (Beresford and Hardie, 1996, p.140). Beresford and Hardie also recognised that a wide range of skills are required for developing relationships with parents which are very different from those of the class room. Evidenced-based programmes such as the Family Education Programme (Dawson et al., 2001) provides an example of the unique contribution that can be made by understanding that it is not about the child needing to change in isolation but the family as a system doing something different. The evidence base of this model of delivery has shown reliable and significant change for children and their families (Dawson and Mc Hugh, 2012).

Therefore, principles consistent with systemic practice can be identified as:

- collaboration between parent, pupil, school and family
- how families perceive the welcome and acceptance they receive from school staff
- not seeing a child or young person in isolation but in the context of the school and family system.

How these principles are approached by school staff is fundamental if systemic practice is to facilitate improved outcomes for vulnerable CYP. This potential is illustrated in initiatives by Educational Psychologists (EP) such as those documented by Pellegrini, (2009), and Williams and McCourt, (2010). In terms of personal experience, the author's own Systemic Practitioner status (Birmingham, 2012) provided a background to consider the contribution of working with the family to be

explored in school-based practice. It is important therefore to identify how the thinking and principles of Systemic Practice could fit with the EP role.

1.3 Systemic Practice and the EP Role

Fox, (2011, p.325) stated that Educational Psychologists, “espouse a range of theoretical perspectives as underpinning interventions”. Alongside this is an understanding of the term ‘systemic practice’, as stated in the code of ethics and practice of The Association of Family Therapists (AFT, 2008). Activities such as consultation, publication, research, supervision, training, and a variety of direct forms of work with clients other than as part of a family are included in the ethics and practice code. All of the described activities are familiar to the working practice of the EP. As such, this supports a wide range of activities to be embraced by the terminology ‘systemic practice’ in the study. In order to address any inconsistencies that may be experienced by the reader, for clarification, the terminology will refer to ‘systemic’ as in ‘systemic practice’, ‘systemic theory’ or systemic thought’. As such, these terms are to be understood as encompassing the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings embodied by the full term ‘Family Therapy and Systemic Practice’. Such a wide range of activities, ethical and philosophical underpinnings is helpful in supporting the arguments foundational to this research study that the context of the child is important. It draws away from the ‘within-child’ perspective (Carr, 1989) and allows for a broad approach to systemic thinking to be explored within a range of activities and individuals.

Many EPs are accustomed to consultation as a model of service delivery (Wagner, 2000), which was developed from the theory of family therapy and systemic practice (FTSP). It is the ethical responsibility of a practitioner Psychologist (BPS, 2000; HPC, 2012) to provide help and interventions that are proven to be ‘effective, feasible and pragmatic’ (Thapar, et al. 2013) and ‘evidence based’ (Fox, 2011). FTSP fits with the EP role as “a highly skilled generalist capable of applying therapeutic skills” (Pugh, 2010, p.397). Consultation is an example of the EP role based on the principle of collaborative working.

Other interventions familiar to the EP such as Solution Focus Brief Therapy (SFBT) (Ajmal and Rhodes, 1995), writing (Vidgen and Williams, 2001), and narrative

(Freedman and Combs, 1996) also fit within the systemic practice framework. They are also collaborative models.

1.3i Building an evidence – base

The role of the Educational Psychologist can be regarded as one that is constantly evolving and “the future we inherit will be the one that we create” (Mackay, (2002), 2010, p.250). Thus, unless Educational Psychologists, through examples of their own successful practice, offer a way of working through which “we create the expectations, rather than operating at a level of responding to the expectations of others as to what a psychologist does” (Mackay, 1982, p.14), we will compromise our unique contribution to the education and well-being of children and young people. Therefore, through the illustration of an evidence-based small-scale action research project conducted by the author and a colleague (Gerrard and Melville, 2011, 2012) an illustration is provided of how family therapy and systemic practice principles and models can be applied by the EP to empower schools in their work with families. It is described in Appendix One. It is acknowledged that the project was dependent upon a complex mixed agenda. An agenda which includes the current political climate of the day (Cameron, 2011; Children and Families Bill, 2014) influencing the priorities of Service Plan Delivery within the prevailing market forces of the Local Authority (Pugh, 2010), and the vision of strategic management to ‘invest in creativity’ (Gerrard and Melville, 2012). It is based on the principle of how something different can be encouraged within families in order that an isolationist perspective focused solely on the child is reduced. In terms of the wider EP context, many EPs are “now working in more diverse and specialised roles” (Farrell et al., 2006, p.15). It can be argued that systemic practice fits the specialist role, as well as the general EP role, in service delivery for children and young people who are regarded as vulnerable, complex or challenging. The personal interest of the EP is a major driving force, (Atkinson et al., 2013) and the application of knowledge through shared practice means that diverse ways of working become recognised amongst colleagues.

The SEN Green Paper (DfE, 2011 p.105) refers to the role of the Educational Psychologist,

in schools and other education settings, educational psychologists can help to develop the skills of teachers and other professionals working with pupils with SEN. Where educational psychologists are deployed to work directly with families, this can help parents to understand their child's need and the support that will enable the child to fulfil his or her potential.

Alongside this recognition, innovative practice has long been the hallmark of the EP role and as such EP practice "is well placed to offer an extended range of effective services" (MacKay, 1999b, p.824). However, beyond the personal interest of the EP it is the commitment of management to support lines of individual interest. In a local authority context, this is affected by consideration of the current political climate, business and service plan delivery.

1.4 The EP and Systemic Practice – A Personal Journey

Interest in systemic practice has evolved along my career path as an EP from post graduate study (University of Bristol, 2003-2006). Heavily influenced by the eco-systemic thinking of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the macro systems of society and political structures to the individual within a family context. I soon realised that the work of the EP is to encounter 'complex, multiple variables' (Billington, 2014) when working with young people. It is about their context and the systems around them, their families and teachers and life events unique to them. I have been fortunate to work in visionary contexts as an EP with managers who have encouraged unique contribution and innovative practice. Therefore, given opportunities to develop my interest through continuing professional development (cpd) on the Foundation and Intermediate pathways of Family Therapy and Systemic Practice courses (Bristol, 2007-2008; Birmingham, 2011-2012) systemic thinking became a facet of my work as an EP.

The opportunity for EPs to conduct studies is recognised to add to the body of knowledge and to provide a local evidence base for EP Services in planning their work.

An example of a study that I have been involved with to provide a local evidence base would include, an evaluation of the direct work undertaken with key adults in

school for young people, and their parent(s) affected by domestic abuse (Acorns and Changing Places, Alison, 2014).

Further examples from my practice of systemic activity would include working with the staff of 'Learning Centres' (formerly Pupil Referral Units), using group supervision where techniques such as 'Circles of Adults' (Newton and Wilson, 2006) provide a context for adults working with children and young people to consider their needs through listening to each other in order to generate reflective problem solving.

Reflecting Teams, an approach of Family Therapy developed by Andersen (1987) is a feature of my supervision work with school staff.

My work within specialist areas with children who are in care or who are adopted and their families has been a feature of my journey as an EP. In these ways and in multiagency contexts, alongside colleagues from Social Care and CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health) consideration of the systemic takes the spotlight off 'within-child' narratives.

Circularity, (Cecchin, 1987) looking for patterns and situations where a problem does not happen in order to create change and difference are reflected in aspects of my work as an EP through the Consultation model (Wagner, 1995, 2000). Consultation also incorporates other tools familiar in systemic practice such as use of questions (Tomm, 1987, 1988). Endeavouring to ask effective and perceptive questions is an ongoing pursuit of my practice as an EP.

1.4i Systemic Theory and Practice and the 'Our Future' Project

As EP allocated to the school the 'Our Future' Project provided me with an opportunity to approach research into a school project that considered the impact of the family system on the engagement of young people with school. It also provided an opportunity to consider a socially constructed narrative of 'hard to engage' given by the school to those that were identified for the 'Our Future' Project.

The formation of the 'Our Future' Project was borne from the realisation by the school that by looking beyond the individual young person change may occur. Looking for ways to elicit change and difference is fundamental to systemic practice (Rivett and Street, 2009). Therefore, in this way the 'Our Future' Project can be considered as being systemic.

A 'Planning, Action, Reflection' approach was used to facilitate the thinking of the school staff involved in the project. A systemic tool, the 'Problem, Possibilities, Resources and Restraints' (Burnham, 2013) quadrant (Appendix Two), was used in my initial discussion with the staff about this research project.

My involvement in the 'Our Future' Project also reflected the systemic influence on my practice through the opportunities assigned to reflect with staff (Senior Manager as Project Lead and Family Worker) through informal discussion the development of the project. The issues raised by other staff members as they interacted with parents and pupils in their initial focus on the families, were addressed through reflective conversations a model espoused through family therapy and systemic practice (Anderson and Goolishian, 1992).

My involvement as a visitor, on Day One, addressing the cohort of young people created an opportunity for them to consider their support and network systems. The nature of this involvement can be regarded in itself as systemic. It introduced something new to them in their system and as EP I became part of their system and they mine.

As researcher in conducting the interviews, by the nature of an IPA methodology, engaging with the participants and becoming part of a "complex dynamic process" (Smith, 2007, p.6). This too resonates with systemic theory and practice as the professional being part of a "collaborative venture" (Sundet, 2014, p.210)

1.4ii Working Definitions for the Study

In the literature review definitions are clarified from the perspectives of systemic practice and schools regarding the terminology of 'family' and 'parents'. Those definitions are also adopted as providing the understanding of those terms for this study. The adoption of those definitions has, as explained, come from literature and accepted definitions in family therapy and systemic practice. However, the terms 'systemic practice' or 'systemic practitioner' will be used through the study to encompass the term Family Therapy and Systemic Practice as used to emphasise the origins throughout the literature review. The term 'systemic therapist' is the preferred term of many family therapists (Rivett and Street, 2009) and also reflects the breadth of systemic practice and has greater identity with the practice of Educational Psychology (Fox, 2009).

The commonly accepted definition of 'school' in UK culture is 'a learning environment'. The more specific school context of the 'Our Future' Project is described as part of the research study in Chapter Four.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Imagining the child to be at the centre, wider spheres of influence such as social policy, immediate spheres of influence, their parents/carers and schools serves to reflect the systemic origins and underpinning of the research.

The chapter is sectioned to cover:

- the historical context, legislation and literature around the broader thinking of children's services. It includes spheres of influence derived from documents and academic literature citing policy development.
- theory derived from the origins of family therapy and systemic practice. This is reflected through the literature selected from school-based interventions and family-minded practice.
- literature pertinent to educational psychology practice which provides a background to the interest of educational psychologists promoting systemic ways of working.

A search for texts included books, journals and web-based documents such as those from government sources. Searches were made using key words into Google Scholar and Web electronic data bases through the University of Sheffield such as the Star Plus On-line Library Catalogue. Key words included 'think family', 'hard to reach', 'evidence-based interventions', 'schools and parents' 'parental engagement', 'educational achievement' 'social exclusion'. Further literature was sought directly from sources referenced through publications by the British Psychological Society, Association of Educational Psychologists and Association of Family Therapists. Literature was chosen in order to provide an historical context. Literature was chosen from 1997 when New Labour came into power. From this time, thinking turned to policies that aim to promote intervention and support families to be proactive and empowered. Papers from health and social care provide a multi-agency context. Specific studies were selected that reflect on school-based interventions and some of these, such as Dawson and McHugh (2012), draw on historical context dating to the 1980s. The purpose was to have studies from which parallels could be made and offer a framework for the ideas that may emerge from this research. It would

also provide a context from which to inform and suggest implications for future EP practice. Underpinnings from seminal literature, upon which studies have drawn on the evolution of social context, include ecological models of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994), home–school relationships and inclusive practice in the United Kingdom (UK) (Bernstein, 1975; Wolfendale, 1999; Mittler, 2000). References to international studies (Driessen, Smit and Slegers, 2005; Rowlands 2010), where important parallels could be made, were also seen as relevant. Such studies provide an understanding and context within a framework of what works best in creating opportunities for success in school-family relationships.

2.1 Background

2.1i Historical Context, Legislation and Policies

Reference to social exclusion is considered to be fundamental to appreciating the context of schools working with families as it is the framework of earlier Government Policy through the 1989 Children Act that has set the agenda. Within this framework it encompasses an evolution of legislation in Children Acts (1989; 2004) and documents such as Every Child Matters (DfEs, 2003, 2005), to the most recent Children and Families Act (2014).

Literature reviewing social exclusion considers how government policies have shaped and directed thinking to address the issues related to the improvement of services, and their implementation and effectiveness towards positive outcomes for children and young people (Buchanan, Bennett, Smith, Smith, Harker, Ritchie and Vitali, 2004). Policies that are referred to in the literature, relating to children and families at high risk of social exclusion pertinent to the 'Our Future' Project intervention, can be recognised in terms of key words. These include: 'poor educational access and achievement', 'vulnerable children and families', 'hard to reach' and 'children in need', defined in terms of social constructs (Dennison, Mc Bay and Shaldon, 2006) and rhetoric (Placier, 1996). Definition and terminology for the purpose of this study is discussed and identified later in the chapter. The purpose of setting up a 'Social Exclusion Unit' (SEU) by the Cabinet Office, in 1997, was described as 'investigating issues leading to social exclusion and to recommend action'. The definition of social exclusion determined by the SEU reflected and emphasised the 'vicious cycle' of problems affecting life and stressing the

intergenerational dimension, “Being born into poverty or to parents with low skills still has a major influence on future life chances” (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). The Children Act 2004 was pivotal. It introduced the development of Children’s Trusts, bringing children’s services into a ‘single organizational framework’ with the purpose of integrating local education, health services and social care for children and young people. The notion of ‘extended schools’ was to be a hub of services for children. This initiative developed into Children Centres networked with local schools. Vulnerable families and children were identified as those with problems that will have costs to both the individual child and to society generally (Buchanan and Hudson, 2000). Studies such as Hughes, Downie and Sharma (2000), and Utting (1995) reflect the social and historical context of parenting and the effect of social situations that can make parenting either more or less difficult. The emphasis was on the ways in which children are parented, suggesting this as a major source of social exclusion. Programmes such as Sure Start were designed to target the most disadvantaged areas of communities, and these have evolved into numerous initiatives with an emphasis on local provision and projects (Craig, 2004). In tandem, there has been the remit and initiatives of the Social Exclusion Unit; Child Protection, (Laming, 2003); Child in Need (Buchanan, 2007) and Children in Care. Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge and Sinclair (2004) defined these as populations of children requiring a continuum of intervention and protection. Adoption legislation has likewise evolved, and the current Children and Families Act (2014), in the best interests of providing children with opportunity and education, is seen as key to a better future for children in care (DfEs 2004c). In terms of overall support for families, an emphasis on parenting programmes has proven to be an effective way of working with families (DfE, 2013; Lindsay and Strand, 2013; Barrett, 2003). However, for some parents parenting programmes have been felt to ‘stigmatise’ (Barrett, 2003). Of importance to schools, and in the context of this paper, evidence suggests that family support with an education focus better engages with families and is less stigmatising’ (Evangelou and Sylva, 2003; Scott and Sylva, 2002). The important role that parental involvement has on children’s education is recognised in many studies (Desforges, 2003; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Flouri, 2006; Harris and Goodall, 2008; C4EO, 2010).

Historically, (Benard, 1993) and over the ensuing decade (Schoon and Bynner, 2003), the emphasis is on distancing from 'at risk' terminology. The focus has instead become about how children and young people can be enabled to develop competences and skills to counteract risk and vulnerability. The emphasis is to build resiliency and the protective factors of family support. Understanding the wider context of societal issues, such as reducing unemployment, child poverty, addressing drug and alcohol issues, domestic abuse and teenage conceptions (Dawson and Hosie, 2005) provides the bigger picture. Without initiatives that provide "joined up solutions for joined up problems" (Buchanan, 2007, p.202) the circle for vulnerable CYP will continue unbroken. Initiatives that have developed from the 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a, 2005) framework introduce three strands to services: universal, targeted and specialist support. This is reflected in multi-agency locality working with school based professionals such as the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) or Family Support Worker (FSW) as the 'Lead Professional'. An example is the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) Team Around the Child or Family (TAC or TAF) process (DfE, 2012), which reflects a continuum from universal services for all children to direct Social Care involvement for the most vulnerable children and young people in need. This approach emphasises addressing family needs as part of the solution.

2.1ii Political Climate

Buchanan (2007, p.202) states, "although some policies have been successful in reaching the 'hard to reach' or those most at risk of social exclusion, this has proved an ongoing challenge". In the political climate of the Coalition Government, legislation was developed to address this ongoing challenge in the form of the Children and Families Act, 2014. The Act sits in the context of several Government Departments: Business, Innovation and Skills, Work and Pensions and the Ministry of Justice, reflects a place in the wider reforms intended to tackle the issues that affect families in society. A major initiative has been the 'Working with Troubled Families' (DCLG, 2012) programme, aimed to provide families with hope (drawing on the work of Seligman, 1980) and help towards making their own efforts make a difference to their own lives and to breaking intergenerational cycles (Casey, 2012).

Schools are seen as key within the theme of current priorities. During the time of the development of the Children and Families Bill, Michael Gove (2010, p.1), then Secretary of State for Education, emphasised:

Schools should be engines of social mobility. They should provide the knowledge and the tools to enable talented young people to overcome accidents of birth and an inheritance of disadvantage in order to enjoy greater opportunities.

Although Michael Gove's intention was to identify priorities for schools it is also an example of political rhetoric. Such statements and rhetoric illustrate the politicised nature of education. In practical terms, it has ranging implications for stakeholders such as the educational psychologist (EP) working as a partner with schools and families. Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires and O'Conner (2006) talk about the uniqueness of the EP contribution; As part of Children's Services the EP's contribution is both as a school practitioner and also in a multi-agency context to family-minded practice. It is through this lens that the literature considers the broader domain of professionals in their work with families in order that greater opportunities can be enjoyed by vulnerable CYP. It is from this context that the 'Our Future' Project was designed to promote engagement with the families of pupils identified by a school as vulnerable. The school staff working on the project considered that relationships and communication could be strengthened as key principles, with a view that this would be a defining factor in the ongoing engagement of the pupils with school once the project was over.

2.2 Family-Minded Practice

Considerations in terms of evidenced-based (Axford and Morpeth, 2012) and strength-based practice (Bozic and Miller, 2013), draw on the experiences of a multi-agency context and reflect the spirit of current legislation. Therefore, set in the legislation and policy to 'think family' (Thoburn, Cooper, Brandon and Connolly, 2012) evidence from the practice of Social Care, Health and Education practitioners is considered. Reflections of 'lessons learned' are also considered. Earlier reading of the literature referred to families feeling 'stigmatised' (Barratt, 2003; Evangelou and Sylva, 2003; Scott and Sylva, 2002) with regard to parenting programmes. Jordan, (2008) cites relationships and reflective practice to be critical to effective working with families. However, relational competence alone is unlikely to meet

complex needs (Thompson, 2008). The literature suggests, from a selection of papers and studies from Social Care professionals, that families 'wanted professionals to understand their realities' and "how families manage and negotiate their day-to-day reality" (Morris, 2013, p.205). This suggests, therefore, that by considering families' day-to-day realities, a deeper understanding of how families are understood and responded to by professionals can be developed. The study by Morris would argue that if professionals can connect with, and respond to, these ways of 'doing family', then better outcomes for children can be achieved. It implies that confidence in encountering and working with family groups is an essential component.

According to Johnson (2010), the history of innovation shows that fields advance when new ideas build on, extend, and only occasionally depart from what exists. Axford and Morpeth (2013), in their critique of evidenced-based programmes as a way of working with families, state that sometimes a suitable programme does not exist, therefore practitioners are required to build on their existing theoretical knowledge. Use of innovation and professionals' experiences and knowledge of what works with their client populations then becomes another way in which an approach can be developed. It extends professionalism (Bessant and Tidd, 2011). The DfE (2011) Green Paper emphasised the need for greater collaboration between local professionals and services in order to improve parental confidence and develop more effective services for children, young people and families. By implication this opens the way to greater innovation in practice. How schools and any services encourage engagement with parents is a fundamental first step.

I would consider to be seminal to the backdrop of this research several examples of literature. These five seminal pieces of literature are taken from the work of practitioners with backgrounds in Educational Psychology (Day, 2013; Roffey, 2013), CAMHS (Child Adolescent Mental Health Service) (Metzer, 2012); Teachers, Family and Systemic Therapists (Dawson and McHugh, 2012), and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (Bentovim, 2014). These examples were chosen because I consider that they suggest examples, of the possibilities for ways in which the EP might become involved in working systemically with schools to promote their engagement with families. These examples from the literature also contribute to the current study as

from them useful parallels to locate this research as part of the body of knowledge on the subject of parental engagement can be drawn.

The title of the article by Day (2013), 'Terms of engagement', not 'hard to reach parents', takes the approach of asking parents how they would like to be engaged with by schools. The title provides an expectation for the reader that the author is looking for solutions away from a 'hard to reach' problem-focused narrative.

The 'Our Future' Project was designed to promote engagement with families so that relationships and communication could be strengthened. It saw this as a key principle if there was to be a change of narrative to create the ongoing engagement of the pupils with school once the project was over. Indeed, later in the article, the author considers the need to reframe 'hard to reach' as a 'how to reach', repositioning from individualising to a systemic epistemology.

Day's findings come from a piece of qualitative research commissioned by a project in a UK Local Authority (LA) but developed from a wider project, 'Achievement for All' (AfA) which was commissioned by the Department for Education (then, the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCFS, 2009). The AfA study took place between 2009 – 2011. Ninety-two percent of parents from ten LA's had participated in a structured conversation. However, why the remaining 8% had not participated remained an unanswered question. Day's research is a study focusing on this 8% of parents. Day wanted to learn more about those parents and the reasons why they felt that they could not engage.

Day's research is contextualised in a literature review from nine publications. 'Findings, principles, practices and barriers to parental engagement' (p.37) were thematically grouped. They were informed by the key findings from the literature of Harrison and Goodall (2007). By grouping in this way, the reader is helpfully provided with conclusive summaries. Day, however, recognises that the literature does not reflect the direct views of parents about how they would like to be engaging with schools. Day (p.41) recognises this as a starting point for her research, "to ask the parents themselves".

Day uses a focus group methodology in order for parents to "engage in conversations" (Day, 2013, p.36). Day argues that this approach could be adapted sensitively to support parents who may be vulnerable. I find Day's argument for

using focus groups of interest because she says, “it was highly compatible with the intentions of the research to explore parents’ views and feelings” (p.42). However, it could also be argued that parents who are described as vulnerable or hard to engage may find a group situation daunting. Hogue, Johnson-Leckrone and Liddle, (1999) refer to needing as much time to recruit to ‘high risk’ families as is needed to devote to the research.

The major finding of the study is that the development of constructive relationships, communication and partnership is what enables engagement with parents. The findings are presented as a taxonomy of terms of engagement.

The taxonomy can be found in Appendix Three. Whilst the taxonomy is very useful, the concern is that this may become prescriptive if taken out of context. Therefore, in her discussion and conclusions, Day provides a caveat referring to parental engagement with schools as ‘a complex, multi-layered process’ (p.52). Day’s references to implications for educational psychology practice provide direction to inform the next step for my research interests through conversations with parents about parental engagement.

In contrast to Day’s (2013) work, the publication, ‘Hope for Children and Families’ by Arnon Bentovim (2014) describes a resource for frontline professionals including educational psychologists. The publication describes a two-year initiative funded by the Department for Education and run by Child and Family Training. The approach taken by Bentovim and colleagues is as a result of the initiative to design a resource pack. It talks about evidence-based approaches “significantly enhancing the impact of a dedicated professional” (p.6). A manual is part of the resource pack it is clearly aimed at practitioners whose role it is to provide interventions. Of particular interest to the EP is that it targets children or young people presenting with emotional or behavioural problems and considers this systemically as associated with neglectful or abusive parenting.

As Bentovim is a child and adolescent psychiatrist and psychoanalyst this publication adds a contrast to the other publications. It provides an approach that is less familiar to the EP used to working consultatively and therefore is on less familiar professional territory. It is included in the literature because it presents alternatives, although I acknowledge it would probably be limited in its practical application by most EPs.

However, it has potential if a service was to decide to offer it as part of its portfolio of service delivery. Arising concerns might be about the manualisation of presenting problems in discourses suggested by language that talks about 'neglectful and abusive' parenting rather than a less problem saturated narrative.

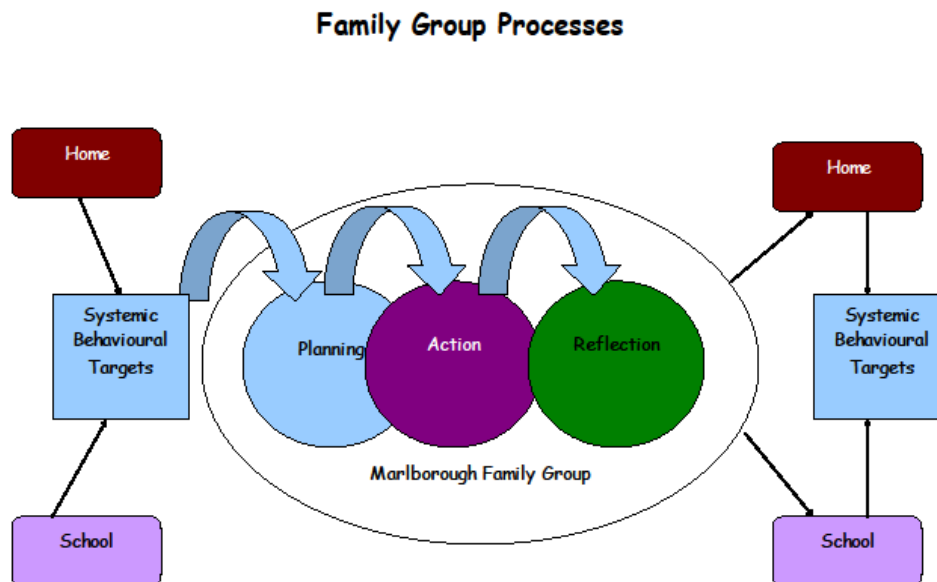
Questions arise from the Bentovim article (p.13) that provide useful guidance and could be adapted by the EP working with a school that wanted to promote engagement with parents where there is no effective current dialogue. The research highlights how reframing of language is a likely starter to make dialogue more accessible to all rather than introduce unintentional bias towards the language of professionals.

Bentovim describes the aim of the project in his article 'to transform hopes for a brighter future for children into a resilient reality' (p.16). Although this is a well-intentioned phrase designed to provoke a narrative of optimism, it is an example of rhetoric suggestive of 'noble aims' by professionals. Language such as 'brighter' can be value-laden and, although unintentional, has undertones that could be perceived as judgemental by families. In itself Bentovim provides a prescriptive framework, but the value of the approach is that it provides an opportunity for families to reconstruct a dominant discourse of abuse and neglect.

In the third publication, Dawson and Mc Hugh (2012) provide a historical perspective to the literature as well as describing their work in schools from the perspectives of educationists and systemic practitioners. They illustrate the thirty-year journey to bring systemic ideas and practice closer to the schools cited in the publication, 'The history and development of Marlborough multi-family groups in education'. They describe how in 1981 to "think family" was to undermine "the honour of the teaching profession" (p.8). The Marlborough article illustrates the pioneering spirit of bringing systemic ideas and practice closer to school. into the classroom and their work was seen as radical and innovative in 1982, whilst in 2012 "it is taken for granted" (p.8). Dawson and McHugh illustrate the dominant discourse that often prevails of problem-saturated narratives where teachers challenge 'helping' professionals. In the article, the challenges illustrated by teachers are parents who need it but won't go for help and the blame culture of teachers towards parents and vice versa. Through 'families helping families' mutual support is promoted as an ethos in order to encourage new perspectives.

The Family Group Processes illustrating the Planning, Action and Reflection as described by Dawson and McHugh, (2012, p.11) is shown in Figure One.

Figure One: Family Group Processes (Dawson and McHugh, 2012, p.11)



This framework is of particular interest because 'planning, action and reflection' is not unlike the 'plan, do, review' process used in consultation by many educational psychologists. As such it provides another model for consideration for the educational psychologist in practice. The language used for goal building is bespoke to each family. Searching for difference (Bateson, 1972), a systemic aim, becomes a joint activity of the group. Dawson and McHugh, however, do not provide the reader with examples of the actions or menu of ideas, these would be helpful to the reader to gain some perspective on the solutions that the families were providing to each other. The expectation is built into the group that feedback is expected in the following session. Dawson and McHugh describe, that, in this way, "old patterns of behaviour and thinking can be challenged and new perspectives encouraged" (p.10). This challenge therefore has the potential to empower and change the discourse for families. The authors report reliable and significant change for children and their

families from evidence that has been gathered from piloting the model in various schools across the UK. However, we are not told how many schools participated or their geography in the UK or reference to explain or illustrate their statistics, the reader is left with an unsatisfactory and abrupt end to the article. Reference is, however, made to signpost the reader to the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families website (annafreud.org) with downloads from the model. I consider that this article provides much food for thought for the educational psychologist interested in working systemically with schools and families. In my view, the skills necessary to facilitate the groups represent a marriage of education and systemic practice. I consider that there is resonance with the 'Our Future' Project and the example of practice proposed by Dawson and McHugh. Dawson and McHugh maintain, "an activity is a vehicle for producing relational events and not an end in itself" (p.11). This reflects the 'Our Future' Project designed by a school with that same outcome in mind.

Metzer (2012) provides an introduction to terms that are familiar within systemic and family therapy practice which also bridges with practice familiar to the educational psychologist such as solution-focused and narrative approaches. This literature serves to illustrate the application of principles of systemic practice in a secondary school setting. It provides an approach that can be applied when working in ways that have much in common with EP practice. Sylvia Metzer's professional background is from CAMHS (Child Adolescent Mental Health Service) and she describes the perspective of school managers in wanting a better relationship with CAMHS and a faster link with services (p.13). Metzer recognises that to be school-based provides a familiarity that is helpful as it makes the professional seem more accessible to the young people and their families. Metzer considers that engagement is about developing trust.

Metzer's description resonates with the IPA methodology of this study. Where she says, that "the mothers were as nervous as the young people, it seems more like a job or a mortgage interview" (p.14). The feelings of nervousness shared by both client and herself is suggestive of the hermeneutic circle of IPA where the researcher / interviewer is deemed to be very much part of the process with the interviewed. It is likewise, suggestive of the circularity referred to in family therapy and systemic practice. It explores mental health problems, but, also whether there are previously

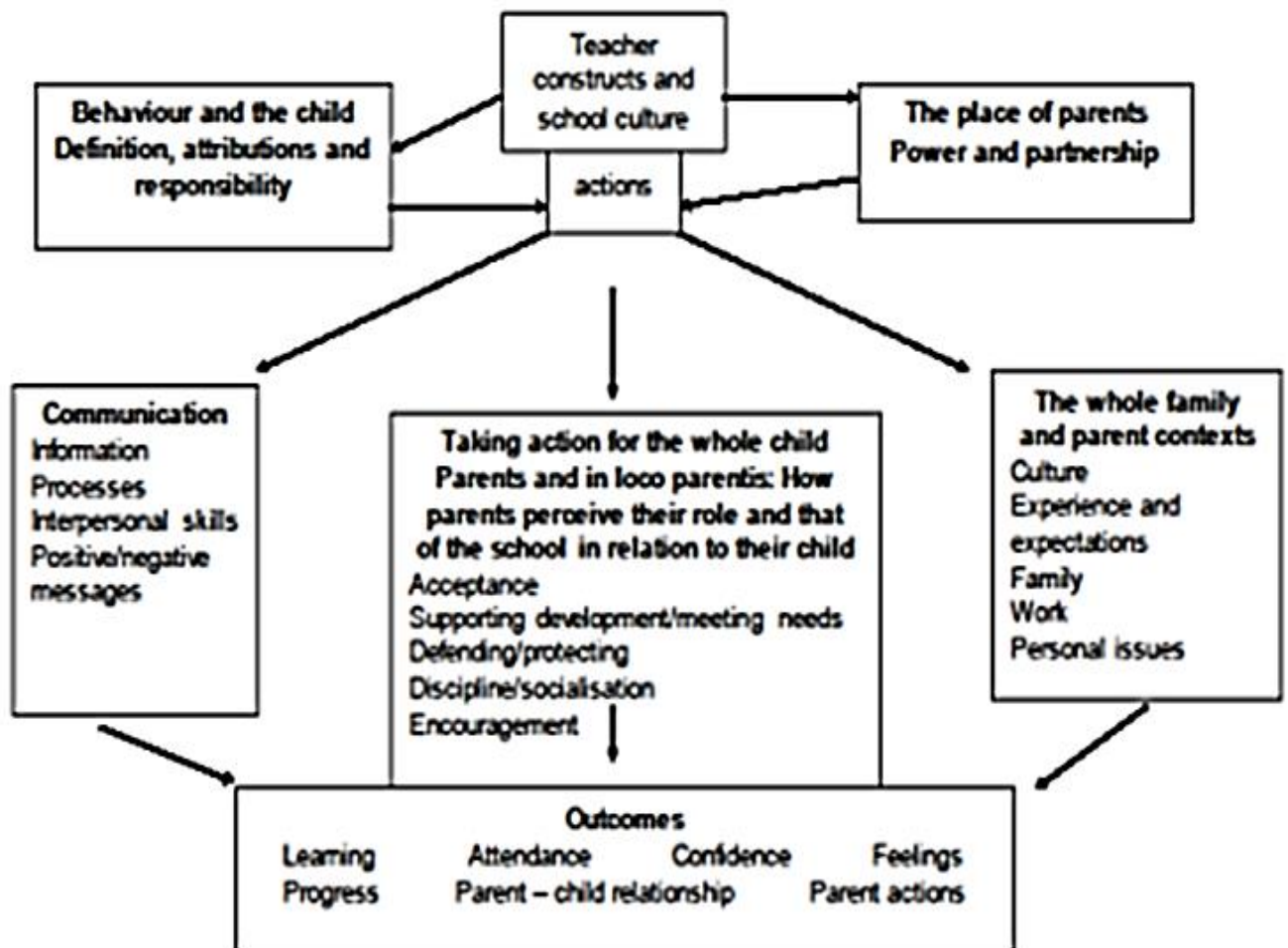
undetected learning issues which may explain and help school and families to understand the frustrations of the young people. It reflects the holistic approach familiar to the EP. In the early links made between school staff and the families in the 'Our Future' Project previously undetected issues were also addressed as part of the relationship building and engagement strategy.

Metzer initially exposed herself within the school sitting in on classes and getting to know the young people in the school environment (p.14). Metzer describes 'feeling a bit of a spare part at the time' but it was important with building staff relationships and establishing her role. In the 'Our Future' Project I can identify with this feeling when I initially became involved with Day One of the hotel experience given to the participants of the project. Although I had a role, it evoked feelings that I was 'intruding' on their event, but, like Metzer, it meant that there was some familiarity for the young people when I met with them at interview. It also meant that we had some commonality in a shared experience.

Metzer's account in the publication is written as a first-person account from a therapist's perspective and not a traditional academic piece of writing. It is, however, useful to this research because it identifies the tensions that parallel those of the EP working systemically in schools. The discourse of the publication is one of 'conversation'. This not only makes the article attractive to the reader but it also promotes the message and models that, in approaching clients who are described as 'vulnerable' or 'hard to reach', a conversational approach is conducive to the promotion of engagement. Once again, as with the previous publications, the use of language is highlighted. The power of reframing labels such as 'difficult' or 'troubled' is promoted in the article. It overlaps with narrative approaches and discourses where, through the introduction of possibility, young people are enabled to re-story their lives.

Roffey (2013) discusses in her book, 'School, Behaviour and Families', how a study resulted in the suggestion of a framework for interaction to promote school and family partnerships. This framework is described in Figure Two.

Figure Two: Framework for interaction (Roffey, 2013, p.62)



The framework is influenced by the type of conceptual premise that a teacher has to determine their willingness to develop positive interactions on behalf of children with behavioural issues. The conceptual premise is described as being built primarily upon the constructs a teacher has of the child and his or her behaviour, and then secondly by their perception of the place of parents within the school. Roffey questions a premise, such as the concept of partnership and what this actually means, suggesting that “power ultimately remains with the school” (p.16). An overview is provided describing the context of the place of parents / carers in education, suggesting that parents/carers can be seen as a resource for learning, as support for the school such as when fund raising, as consumers of education services and as parents as partners. It is noted in the publication that partnership

has become rooted in educational discourse, in particular where children have additional needs such as behaviour or learning needs. Roffey proposes that there is much rhetoric of parents as partners in the law and much literary guidance, but the reality is “not necessarily transformed in practice” (p.17). Roffey provides insight into tensions that are present in the home-school relationship from the perspectives of both parents and teachers. These include the pressures on time and resources on the part of teachers and the feelings of intimidation that can be evoked for some parents by just entering the school environment. Roffey cites a study by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER, 1991) which talks about parents' perceptions that “the establishment of effective two-way communication channels seem to be the pre-requisite to many other activities” (p19). Often the dialogue between parent and school is problem-focused. Again, as in the other publications, this problem focused narrative is the discourse that dominates leaving parents feeling judged and disempowered. Parent comments are quoted and this allows the reader to hear authentic voices. Wolfendale (1992), however, challenges the use of the word “empowerment” which is described as being “potentially misleading and inaccurate” (p.21). “Enabling” is suggested as a more useful description.

Of particular interest to this study is chapter four, where Roffey aims to discover what families find more and less supportive in their interactions with schools about their children's behaviour. The chapter describes the research as qualitative in a straightforward way describing that it does not assume the world is predictable or linear and recognising that there are many variables that contribute to a phenomenon. It is a study which looks at perceptions, it explores the constructs that underpin expectations and responses to events stating that people are neither “culture nor value free” (p.28).

As in this study, Roffey admits limitations in hers, as the sample was self-selected, predominantly female English-speaking people (p.29).

Influential to this thesis is the exploration of constructs made by Roffey, such as those about language and exploring how parents see their involvement with a school. Parents see facilitating their involvement as being comfortable to be in school, having an informal approach which is less intimidating, having a shared view

of a child, the parent not having to defend their child against “a negative barrage of accusations”, and having the opportunity to participate in “joint problem-solving” (p.37). Language that is not jargon-laden is important, as is feeling that someone in school is committed to their child. Roffey writes about parent/carer constructs, speaking about parents' previous experiences when at school themselves, their success as learners, their social relationships and their contact with authority figures. These constructs contribute to the confidence level of parents and what they want for their children. Roffey describes how constructs can change when parents are encouraged to contribute and when an effort is made to listen to what parents have to say and that cultural context should be given sufficient consideration. Assumptions and stereotyping on the part of both parents and schools often leads to misunderstanding and potential conflict. Roffey discusses the expectation that some parents have of teachers. Roffey’s style is candid in reflecting what parents think and she draws on the evidence by weaving the parent voice through her comment. An interesting aspect of the study is the discussion about parents’ constructs of their own role and the clear message that parents see themselves as supporters and defenders for their children although the ways they do this differ (p.43).

Parents of all backgrounds talk about their awareness of experiencing a lack of power at some time in their relationship with their child’s school. Confidence within the parental role and within the school is a dynamic that can be affected by the responses of teachers towards a parent but also the responses of parents towards each other. The ways in which a school dealt with issues, it was found, may impact on the parent-child relationship outside of school. However, from the perspective of the parents it suggests that even if the partnership is flawed there are benefits all round (p.56).

As with Day’s taxonomy discussed in the earlier article (Day, 2013) the framework could be used by the educational psychologist when working with schools to promote engagement with families. It is an open framework on which a school staff and EP could reflect and create a plan of action or even use as an audit of their school – family partnership.

The Day (2013) and Roffey (2013) publications make their contribution to this thesis because they provide the perspective of the EP in practice as they are written by Educational Psychologists. Emphasis on therapeutic resources such as that described by Bentovim (2014) and the current school-based intervention work promoted by the Marlborough Family Therapists (Dawson and McHugh, 2012 and Metzger, 2012) provide a paradigm shift in the ways school and family may work together. The review of literature for evidence-based family therapy with children (Carr, 2014) discusses the use of familiar tools and maps to support engagement with families. Carr, (2014) like Bentovim (2014) proposes that certain tools already familiar to practitioners can be incorporated into interventions. Examples include, the 'Attachment Style Interview' (Bifulco, Jacobs, Bunn, Thomas and Irving, 2002, a, b) and 'In My Shoes' (Calam, Cox, Glasgow and Jimmieson, 2005) resources. Singh (2014) suggests that there is a movement towards manualisation and that many of the interventions drawn from manuals can be helpfully incorporated flexibly into practice. This does, however, raise questions about adherence to manuals and the flexibility that can be afforded within such guidelines. In contrast, Day (2013)'s reference to Harris and Goodall (2007)'s taxonomy provides principles and scope as a platform from which systemic approaches can be applied. An example of how this could match in practice would perhaps be to map the Marlborough approach of the family group process with the taxonomy for terms of engagement. Similarities are evident between the Dawson and McHugh (2012) and Day (2013) publications in identifying commonalities such as reducing isolation, sharing activities and having fun with other parents. These terms are to be examined in greater detail as the identification of the 'Our Future' Project is discussed within the context of the literature.

The purpose of highlighting these publications provides the research with an evidence base for proven family and systemic work and presents the possibility of how that might operate in schools.

The intention of the 'Our Future' Project was for relationships and communication to be strengthened, with a view that this would become a key factor in the ongoing engagement of the pupils with school once the project is over. An understanding of how EPs can work with schools using systemic thinking and principles remains a challenge, however, it can be seen as an opportunity for EP practice. Pellegrini (2009, p.282) reflects the optimism that is shared in this research for the wealth of

work by EPs in schools that systemic practice affords. The relationship between schools and parents has shifted since the meritocratic days, triggered from the 1944 Education Act to twenty-first century consumer culture (Brown, 1997). This, and the political shift towards individuals becoming “experts of themselves” (Rose, 1996, p.59), all contribute to an understanding of the context through which schools and parents need to consider how they work together. Therefore, within a climate of parental rights and parental responsibilities, social inclusion and driving up standards is reflected in the legislation of successive governments (Crozier, 2000). For professionals to deliver effective interventions, innovation is required. It could be argued from a political perspective that it is about the ‘normalisation’ of parents in order to enable them to play a key role in ensuring the smooth running of the education system (Ball, 1994). It is, therefore, in the best interests of society and from the perspective of schools that they require parents to comply and support their children and schools in their work as educators. In terms of families that are described as ‘hard to engage’, schools are posed with significant challenge; in particular where families have negative experiences and perspectives of school and helping agencies. Professional innovation is described in the ‘Hope for Children and Families Project’ (Bentovim, 2014, DfE, 2013) which refers to elements of common practice in the application of working with parents. In addition to specific approaches within interventions, Corpita and Deleiden, (2009) identify a ‘common – factors framework’. The common – factors framework asserts that there are commonalities to all interventions which includes client motivation and the alliance that is built between the practitioner and the client. Bentovim (2014, p.7) argues that this is responsible to a significant degree for the outcome. I would argue that the alliance and client motivation described in the common-factors framework could be applied to the ‘Our Future’ Project because it is an intervention. It is an intervention designed to promote engagement between parents, pupils and a school. The position of this thesis is not one that advocates that the role of therapist is being promoted in a school setting. It does however consider that lessons can be learned from Social Care literature where, in common with school settings, in developing relationships with families, engagement remains the central task (McGowan, 2014). Application of school-based family-minded practice should ensure that children feel safe in the relationships between them, the parents and professionals “before we can take risks in our exploration of change” (McGowan, 2014, p.25). Tailoring interventions where

the unique needs of families can be matched is deemed to be crucial and reiterates the message that a 'one size fits all' approach is not the answer if change is to be effective (Sanders and Ralph, 2002). This, and careful response to feedback from parents, is an ingredient vital for ongoing engagement (Staines, 2014).

Social Care studies identify main themes as taking time to listen, explaining and sharing information, and highlighting families appreciating that someone was truly trying to get to know them and understand the factors affecting them (Totsuka, Muir, Metzger and Obi, 2014).

Totsuka et al. (2014, p. 34 - 35) go on to emphasise,

the combination of taking time to get to know families and a flexible responsive approach appeared to generate a sense within families that the therapists and social workers were understanding them and not judging them, they felt viewed positively.

In summary, as illustrated, evidence from the literature drawn from the context of a range of multi-professional studies would suggest that interventions with families work best when they are:

- Bespoke (Harris and Goodall, 2007)
- Relational and reflective (Jordan, 2008)
- Do not stigmatise (Scott and Sylva, 2002)
- Understand the realities of individual families (Morris, 2013)
- Non-judgemental (Totsuka, et al., 2014)
- Listening and understanding (Totsuka, et al., 2014)

Professionals need to be confident in working with family groups, and, where programmes are being introduced, the importance of the practitioner is highlighted, "demonstrating how professional knowledge and experience contribute to outcomes" (Axford and Morpeth, 2013, p.274).

In terms of Educational Psychology practice, Wicks (2013) draws on the literature to expound 'executive frameworks', explained as "providing a scaffolding to accommodate EPs' individual areas of psychological expertise" (Woolfson, 2008, p.131). This differs from the adoption of 'practice frameworks' such as 'Consultation' (Wagner, 2000) that supports the application of theoretical models (Kelly, 2008). It is

in this context that the EP is well placed to work in ways that show flexibility, can be client specific and can tailor approaches to the individual school, family or child or young person. It is argued that this way of working is conducive to the descriptions identified through the literature. Day (2013), in her review of literature into 'terms of engagement' with families, highlights that the EP is well placed to promote and deliver "the bespoke' and key psychological approaches in the interests of vulnerable children" (p.53). Evidence from further studies, such as that by Roffey (2004), Gus (2008) and the wider literature already presented, provides this study with a background based on a set of principles that schools can be encouraged to adopt. This would then act as a reference point to work systemically and enhance their engagement with families.

2.3 Towards Definitions

Evident throughout the literature are many references to terms such as, 'family', 'systems', 'complex', 'vulnerable' or 'hard to reach', for example as cited by Thoburn, et al., (2013); and Day, (2013). Although these terms provide a starting point for literature searches, establishing definitions provides 'operational descriptions' (Clough and Nutbrown, 2002). The clarification of definitions serves to locate the study and provide it with a sense of its own identity together with common understanding and clarity for the reader.

2.3i Working Definitions of Child, Family and School

The description of at-risk students and their families should be familiar. After all, it is almost 200 years old (Cuban, 1989, p.780).

Providing definition is by nature a tricky business as terms are loaded with historical, social, political, cultural, socio – linguistic and personal connotation and, thereby, old problems receive new labels (Placier, 1996). However, it has been recognised over time that definitions and labels should open the way for support (Mitchell, 1993) if not, "reform may well be an illusion of change" (Placier, 1996, p.264).

From 1996 to more current services to families and children the outcomes required have differed little in their desire to reform. To evaluate how or if services address the needs of particular groups and are impacting on positive outcomes for them, defining a population is crucial (Doherty, Stott and Kinder, 2004). In order to underpin their definition of what 'hard-to-reach' means the Home Office (2004) asked

an array of professionals *What does 'hard-to-reach' mean to you?* The responses were then identified into types from which action points for service delivery were made. Questions to test whether the choices were evidence-based were then applied. Addressing the process illustrates how multi-layered definitions are. In terms of home–school relations, 'hard-to-reach parents' is a term that is commonly used to describe parents who are

deemed to inhabit the fringes of school or society as a whole-who are socially excluded and who, seemingly, need to be brought in and re–engaged as stakeholders

(Crozier and Davies, 2007, P. 295, Levitas, 1998).

Crozier (2000, p.8) highlights how parents are pathologised and homogenised in an attempt to “prescribe and plan to regulate parental standards for all” (David, 1999, p.218). Santin (2014) argues that the Government initiative for 'Troubled Families' may further reinforce the process of 'othering' by creating a sense of 'us and them'. This, it is suggested, creates barriers and “interferes with their sense of belonging” (p.21).

It is therefore, a fine balance between creating opportunities for children and young people and creating a framework that has the potential to actually reinforce negative perceptions and alienation.

Whether teachers manage to initiate a supportive relationship, or unwittingly collude with parents' negative expectations, will at least in part depend on their own understanding of such issues and their reactions to parents' behaviour (Hanko, 1999, p.21).

2.3ii Definition of who is a parent

Roffey (2013, p.3) advocates that in today's society 'who is a parent' is 'no longer a straightforward concept' and regards the term parent as an inclusive term 'encompassing all those who have a parental responsibility towards the child'. However, in terms of working with families to effect change for children and young people, further definition for the purpose of this study will be discussed in broader terms.

2.3iii Definition of family

In the literature, families are described as unique social systems with membership based on biological, legal, affectionate, geographic and historical ties. Family systems are entered through birth, adoption, fostering or marriage, and the only way that members can exit the system is through death (Carr, 2003). The family is “an intimate domestic group made up of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating or legal ties” (Marshall, 1998, p.222). Family life is described as diverse and with differing values and beliefs amongst religious, ethnic and class background groups (Newson, 1967; Kohn, 1983).

Walsh (1993) suggests that it is no longer useful to have a narrow and traditional definition of the family. Therefore, the family is, according to Carr, 20013, p.5) “a network of people in the child’s immediate psychosocial field”. Carr (1995, 1997, 1999) also describes family as being not just members of a child’s household, but those who also play a significant role in the life of a child. It is this definition that is adopted in the study.

The systemic aspect of the ideological, political and economic processes that shape the family are also recognised and how family life has become intertwined with practical policy concerns. The current ‘think family’ policy (DCSF, 2009) provides an example, with an emphasis on ‘vulnerable families’ and ‘children in need’.

2.3iv Family therapy and systemic practitioner definition of ‘family’

The definition of family as a system is the one adopted by family therapists and systemic practitioners. Foundational to the basis of this study is the theory of family therapy and systemic practice. It is therefore important that systems theory is applied to families whatever their structure. It is the pattern of connections between the individuals, ‘each component of a family system being seen as contributing to its operation as a whole’ (Rivett and Street, 2009, p.7). Every behaviour between family members is seen as having a relationship dynamic; a change in one part having an effect on another. Feedback between family members develops into connecting patterns which have been established by the process of information exchange, communication in all its facets, verbal and non-verbal, emotional, cognitive or behavioural exchanges. Rivett and Street indicate that in a family it is impossible not to communicate, and communicational patterns are what define a family. Human

action and activity is embedded within the interactions and connections between people. The communication patterns are information exchange between family members,

Individuals are part of the communication system that we call the family, and to be involved in a communication system continually is at the core of human identity (Rivett and Street, 2009, p.9).

Therefore, as social individuals every behaviour is at one and the same time an expression of the individual and a communication to others. This complex connection of patterns places an individual's beliefs, behaviours and emotions in a context (Rivett and Street, 2009, p.11 and 12). Gergen (1996) underlines this thinking from a philosophical perspective. Gergen recasts the discourse of the mind stating that connection replaces separation as the fundamental reality. Therefore, we are relationship-centred beings. As a system, the family is a subsystem of a community and cultural and political systems. Therefore, individuals in families are participating in a community of 'meaning makers' to achieve goals valued by this community (Gergen, 2009, p.238). The context within families is also interpreted through 'meanings' (Pearce and Cronen, 1980) and interpreted as 'the family ideology' (Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin and Prata (1978). The values, beliefs and ideas a family hold will present in terms of how a family will operate in the world. Minchin (1974, p.17) described the family structure "as a way of considering how all the subsystems relate to each other to form different patterns of relationships within the family". The concept of circularity (Penn, 1982; Cecchin, 1987) is also important within systems thinking. It describes the ways in which the responses to interactions between individuals occur as a circular not a linear process. However, the family lifecycle provides a linear course for families. Carter and McGoldrick (1999, p.23) note:

individual life cycles are the threads from which the overall family context is woven, with changes in the individual threads being reflected in the appearance and shape of a particular family life-cycle.

The trans-generational aspect of the family needs also to be considered as it describes the process of history influencing the learning of each generation. Importantly for consideration in improving outcomes for families, the individual is presented through his/her family history "with a blueprint of how a male or female life

should unfold” (Rivett and Street, 2009, p.24). The systemic practitioner describes this as the ‘family script’. The script not only provides a framework on which the self-image of the individual is constructed, but also a family sense of identity. Family scripts are described by Byng–Hall (1995) as ‘replicative and corrective’; ‘replicative’ when generational ways are evident: ‘the old way of doing things’; ‘corrective’ when the script is changed by the new generation. The ways in which schools work with families to effect change is important if scripts are to be reinterpreted (White, 2007) for better outcomes for current and future generations. Scripts and the concept of narrative will be part of the discussion in later chapters to explore how ‘new possibilities’ (White, 1996) can be opened between school staff, pupils and parents through the ‘Our Future’ Project.

The definition of family as a system, therefore, enables a view to be taken that, through the examination of the hierarchy and alliances within the structure of families, ‘dysfunction’ can be seen as inappropriate family organisation (Cottrell and Boston, 2002). This view affects the function of how individuals within a family will interpret their own future. This is important to consider when the ‘solution focused’ and ‘reframing’ models are applied as practised through the model of Consultation (Wagner, 2000) and considered in ecological models of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). The term ‘dysfunction’ relates to earlier references in the script describing such as ‘hard to engage’ and ‘hard to reach’ terms, that may be regarded as stigmatising to the very families schools are attempting not to isolate (Doherty, Stott and Kinder, 2004).

The definition of systems theory, as applied to the family and defined in terms of psychological definitions of reframing and solution-focused approaches, are a framework which allows the narrative of families to be explored. The literature of the systemic practitioner introduces ‘new meanings’ (Bowman and Goldberg, 1983). ‘Blame’ and ‘undermining’ directed towards families, such as that implied through the terminology of ‘dysfunction’ and ‘hard to reach’, then becomes an alternative rhetoric.

It becomes a rhetoric that

simultaneously validates the families’ difficulties, while also providing insight and possible new ways of interacting with a supportive (school) environment (Bowman and Goldberg, 1983, p.211).

My brackets in the quote are intended to imply that collaboration in ways where systemic practice can provide insight enables parental investment to be seen as supportive in a school environment rather than antagonistic. Examples from literature such as that of Crozier (2000) would promote the philosophical assumption referred to by Pellegrini (2009, p.274) that “families have genuine concerns for one another, no matter what the manifest behaviours are”, and “previously unrecognised positive feelings are encouraged to surface” through the practitioner working together with the family in the context of a supportive environment. There are many contexts for change that can be introduced, for example through questions and interventive interviewing (Tomm, 1985, 1987b and 1988).

2.4 School and Family Relationships

There are strong reasons for working in partnership with parents. If they feel confident that schools and professionals actively involve them, take account of their wishes, feelings and unique perspectives on their children’s development, then the work of those schools and professionals can be more effective (DfEE 2000:8).

The premise that teachers generally want parents to be involved and parents want to support their children provides a positive direction for facilitating partnership and enhancing school-family relationships. However, families that are described as ‘hard to reach’ may, because of the behavioural concerns of both themselves and their child, provide schools with challenge and make demands on teacher professionalism. Therefore, in order to actively involve them and take account of their perspectives, teachers require support to handle the strong emotions that are inevitably evoked in working in challenging circumstances (Roffey, 2013). The EP can have an active role and provide schools with support for teacher well-being and empower them through skills development (Brumby, 2012; Graham, 2014) towards effective partnership with parents. Key findings from studies where services are delivered to ‘hard-to-reach’ families suggest that the positive characteristics of the family group are emphasised, rather than the perceived need of the group (Doherty et al. 2004). This, therefore, allows for the perspective of individual families to be taken into account and supports the findings identified by Harris and Goodall (2007) of having a ‘bespoke approach’ for the most at need.

Crozier (2000) recognises that in the school / family partnership there are many influences on the relationship on the part of both the school and family, but implicit power relations underpin all parent school relationships. In summary, Young, (1989 p. 257) states,

in a society where some groups are privileged while others are oppressed the perspectives and interests of the privileged will tend to dominate marginalising or silencing those of other groups.

The literature suggests that the school determines the terms and agenda of parental participation (Hatcher, 1999) but according to class will depend on how this is perceived. Areas of parental participation include;

1. To influence policy, such as being on the school governing body (Phillips,1993).
2. Providing academic support (Ulich, 1989).
3. Trust in teachers to 'get on with the job' (Giddens, 1991).

Giddens considers that working class parents perceive it as 'a risk' when school enters home and family life. Crozier argues that, working class parents often opt out and could therefore be regarded as 'hard to engage'. Carnoy (1983) states that if there is to be change for disadvantaged and disempowered groups then mutual trust and respect has to be established. In a democratic society Giroux (1989, p.28-29) argues that democracy "as a social practice is informed by competing ideological conceptions of power, politics and community." Where throughout the twentieth century psychology has been built upon discourses of deficit, principles of relations to redress this discourse now need to be promoted (Billington, 2014). The social constructionist and systemic perspective is intrinsically relational. Billington (2014, p.125) advocates us 'to be sensitive to the multiple variables unique to human being such as our emotions and social and environmental situatedness'. This sensitivity provides both schools and parents with tensions and challenges if they are to work in partnership which may be problematic. However, it also presents possibilities (Yeatman, 1994).

2.4i School and Family as a Partnership

Wolfendale and Cook (1997) suggest that partnership has different connotations to different people and is an evolving process. It could also be suggested that there is not a partnership but rather a power imbalance as schools, which are representative of the education system as an established institution of society, have the power. Modern philosophical ideas (such as Foucault's writings on power 1954 - 1984) suggest that relations of power are inherent in society. By its nature, therefore, as an institution of society a school is a place of power and, as such, is implicit in social control. Aside from these theoretical speculations, in the modern world, at a practical level, for the school wishing to engage with parents, "it is within the school's gift to facilitate liaison and empower parents not the other way around" (Roffey, 2013, p.16). However, this use of the word 'gift' might be construed as 'patronising' too. Davies (1996) and Phtiaka (1996) propose that teachers have a 'built in command' over the parent-school relationship. Similar arguments suggest that the use of the term 'partnership' is an implicit term for marginalising and controlling parents (Lareau, 1989). There is considered in general to be 'a deficit view of parents' (Vincent and Tomlinson, 1997). Prevailing attitudes would suggest that working-class parents in particular are regarded as 'the odds to be struggled against' and those parents who are willing and able to act as school supporters are privileged by school staff (Bowe, Ball and Gewirtz, (1994). Schools have traditionally promoted a linear approach to partnership (Bastiani, 1993) for example, through home-school contracts. The effectiveness of such a framework has evolved towards positioning parents as being solely responsible for the social behaviour and educational achievement of children (Oakley and Mayall, 1996, Carvel, 1998).

Therefore, as a result quality of parenting became the vogue:

Good parenting is really important in determining children's life chances, acting as a protection against poverty, social exclusion, poor academic attainment as well as crime and antisocial behaviour

(Home Office, 2008, p.182).

Schools work with outside agencies in a variety of ways, such as with CAMHS and Educational Psychologists (Bowerman and Melville, 2012), in order to promote engagement with parents.

An example is parenting programmes. Parenting programmes can be described as providing a social-learning approach designed with an agenda to promote social inclusion and improve outcomes for children and young people. In the current climate of the 'think family' agenda, the nature of parental involvement and home-school partnerships are changing rapidly (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). The literature, both in the UK and internationally, emphasises 'the curriculum of the home' (Walberg, 1984). Policy has focused on supporting parents to engage with their children's education through learning and knowledge of the curriculum (DfEE, (1997); DfEE, (1998); DfEE, (2000). Furthermore, social capital theories (Hartas, 2008) consider how family strengths and cultural resources are influential in parental participation. However, Roffey (2013) highlights examples of how parents have been conceptualised within the school context; a 'resource for learning', a 'support for the school', 'consumer of education services', and 'partners'. There are many reasons why parents would stay away from schools particularly if concerns are expressed about the behaviour of their children (Bridges, 1987). This suggests that instead of apathy about children, practical and confidence issues are at the root of why parents find it difficult to engage with their children's schools.

Conversely, there are many documented examples of positive home-school relationships where there have been improved outcomes academically, socially and behaviourally for children and young people (Feinstein and Symons, 1999; Hill and Taylor, 2004; Flouri, 2006; Harris and Goodall, 2007). Long term studies such as that of the 1970, British Cohort Study (BCS70) provide significant insight into the influence of parents' interest on educational attainment. Literature such as that highlighted by Gus (2008) and Day (2013) emphasises that, if parents are to be engaged, constructive relationships, communication and partnership are the ingredients that will enable this process. The key quality of significant people in school ensures that practical and attitudinal barriers are addressed and will promote engagement and partnership.

In terms of bringing another perspective that befits the framework of promoting engagement with families the psychological approach of reframing (Bowman and Goldberg, 1983; Ravenette, 1984) is appropriate. Reframing provides the possibility of an alternative rhetoric for 'hard to reach schools' (Crozier and Davies, 2007; Day, 2013) in order to promote terms of engagement.

Reframing suggests that schools need to adopt an ‘in their shoes’ (the families’ shoes) frame of reference.

2.5 Systemic Theory and Practice and the EP Practitioner

The role of the Educational Psychologist is evolving within a developing framework of community-based multi-agency working (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squire and O’Connor (2006). It could be argued therefore, that the EP has understanding of, and access to, the broader community of school within its local domestic community systems (Srebnik, 1991). The EP role to effect social change through the “empowerment of disadvantaged and disenfranchised people” (Maxwell, 2013, p.17). In their work with schools, EP’s have the opportunity to add value ‘as highly skilled generalists capable of applying therapeutic skills to a wide variety of situations and contexts’ (Pugh, 2010, p.397). Therefore, it is with consideration to how the examples could be applied to, or inform the practice of EPs, that the publications by Day (2013), Bentovim (2014), Metzger (2012), Dawson and Mc Hugh (2012) and Roffey (2013) were selected, their scope illustrating the potential and possibilities of providing schools with routes into partnership with families. The literature was chosen as representative because the publications provide a background to the tensions of school and families (Crozier, 2000; Roffey, 2013). Examples of direct work with schools (Day, 2013; Metzger, 2012) are illustrative of tools that could be adopted by Educational Psychologists and other practitioners (Dawson and McHugh, 2012; Bentovim, 2014). An understanding of how schools can embed such interventions remains a challenge in terms of engagement, but this can be seen as an opportunity for EP practice. Pellegrini (2009, p.282) reflects the optimism of the wealth of work for EPs in schools that family and systemic practice affords. The principles of systemic practice were relevant to the ‘Our Future’ Project intervention because the school staff involved held the view that in order to stimulate change for certain pupils the wider systems around them needed to be engaged with in a positive and different way than was currently being experienced. There was a concerted effort by school staff to get to know the families of these pupils, not just during the project but through taking an interest in their lives and communicating with them to understand their context. This was accomplished through phone calls and face to face conversations which were not time-bound, thereby providing opportunities to build relationships and encouraging a collaborative position. The

problem-saturated narrative of 'hard to reach' was in a process of change. Previous dialogue about poor attendance, low motivation and underachievement promoting disempowerment for families and creating a 'them and us' problem-based narrative was emerging as a narrative of relationship, empowerment and possibility. The potential of a 'how to reach' dialogue was being promoted through the school staff and families involved in the 'Our Future' Project. In practical ways, in my role as the EP, it was about giving support to school staff in their thinking. To work with them I used a systemic tool, the Burnham Quadrant (Appendix Two) and ongoing throughout the project reflective conversations were prioritised with the Family Liaison staff member. I also interfaced with the young people on day one of the activities. I met with some of the young people and their parents/carers to gain their perspectives through this research. The outcome provided a local evidence base for the LA and information for the school about their project. Strategically, within the EP Service and Local Authority for which I work, systemic approaches are being promoted across disciplines. The investment of other disciplines, as well as EPs (such as CAMHS practitioners, Social Care and Learning Disability colleagues) following the route of gaining systemic practitioner status through Association of Family Therapist (AFT) recognised courses, is recognition of their commitment. Moving towards the wider narrative of the historical and political perspective the literature review provides the context from which this research is drawn.

Pellegrini (2009) hypothesises and provides a comprehensive overview of systemic practice in educational psychology work. EPs often have limited opportunity to benefit from additional training in Family Therapy and Systemic Practice (Roper-Hall, 2011) because it is costly and demanding on time and EP commitment. It is innovative for Local Authority Psychology Services to have the vision and resources to invest in additional training for EPs especially in the current climate when Educational Psychology is "increasingly subject to market forces" (Pugh, 2010, p.397).

The political climate of successive governments and social policy has evolved from working with families in schools to being "an almost disciplinary offence in the field of education" (Dawson and Mc Hugh, 2012, p.8) to 'think family' on the part of all professionals (Fox, 2009). Processes such as the Team around the Family (TAF) as part of the common assessment framework has supported schools to think in terms

of family and to engage with professionals that can offer wider networks of support to them. Constraints of the literature are the limitations of not having a wide sample of documented family based systemic work as part of EP practice (Pellegrini, 2009). However, in highlighting the selected studies it can be argued that this strengthens the evidence base to show how EP practitioners might be drawn to apply systemic thinking and support schools in a range of ways in their work with families. Carr (2014) provides a current and flexible documentation of evidenced-based practice of working with families in ways that would be familiar not only to family and systemic therapists but also the Educational Psychologist.

Within daily practice there are constraints to the EP in working with schools and parents, using the techniques of systemic practice. Constraints would include the limitations put on the work of the EP by schools who may have a narrow view of the EP role (Ashton and Roberts, 2006). Time is always a factor, particularly where pressure for statutory work and cognitive assessment is a priority for schools and Local Authorities. Within a time-allocation model, creativity and commitment on the part of all parties would be required to allow for alternative ways of working to be promoted (Boyle and Mackay, 1990; Mackay and Boyle, 1994).

Arguably, one of the strengths of the EP role within the 'Our Future' Project will be the documentation of the study for the school. The involvement of the EP in this project is building on earlier work based on Family Therapy and Systemic Practice by two EPs, as documented through the School's Family Workshops Project (Appendix One). It further exemplifies effective practice with schools and their relationship with families on the part of the Educational Psychologist.

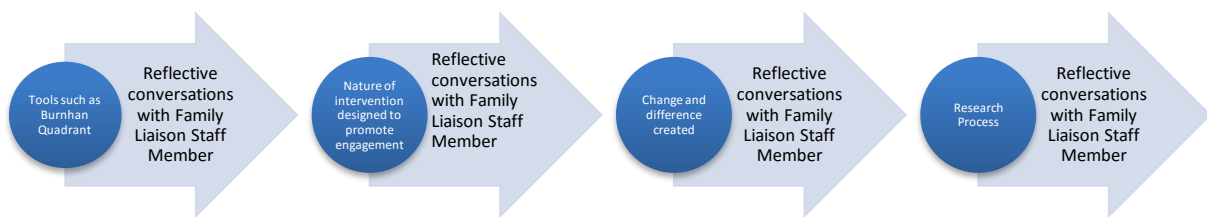
The drive of the school in the 'Our Future' Project reflects the positive ethos towards being in partnership with families and as such identifies with the literature of Crozier and Roffey.

Consultation and opportunities to develop skills as a systemic practitioner through additional training provide me with the background to promote systemic practice in supporting schools in their work with families. The literature has promoted my interest in the role of the EP as a systemic practitioner because it not only reflects the scope of systemic practice as an evidence base, but also reflects the limited engagement with systemic thinking in EP practice, as seen through published

literature. I would argue that the evidence outlined through the main publications described illustrates the possibility and effectiveness of systemic practice and the qualities required for school and family to work together and, as such, grounds the thesis.

As researcher of this project I am part of the systemic process. This is illustrated in table two and shown in the timeline Table One pages 17-20.

Table Two: Summary of Systemic Processes Represented in the Timeline:



How I participated directly as part of the project, enabling reflective conversations with the staff, meeting the pupils on Day One of the ‘Conference’ and through the interview questions, ‘enabling voices’.

The name of the initiative was chosen by the school as the ‘Our Future’ Project. Taking philosophical and semantic perspectives it seemed that this name for the project gave it a positive and neutral connotation. The name ‘Our Future’ Project was open ended; it did not indicate the future of any one person or group in particular. Collectively, it promoted an ethos that everyone (school, parent and pupil) was involved and interconnected which fits well with a systemic ethos. I was interested to find out what the perspectives of those involved were. From this, questions developed such as: ‘what had parents experienced in their relationship with school during this year?’, ‘How are parents talking to all parties (other parents, friends, within the family) about their experiences?’, ‘How do they perceive their relationship with school as participants of the ‘Our Future’ Project? ‘How are pupils talking about their engagement with school’? It then became an intention for this latter question to be developed through the methodology based on the experiences of the young people and their families. Had this focus on families made any

difference, or would it suggest a Hawthorne effect? How could 'any difference' be measured or captured and a reflective stance made?

Goldenberg and Goldenberg (2004) describe how systemic practice can provide a vehicle from which it is possible to consider new explanations and co-construct new solutions. In this way, the intervention researched can be described as systemic. It provided a context for school staff to interact with parents and for parents and pupils to engage in a collaborative activity. The intervention as in systemic practice invoked difference and created change for all concerned. Change occurred both in the immediate, the shared experience and in the longer term, for example, through increased confidence and improved school attendance.

Collaboratively, the voices of the family, child and school are heard and the discussion emanates. Systems thinking provides background and context to the effectiveness of the study and the research draws on what can be learned from it to inform future work within this school, other schools and to wider implications for EP practice.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.0 Research Questions

Although four questions shaped my thoughts as to how the voices of parents and pupils would best be captured, the overarching question which drove this study design was 'what can be learned about promoting parent and pupil engagement with school from the experiences of parents and pupils involved in a school initiative, the 'Our Future' Project?'

Following the overarching research question four research questions were identified. The questions were identified through peer and tutor discussion.

The purpose of the questions was designed to explore parent and pupil engagement with school through their experience and perspective of their involvement in the 'Our Future' Project:

1. What are pupils' and parents' experiences of engagement with school staff as a result of being involved in the 'Our Future' Project?
2. How can the experiences of pupils, parents and school staff involved in the school initiative, 'Our Future' Project be used to provide insight into further ways of engaging with pupils and families?
3. What does this research have to contribute to questions about the engagement between school staff, parents and pupils?
4. How will these insights inform the knowledge and practice of Educational Psychology in their support of this school and other schools to engage with families?

3.1 Introduction

What can be learned about promoting parent and pupil engagement with school from the 'Our Future' Project? Consideration was given to identifying a methodology that would answer the four questions and the main research question, and also give an opportunity to the participants to provide their perspectives and experience of the Project.

The research would therefore, require a methodology that would enable individual voices to be heard, their stories told, and through them provide an opportunity for rich data to be gathered. In addition to this 'focus on the particular' it would require a

methodology that would allow for interpretation and analysis 'which can help illuminate the universal' (Warnock, 1987, p.758). In addressing the 'particular', the perceptions and experiences of parents and pupils to a school initiative, the 'universal', how parent and pupil engagement with school can be promoted, would also need to be captured. The chapter goes on to explain how I came to the methodology of choice, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, 1996): the rationale behind how very early in the process of selecting a methodological approach it was thought that a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach would best fit the generation and collection of data, how this thought process evolved, and the challenges, critiques and ethical issues posed. The journey also took me along a path of asking myself what methodology would also be congruent with my personality and professional skills. An opportunity to listen to people's stories and lived experiences through asking questions was also consistent with the principles of Systemic Practice. Tomm (1988) describes the characteristics of questions being formulated dependent upon their intent. In terms of research the intent could probably best be described as 'strategic'. The questions would be used to enhance the way in which the participants would tell their stories. The questions would be asked to assist the researcher (myself) to gain information that would provide themes and be used to inform the practice of wider systems such in schools and in educational psychology. I also wanted to provide, within the research, an opportunity to meet parents and use my involvement with them to network. As part of my role as the allocated school educational psychologist it was hoped that the process in itself would provide a positive experience of engagement.

My personal attraction to an IPA methodology was that it affords flexibility within a structure and in accordance with the guidelines proposed by Smith et al. (2009) provides rigour. The circularity, the cause and effect of interacting with the 'real voices' of the participants also fitted with my desire, to work within a methodology that in the spirit of systemic practice would challenge me as a co-participant to introduce new information into the system (Rivett and Street, 2009). I was also mindful that, as Flyvberg (2011, p.242) states:

Good social science is problem driven and not methodology driven in the sense that it employs those methods that for a given problematic, best help answer the research questions at hand.

The overarching research question and key questions of this study are all about capturing participant experiences and gaining insight and perspectives, thereby suggesting that it would be most appropriate to apply a qualitative methodology to the purpose. I had considered using a less personalised approach of providing participants with questionnaires which could also capture voices and experiences. In this study, for example, a questionnaire would have enabled a larger sample of views to be collected, possibly even asking the same questions that would be used in the framework when meeting with the participants. However, it would have removed an opportunity to interface directly with parents and pupils. It would have potentially been a barrier to participants who have limited literacy skills. In particular, it would have been incongruent with the underpinnings and intentions of this study in its desire to reflect a methodology sympathetic to the interests of systemic practice. It would also have missed an opportunity to promote educational psychology in practice in terms of face to face engagement with people. On the other hand, it could also be argued that for those described as 'hard to engage' it could provide a less personal 'less threatening' approach. Online and paper-based surveys, assuming that literacy levels and internet access are not barriers, may be more preferable to some than the face-to-face interview. Individuals with mobility or social communication needs may also regard less personalised approaches as more acceptable. Statistical information gathering may also be appealing, providing something tangible for the outcome data, target-focused and potential funders commissioning services (Singh, 2014). However, outcome measures can be seen as tools in themselves and an analogy with psychotherapy research suggests that 'measurements, questionnaires and manuals used as part of a monitoring system are potential tools for conversations' (Finn and Tonsager, 1997, 1992). In the context of a school based study it could be argued that conversations based on measurements and questionnaires could be problematic. It may be an assumption, but would an approach based on these methods of data collection have the potential to disempower and undermine participants in this context? Measurements and questionnaires are familiar tools used regularly by schools in their presentation to parents in the form of grades and statistics about learning, attendance and behaviour. These tools of measurement may be interpreted by parents and young people and perceived by them in such a way that condemns and invokes shame, thereby further alienating those that they are keen to engage. I preferred to see

information gathering about a project that is designed to engage, being a “collaborative venture” (Sundet, 2014, p.210). It was an opportunity for collaboration to be promoted, a principle of systemic practice, an opportunity as part of the process of engagement, and also, ethically, care needed to be taken in order to minimise the risk of further alienation of this vulnerable group.

It could be suggested that, after further considerations from the field of psychotherapeutic research aligning with the systemic practice and family therapy interests of my research, the concept of ‘practice-based evidence’ is appealing (Barkham and Mellor-Clark, 2003). The value of ‘evidence-based practice’ is one that is widely publicised and a term that is familiar to practitioners of all fields.

In recent years, there has been ever increasing importance placed on educational psychology practice to ensure that interventions are based on systematic knowledge of intervention outcomes (Cottrell, 2002; Larney, 2003). There are, however, key issues with evidence-based practice and how this can be best embedded in public services (Dunsmuir, Brown, Iyadurai and Monsen, 2009). The appeal of ‘practice-based evidence’, it could be argued, is at the heart of a methodology that would seek to capture voices, and in gathering that evidence communicate with participants as part of that research process. The effect of providing an arena for those conversations to take place may have the unintended consequence of causing change. Surely, where entrenched vulnerability and lack of engagement is apparent, where those unmotivated to engage with school are motivated otherwise, and change seems unlikely, those motivations and intentions are there to be explored. To explore the intentions of those parents and pupils is “a more profitable avenue than an increased use of psychological explanations for the lack of change” (Baldwin, Wampold and Imel, 2007). In psychology, where thoughts, emotions and meanings are integral to the study of mind and behaviour, it recognises that social science study is about increasing our psychological knowledge about behaviour. The focus of study is to understand what that behaviour is about, and how to make sense of it (Statt, 1990). Therefore, a methodology of psychological research that embodies the opportunity to provide rich pictures about “people’s involvement in and orientation towards the world and/or how they make sense of this” (Smith et al. 2009, p.46) would be necessary, also a research question that wished to find out about the experience of a school intervention and parent and pupil engagement.

The counter argument that IPA can sit alongside quantitative approaches is a very powerful one. A mixed-methods approach to research would arguably cover all bases! Nevertheless, interpretative activities remain a necessary part of the exercise. Smith et al. (2009, p.193) state:

the power of mixed designs lies in the combination of insights and leverage which can be offered by IPA when it is used alongside quantitative approaches.....phenomenological work can be used to explain and make sense of quantitative findings.

However, Smith et al. go on to explain how IPA also illuminates something of the 'less typical' participants, who can so easily disappear in the aggregates of statistical analysis. If, as Smith et al. suggest, it is necessary to begin with the epistemological position of a research question, then this will lead to how assumptions of the world, how it works and how it is known, are expressed through the tradition of a chosen research methodology.

3.2 Paradigms and Philosophical Underpinnings

Both parents and pupils will have constructed their reality, in accordance with their experiences, perceptions and experiences.

The definition provided by Statt (1998, p.123),

the idea that people are a product of their personal situation and their social environment and construct their view of reality accordingly...it emphasises social rather than individual aspects of psychological concepts

is useful in drawing alongside the view that IPA subscribes to social constructionism (Smith et al. (2009). In consideration of a social constructionist position the language that embodies such constructs as 'hard to engage' or 'vulnerable' can provide professionals with terms classed as a 'specialist-shorthand' (Burnham, 1992) or a 'problem-saturated description' (White, 1989). Burnham suggests that these descriptions are useful for professionals but can 'close down the space' for engagement and communication to take place with individuals to whom these constructs could be applied. Harré, (1986) refers to 'the linguistic practices and moral judgements' that define the quality of encounters between professionals and others such as clients, parents and pupils. It is, therefore, important to create a context that promotes 'interactional information' (Selvini, Boscolo, Cecchin and Prata, 1980).

The philosophical roots of IPA as a social constructionist model provides the theoretical underpinnings (Heidegger, 1962, 1927).

Smith et al. (2009) make reference to 'engagement with complexity' in the process of qualitative research and the business of aiming "to understand our participants' perspectives as best we can" in the "messy chaos of the lived world" (p.55). Enabling of voices, voices of individuals and the collective voice encapsulates the visible and voiced; visible and unvoiced; invisible and voiced; invisible and unvoiced' (Burnham, 2008). The insight is provided through interpretation and analysis in an attempt to answer the research question(s). This is a challenging process given the ethical considerations of remaining faithful to those voices on the part of the researcher.

3.3 Ontology

Burr (1995, p.92) describes ontology as "the study of being and existence in the world". A person's experience is real to the individual experiencing it. Willig (2008, p.53) states that "different people experience the same environment in radically different ways". From personal experience, accounts amongst friends of a common event would substantiate this. Witnesses to an incident prove that the perceptions and experience of a moment is particular and subjective. Our being and existence in the world is part of a larger social and 'public world' (Mulhall, 1996, 2005, p.48). In the same way I would suggest that the families in this research study, although individuals, exist in relation to each other, the school community and to wider society. This identifies how, within the experience of the school-based project described in this research study, perceptions will differ. My ontological stance is driven by a desire to ensure that the being and existence in the world of those participating in the study is recognised and respected. Implicit in capturing the reality of the individual is their culture, world view and values. These constructs also shape the perceptions and reality for those individuals in their experience of school events. I acknowledge, likewise, that my own culture world view and values are also implicit and will inevitably shape the interpretation of the accounts of the participants.

3.4 Epistemology

The epistemological position or 'theory of knowledge' assumed so far in this chapter has indicated that the research question(s) will be designed to produce data that will provide me, as the researcher, with something about the parents' and pupils' experiences of their engagement with a school initiative. I have emphasised so far in the chapter that I consider IPA as a 'best fit' methodology for this purpose (Willig, 2008). I acknowledge the role of myself as the researcher, and in pursuing the lived experience of the individual, my own experiences and views will influence the accounts that are given to me. The views of parent and child in their experience of school will be subjective and an interpretation of the experiences that they express. Heidegger (1962) suggests that presuppositions cannot be bracketed off, (Husserl (1970, p.67), and the researcher can only remain as transparent as possible in order to achieve the desired neutrality. I am mindful of the part played by the therapist in a family therapy context in attempting to achieve neutrality and aware of the subconscious impact of the presence of gender and culture, for example, to impact presupposition. Likewise, in the context of the research process my own prior knowledge and assumptions could intrude. Constructs such as 'hard to reach' are alien to me, my background and culture. Why would anyone not want to engage with school? Why would any family not want to ensure that their child conformed and fit with society? As 'an outsider' (Langdrige, 2007, p.59) my role and responsibility as researcher was to ensure that the views of participants were not misrepresented because I had imposed my own beliefs on them. However, the intent of the researcher is to learn from the experiences of the individuals in the 'Our Future' Project.

Smith, Flowers and Larkin, (2009, p.35) suggest that

There is a phenomenon ready to shine forth, but detective work is required by the researcher to facilitate the coming forth, and then to make sense of it once it has happened.

Realism assumes that the true experiences of people can be accessed within their world. Within the realism relativism paradigms it can be argued that, "while experience is always the product of interpretation and, therefore, constructed (and flexible) rather than determined (and fixed) it is nevertheless 'real' to the person who is having the experience" (Willig, 2008, p.13). An interpretation of the phenomenon

of school engagement through a school project is therefore captured through two lenses, it provides a double hermeneutic: that of the participants themselves and that of the interpretative stance of the researcher.

3.5 Choice of Methodology

How I could hear people's own stories and experiences without reserve was one of the considerations in the choice of methodology. A further consideration was how best the perceptions and experiences of individuals who were described as 'hard to engage' could embrace the research process. Focus groups would not sit easily, as individuals would be unlikely to participate in a group setting. Although, I question if this is an assumption imposed from my own experience and I am thinking in a way that is stereotypical. Likewise, the option to meet in an environment that would not feel threatening to them would need to be considered. What I would consider non-threatening, such as the option of an at-home interview, might also pose the difficulty of letting a professional through the door. The research would require a methodology that would allow the experiences and perceptions to be heard. I required a methodology that would allow flexibility within its framework. I considered that data collection with reduced demands on literacy skills would also be important with this population and face to face without the demand of group interaction preferable. In this section I also acknowledge that IPA has limitations as the methodology for my study when discussed alongside alternatives.

3.6 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Having made decisions expressed earlier in the chapter about the journey I have taken to arrive at the chosen methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), it is important to recognise why this methodology was chosen. It starts with the subject matter of my research study and with the questions that I am intending to answer. Therefore, which methodological approach would best suit my research questions?

1. What are parents' experiences of engagement with school staff as a result of their involvement in the 'Our Future' Project?
2. How can the experiences of parents, pupils and school staff involved in the 'Our Future' Project be used to provide insight into future ways of engaging with pupils and families?

3. What does this research have to contribute to the understanding of engagement between school and families?

4. How will these insights inform Educational Psychology knowledge and practice in their support of this school and other schools, to engage with families?

Smith and Osborn (2008) describe IPA as being suitable for studies that involve broad and open research questions. Harris and Goodall (2007) suggest that there have been studies to illustrate the consistent relationship between increasing parental engagement (particularly of 'hard to reach' parents) and improved attendance, behaviour and student achievement. However, observations in the Report of the Chair of the Enquiry, The Lamb Report to the Secretary of State (2009, p.20) stated:

What was apparent, was that few of the parents the enquiry met seemed to have been encouraged to have a discussion about the outcomes they expected or aspired to for their child, or how best these outcomes might be achieved.

Therefore, to provide an opportunity to have discussions with a group of parents and pupils identified by a school as having barriers of vulnerability which were impacting on the attendance, behaviour and achievement of their children, the methodology would have to be such that it gave them the opportunity to speak, 'to give voice' (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2008).

The platform provided by the school was to create an experience of engagement for those caregivers and pupils in the form of the 'Our Future' Project. The participants could then be 'co-conversationalists' with experts and empowered to share their view points about an experience of the project. . How the interviewer and participant will work in '*flexible collaboration*' is described by Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005, p.22) in, for example, the one-to-one interview:

one to one interviews aid this...allow rapport to be developed; allow participants to think, speak and be heard; and are well suited to in depth and personal discussion.

The chosen method of data collection in this study will be the semi-structured interview in the form of questions.

3.6i Phenomenology

Larkin et al. (2006, p.104) emphasise that at the heart of IPA is “the experiential claims and concerns” of those taking part in the research study. It is understanding that phenomenology is about understanding the person in context. The philosophical underpinnings of the phenomenological approach to research derive from Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) and “systematically and attentively reflect on everyday lived experience” (Smith et al. (2009, p.33). Husserl advocates ‘the lived experience’ and Smith et al. emphasise that the lived experience is both ‘first order’ – the actual experience and ‘second order’ – “the mental and affective responses to that activity” (p.33). Larkin et al. p.107 refer to Dreyfus (1995) and propose that the general sense of meaning is encapsulated by, “What is real is not dependent on us, but the exact meaning and nature of reality is”

The entity as an entity is ‘in itself’ and independent of any apprehension of it; yet, the being of the entity is found only in encounter and can be explained, and made understandable, only from the phenomenal exhibition and interpretation of the structure of encounter. (Heidegger, (Kisiel, (translation) 1985, p.217).

This research study is about understanding the parent and pupil in their context with engagement in school through a project designed by the school to encourage participation. The encounter with the participants as researcher, interpreting the parent and pupil experience as interpreted by them. The view of the person as

embedded and immersed in a world of objects and relationships, language and culture, projects and concerns...towards a more interpretative and worldly position with a focus on understanding the perspectival directedness of our involvement in the lived-world something which is personal to each of us, but which is a property of our relationships to the world and others...(Smith et al.2009, p.21).

I have stated my intent to draw parallels with systemic practice in this research project from the outset. This particular emphasis supports the viewpoint of the role of the practitioner as part of the system (Hofman, 1993; Dallos and Urry, 1999). In the discipline of Educational Psychology, the role of the Educational Psychologist is recognised both within and outside of the school context. The interplay that individual Educational Psychologists can bring to each encounter in their work with schools, children and parents as part of that system is also recognised. Johnson (2000)

states (in McConnell-Henry, Chapman and Francis, 2009, p.9), “we always understand from within the context of our disposition and involvement in the world.” This quotation states that it is not possible to have an understanding of anything from a purely objective position. Therefore, I recognise, my own experiences of the past will influence those of both the present and the future, as will those of the parents and pupils participating in this study.

3.6ii Hermeneutics

In order to understand the relationship of the parents and pupils to their engagement with school, the interpretative aspect of IPA is the part employed to illuminate how meaning is made of their experience through the event of the ‘Our Future’ Project. Hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation provides the theoretical underpinnings.

Magrini (2012, p.1) describes hermeneutics as “the philosophical practice of interpreting texts of all types”. He exemplifies human beings as one of these types. My research focuses on the parents’ and young peoples’ perceptions of their lived experience of school engagement and their relationships with each other. My role is to interpret their perceptions in order that a deeper understanding about engagement between schools and families can be found. I also hope that through this research personal growth will be evident not just for myself, but for those who are part of this research journey with me.

Heidegger redefined hermeneutics as “a way of studying all human activities, it is the basis for interpretation, with the aim of allowing the text to speak for itself” (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009, p.8). Smith et al. (2009) draw attention to hermeneutics as the theory and practice of interpretation. They draw on Heidegger’s idea that studying experience is based on observations always made from our own point of view. Our being there indicates that we are always involved in the world and relationships with others and cannot therefore step into an objective stance (Langdrige, 2007, p.29). So, an interpretation of experience is the best that can be achieved. Smith et al. (2009) highlight that within IPA interpretation is always the lived experience from the participant’s point of view. Smith et al. (2009) describe this as the researcher facilitating the appearance of the phenomenon and making sense of it. In trying to make sense of the participant’s sense-making of their experience

the researcher, in using the IPA methodology, is described as employing a double hermeneutic (Smith and Osborn, 2003).

It is also suggested by Smith et al. (2009) that the analyst may come from different interpretative approaches; typically, these are 'empathic' and 'questioning'. The empathic stance is about the researcher trying to recognise and appreciate what the experience of the participant is like from the participant's perspective. It is about the researcher's identification with the participant in trying to understand and to make sense of their views. The questioning stance progresses the evolving process of the interpretative work of the researcher. It allows for critical questions to be asked of the participants' responses. Smith (2004) suggests that the empathic and questioning allows for totality of representation for the participant. Therefore, as the researcher I will be like and unlike the participants. Like, because I, too, am a human trying to make sense of the world, and unlike, because I am not the participant. I do not know their experience first-hand but rather only their report of what engagement with school through a project is like for them. My lens as researcher is experientially informed, making sense of the participant's meaning, experience and perception.

3.6iii The Hermeneutic Circle

Within the research process of hermeneutic theory is the concept of the 'hermeneutic cycle', 'hermeneutic turn' or the 'hermeneutic circle'. Smith et al... (2009, p. 35) describe the positive process of engaging with the participant. Smith describes how this can help our understanding of the research process, describing the researcher at one point in the circle 'preoccupied by their own concerns, influenced by their preconceptions, shaped by their experience and expertise'. These preconceptions are then '*bracketed*' or at least acknowledged before the encounter with the participant takes place. The focus on the story of the participant is intense, "it is a complex dynamic process" (Smith, 2007, p.6). The researcher then continues around the circle back home to analyse the material from the participant returning to their "prior conceptions and experience", but "also irretrievably changed because of the encounter with the new, the participant and his/her account". As the encounter is re-lived by the researcher and sense-making takes place, "the various actions inherent in the hermeneutic circle between part and whole take place".

Although the process of IPA is a linear research method as an organised process of step by step analysis, it can also be described as an iterative process. The account of the hermeneutic circle described alludes to the researcher moving back and forth to engage with the data in different ways (Smith et al. 2009). In the study of school engagement I, as the researcher, would be involved in the analysis of the parents' and pupils' accounts of their perceptions of engagement. Each experience would be a focus in its own right and this would be examined in terms of the whole experience of the 'Our Future' Project, and in terms of the experience of each participant.

The combination of IPA therefore requires phenomenological and hermeneutic insights in the words of Smith et al... (2009, p.37):

It is phenomenological in attempting to get as close as possible to the personal experience of the participant, but recognises that this inevitably becomes an interpretative endeavour for both participant and researcher. Without phenomenology there would be nothing to interpret; without the hermeneutic, the phenomenon would not be seen.

3.6 iv Idiography

The third major influence on IPA is idiography. Smith et al... (2009, p.29) describe the sense of detail and depth of thorough and systematic analysis required in IPA. It is through the depth and focus on the particular rather than the nomothetic, the psychological approach from studying groups or populations of devising universal claims. IPA is an approach committed to understanding experience from the perspective of the particular person in a particular context. It is also committed to detail that is particular to individual participants and its examination in detail before making wider claims from the detailed accounts of those individuals. In the context of my research study, the intention as researcher central to the process is to take the detail from the individual parents and pupils involved and "through this small, purposively-selected and carefully-situated sample...prescribe a different way of establishing generalisations" (Smith et al...2009, p.29; Harré,1979). Warnock (1987) states that by delving deeper into the particular we are taken closer to the universal and closer to significant aspects of the general (Smith et al... 2009, p.32). IPA therefore, provides not only the opportunity to understand the individual experience, but also, through depth and understanding, to recognise messages that will resonate more widely in understanding the phenomenon for particular

individuals. In the example of this study, the phenomenon is the lived experience of individuals participating in a school project.

3.6v Language

The importance of language is integral to IPA because the ability of participants to communicate their experiences is essential. Language is also vital to the way in which the researcher makes sense of participant's sense making. Mulhall (1996, 2005, p.89) talks about the distinctive account of the nature of truth and reality generated from Heidegger's analysis of language. Communication by parents and pupils of their lived experience is conveyed through spoken language in this study. Semi-structured interview questions are the tool used to draw the 'distinctive account' from them.

Language is a framework of meaning. To grasp the framework is not just to grasp certain facts about our uses of words; it is also to grasp the essence of things. (Mulhall, 1996, 2005, p.93).

Smith et al. (2009, p.194) refer to Heidegger's emphasis that 'our interpretations of experience are always shaped and limited and enabled by language'.

3.7vi Limitations

Critics of IPA highlight the reliance on participant's ability to communicate their experiences and a researcher's ability to reflect and to analyse (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). I am also mindful that IPA research is about the cultural position of a person. Heidegger talks of 'Dasein' as being "thrown into the world". Smith et al... (2009, p.194) refer to this as a metaphor for understanding the relationship we have with cultural objects and resources. "The physical, social and cultural world has an existence which preceded us and which constrains what we can do, be and claim." In terms of my research, I am trying to appreciate what the participant's terms of reference for engagement with school consists of and to appreciate the cultural dimension and the effect of parent on pupil's engagement with school in the context of history and time.

IPA is experiential research rather than discursive (Eatough and Smith, 2006; Larkin et al. 2006). The discursive, for example, in discourse analysis has as its focus the way in which language constructs people's worlds. IPA, in being an experiential approach, focuses on the understanding and sense-making of the thoughts,

motivations and actions of participants. Language is recognised in IPA as having an influence on the way in which participants' lives are constructed it is also through language that the researcher will make sense of the participants' experiences. Discourse analysis is described as strongly constructionist compared with IPA reflecting a lighter constructionist description (Smith et al... 2009).

I was aware of limitations, such as that raised by Willig (2001) who makes the point that meeting to be interviewed is a challenge for people who are not used to the open interview approach. That may be so, but in giving that opportunity one could argue the challenge is counteracted by the empowerment that person may achieve in having an experience to which they have agreed by their specific consent. All participants in the study, outside of the interview questions, expressed to me that they were pleased to have the opportunity to talk to someone. Without research which allows people to tell their stories and give their perspectives, it can be argued that many rich seams of data are lost.

I was more mindful of the likelihood of my own short comings in doing justice to the narratives of the individuals whom I met. This point is raised by Smith et al... (2009, p.194), our interpretations of experience as human beings are shaped, limited and enabled by language. It is likewise so for the interpreter-researcher. As a novice of the IPA process I noted that my interpretations of what I had heard, and my experience of the interviews, were also something that was open to question, to reflect upon and consider how I might change. How would my 'Lebenswelt' (Husserl, 1970) interact with that of the participants, and how as part of the hermeneutic circle, would I give my interpretation and analysis to present the findings in a rigorous manner? Therefore, the checks and balances of my own reflection and reflexivity, peer support, tutor guidance, references to Smith et al... (2009)'s structure, Yardley's principles (2000) and Yin's audit guidelines (1989) are all ways in which I was provided with the necessary framework to furnish me with the required confidence in the purpose and place of this research study. In accordance with the point made by Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011) about 'theoretical generalisability', IPA doesn't lay claim to findings that can be transferred between groups and contexts. The purpose and focus would be to increase understanding and knowledge and contribute to existing research about what can be learned when a school provides an event ('Our Future' Project) designed to promote engagement.

3.7 The interview questions

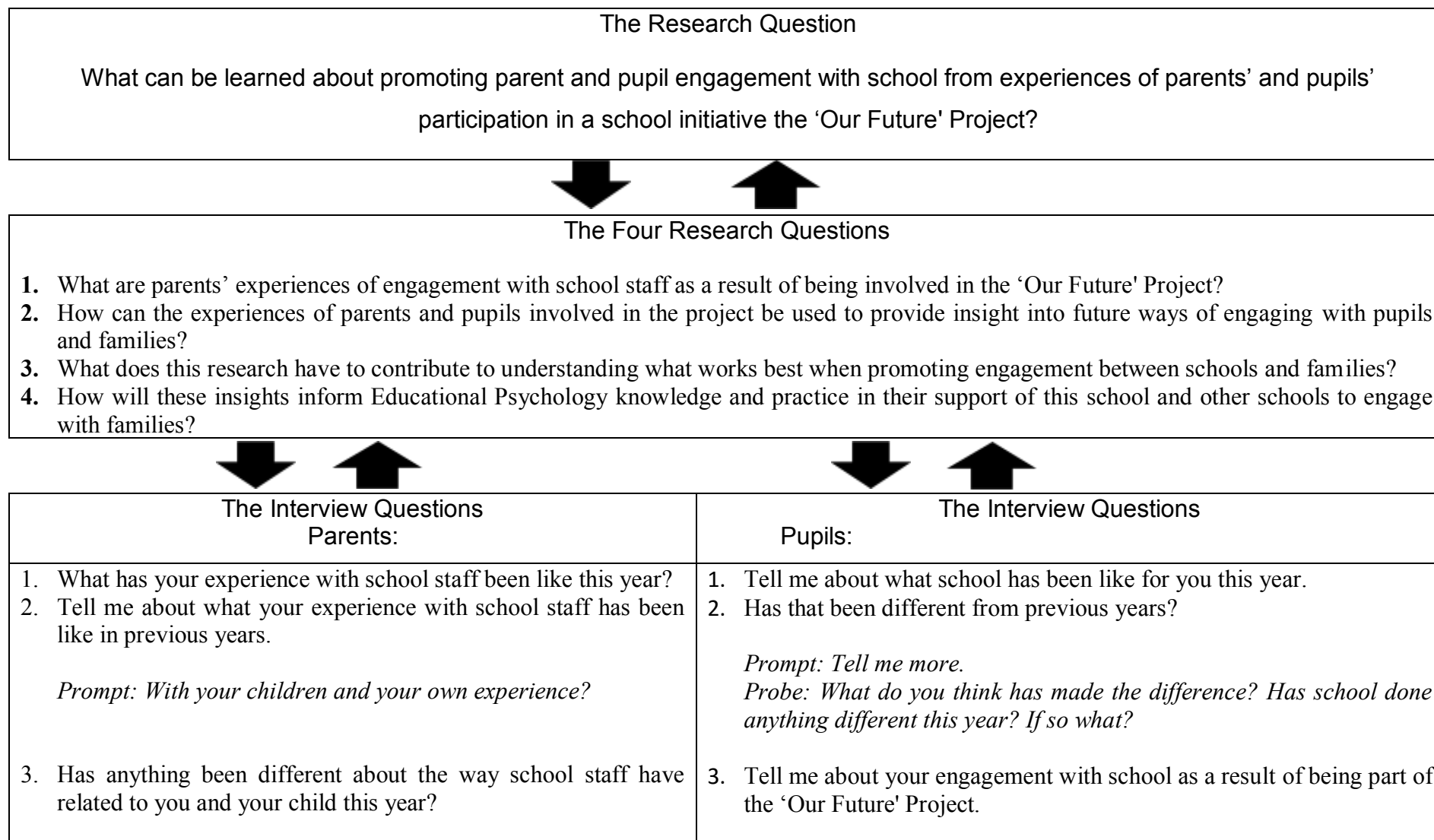
A one-to-one interview allowing a rapport to be developed that allows the participants

the space to think, speak and be heard...allowing the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue with initial questions modified in the light of participant's responses, 'conversation with a purpose' (Smith et al. (2009, p.57).

This description informed my thinking to formulate the interview questions. As a guide Smith, et al... (2009) suggest between six to ten questions with possible prompts in order to occupy forty-five to ninety minutes of conversation.

Figure Three, pages seventy-six to seventy-seven, shows the interrelation between the Research Question, the Four Subsidiary Research Questions and Interview Questions.

Figure Three: The interrelation between the Research Question, Four Research Questions and Interview Questions.



<p><i>Probe: Has school worked any differently this year? If so what has been different in the way it has worked?</i></p> <p>4. How do you feel that this school values its engagement with pupils and parents?</p> <p>5. Tell me about your engagement with school as a result of being part of the 'Our Future' Project.</p> <p><i>Probe: What has this experience been like? What has made the difference?</i></p> <p>6. Do you think that the Project has made a difference to your understanding of the part that support by parents can bring to how your child can enjoy school more?</p> <p><i>Probe: What was your previous understanding? How has this changed?</i></p> <p>7. What else would be helpful to you in the way that school staff engage with parents and pupils?</p> <p><i>Probe: For their ideas, projects or personal approaches. Is there anything that would be off putting to them?</i></p>	<p><i>Probe: What has this experience been like? What has made the difference?</i></p> <p>4. Do you think that support from parents / carers makes a difference to the way you enjoy school?</p> <p><i>Prompt: Describe ways</i> <i>Probe: What sort of things would they do or say?</i></p> <p>5. What else would you find helpful in the way that school staff relate to you?</p> <p><i>Probe: What sort of ways? What sort of things would they be doing?</i> <i>Prompt: Tell me more.</i></p>
<p><i>General Prompts: Can you tell me a bit more about that? Please describe your experience in a little more detail.</i></p>	<p><i>General Prompts: Can you tell me a bit more about that? Please describe your experience in a little more detail.</i></p>

Chapter Four

Research Construction

Procedure, practical and ethical aspects of the research

4.1 Pilot

I was aware that it is ideal and best practice to pilot the interview questions ahead of the main study (Langdridge, 2007). I was concerned about how best to pilot the interview questions because of difficulties recruiting families to a final three out of a potential twenty-six. I was confident about the structure of the questions, because they had been discussed with my Supervising Tutor, a colleague and the Senior Member of Staff leading the 'Our Future' Project at the school.

Initially I had arranged with another school to trial the questions with one or two of their parents and pupils who they considered to be 'hard to engage' in terms of poor school attendance. Both families were involved in the Team Around the Family (TAF) process as were two of the families in the 'Our Future' Project. The cohort wouldn't be a like match with the demographic of the parents and pupils from the 'Our Future' Project, however, they would have provided an opportunity for me to try the interview questions with a similar population. This also posed an ethical consideration about transparency and purpose, although the potential pilot cohort would have been invited due to their status with being part of the TAF process. The ethical consideration was overcome by the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) speaking to the parents on my behalf, and the purpose became focused on engagement in terms of Special Educational Needs (SEN) support. At a later date the opportunity of a consultation with the SENCO was to be provided by my colleague, who is EP to the school, using the information as feedback. This would have been useful to the school and in the interest of the parent and pupils in gaining insight into their needs and perceptions. In turn, this could make a difference for the provision of support for them and their children. Ethically, this would have posed different concerns to the main research project, for example, anonymity and confidentiality would not have been agreed in the usual sense, although the information in feedback would have removed references to anything that would have identified the participants. Although it is very likely that this would have

compromised openness in the responses given by participants, it would have provided them with a different platform from which to express their views. Their views would have been useful in providing starting points for respectful solution-focused discussions once in the consultations about their engagement with SEN support.

In order to address the different purpose of meeting with the 'pilot families' I decided to sample some of the interview questions with these parents, using Questions 1, 2, 4, 5 and 7, with an adjustment to Question 5 to refer to SEN. For the pupils, all the questions were asked with adjustment to question 3 to refer to their SEN support. The prompts would also be re-worded slightly to reflect this difference.

The value of the pilot study would provide an opportunity to test my style of questioning. For example, would the questions be sufficiently open to elicit responses or close the narrative down? Would my style of prompts and probes be supportive to participants and increase their confidence to be empowered to tell their story, or would I be promoting my own agenda and looking for answers to support my own knowledge? Such pitfalls are clearly referenced through the research methods literature (Fontana and Frey, 2000; Clough and Nutbrown, 2002; Parker 1994b).

Finally, the participants would have given invaluable feedback to me about my technique as an interviewer, how had it felt for them to be interviewed, did they feel comfortable, were the questions clear? It would also provide an opportunity for the technical aspects of the interview to be tried, such as the positioning and reliability of the recording equipment. However, before this could take place, one family left the school and the other decided not to participate!

The planning of the Pilot Study was in itself invaluable not only in reflecting upon the purpose and how I would conduct the study, but also in helping me to realise that recruiting participants as part of a 'real world' qualitative research study is 'not for the faint-hearted!' (Forrester-Jones, 2015). It also provided me with insight into the time it takes to prepare for, and to conduct research. These observations are also referred to in the literature (Oliver 2004, 2008, Smith et al. 2009) and highlight how timing can be crucial in the success of recruiting participants. Discussions had taken

place alongside the 'Our Future' Project event with a view to interviews for the main study being conducted early in the first half of the autumn term on return to school after the summer break. The memories of participation in the 'Our Future' Project would still be fresh in the minds of the participants, but also far enough removed from the event to provide opportunity for indications of longer term outcomes of school engagement and family support as the autumn term progressed.

The pilot of the main study had been timed to take place during the second part of the summer term of 2014, ahead of the main study scheduled for the autumn. The response of the potential pilot participants also proved to be typical of the experience referenced in the literature (Gorin et al. 2008; Wolfendale, 1999) and later proved in the final recruitment of families as participants for the main study. Eventually it was just before the Christmas break that the main study interviews were completed.

At this point I was unsure about running a pilot of the main study ('Our Future' Project families). The response rate to participate was lower than I had expected with participants proving difficult to engage. Potentially, out of the twenty-six families that had participated in the 'Our Future' Project I had the interest of five. If I ran a pilot I was faced with the dilemma of restricting the potential sample size. Also, ethically, these five families had responded to be part of the study proper. Would this be compromised if I had taken the first two families and then started to ask additional questions about the interview process? Gorin et al. (2008) make reference to the ethical dilemmas and emotional stress experienced by researchers working with families classed as 'hard to engage'. Eventually I was in the position where I had three families willing to participate and the decision was made that if I didn't 'just go for it' there would be further disengagement at a cost to the research project.

Reflection

I reflect on this time as one ranging between despondency and euphoria. It was here that my research diary became an outlet for expressing my research journey. I drew an analogy with mountaineering and recognised that I was stuck part way up the mountain having been hit by an avalanche of disengagement and cut off from base camp. I drew a picture of this in my diary as a mountain trek along a research time line. In therapeutic terms was I undergoing the experience of being drawn into the circle of client dysfunction? I was stuck and there was a long climb ahead! From the systemic perspective was I perhaps experiencing the emotion involved in the role of the researcher active in the process? Communication with colleagues and Tutor was key, reframing, motivation and humour telling me that I was working with 'the hard to engage' after all! enabled me to persevere. The willingness of the first family who agreed to participate meant so much. I could continue this research journey and, as other families gradually gave their consent, the opportunity to develop a study based on the 'life-world' of individuals became possible.

4.2 The Study Context

The context for my research study was a project called 'Our Future' based in a city high school. The project is described in the introduction and timeline, pages **xxxxx**

A member of staff whose role involves direct pastoral and learning support of students and through family liaison was key to this study. The staff member had been part of a 'Family Workshops' initiative. The workshops had been designed to promote the skills of staff in their engagement with families. They were run by a colleague and myself based on the principles of systemic practice (Gerrard and Melville, 2012-2013) (Appendix One). Through her professional experience and participation in the workshops, this member of staff was recognised by Senior Management as pivotal to providing a route from the initial contact between school, student and families in building their 'event to engage', which became known as the 'Our Future' Project. The role of this member of staff, who already had an informal relationship with the families, was crucial also to the success of my achieving access to families for this research study.

The preparation for the project began early in the spring term with the events and activities planned for the summer term. The 'Our Future' Project was funded from pupil premium funding. This funding is provided by the government to be used by publically funded schools to raise the attainment and to close the gap between pupils who are regarded as disadvantaged and their peers (DfE and EFA, 2014). The project, therefore, was designed to provide an opportunity for a group of vulnerable young people, to refocus and to engage them and their parents in a mutual school experience. I was interested in finding out how this approach would be perceived by them and what would promote success for underachieving pupils when parents and schools work together. I was also interested in what works best for parents/carers when schools work systemically to address the needs of young people. This could then be used to inform educational psychology practice.

4.2i The Study Process

The study to answer the research question of this thesis is about what can be learned from those who are considered 'hard to engage' in terms of this school and who were selected by the school to participate in the 'Our Future' Project.

Initially, I wished to interview as many families (parents and pupils) who would be prepared to meet with me. I met with the pupils joining with them on one of the 'Our Future' Project activity days. This opportunity was intended to provide some awareness and familiarity with who I was. I took part by providing a short session about how we can promote our emotional health and well-being, so that I would be a familiar face when it came to inviting participants to be interviewed. I was not previously known to any of the young people in my capacity as the Educational Psychologist allocated to the school. In my talk about emotional health and well-being I approached the young people by asking them to think about the networks that they have around them, to consider those that are supportive to them. What makes those networks supportive and what qualities are needed for mutual support. In this way the session exposed the group to systemic ideas and reflected that those around us are important to the quality of our emotional health and well-being. I had also hoped to meet the parents informally at their introductory meeting to the 'Our Future' Project by school. However, following reflection and discussion with the school staff involved, it was decided that my presence was likely to be perceived as a 'stranger'. The reference to 'researcher' and 'psychologist' would be off-putting at

this stage. It may add to the barrier of participation by families rather than be supportive to the school in their aim. It was agreed that the best approach would be if the senior teacher leading the project spoke about the research, and the key staff member referred to earlier followed this up in her personal networking with parents. Gorin, Hooper, Dyson and Cabral (2008) refer to the ethical challenges involved in conducting research with 'hard to reach' families and describe that it is usual practice for information about a study to be promoted second-party to this population through organisations or individuals with whom they already have contact.

An 'opt in' approach was taken and initially five families responded through contact with the key member of staff, who was known to and trusted by them. The reality of the difficulties that can arise with 'real world' research was beginning to impact on me, Gorin et al... (2008) and Moran-Ellis, (1996) refer to the 'feelings and concerns that the work evokes'. Gorin et al... (2008) refer also to the difficulty of the recruitment of participants. In terms of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Smith et al... (2009, p.52) highlight that students undertaking professional doctorates usually engage in four to ten interviews. I was relieved to have the initial interest of five families who would meet with me. That had the potential to equate to eight interviews: Three of the families showing interest comprised both of parent/carers and pupils of the same families; the other two families each comprising an interested parent. I had five families who had responded, and arranged to meet with the parents at home as it was agreed with them this is where they would feel most comfortable to conduct the interview. Wolfendale (1999) talks about the 'Code of Conduct for Co-Operative Research', Section three referring to 'conducive surroundings'. I duly arrived at the first house to find they were out! Through later conversation on the phone I was told that they had forgotten about the appointment but would be willing to do a phone interview at a later date. This was later followed up, but the family then decided not to take part. The right to withdraw without a reason had been made clear as part of the contract of consent. This also occurred with the second family, who called both me and the key contact adult at school to say that they no longer wished to take part.

The research study then went ahead with three families. This study would therefore identify with arguments such as proposed by Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011, p.756) who state that "more is not always more". Smith et al... (2009, p. 48-49) refer

to purposively selected samples because of the insight that they offer into a particular experience. With participants contacted via:

1. Referral from various kinds of '*gatekeepers*'. In this case, the school.
2. '*Opportunities*' as a result of one's own contacts. In this study, contact through a member of staff who had been a participant in the original workshops project.

They are participants who "represent a perspective rather than a population" (p.49). Reid, Flowers and Larkin, (2005, p.22) also state, "IPA challenges the traditional linear relationship between number of participants and value of research."

Although small in number, three families equated to six interviews which is more than appropriate for an idiographic approach such as IPA "concerned with understanding particular phenomena in particular contexts" (Smith et al... p.49). I was confident that the sample also fitted with Yardley's (2000) principles. This is supported by recommendations in Smith et al.'s (2009, p.182) commentary which recognises the validity of a small sample size in an idiographic study.

4.2ii Ethical Considerations

The Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2010) was the guidance followed for this research study. The study was granted ethical approval by the University of Sheffield School of Education Ethics Review Panel (Appendix Four). These guidelines ensured that the research process was rigorously underpinned by a respectful and trustworthy approach towards participants and in my dealings with school staff, who were the '*gatekeepers*' who had provided the opportunity for me to meet with the participants. The design approach of the research and implementation was with guidance of my Tutor from the School of Education. I was aware of the responsibility required, for example to pay particular regard to ensuring consent, confidentiality, the reduction of and potential for harm. I consider this was proven in both the intended pilot and in my dealings with the two families from the original five who opted not to participate.

All participants (parents and pupils) were given a '*Participant Information Sheet*'. There was a sheet for the adults and a modified one with the same content for the young people (Appendix Four). This ensured that everyone would be fully informed about all aspects of the research. I met with all participants to explain the research

and left them with the sheet so that they had time to consider their involvement. Before each interview I obtained written consent, and for those parents whose young people would also be participating, (which turned out to be all of them), obtained their signatures to say that they were happy for me to meet with their children. The young people were also provided with the information sheet in the same way, indicating that they had read their Participant Information Sheet and were in agreement to participate separately from their parents even though I had gained parental consent. It was important that the young people, too, were empowered in gaining their written consent, and it was also a matter of ethical best practice. I emphasised that participation was voluntary and they understood that their responses would be anonymised. The participants were referenced as P1 through to P6. P1, P2, P3 as parent participants and P4, P5, P6 as pupil participants. All participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and it was made clear about how the procedure would progress and what to do should they wish to speak with anyone about the interview or meeting with me. The named person was the key staff member in school who had provided the contacts, or my University Tutor in case of concern about my conduct, who they had as a named person with details on the Information Sheet(s).

I ensured when I met with all participants that they were still happy to consent and were free to withdraw without any explanation at any time. I also made it clear that if they were uncomfortable with any of the questions they were free to pass. I ensured that I was aware of both verbal and non-verbal cues that they might display in communicating any discomfort. There was one instance of this with P3 during the interview and I informed the participant that I would pause the recording so that I could check that there was no pressure to continue if he/she didn't want to. P3 wished to continue and the recording continued.

The participants were clear that the interviews would be voice recorded and the recording machine was visible in front of us both during the interview, clearly turned on and off stating when the beginning and end of the interview was taking place. Some of the participants wished to chat generally as I did in the general dialogue of making someone feel comfortable. The adult participants were pleased to welcome me into their homes and the warm-up to the interview was important in the process of the exchange, being itself as close to a natural dialogue as possible. This enabled

the participants freedom to tell their story as naturally as possible. It was made clear that the informal and incidental chats were not part of the purpose of the research and all participants, whether adult or young person, appreciated this. I was, however, also aware of the responsibility that I had in being part of the process of how these families would continue to view school engagement, and therefore wanted to ensure that the experience would promote engagement and not provide a further barrier to overcome. I was also aware that as an Educational Psychologist I was perhaps viewed as part of the system; 'an official' affecting the 'power dynamic'. Although I have no evidence it may also have been a contributory factor to the difficulties in recruitment for the study. It was my intention that, as part of the process, it was an opportunity to ensure that all participants felt valued, respected and empowered. Only one of the families had ever previously met a psychologist.

All participants gave feedback that they had enjoyed the opportunity to speak about the 'Our Future' Project and other areas about school that had arisen. Participants were aware that the recordings would be used for transcription and that both the audio recording and the transcript would be securely stored with encrypted password access on electronic equipment held by and known only to myself. Any paper copies would be kept safe in a locked filing cabinet to which only I have access and this would then be sent to confidential shredding following successful completion of the thesis. This way of working was familiar to me as it is consistent with the policy and practice of the Psychology Service to which I belong. I did have administration support to type the transcripts into electronic format which I had already completed by hand into a notebook from the audio recordings. The administrator was someone familiar with service policy of confidentiality and the notebook transcripts were already anonymised by me, and any reference to personal information had been removed replacing names with 'X' or 'the child' or 'the parent'. The participants had also been coded by number for anonymity. Likewise, the consent forms would also be destroyed at the end of the study. Participants were fully aware that the information would be used to support my studies in the format of a thesis which would be an open document and therefore the information that they had been provided would be public in this way. They were also aware that I would be providing school with a feedback document about 'Our Future' Project. Again, this would be anonymised and intended to help school to learn from the Project.

I found that the participants were pleased to be a part of the study and enjoyed the opportunity to talk. This is consistent with the findings of Gorin et al... (2008) that once 'hard to reach' families had become involved they were usually pleased that they had had the opportunity to contribute and enjoyed sharing their views. I was also aware of having the responsibility of not being perceived as another reason to be a cause for being a barrier to school engagement. Psychological harm is an ethical consideration (BPS, 2010), therefore ensuring that participants do not feel wronged or harmed by being part of a research project is a researcher's responsibility. Therefore, to this end I was careful not to appear intrusive in their private lives (Casell, 1982) and, whilst ensuring that participants felt comfortable, I was guarded about how I entered into open conversation with them. I was also aware that I needed to add the 'script' familiar to my practice as a psychologist with reference to disclosure which would be a reason for me to break confidentiality.

Additional ways that the potential for psychological harm could have been possible in this study is if participants perceived that I had a hidden agenda and could have felt sensitive about whether they would be stigmatised or judged in any way. Could I be trusted? Parents were particularly concerned about signing a document, although it was explained that this document was designed to protect us both and that was part of research protocol. I had to be gently insistent that the consent forms were signed and this increased the need for me to ensure that they were carefully explained. I was also aware that, in order to ensure that participants felt comfortable, consent had to be returned to regularly during the interview process to stress that it was their free choice to participate. One of the original five families asked the question several times before opting out, '*Do I have to do this?*' even though it had been clearly explained that participation was voluntary and an 'opt in' process. This identifies with the experience of Alderson and Morrow (2004) who also found that consent had to be viewed throughout as an ongoing process in order for participants to be reassured that they were in control of their agreement to participate. I found that it was necessary to be clear to both parents and young people about the time that the interviews would take. This too, I considered, was an aspect of ensuring that psychological harm was minimised. It was also important to clearly explain to them exactly what to expect from the process; particularly important for P6 who is wary of the unfamiliar.

I also found, during the interviews with two parents, that conversation around the interview led to suggesting signposting them to another service for advice. I had not foreseen this. My experience as an educational psychologist in consultations with parents, pupils and schools, however, meant that I was prepared because often in consultations signposting to other services is required. It meant that I was both knowledgeable and confident in imparting advice for a parent to follow if they wished. I was also careful not to allow the interview to become a consultation and therefore ensured that I did not offer any direct recommendations to parents. This did not occur in the pupil interviews. The pupils I found were focused on the purpose of their meeting with me -- to answer the interview questions -- and therefore their interviews tended to be slightly shorter in the time taken than the parental ones.

As I listened to the initial interview I was aware of the potential for my own personal pitfalls when interviewing. Two pitfalls in particular, made me more self-aware during subsequent interviews. The first was a tendency to 'help out' by jumping in too quickly to support answers rather than sitting back and waiting a little longer. Secondly, when I heard something that I knew fitted with the literature related to school engagement I wanted to direct the response of the participant and prompted accordingly. I was aware that this could influence the participant and not allow them to pursue this of their own accord and therefore was more aware about how I was tempering the probes and prompts following the questions. The first interview also taught me that my recording equipment was not ideal even though I had practised with it. The machine was not picking up the softer voice of the participant clearly. As a result I changed the recording machine resulting in better quality recordings throughout the remaining interviews. This experience also made me aware of the length of time it was likely to take to convert the recordings into transcripts. It was an especially painstaking experience to transcribe the first recording due to the lower sound quality. Subsequent recordings were enhanced by their better clarity and therefore less problematic to transcribe.

4.2iii The Study Demographic

The participants of the study are summarised in Table One:

Table Three: Demographic of the study participants:

Participants:	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Gender:	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Ethnicity:	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British
Participation in 'Our Future' Project:	√	√	√	√	√	√
School Year Group:	n/a	n/a	n/a	9	9	10

Additional Information

In the interests of confidentiality and anonymity the following information was considered to be too defining to be included on the table assigned to individuals:

- a. One of the Parents is a Kinship Carer with Special Guardianship.
- b. The reasons for pupils' inclusion in the 'Our Future' Project because of presenting behaviours related to exclusion, attendance, emotional and social needs are not assigned to the individual participants.
- c. The views of two young people in the same family who wished to be interviewed together for mutual support were agreed at interview, accordingly, their views are represented as one participant (P4).

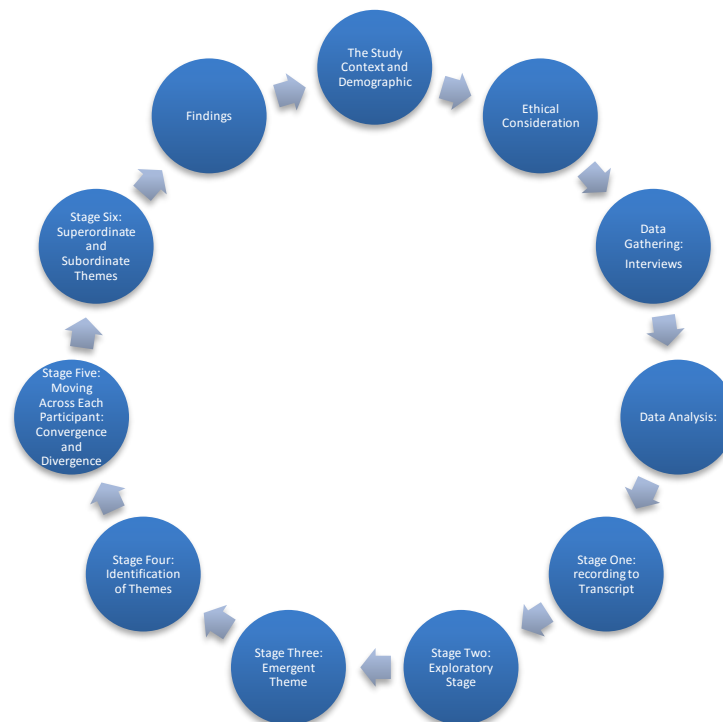
Reflection:

I was understandably nervous about whether consent and voluntary participation would be withdrawn because of my earlier experiences about recruitment and the planned pilot study. However, I also appreciated that this is the prerogative of the participant. I was both very pleased and very relieved when all interviews had successfully taken place and I had a sample of participants who were more than willing to provide their views and ideas once engaged.

4.2iv An Overview of the Study Process

The process of the study was designed to gain the perspectives of parents and pupils involved in a project 'Our Future' through interview questions. The purpose of the project was to promote engagement with the families of pupils considered to be vulnerable in the context of a particular school. The 'Our Future' Project intended that relationships and communication could be strengthened with a view that this would be a key factor in the ongoing engagement of the pupils with school once the project was over. An overview of the study process is illustrated in Table Four:

Table Four: – The Study Process: An Overview



4.3 Stages of Analysis

As a novice to the IPA research process I decided to follow the guidelines suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p.79-80) in dealing with the analysis and interpretation of the narratives provided by the participant's interviews. It enabled me to consider the process within a heuristic framework to guide me with steps that would help me to focus. I was also mindful of the opportunity such a methodology provides for the researcher to be flexible, and equally to provide a discursive account in respect of the validity of qualitative psychology. In order to provide myself with a recognised framework for the validity and quality of my research, I adopted the four broad principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research suggested by Lucy Yardley (2000). In auditing the validity of my research I mapped the check suggested by Yin (1989) onto my work. The stages were discussed with my Tutor at each step and peer reviewed with two colleagues on my team. I also discussed the process informally with systemic practitioner colleagues at the AFT conference (Liverpool, 2014).

4.3i Stages of Analysis and Process of Arriving at the Subordinate and Superordinate Themes of the Research

I listened to the tapes in a quiet and confidential space. I approached the initial listening to the recordings with a clear and open mind in order to gain insight into what each participant had to say. I consider that my reflexive attitude when listening back to the interviews respected Yardley's (Yardley, 2000) initial principle of 'sensitivity to context'. I was also mindful of ensuring that I approached the analysis in a logical way (Yin, 1989) and therefore I have presented the analysis process as a series of stages.

Reflection

I wondered how best to ensure the quality of the research by adhering to the principles set out by Lucy Yardley. I also considered that laying out the stages would help to make clear the chain of evidence required for validity (Yin). I found it helpful to write the interviews by hand as an initial phase. I was also not prepared for how time-consuming the process of data analysis would become.

Stage One: Recording to Transcript

I listened, wrote, read and re-read the transcripts in order to immerse myself and connect with the sense-making and life-world of the participants. I consider, from the informal discussion before the interviews, that the participants were pleased to have an opportunity to speak about the issues affecting their lives. (Refer to Appendix Five relating to transcripts and process of interpretation for Stages 1-3).

Stage Two: Exploratory Stage

I transferred the 'raw' transcripts into a table of 'Exploratory Comments' making notes which included reflections, thoughts and possible interpretations. I included comments and questions that arose following the suggestion of Smith et al... (2009, p.84) to categorise the data. I did this by highlighting and underlining the text. Table Three provides an example of the highlighted initial comments arising from the transcripts. The reader is drawn to the asking of the research questions denoted by (I) for 'Interviewer'.

Table Five: The Process of Interpretation Highlighted to Show Descriptive, Linguistic, Interpretative Comments and Emotional Responses

Key: **Descriptive Comments**; **Linguistic Comments**; **Interpretative Comments**;

Emotional Responses and corresponding sample from the Transcript

Numbers refer to the initial transcript line references

Original Transcript	Initial Comments
<p>I – Ask about your experience of school as a result of the project. What are your feelings towards school for putting on something like that?</p>	<p>Curious about this as Researcher mindful of the literature about the influence of the experience of family members own schooling and the views and outcomes of children</p>
<p>R: It's very good, um. The girls (124) have settled in better this year. They are really trying hard to do their best, more motivated two years ago Teachers there who are interested in them. (130)</p>	<p>Exploring whether the project has influenced the Carer perspective on school for the girls. The 'Our Future' Project</p>
<p>I – What is it about the teachers interested and the girls now much more motivated?</p>	
<p>R: It was day in day out the same. The lessons were now Girls more positive towards school, very much so, very much. (138) She's (one of the girls) urm catching up. Confidence has improved. (143-144).</p>	<p>Urm's and pauses processing and providing a reflective space? Providing insight into what is valued and how it impacts the girls for example increased motivation. 130 Prompt on my part to find out more?</p>
<p>I: Prompt about your own experience of school: (145)</p>	<p>Motivation and Personal interest in the individual</p>
<p>R: A long time ago. I just went to school.</p>	<p>Speech pattern and emphasis 143-144 The 'very' repetition 'much so, much so' 138 This also was said emphatically to</p>

<p>I – Was it a positive experience of school for yourself?</p> <p>R: Yes, I went to (different school than the girls). It was (inaudible?) better now than then (inaudible). (158)</p> <p>I – The experience, do you think that influences how you view education for the girls?</p> <p>R: Value of education – yes. My two daughters (girl's Aunties) (both did well in school) – went to University and got degrees. (160) They actually say to the girls you have to work hard. One didn't do well at school. But you still have to work hard. (161)</p> <p>I: (affirmative of the interviewer as listener) You encourage them to do their best, and their Auntie's support this? (162)</p> <p>R. Yes, yes, most definitely. (164-165)</p>	<p><u>convey the importance of the point.</u></p> <p>As researcher am I curious to draw on previous knowledge about Carers experience of the school and the difference this has made also her own experience of school158</p> <p>Outcomes suggested are that the girls have:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Settled better in school this year 2. Trying hard to do their best 3. They are more positive towards school with an increased sense of belonging. 4. Gained a sense that Teachers are interested in them Made academic gain 5. Improved confidence 6. Also see 8:200 <p>Reflecting the exchange of the Interviewer as listener to enable the narrative to flow rather than interruptive use of prompt – desire to make the research design conversational to 'hear' people's stories. 160 and 161</p> <p>Reflection of the family work ethic and value on education and the expectation of having to work hard. 162 Emotional response on the part of the I felt that I needed to affirm and reflect that R was being heard. Affirmative – use of 'yes' emphasising the point about the value of education and the value of family and family expectation 164 – 165.</p>
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Reflection

During this process, I was conscious of the way in which my own preconceptions; professional and personal views and experiences could influence the interpretative process. I was mindful of the words of Johnson quoted in Chapter 2, “we always understand from within the context of our disposition and involvement in the world” (Johnson (2000, p.90). I was also aware during this process, as I had been during the interviews and entering the participants' homes, of my professional stance as an educational psychologist. I was after all both a professional, and from their world view ‘an insider’ of the school establishment, however much I tried to remain neutral. I recognised, however, that in IPA Methodology I need also to embrace the fact that it is acceptable to be who I am in the collaborative process.

Stage Three: Emergent Themes

I made a third column on the transcript to provide a space to populate with emergent themes. There is at this stage a shift from working with the initial to the exploratory notes to process towards the identifying of emergent themes. This is illustrated in Table Six:

Table Six: Transcript with Exploratory Comments and Emergent Themes

Examples of descriptive comments are identified by **bold** text. I= Interviewer R= Response

Original Transcript	Moving from Initial to Exploratory Comments	Emergent Themes
<p>I: - What has your experience with school staff been like this year?</p> <p>R: <i>not been much difference for parents or carers but the girls have noticed things. The only thing was the meeting with parents.</i></p> <p>I (Prompt) - So who was at the meeting? (10)</p> <p>R: <i>Some of the other parents and teachers. We sat around at the tables and made suggestions. I suggested what the um, what the girls did at XXXX (the girls primary school) see the work the children are doing so they can help them with their homework. (014) T1 1:14</i></p>	<p>L.10 –I suggestion of curiosity to learn more</p> <p>Use of ‘um’ – as a pause for thought, word finding or mannerism as articulation. This figure of speech recurs throughout the transcript.</p> <p>‘I suggested’- may indicate that this Carer has the confidence to propose and articulate an idea. Is she more confident because it is an idea from her previous experience?</p> <p>014 and 015 would suggest a valuing of</p>	<p>Interest in learning</p> <p>Purpose of learning to help the children</p> <p>Purpose to support the girls</p>

<p><i>Parents should go to classes like Maths the children are doing <u>so parents can help with the homework.</u> (015) T1 1:15 and T1 1:15-22</i></p> <p>I: prompt – Did they take up the suggestion? (018)</p> <p>R: <i>Yes, yes, I never went to it though. It was completely different when at school in my day so I couldn't help them. (021) It changes all the time you know, you need to know how to work a computer (laughs). (022)</i></p> <p>I (023) - So you made these suggestions at the meeting? (Prompt) were there a lot of you?</p>	<p>education.</p> <p>The expectation that a Parent/Carer would be expected to support their child to complete homework. An example of a 'subsumption'? suggesting that helping with homework is a about valuing education? An action that would support prioritising helping a child with homework as important. Therefore, a value or belief held by this family?</p> <p>Computers provide an emphasis. The laughter (022) indicative of a mannerism to hide a shortcoming / that I would identify with this /a nervous response in self recognition that the Carer had presented an idea but not one that she felt able to follow up.</p>	<p>Recognition that homework is important</p> <p>Children need support and help with homework and their work.</p> <p>Own feelings preventive of taking the step to attend a meeting about learning even though it is thought to be important and suggested by the R.</p> <p>Generational beliefs/change would provide barriers to participation?</p>
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Reflection

My response during this process evoked a sense of excitement and fulfilment as the themes emerged and I felt that I was truly experiencing the collaborative nature of the process. However, how were the themes relating to the wider research question? What was I finding out about school engagement that would enable me to answer the research question and also how would it sit with the wider body of knowledge on the subject?

Stage Four: Identification of Themes

At this stage, the themes were not confirmed but, in order to show the process, have been mapped to show their link with the transcript and corresponding comment. This is illustrated in Table Seven.

Table Seven: Corresponding Transcript to denote the potential superordinate and subordinate themes mapped onto an extract of a Participant's (P3) Interpretative Comment

Key to link transcript with interpretative comment and potential themes **Appreciation**; **Enjoyment**; **Empowerment**

Transcript	Interpretative Comment	Potential Super-ordinate and Subordinate Themes
<p>R: <i>It was alright to be honest because they are pretty good there. Yes they are very good about X* They put all her stuff into place so that, she wasn't in school for five days, so she could have a break and then she seemed to like Mrs X as a person, seemed to be a lot better. I think that's why they did it, because she was slow or disengaged with school.</i> (5.1)</p> <p>I: The Project?</p> <p>R: <i>I think she saw it as another activity to do because like she didn't have to.... It wasn't a normal lesson for her. She sees it as something different so she could like and she is quite creative because she had to create all these different dishes she had, she was quite happy to do that. Urm she did quite enjoy it actually.</i> (5.2)</p>	<p>Linguistic – what does this colloquialism suggest? 'to be honest' regularly occurring phrase through the transcript. Emphasising the truth. A desire for the truth? Important for the truth to be told. 5.1 Suggests liking a Teacher is important. Relational aspect to appreciation, enjoyment and empowerment. School had acted on the needs of X and rated as 'pretty good'. Perception of the school by the actions to meet need. Suggests appreciation of the school by the Parent.</p> <p>A divergence of empowerment? To be disengaged is empowering in the sense that it is non-conforming and an individual is doing what they want to. However the 'OFF' enabled this Pupil to become engaged.</p> <p>5.1 – 5.2 Descriptive narrative insight into the family story. A reason why X* was involved with the project. Recognising</p>	<p>Appreciation Support Support Recognised and met needs Relational Relational</p> <p>Enjoyment Conformity – she did it when previously finds it difficult to engage with school. Also overlaps with empowerment. Creativity Positive Motivated Relational</p> <p>Empowerment Disengagement, Dislikes – divergence within Empowerment: Attendance Confidence Relational</p>

<p>I: Prompt - Hotel days?</p> <p>R: <i>No she just went and said nothing about it.</i></p>	<p>disengagement therefore the Project was an example of how to motivate this pupil to become engaged. ALSO EMPOWERMENT.</p> <p>Indication that the project was an activity that didn't have to be done. It was enjoyable. Conformity because it was voluntary?</p> <p>Characteristics of X* – creative. Practical skills would appeal and suggest enjoyment.</p> <p>'Urm' – pause for thought.</p> <p>No drama getting on with it because positive and motivated.</p>	
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*Denotes change in the transcript in order to protect confidentiality.

Reflection

I was mindful of the responsibility of ensuring that my processes were transparent and replicable. In accordance with Yardley's second broad principle I consider I have shown commitment and rigour in my attempts to move beyond the purely descriptive to be interpretative when identifying and evidencing the subordinate themes. This is evidenced by my circular reflection over the themes as described by the stages, (as referenced in table two) before coming to final decisions about what the subordinate themes would be.

Stage Five: Moving Across Each Participant

The purpose of this step was to then be able to look across the emergent themes across all of the participants. This is illustrated in Tables Six and Seven. The full table of this process and stage six can be found in Appendix Six. I was aware that within the participant accounts the attributed meanings may be different and would be subject to interpretation. The convergence and divergence across the participants is indicated with divergence identified by bold type. Further discussion about convergence and divergence follows after Table Nine and examples are shown in Tables Ten and Eleven.

Table Eight: An Example of Themes across Participants(Parents) for the subordinate theme ‘creating good memories and positive experiences’

Key: Underlining indicates emphasis **Bold** indicates divergence

Subordinate Theme	Parent P1	Parent P2	Parent P3
<p><i>Creating good memories and positive experiences</i></p> <p><i>Narratives reflecting parent/carer perspectives on how schools could promote good experiences in order to create memories that will engage and encourage pupils.</i></p>	<p><i>It was doing something different, inviting us for a meal. Yes because it was something we could do <u>with them</u> in school. T1 5:094</i></p> <p><i>They talked, buzzing. Good for the positive relationship between self and the girls. T1 5:108</i></p>	<p><i>That I think would have been something she could have looked back on and said when we first started we did this, whereas at the minute she'll look at it and say Year 7 we just did that. T2 9:9.2.</i></p> <p><i>I think if they did it with the younger kids as well, I think it might help them, you know, if they can't like settle into school or can't like, or having a few issues and stuff, if they did something like that with the younger kids.T2 8: 8.6 You know because they are all new parents as well and don't really know the school and stuff.....maybe get the Year 9's who did it last year to help out a bit, that would be nice for the younger ones to be honest. T2 8:8.7</i></p>	<p><i>X came home and he was buzzing, he was just, he was so happy. I think they were all really proud of themselves. T3 9: 14.04</i></p> <p><i>If it had grown and moved to you know maybe we are doing something once a month, it doesn't have to be something as grand as that (the OFF) T3 13: 16.06</i></p> <p><i>If it is going to make them feel good about themselves, if they've achieved something..... but the results are doing it and do it again and again and again T3 13:17.00</i></p>

Table Nine: An Example of Themes across Participants (Pupil) for the subordinate theme ‘creating good memories and positive experiences’

Key: Underlining indicates emphasis **Bold** indicates divergence

Subordinate Themes	Pupil P4	Pupil P5	Pupil P6
<p>Creating good memories and positive experiences</p>	<p><i>School can be fun if you let it.</i> T4 5: 11:20</p> <p><i>I feel more part of the school. It helps me take part in lessons.</i> T4 5: 12:49</p>	<p><i>I like cooking, I did a bit before but now I want to do it all the time. I hadn't cooked anything like that before (fish) but it was dead good.</i> T5 2: 5:61</p>	<p><i>It was so much fun, some of us already knew each other though a couple of us didn't know who each other were, so we were kind of nervous but after the first hour or so, everyone was really happy and everybody I know would all love to do it again because it was all so much fun.</i> T6 1/2: 14:47; 14:49.</p>

Reflection

I was aware that at this moment the process seemed to be taking a very linear pathway. However, although it is presented as linear, for my clarity of thought, clarity of understanding for the reader and also in the interests of replicability it needed to be a logical step-by-step account of evidence describing the process. At the same time, however, the cyclical and hermeneutic process was occurring. I likened this to the 'Dasein' because I was experiencing the 'being there' with the participants. It was difficult to express this as a logical step of the research process and at the same time communicate my lived experience of the narratives. I found that the voices of the participants largely converged in this study to comprise the themes. Was this about my interpretation and analysis? I decided that some further thought about how convergence and divergence is expressed in the themes would be helpful. Smith et al (2009, p.96) talk about the IPA process not being prescriptive, and therefore, as the analyst, 'to explore and innovate'. Therefore, discussing the perspective that I took and explaining my interpretative thinking would support the transparency and coherence of the process.

4.3ii Convergence and Divergence

I had taken divergence to mean the alternate ways in which some of the participants had related their narrative. An example would be the comparison between P4 and P6 as shown below when discussing what participation of the 'Our Future' Project had meant to them. This provides an example of the contrasting, and very different voices shown in the contributory narrative to become identified with the same subordinate theme of Confidence. In clarifying divergence in this theme, it could be argued that whilst P4 and P5 are talking more directly about confidence and using the word 'confidence' in their stories, P6 is using the language and narrative of confidence in his story. P6 provides an indirect account of his experience of how confidence grew from panic to describing something as 'good'. Had P6 overcome his fears by reducing his panic to be sufficiently confident to participate in an event and then seem to enjoy it? Or, was this divergence from being confident? I would

argue that this suggests that the participants' use of language indicates a growing confidence and provides an example of how the interpretative and analytical processes might work to describe the same theme of confidence. Both these examples, therefore, support the theme that can be described as a narrative of 'confidence' whilst sharing different stories and perspectives about being confident.

Table Ten: Examples from Pupils' Transcripts showing convergence and divergence (highlighted P4 and P6) for the Subordinate theme 'Confidence'

Key: **bold** indicates divergence

Subordinate Theme	Pupil P4	Pupil P5	Pupil P6
Confidence	<p><i>It has made me build up my confidence because I wasn't confident. More confident than in Year 7. T4 1: 21:29.</i></p> <p><i>When I'm in a group I don't like speaking or giving my ideas but now I do.</i>T4 3: 17:58</p>	<p><i>I learned that like, I earned that like er, I don't know how to explain it like er, more responsible, my confidence has increased. T5 2: 5:47</i></p> <p><i>I think if you have support from people (like parents) you feel more happier, more confident. I don't know, you just like erm, what's the word?....like feel better about yourself. T5 3: 5:67</i></p>	<p><i>At the start, the first day I was really panicking, I was refusing to come in cos I was scared because I don't know what I was going into but I er from then on, I found it good.</i>T6 2:15:40</p>

The extract in Table Ten provides an example of the way in which I interpreted convergence, to mean where ideas converged.

Here, in Table Eleven, I argue that the participants' stories provide a narrative of the theme 'Participation and Contribution', again from the perspective of different stories.

Table Eleven: An example of the converged extracts of pupils described in the theme 'participation and contribution'.

Subordinate Theme	Pupil P4	Pupil P5	Pupil P6
Participation and Contribution	<p><i>...it was fun meeting new people. New skills</i> <i>T4 3: 18:17</i></p> <p><i>.... Working as a team in a group., T4 3: 17:58</i></p>	<p><i>I think we should do another thing this year with the same people and then with the Year 7 and 8's so they do that one and we do something else.</i> <i>T5 6:5:83</i></p> <p><i>We could support them, things like days out and stuff. Things for people in need like XXXX in Need and things can go to families in need. We raise money and they give the stuff to them – I'm involved in this.</i> <i>T5 6: 5:84; 5:85</i></p>	<p><i>School is difficult again because we'd had so much fun and I actually had something to participate in and to come into school for. Then that all stopped and I felt I had nothing to come into school for. I guess my subconscious thought there's nothing for me.</i> <i>T6 5:8:50</i></p>

Stage Six: Patterns Across Themes

I continued by revisiting the themes based on the approach as suggested by Smith et al... (2009, p.96) looking for connections. I typed the references to the themes from all participants and summarised them into a master table (Table Ten). An extract showing the proposed Superordinate Theme 'Appreciation of Effort' with the subordinate themes of 'participation and contribution' and 'communication and relationship' from the master table of themes is shown below. The full table of themes and extracts can be found in Appendix Six.

Table Twelve: An Extract from the Master Table of Themes (Tables in Appendix Six)

Key: T=Transcript followed by 1, 2, 3; Page number within the transcript and line reference. Therefore: T1 1:9 = Transcript Participant 1 page 1 line 9. **BOLD type** indicates divergence.

1. Appreciation of Effort	Transcript Reference
a. <u>participation and contribution</u>	
P1:	
<i>the meeting with the parents</i>	T1 1:9/10
<i>we sat around at the tables and made suggestions, I suggested...</i>	T1 1:14
<i>It was doing something different, inviting us for a meal</i>	T1 5:094
<i>The school's efforts. Yes, I need to do my part and to do my bit.</i>	T1 8:180
<i>The Project has made a huge difference to our girls</i>	T1 2:200
P 2:	
<i>They put all her stuff into place</i>	T2 1:5.1
<i>It was alright but it could have been improved</i>	T2 4:6.2
<i>Like the way they served it (meal)</i>	T2 4:6.3
<i>I think it was because they were all participating in it, yes.</i>	T2 5:6.5

	Transcript Reference
<i>The fact that the kids had done it themselves was absolutely brilliant</i>	T2 5:6.8
I: It sounds as though it has encouraged her to do something that she wouldn't have	T2 6:7.4
R: <i>Definitely</i>	T2 6:7.5
(Contributory dialogue of ideas: T2 8:8.6 to 9:9.3)	
P 3:	
<i>I do genuinely think that they (the school) are bending over backwards, really trying</i>	T3 5:11.09
<i>They are being quite flexible with him as to because at the moment he's almost like an equal participant and he's making his own decisions which is great.</i>	T3 5:12.02
<i>I totally applaud the fact that they did it, it was wonderful.</i>	T3 12:16.02
<i>It doesn't raise me for one event.....it was a singular event</i>	T3 12:16.05
<i>I do really thank the school for doing it</i>	T3 13:16.10
<i>I think the school does what it can, erm, OfSTED make it a bit rigid for them</i>	T3 15:18.01
<i>I just wish it was more involved, even if they did some more parent participation</i>	T3 17:19.01
<i>They are trying, they are trying to engage him and I appreciate that, I really do</i>	T3 17:18:09
<i>I am really grateful for the fact they've done the you know ('Our Future Project')</i>	T3 17:19.00

	Transcript Reference
2. <u>Communication and relationship</u>	
P1:	
<i>It values by giving the support and trying to understand</i>	T1 3:065
<i>Yes, yes, yes. I know who to speak to. Not a named person but Head of Year and Tutor.</i>	T1 5:116
<i>More time to discuss the children; parents evenings are always short and rushed</i>	T1 6:130
<i>Teachers there who are interested in them</i>	T1 8:204
<i>School not taking concerns seriously and the same with children as well with the relationship (with Teachers).</i>	T1 8:205
<i>Got to have good communication. Whatever you do, good communication. Communicate and have that relationship</i>	T1 9:207
<i>I do find sometimes, that the school does things different to me; (laughter) such as cooking, baking. The girls say this to the staff! (laughs)</i>	T1 9:209
P2:	
<i>She seemed to like Mrs X as a person</i>	T2 2:51
<i>They always sort it (issues / problems) out</i>	T2 7:8.0

	Transcript Reference
<i>Definitely more helpful than any other high school I know, definitely</i>	T2 8:84
<i>Alright, it's just a pain when you ring because you ask Reception staff if you can speak to a certain member of staff..... Oh, we'll get them to ring you back but then they don't.... Reception staff didn't tell her I was waiting for her to ring.</i>	T2 3:38
<i>Never had an issue with the high school to be honest except frustrating when I phone them. But when I got through they always sort it out.</i>	T2 7:8.0
P 3:	
<i>His Dad and myself did feel a bit of pressure actually urm</i>	T3 6:12.09
<i>Well, there's always somebody there who will answer the phone</i>	T3 15:18.00
<i>If the school would ask me I would say the same</i>	T3 17:19.0

I then took the themes from the Table of Master Themes and categorised them according to occurrence using the computer and ordered them alphabetically for clarification (Appendix Six). I left the lists and categories and returned to them fresh on the following day. I then cut out the printed themes and positioned them out on flip chart paper, Figure four (Picture A). This was a tangible way of supporting my decision making. This practical and visual approach ensured that I was able to handle the labels representing the themes, and move them around. In order to gain further perspective, I wrote the categories and slightly reworked them, Figure five (Picture B). (Refer to Appendix Six for further pictures illustrating the process). This approach to grouping and regrouping culminated in the final decisions and the evidence that became the superordinate and subordinate themes.

Figure Four (Picture A): Towards sub-ordinate and super-ordinate themes. Themes printed and cut out to position and reposition to illustrate the decision making process

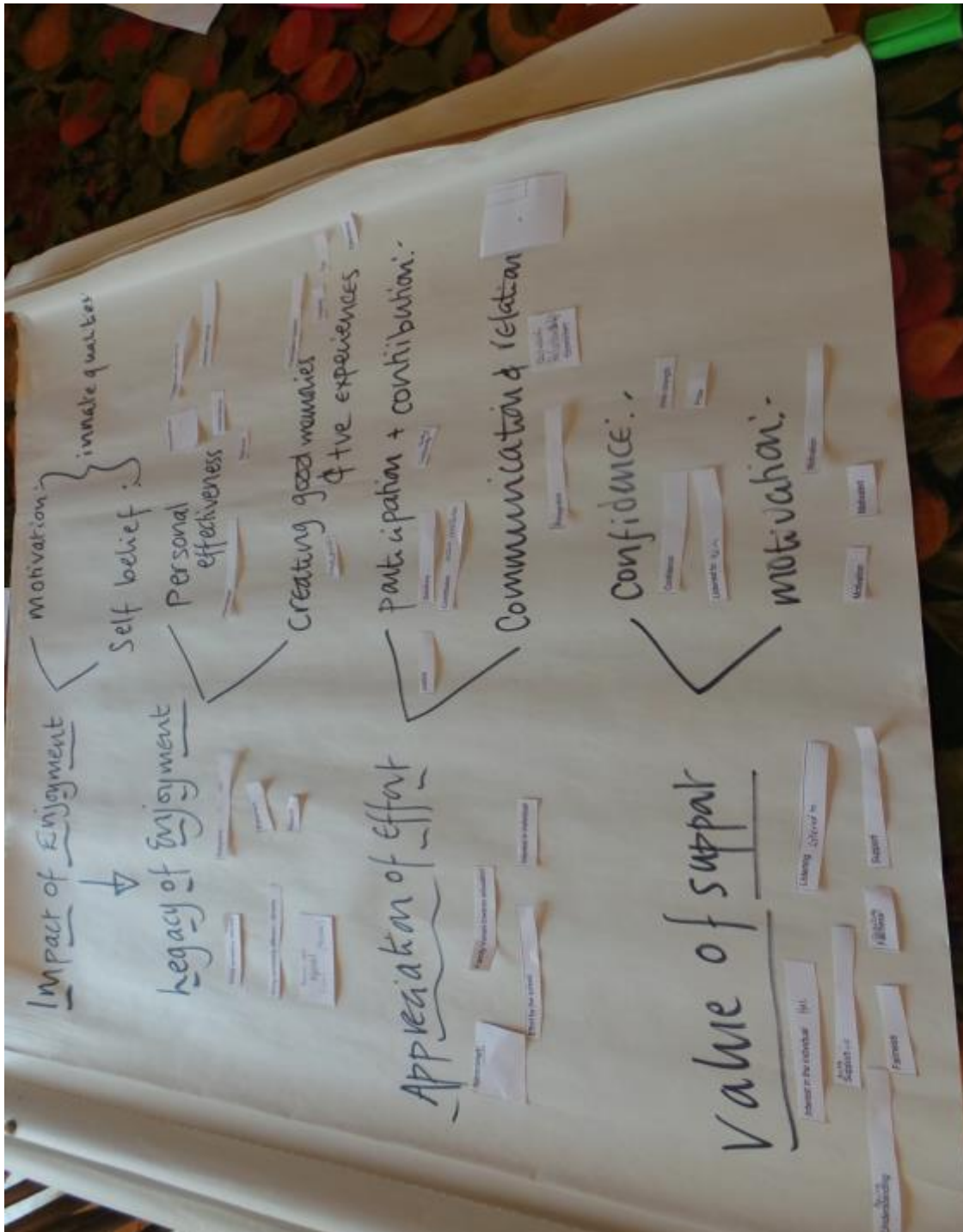
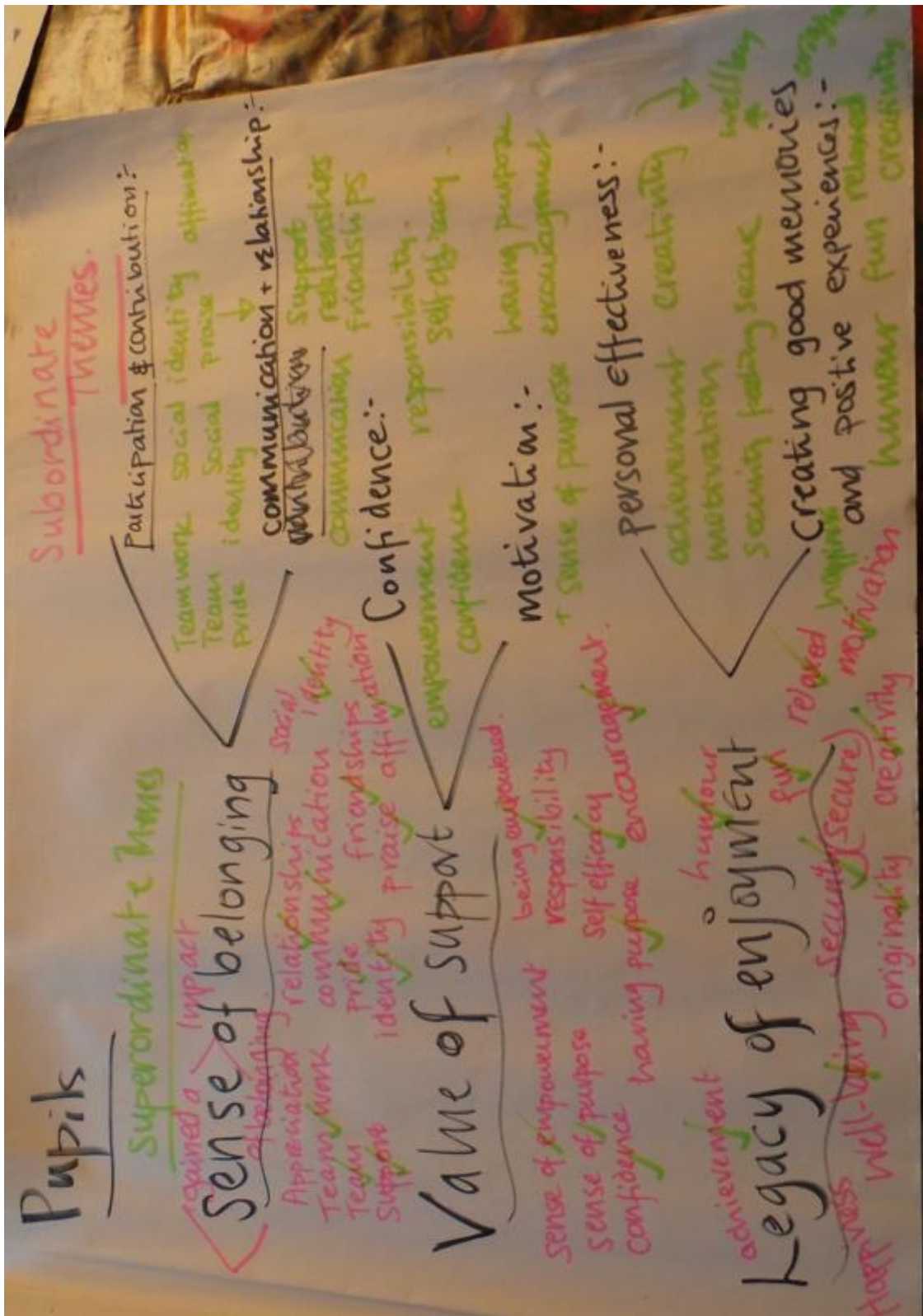


Figure Five (Picture B): Towards sub-ordinate and super-ordinate themes. Writing and re-working the categories



Reflection

At this point I am examining myself for Yardley's broad principle of 'transparency and coherence' in my stages of analysis. I think that I have been self-reflexive, and have also illustrated in practical terms my commitment to providing a piece of work that is transparent through my commitment to draft and redraft the stages. Evidence of coherence is not just about the stages of analysis; it is also about the outcome of the perspectives that I have taken to be interpretative in the coherence that will be collated as the 'Findings' derived from my analysis. I am aware that in order to make a worthwhile contribution, the overall narrative running throughout the research as a whole will be defined by the transparency and coherence that I have applied to the process.

4.3iii Subordinate and Superordinate Themes

The re-worked themes were then presented to show an overview (Table Eleven). Smith et al. (2009, p.182) talk about demonstrating a consistency with the underlying principles of IPA. In conclusion, the value of peer discussion around the principle of 'transparency and coherence' (Yardley, 2000) has been an invaluable part of the analysis in challenging validity and replicability of the process. The support of colleagues who have peer-reviewed this work and challenged my themes and the role of my supervising tutor is acknowledged as being a necessary part of the plausibility of the account.

Table Thirteen: Parents and Pupils: Collated Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

Parents Superordinate Theme	Parents Subordinate Theme	Pupils Superordinate Theme	Pupils Subordinate Theme
Appreciation of Effort	a. Participation and contribution b. Communication and Relationship	Sense of Belonging	a. Participation and contribution b. Communication and Relationship
Value of Support	a. Confidence b. Motivation	Value of Support	a. Confidence b. Motivation
Legacy of Enjoyment	a. Personal effectiveness b. Creating good memories and positive experiences	Legacy of Enjoyment	a. Personal effectiveness b. Creating good memories and positive experiences

Reflection

As the stages of analysis are completed I recognise that it has been quite a task! I think about a comment made to me during this journey that 'qualitative research is not for the faint-hearted'! I see more than ever why peer review and tutorial support are necessary to ensure that the expected rigour is apparent and that my 'account is credible' (Smith et al... 2009, P.183). Entries in my Research Diary express some of the agony and the ecstasy I experienced in the hermeneutic process to produce the higher order themes and to see beyond the descriptive. I identify that I have been active in the interpretative strand of the role of the IPA researcher. I believe that reflection and the reflexive have been part of this cyclical process throughout.

Chapter 5

Findings

In everyday life, each of us is something of a phenomenologist insofar as we genuinely listen to the stories that people tell us and insofar as we pay attention to and reflect on our own perceptions.
(Halling, 2008, p.145).

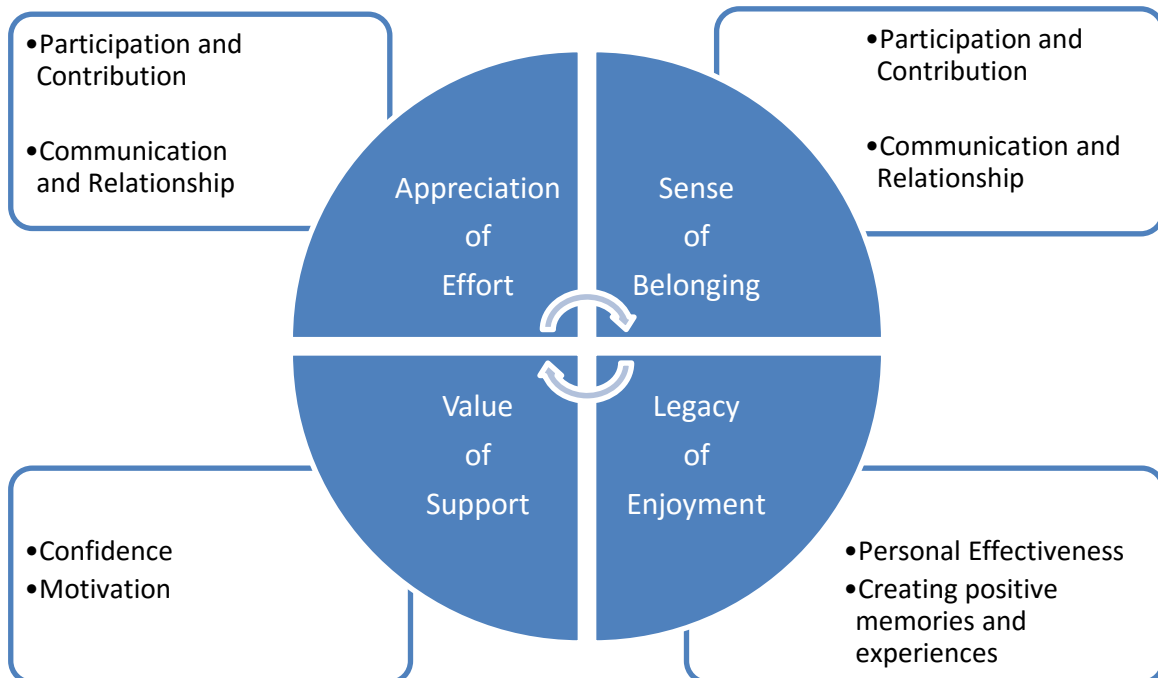
5.1 Introduction

Chapter Five provides an account of the findings from the presentation of the analysis of this research. It begins with an overview of the superordinate and subordinate themes from Table Thirteen.

5.2 An Overview of the Superordinate and Subordinate Themes

The reader is provided with a ready reference to the themes summarised in Figure Six at the outset of the chapter. The figure shows how the sub sections of the chapter are located as part of the whole findings.

Figure Six: Summary of Superordinate and Subordinate Themes.



The reader will appreciate that the themes became separated and categorised as part of the process of analysis. Figure six is intended to suggest how the themes relate and inter-relate and illustrates the holistic and hermeneutic experience of the analysis and findings. They are presented in the chapter under each of the theme headings. The voices of the participants continue to be heard through the quotations selected from the transcripts and through my interpretations to illustrate the themes. Smith (2011) suggests that claims for findings should include extracts from half of the participants in order for them to be supported. Reference to the convergence and divergence within and between the accounts is made, and the findings are punctuated by personal reflection. Reference is made to the Participants as P1, 2, 3 (Parent / Carers) and P4, 5, 6 (Pupils) in order to allow for a smoother running of the coherence of their accounts within the body of the findings. References to the transcript are made as T1, 2, 3, - relating to parents and T4, 5, 6 referring to pupils. Reference to the transcripts (T) also helps to respect participant confidentiality. Therefore, in the example, T1 7:180 the reader would refer to Transcript 1, page 7 and line 180. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

5.3 Superordinate Theme (Parents): Appreciation of Effort

*'Yes, the school's efforts. Yes, I need to do my part and to do my bit'.
(T1 7:180)*

The superordinate theme 'Appreciation of Effort' consists of the subordinate themes 'Participation and Contribution' and 'Communication and Relationship'. The perception that Parents/ Carers had of their children/s participation and contribution relates both to the 'Our Future' Project and to references about school engagement in general. The accounts from the participants suggest that participation and contribution is enhanced or distanced through communication and relationship. The findings of this study would propose a narrative that participation and contribution on the part of families that do not readily engage with school can be encouraged.

5.3i Subordinate theme (Parents): Participation and Contribution

The first of the two subordinate themes to comprise parent / carer views is participation and contribution. Participation and contribution relates on the part of the parent / carers as both their own participation and contribution to the school and

that of their children. All the families appreciated the effort made on the part of the school to put on an event. It was found that parental as well as pupil participation in an event encouraged greater participation and contribution to attend and engage with school on the part of their children once the event was over.

Although the comment from P2 is brief: *'She just went and said nothing about it'* (T2 15:2), it is a statement that reflects for the young person of this family that having a project to focus on in school meant that they 'just got on with it' and participated and contributed in a school activity without any fuss. It is an important statement for this family because participation of the young person in school activities has been a struggle with reduced attendance. To the narrative of this family it represents a shift in the attitude of their daughter.

Appreciation through participation and contribution is expressed through the recognition that school had acted on the needs of the pupil outside of the project and rated by P2 as *'pretty good'*. It provides a perception of the school by this family that they will act to meet need. This statement relates to underlying constructs that are both normative (slow) and relational (disengaged) aspects of the young person's needs as perceived by the parent.

'Yes they are very good about X. They put all her stuff into place.....I think that's why they did it, because she was slow or disengaged with school' (T 2 15:00 – 5:01).

Likewise, P3 relates the experience of their family beyond the 'Our Future' Project:

'Well, they're trying to urm, accommodate him as best as they possibly can, urm, and putting the ball quite a bit in X's court and seeing how, what do you feel comfortable with and urm, we just want you back in school, urm. They are being quite flexible with him as to ... it does help, because at the moment, he's almost like the equal participant and he's making his own decisions which is great. It empowers X. For me it is fab' (T3 6 12:00 -12.03).

P1 goes on to relate a clear sense of the Carer's feelings evoked by the positives that the project had provided for this family.

'I was ever so proud. It was a good idea. It was very enjoyable' (T15:095).

The detail of participation goes on to be described by P1; she had participated by going along to a school meeting about the forthcoming 'Our Future' Project and she had contributed by making suggestions:

'We sat around at the tables and made suggestions. I suggested what the um, what the girls did at XXXX (primary school) see the work the children are doing so they can help them with their homework' (T1 1:14).

This reference to primary school also illustrates that for P1 it is not the first time a contribution has been made. It would go on to suggest P1's underlying beliefs and family narrative that support for children in their learning through parental contribution and participation is important,

'Parents should go to classes like Maths the children are doing, so parents can help with the homework' (T1 1:15).

P3 suggests a willingness to make a greater contribution beyond the 'Our Future' Project.

'I'm grateful for the fact they've done you know ('Our Future Project'). I just wish it was more involved, even if they did some more parent participation. I know for a fact there's myself and P (Dad) who would be more than willing and X another child. Her Dad's ex forces, and her Mum, I know she works at the hospital, we you know would have made the time you know to do more to have helped. Because I did, you know, see the benefits of it but it would have been something that could go on more'. (T3 1719:00 - 19:03)

Reference to the participation and contribution of child(ren) to the 'Our Future' Project and the ongoing benefits was enthusiastically endorsed by all participants:

'The fact that the kids had done it themselves was absolutely brilliant.'(T2 56:8)

'They XXX have settled in better this year. They are really trying hard to do their best, more motivated than two years ago' (T1 6:130).

'We went to that meeting ('Our Future' Project meeting) and it seemed he had talked with me, spoken to X and went into the TAF and urm, he was asked 'what did he want' and 'what did he* want to do (had previously been out of school) and he**

wants to go to school urm, so he made the decision that he would come in and started by saying after Christmas, 'I will come in in the mornings' urm we've got a week and a half left of school to go (until Christmas) a week tomorrow' (T3 6 12:04 to 12:06). 'And he's been going' (T3 6 12:07) (as a result of engagement with the 'Our Future' Project). These narratives would suggest that parents are inclined to participate and make a contribution to school if they can see there is benefit for their children. Benefit is not just about participation in a project that has been laid on for them but about realising the ongoing benefits such as improved attendance (P2 and P3), and increased motivation to participate in school lessons (P1). All the parents were, however, prepared to participate themselves, indicating that they all valued participation even if this was not necessarily something that was easy for them to do. They had all made the step to participate by attending a meeting about the project, and following that, an event that was put in place to encourage their participation and to engage them. It suggests a narrative that participation and contribution is not always easy, as illustrated through the following extract,

P1: Parents should go to classes like Maths the children are doing, so parents can help with the homework. (T1 1 15-22)

I: prompt – Did they take up the suggestion?

P1: Yes, yes, I never went to it though. It was completely different when at school in my day so I couldn't help them. It changes all the time you know; you need to know how to work a computer (laughs) (T1 1 15 – 0:22).

earlier in the interview P1 had shared that she had made suggestions in a meeting. It suggests that she has the confidence to propose and articulate an idea. However, is she more confident because that idea was one from her previous experience of when the children were at primary school? The expectation that supporting children to complete homework is part of the responsibility and participation of family suggests it is a value or belief held in the narrative of this family. It would suggest that families are able to engage, participate and contribute at different levels. Attending a maths class could be perceived as risky for some, but for all the individuals in this study, the non-traditional school experience of the 'Our Future' Project was something in which they felt able to participate in.

The tension of having a child who finds it difficult to engage with school is experienced and provides an example of divergence from the narrative of participation and contribution within the superordinate theme of appreciation,

'His dad and myself did feel a bit of pressure actually urm... It's as if the school thought that we hadn't tried hard enough or that we weren't being forceful enough which wasn't the case' (T3 612:09 -13:00).

Being self-critical and having perceptions that a school is questioning your parenting also contributes to feelings of alienation which would polarise families from engaging with school, participating and making a contribution.

Itwas just the impression that we got was that urm, or whether that was us being critical of ourselves, we felt it (T3 713:01 – 13:02).

Reflection

I felt that there had been evidenced some clear messages about participation and contribution through these narratives. It reveals a picture that is not straightforward for schools or families. Perceptions of prevailing attitudes and underlying feelings associated with risk-taking and pressure are 'lived-world' barriers to participation and contribution. However, it also reflects that barriers can be overcome through an experience that has inclined someone to feel appreciative. I was excited, as I thought that clear messages were being created through the narratives that were suggesting a willingness to participate and contribute in school activities on the part of parents / carers. However, I also thought that it exposed a narrative about personal confidence. An example is the parent who had suggested about going to a maths class but then didn't go herself. Did she perhaps feel aware that her experience of education wouldn't relate to the modern experience of being taught mathematics? I suggest that it represents a psychological risk of exposure. It may also suggest a social construct of the perceived expectation that parents/carers may have both of themselves and by teachers.

5.3ii Subordinate theme (Parents): Communication and Relationship

Good communication and relationships were highlighted by all participants. They knew whom to contact, and how easily they could speak to someone in school about the needs or issues affecting their children. P1 and P3 make references to how easily someone could be contacted on the phone as a measure of their satisfaction of communication with the school.

'Yes, yes, yes. I know who to speak to. Not a named person but Head of Year and Tutor' (T1 3:065).

P2 provides a contradictory message although levels of frustration and satisfaction with communication are reflected. I suspect that the level of frustration was played down in the interview. It was an area referred to by the daughter during her interview. This would suggest that it was a bigger issue to the parent than indicated.

P5 (the daughter) related, *'Sometimes my Mum gets quite angry and says school never listens....'* (T5 45.69).

It is an insight that may relate to the effect that participants may tell interviewers what they think they want to hear or play down (or up) narratives.

'Alright, it's just a pain when you ring because you ask Reception staff if you can speak to a certain member of staff....Oh we'll get them to ring you back but then they don't. Reception staff didn't tell her I was waiting for her to ring'(T2 33.8).

'Never had an issue with the high school to be honest except frustrating when I phone them. But when I got through they always sort it out' (T2 78.0).

Communication and relationship interrelates with confidence that school will do something and provide support for their children this was quite explicit for P1 –

I can always ring them up. They actually helped by talking to XXXX (the children) and worked with XXXX (name of staff member) through their problems as well (T1 3039-44).

I would interpret from these examples that they provide evidence to illustrate that being able to communicate with school about particular issues is important for

parents. It suggests that parents will be proactive in engaging with the school and that these parents were happy to communicate using the phone.

'I've been waiting 3 weeks for 'X' (Head of Year) to ring me. I've spoke to her since because I rang her back' (T2 35.8).

Other ways in which communication and relationship are valued involves time for discussing the children,

'More time to discuss the children parents' evenings are always short and rushed' (T1 5106:116).

It would suggest that parents are more inclined to want to discuss their children than sometimes staff in schools believe. However, it might depend on the agenda on the parts of the school and family. Both P3 and P2 had rich narratives about their issues with school (see T2 1 5:00 - 5:02; T3, 411:02 – 11:05) and referral to the TAF (Team Around the Family) process (T3 612:04 – 12:06) also provides a framework (albeit a formal one) through which school and families communicate and relate.

P1, however, is clear about the importance of communication and positive relationships.

'Got to have good communication. Whatever you do good communication, yes, communicate and have that relationship. I do find sometimes that the school does things different to me (laughter) such as cooking, baking. XXX (children) say this to the staff! (laughs)' (T1 8207-209).

This extract provides an illustration of the good relationship and positive engagement with school by P1 and the family. The language has a suggestion of 'banter' with the school through a connection with something that P1 can relate to. It is within her comfort zone, and therefore she may feel empowered.

I propose that this example is one of an exploration of difference, as once again it opens up questions about levels of engagement with schools. It suggests that communication and relationship with school is dependent upon what a project involves, and to how people feel that they can engage with it. This example further suggests that engaging with a school to eat, compared with learning, as discussed earlier in participation and contribution, is to be deemed less 'risky' to a sense of self

from a psychological perspective for P1. It also illustrates that the children of this family are confident to communicate and relate to staff using the currency of a perceived strength in the family narrative.

Reflection

I was concerned that I was drawing on the P1 narrative more than examples from the others. However, it is an example that expands communication and relationship and draws on a relational perspective of the sense of self (Gergen, 1996). From this example I was interested in the notion of the beliefs that construct the narratives families have. It led to thoughts about how this could be further explored in the discussion chapter of the thesis.

5.4 Superordinate Theme (Pupils): Sense of Belonging

'It was so nice for all of us to be together and sit down and talk...'

(T6 2 20:05)

For the young people involved in the 'Our Future' Project the evidence suggested that being part of the project increased their sense of belonging in the school. It emphasised their participation to be a part of, and contribute to not only a specific event but in terms of their longer-term feelings, towards engagement with school and their relationships with other people.

5.4i Subordinate Theme (Pupils): Participation and Contribution

P4 was keen to describe the activities that they had been a part of on Day One. He relates the team building skills required, such as making a tee-pee out of bamboo sticks (T4 3:18:16) and how this led to working with other people and sharing ideas, *'working as a team in a group'*(T4 3 18:17) *'taking ideas from other people and using them'* (T4 3 18:18), *'When I'm in a group I don't like speaking or giving my ideas but now I do'* (T4 3: 17:58).

P5 also had a renewed sense of participation, firstly speaking to different people as part of the Project, *'yes, I got to know people that I wouldn't normally speak to before'* (T5 1 9:44), and later in terms of greater participation in school,

'This year they've sorted out courses for me and erm, I've thingy like, I've had one, one detention, and I haven't been excluded. Towards the end of last year like I did two courses and my behaviour started to change' (T5 5 9:69 -9.70).

Thirdly, P5 talks about ways in which her personal participation and contribution could be extended and was prepared to extend her involvement through 'XXXX (name of place) in Need',

'I think we should do another thing this year with the same people and then with the Year 7 and 8's so they do that one. We can help and they can do that one and we do something else.

I: (Prompt) Like mentor Year 7?

P5: We could support them, things like days out and stuff. Things for people in need like XXXX in Need and things can go to families in need. We raise money and they give the stuff to them – I'm involved in this. It's about having something(T5 6 9:76-9:77).

It also underlines how having something to be a part of is important to these young people. P6 is reflective about this and also shares:

'School is difficult again because we'd had so much fun and I actually had something to participate in and to come into school for. Then that all stopped and I felt I had nothing to come into school for. I guess my subconscious thought there's nothing for me' (T6 4 21:04-21:06).

The perception of P6 underlines in this very powerful quote the need to have a personal focus which would suggest that it is a strong element of engagement. A key ingredient in the individual's identity within the psychological term 'sense of belonging' is substantiated by the narratives of P4, 5, and 6. They all underlie the concept of an individual's well-being in relation to a lived experience of a phenomenon as feeling part of something.

The second subordinate theme that arose from the narratives and constitutes the superordinate theme of 'sense of belonging' is the young people's narratives about communication and relationships.

5.4ii Subordinate Theme (Pupils): Communication and Relationship

P4, 5 and 6, like the Parents/Carers, needed to know that the school 'listens'. This is made clear by P5 who earlier in the narrative (T5 5 9:69-9:70) talks about teachers who are *'dead nice and dead helpful'*, and *'school having sorted out courses'* which it is thought has led to her behaviour change and being about, *'If school listens'*(T5 69:72) because P5's experience is that school has communicated with her in order to meet her needs.

P4 refers to the reciprocal relationship between pupils and teachers when communicating,

'.....it depends on how you act, how a teacher behaves back to you'
(T48 21:24).

Specific ideas of how teachers should relate to pupils is also conveyed, they are described as *'making something fun'*, *'being funny'* and *'being fun'* (T4 8 21:26, 21:27).

For P4 it also *'helps when teachers explain it so you understand it'* (T4 9 23:34).

Referring to parental responses to communication and relationship with school, P5 is reflective and, although she refers to parental anger, also recognises that from her own experience school does listen and respond in the help that they provide,

'Sometimes my Mum gets quite angry and says school never listens but I suppose like on the other side of it they do help, they do listen' (T5 4 9:61).

The importance to P6 of experiencing a sense of belonging through opportunities to communicate and to relate to others in a psychologically safe and comfortable way is reiterated throughout the narrative. It is summarised in his words about the 'Our Future' Project:

'We all got to learn so much new stuff. It was so nice for all of us to be together and sit down and talk about each and all of our problems and play, and play games' (T6 220:03-20:06).

5.5 Superordinate Theme (Parents and Pupils): Value of Support

'It empowers X (child). For Me (Parent) it is fab' (T3 6 12:03).

The finding from these families is that they value the support given to them by a school. They relate that if concerns are followed up they feel supported and this instils confidence because they have been heard. Knowing that they have been heard both enables and empowers them because receiving support is reinforcing to them. Positive reinforcement enhances confidence to communicate, which creates and strengthens positive engagement with school.

5.5i Subordinate theme (Parents and Pupils): Confidence

Continuing from the findings that 'Appreciation of Effort' by a school enhances communication and relationships, we have seen that confidence increases in parents, knowing that there is someone on the phone that they can contact in school. The satisfaction that is derived from how a need is met equates with increased confidence in the school relationship. This is further illustrated in the following extract and underlines the value that these parents place on the support given to them by school. They recognise that this increases confidence, not just for themselves in knowing that the school will be supportive, but also in making a difference to the confidence level of a young person.

I: Clarifying – *I think from what you've told me you're already very positive towards school.*

P1: *Positive before and now more positive yes, yes already positive about it. The Project has made a huge difference to our girls, yes, be more motivated – yes, increased confidence. A lot of support and encouragement, yes, yes.*

I: *What would be off putting?*

P1: *Schools not taking concerns seriously and the same with children as well with the relationship. X (one of the children) it has made a lot of difference to her, her confidence (T1 8: 200-204).*

This same finding is illustrated through the narrative of P3 who is talking about an experience by their child of verbal bullying. It illustrates how being heard and being effective is an important value placed on the home–school relationship:

'X is reluctant to go to school, urm has been a few issues, urm with the way the staff, urm in some respects it could have been dealt with better, urm some of the feedback we've had from the urm school about what the teachers have witnessed and urm and what's happened is that its banter and I put to the school and his dad put to the school that it's not banter if you're on the receiving end and if you're on the receiving end what's banter? To somebody else is torture on a daily basis urm er I appreciate there is only so much they can do' (T3 1 10:00 – 10:01).

P3 goes on later in the interview, when continuing to expand on this narrative, to say: *'So the little bit of faith he built back up again just went'* (T3 310:10) illustrating how quickly confidence can be eroded. It may suggest that the rise and fall of a child's confidence can be an underlying barrier that reflects the confidence a parent might have towards their willingness to engage with a school.

However, P3 suggests that a school can address this barrier by providing support to families both in the everyday relationships with pupils and in special events where new skills are learned. Both are valued by families.

P3: *'I'm just grateful to the school for being as, as patient as they have been. You know, because there's plenty of time left, you know, for drawing the line in the sand and that's it. They are trying, they are trying to engage him and I appreciate that, I really do. I'm grateful for the fact they've done the you know ('Our Future' Project)'* (T3 17 18:08 – 19:00).

The effect of daily support enhances pupil confidence and this is apparent in several ways through the narratives of P4, 5 and 6:

'I learned that like, I learned that like er, I don't know how to explain it like er, more responsible, my confidence has increased' (T5 29:45).

P6 requires daily support to enable increased confidence to occur resulting in attendance at school:

'Their support helps me every day. I just don't want to come anymore but they help me, they give me the confidence to come in. You can tell I'm here today' (T6 622:07).

P4 values the support given through the Project as being important for the enhancement of skills,

'When I'm in a group I don't like speaking or giving my ideas but now I do' (T4 3 17:58).

'It has made me build up my confidence because I wasn't confident. More confident than in Year 7 (T4 1 21:29).

and P2 relates the effect of raised confidence because of the impact of learning new skills,

P2: *'She was like "YES". Yes it increased her confidence, it probably did because it is something she doesn't cook.....' (T2 6 7:2).*

Reflection

I recognised that I probably led with my questioning. Was it because I wanted to hear it and I drew my own agenda into the narrative? Was it about my inexperience as an interviewer using an IPA methodology? Did I want to make sure that I had something that I thought might substantiate the accounts from parents? I do, however, feel that it is justified to prompt and think that it lends substance to the findings. It is also probably an example of being consciously part of the hermeneutic circle. If I was conscious of being part of the hermeneutic circle perhaps it changed the way in which I asked subsequent questions?

5.5ii Subordinate Theme (Parents and Pupils): Motivation

Motivation sat alongside confidence for Parents/Carers and Pupils who participated in the 'Our Future' Project.

A range of perceptions was held between all three families evident in their narratives that the level of support given related to their motivation. It related to motivation on the part of parents to:

- engage with school
- support their children.

On the part of pupils to:

- participate in an event
- learn new skills

- attend school
- contribute in lessons
- have the confidence to transfer skills beyond school.

The multi-faceted concept of motivation is suggested through the Parent/Carer narratives. Initially that all three families were motivated to engage with school occurred in their attending the special events related to the 'Our Future' Project. Within the event they were then able to express the effects of the event to motivate the use of skills and activities through the participation of the young people. Beyond the 'Our Future' Project 'Come Dine with Me' event, reference is made to improved motivation for school (P1).

P2: 'To be fair, it did look quite nice. Even the stuff I wasn't eating because I wouldn't eat it because I don't like it but it did actually look quite nice. The fact the kids had all done it themselves was absolutely brilliant' (T2 5 6:8).

P1: 'The Project has made a huge difference to our girls, yes, be more motivated – yes, increased confidence. A lot of support and encouragement, yes, yes' (T1 8 200-201).

P3: 'That's the thing, chuck him in a situation like that and he just seems to erm, thrive, and find strengths within himself' (T3 12 16:00).

The narratives also gave recognition to the value placed on everyday support by the school. It also emphasises a response from Parents/Carers to

'see the work the children are doing so they can help them with their homework' (T1 1014).

P1 goes on to acknowledge, *'Yes, the school's efforts. Also, agreeing, 'Yes I need to do my part and to do my bit' (T1 7:180).*

The latter suggests recognition that the school, in being supportive and making an effort for the family, has a direct correlation for P1 to respond and do their part whether it is to support an event or to support the children with homework.

However, for P2 whilst recognising and valuing the current support in place for her daughter and the value of the 'Our Future' Project it would have made a difference if it had come earlier for her -

P2: *'I think if they'd done that when more were in Year 7 I think she would have been a different person to what she actually was'*(T2 913:27).

This statement provides insight into the recognition on the part of Parents/Carers that support provided on the part of a school would affect the motivation of a young person and make a significant difference to who they become.

P1 talks about increased motivation and the way in which this has created change, *'XXXXX (children) have settled in better this year. They are really trying hard to do their best, more motivated (than) two years agoTeachers there who are interested in them'* (T1 6 130).

This example also provides insight into what is valued and the impact of motivation. It is suggested, based on P1's perspective, that XXXX have:

1. settled better in school this year
2. are trying hard to do their best
3. developed a more positive attitude towards school
4. gained a sense that teachers are interested in them

Recognition that increased confidence can enhance motivation is summarised by P2:

'Yes it increases her confidence, it probably did because it is something she doesn't cook, she just wouldn't cook it so She cooks more now (at home) than she did before. It has motivated her, definitely, definitely'(T2 6 7:1).

This observation is reflected in the parallel narrative of P5 who became proactive in her choice to participate. P5 was motivated it seems because the responsibility was put on her, *'We had to* make it. We had to* sort everything out.'* (T5 39:51:).

The passion in P5's voice is represented by the underline of 'we had to'; it was down to them not only to create but to produce something of value and worth for their families. The circle of having the opportunity to experience, to increase interest and to increase confidence is also evident in the voice of P5:

'I like cooking, I did a bit before but now I want to do it all the time. I hadn't cooked anything like that before (fish) but it was dead good' (T5 39:49).

P3 also refers to the tension and power of the intrinsic:

'It just seems to be something within him. If you put him in that sort of situation erm, he does seem to have these leadership qualities about him. That I don't know if it is inherent in his personality erm, that it is putting him in the situation, to pull it out of him, that makes X think. That's when he will switch on, because when he came home from the Come Dine with Me, he was so chuffed because it makes him believe that "I can do that" (T3 11 15:05 -15:07).

The narratives of pupils suggested that they were more empowered and therefore motivation increased, in the words of P4,

'like doing stuff, like doing stuff for myself....I can do it myself like, I can do it if I try. I can do it myself' (T4 2 20:40).

The repetition of 'I can do' is almost a mantra. It reflects internal motivation, '***I can do it if I try***'*and reflects the shift because of the effect of having had support by school on P4's motivation.

The impact of the project as told through the narrative of P6, I would argue, illustrates how important extrinsic motivation is to encourage and effect change in an individual. However, it differs to that of P4 in that we are left (at this stage) to guess whether the motivation will be sufficiently strong for P6 to have lasting impact.

'I was coming into school even more. Yes, I was more keen, I was happy to come in every day because I knew that we were going to be discussing it even more and that even that was just helping me and it ended and that was it – what now?'(T6 4 21:03-21:04).

*underlining and **bold** highlights emphasis

Reflection

I was aware that the accounts related to the experiences of parents about the 'Our Future' Project event tended to lack interpretative focus and were prone to be descriptive. I think that they reflect personal opinion and what was interesting was that the narratives went on to offer constructive solutions which weren't reflected in the themes that I used. However, it suggests a finding that if the opinions of those parents had been sought they would have provided the school with a rich source of information about other ideas for engagement events. It is an example that will be drawn upon in the Discussion Chapter. The pupil narratives are also a rich seam, and opened questions in my mind about the shift in change from extrinsic motivation to become intrinsic within an individual. I drew parallels with the strength of my own motivation when writing this thesis, particularly the tension that I experienced on some occasions between balancing the demands and time constraints of the 'day job' and being an EP with time for my own study.

5.6 Superordinate Theme (Parents and Pupils): Legacy of Enjoyment

'School can be fun if you let it' (T4 5 11:20).

All participants relate their experience of the 'Our Future' Project as enjoyable, and this has left a legacy of good memories and positive experiences that has enhanced engagement with school and has empowered individuals to become personally more effective in a variety of ways.

5.6i Subordinate theme (Parents and Pupils): Personal Effectiveness

Motivation and confidence, therefore, overlap with personal effectiveness, and are examples of 'lived –world' experiences not falling into neat categories (the 'multi-variables referred to by Billington, 2014) however painstakingly themes have been re-worked. I have chosen 'personal effectiveness' to label the subordinate theme rather than 'self-efficacy' because I think that it best describes key words and phrases that arose from the narratives during interpretation and analysis. I also

consider that 'personal effectiveness' fits more readily with the social construct and systemic paradigm of this thesis.

Collectively, taken from the narratives amongst the parents were:

'Can do' attitude, communication, confidence, conformity, critical, empowerment, frustration, ideas to contribute, independence, inner strength, new skills, persistence, pride, proactive, positive, recognition, responsibility, solutions, 'stepping out of comfort zone'.

and the pupils:

Attendance, change, engagement, 'in your own hands to change things', skills, trying hard, 'out of comfort zone', over-coming, perceptive, purpose, self-awareness, well-being, work ethic, willingness.

The emphasis on personal effectiveness is to relate how, as a result of a person's current level of confidence and motivation, the participant is able to make choices which may suggest how personally effective he or she may perceive themselves to be in a particular situation. The earlier cited example from P1 whose experience is described as a parent suggesting going to classes so that he or she can help her children with their homework (T1 1 015) but not going to it herself (T1 1:021) is a case in point. However, participation at an 'Our Future' Project event was something that this parent could access with a greater level of confidence. The connection that P1 has with school is revealed throughout the narrative in her references to appreciation of the support given to the children.

'I can always ring them up. They actually helped by talking to XXXX (children) and worked with XXXX through their problems as well. They had quite a few problems actually because I already had a social worker involved. It is helpful knowing someone at school who would talk to the girls' (T1 3039 – 054).

Towards the end of the interview it is suggested that cooking is something that empowers P1 (T1 8:208-209). The tone of laughter expressed is about connection, *'I do find that the school does things different to me (laughter) such as cooking, baking.'* compared to the laugh in recognising that *'you need to know how to work a computer'* (laughs) (T1 1 022) which makes reference to something out of the individual's comfort zone.

Likewise, references are made by P2 and P3 to their children's confidence and increased personal effectiveness to participate in a school activity that is perceived as being accessible to them,

'I think she saw it as another activity to do because like she didn't have to.... It wasn't a normal lesson for her. She sees it as something different so she could like and she is quite creative because she had to create all these different dishes she had, she was quite happy to do that. Urm she did quite enjoy it actually' (T2 1 5:2).

'Yes, anything practical she will do it' (T2 3 5:6). *'She is quite a practical person to be fair. Yes, it was helpful to her'* (T2 7:7:9).

'it just seems to be something within him. If you put him in that sort of situation erm, he does seem to have these leadership qualities about him. That I don't know if it is inherent in his personality erm, that it is pulling him in the situation, to pull it out of him, that makes X think. That's when he will switch on, because when he came home from the Come Dine with Me, he was so chuffed because it makes him believe that "I can do that"' (T3 11 15:05 - 15:07).

This perception of connection P1, P2 and P3 have with the school has many similarities to the approach needed to promote engagement with children and young people. Therefore, the findings of this study would suggest that school engagement hinges on accessibility, communication and a relational approach. It also depends on an individual's level of personal effectiveness in a given situation, as described in the examples above. Personal effectiveness may not necessarily be pro-social, for example a young person may be personally effective in choosing to opt out of school, they may be making a personally effective choice, but it is not a desired outcome for educators or, in the main, for most families. Therefore, in this study personal effectiveness is interpreted as an individual's ability to have the competence to respond in ways that would illustrate they have acted in a pro-social way. Pro-social ways in this study would include young people and families showing personal effectiveness as their motivation and confidence to participate in the 'Our Future' Project. It illustrates the individual's response to a special event. It is illustrated by examples of their competence to handle the everyday interaction with school and for the young people (P4, P5, P6) includes the daily interface within the

school environment. The daily interface with the environment could be described in the study as behaviours such as the competences and confidence to turn up to school (P6), and competencies and confidence such as speaking out to contribute in a lesson (P4). The views, values and family scripts (refer to page 31) affect the personal effectiveness of the individual, for example, beliefs and values, such as P4's gender perception,

'Usually boys do the cooking and girls do setting the table – we thought about swapping it around and that worked.' (T4 4 15:60).

Suggesting that P4 felt personally effective enough to challenge and contribute this idea which was adopted by the group and, on this occasion, worked successfully. It leaves questions such as: had it not worked, would it have confirmed P4's gender beliefs and constructs about gender roles? or, if the individual's self-esteem had been fragile, would it have confirmed his or her belief had the idea not worked, that his or her ideas are 'rubbish' and never work? The result of which would be the eroding of confidence in his or her self-belief, motivation and confidence to contribute in the future.

This example represents the complexity of thoughts, feelings and beliefs, and the levels of inner conflict that comprise the individual's response to the construct of participation and contribution and therefore how personally effective an individual becomes.

The level of personal effectiveness is evident when a school asks an individual to be involved in their own decision making. P3 describes how this empowered their child (P6) to attend school,

'He was asked what did he want and what did he want to do? ...and he wants to go to school...he made the decision that he would come in'(T3 6 12:04 –12:06).

The underline refers to the emphasis placed on 'he' by P3 stressing the emotion behind the statement. Although the amount of confidence that it took for the young person (P6) to access the first day of the 'Our Future' Project is shared:

'At the start, the very first day I was really panicking, I was refusing to come in cos I was scared because I don't know what I was going into but I er from then on, I found it good' (T6 2 20:06),

the narrative goes on to describe how P6's confidence within his role in the 'Our Future' Project grew and reveals the development of his skills to be personally effective to lead and supervise:

'It was a lot of fun, it really really was. I was Head Chef, I supervised all the other foods, how it was set out, and cooked the spaghetti bolognese' (T6 5 8 21:06-21:07).

'Mum and Dad said it was brilliant. They were surprised like how much I was doing in it cos er, it was a big role to do, they said they were really proud of me' (T6 6 22:03).

P4 describes how she realises that it is in her power to change something with emphasis and repetition of *'I can do it myself'* in the following extract:

'Like doing stuff, like doing stuff for myself, instead of the other people in the class helping. I can do it myself like, I can do it if I try. I can do it myself (T4 2 20:40).

The following extract from the interview with P5 also underlines this;

P5: *'Um before I was bad in school I was always er like, I was always naughty then after if I like er started behaving and I think my behaviour has got better now, you know since the 'Our Future', it was dead good'.*

I: *Behaviour? How's it changed?*

P5: *'I'm not getting in trouble as much. I was excluded. Since 'Our Future' I have been excluded but nothing like as much'.*

I: *The 'Our Future'?*

P5: *'It was dead good, it wasn't all strict and sensible like, it was like, I don't know, it wasn't strict, it was like dead good. It wasn't like you have to do this, you have to do that, you know, like they gave you the choice. Yes, they didn't force you to do anything'*

Yes, I got to know people that I wouldn't normally speak to before. It was dead good because we did team building stuff.

I: *What did you learn about yourself?*

P5: *'I learned that like, I learned that like er, I don't know how to explain it like er, more responsible, my confidence has increased. I didn't er like to really speak to different people and stuff like that. I er stayed with the people I er knew but now I will er speak to everyone' (T5 1, 2: 9:40 – 9:46).*

These examples constitute evidence for the finding that became the superordinate theme of 'Legacy of Enjoyment'. They illustrate that across all participants there was a transference over time from the 'Our Future' Project to skills of engagement with school, such as greater confidence in the classroom (P4), reduced exclusion (P5) and increased attendance (P6). The evidence suggests that this was directly linked to the enjoyment that had been experienced by the pupils in their participation as part of the 'Our Future' Project.

Reflection

I found this part of the chapter on the legacy of enjoyment the most exciting to write. As I revisited the narratives the difference that the 'Our Future' Project had made to these families was increasingly apparent, in particular the difference made to the young people was a message that was coming over clearly. Had I done justice in relaying the narratives and using the examples and quotes? Could I have used more, or the ones I did use, differently? I thought, too, about the influence of the group on the individual and the processes that occur within groups (Bion, 1961), for example, 'the unconscious alliances' that occur in groups, how the 'Our Future' participants had come together, and how they had responded as a group in preparing for an event to which their parents/carers were to be invited. I also thought about the day that I had attended their team building event. On that day, the young people took part in an activity where they were instructed as a group to make structures from bamboo canes. I observed as 'basic assumptions' took place. 'Basic assumptions', in Bion's theory, such as 'dependency', waiting for the (assumed) leader to do everything, or 'pairing' where members allied to offer solutions. How was the self-efficacy of the individual affecting the 'unconscious alliance' in this, a newly formed group?

5.6ii Subordinate theme (Parents and Pupils): Creating good memories and positive experiences

The voices across both parents and pupils were unanimous in describing the enjoyment that had been derived from taking part in the 'Our Future Project' as a specific event designed to engage families and to make a difference for young people in their engagement with school.

In describing the response after arriving home, parents related:

P1: *'Tired, mayhem – it was busy, non-stop.....They talked, buzzing. Good for the positive relationship between self and the girls'* (T1 4 105).

P2: *'Yes, yes she did say she enjoyed it and she did say she, that she'd definitely do it again. She would, yes, do that again but I think she was more made up because she put on a fish dish and she hates it'* (T2 5 6:9 – 7:0).

P3: *'X came home and he was buzzing, he was just, he was so happy. I think they were all really proud of themselves'* (T3 9 14.04).

The psychological perspective of the joint experience of shared memories is appreciated in particular by P1,

'It was doing something different inviting us for a meal. Yes, because it was something we could do with them in school' (T1 4 094).

'They talked, buzzing. Good for the positive relationship between self and the girls' (T1 5 105).

However, whilst P3 was pleased, *'I totally applaud the fact that they did it, it was wonderful'* (T3 12 16:02).

P3, like P2, emphasises that she wishes it was an ongoing event,

P3: *'I just wish the programme continued, that it wasn't just a thing, because personally if you are trying to show a child if for whatever reason has doubts about his self that feelings or whatever reason, they put onto that project because they were all hand-picked to go on it. It doesn't raise me for one event. Yes, they loved it, I understand it and I think quite a few of the kids that were in X's group that evening all got something out of it and they all went away quite chuffed with themselves but it was a singular event'* (T3 12 16:03 -16:05).

P2: *'I think if they did it with the younger kids as well, I think it might help them, you know, if they can't like settle into school or can't like, or having a few issues and stuff, if they did something like that with the younger kids'* (T2 8 13:8-13:10).

P2: *'You know because they are all new parents as well and don't really know the school and stuff.....maybe get the Year 9's who did it last year to help out a bit, that would be nice for the younger ones to be honest'* (T2 8 13.9).

In my view these latter quotes are visionary and will be discussed in greater detail in the wider context of the perception that schools often have about trying to engage parents. It would suggest that parents are more willing to be part of solutions than is often perceived by schools. The participants had ideas about having the event as part of a rolling programme and building on the skills of each year group, with the older pupils mentoring the younger ones. It also refers to 'the catching' of the new parents of Year 7 pupils who would be ripe for engagement when transition information is shared. It would provide a focus on 'hard to engage' families from the outset. It suggests that it is not about families being 'hard to engage' but schools

asking the question, 'how to engage?' The phrase, 'It doesn't raise me for one event' (P3 12: 16:02) underlined as emphasis from the narrative of P3. This provides an example of a divergence in the narrative. However, although there is reference to the event being singular, P3 had a suggestion:

'If it had grown and moved to you know maybe we are doing something once a month, it doesn't have to be something as grand as that (the 'Our Future Project')' (T3 13 16.06).

'If it is going to make them feel good about themselves, if they've achieved something..... but the results are doing it and do it again and again and again' (T3 13 17.00).

It would seem that the findings suggest that families perceive special events as enjoyable and can provide parents with an opportunity for shared memories with their children. An event can give families a positive opinion about school. It contributes to a perception that school is supportive and wants 'the best' for young people who for a variety of reasons find it hard to engage with school. Parents recognise that such events do have a positive legacy of impact on attitude, skills and participation of their children towards school but also ask, is once enough?

Asking 'is once enough?' the pupil narratives provide some insight that it might be:

'I like cooking, I did a bit before but now I want to do it all the time. I hadn't cooked anything like that before (fish) but it was dead good' (T5 39:49).

The narrative of P5 refers to the achievement of new skills beyond the 'Our Future' event.

The phrases prefixed by 'dead' are ones that appear throughout the narrative of P5 and highlight her emphasis of when something is 'very' and highly pleasing to her. The narrative of P5 goes on to talk about beyond the 'Our Future',

P5: *'My mum said it was "dead good", she said "the fish tasted dead nice". I'd never cooked fish before so I was proud of myself'*.

P5: *'I think if you have support from people (like parents) you feel more happier, more confident. I don't know, you just like erm, what's the word? My words don't come out, like feel better about yourself'* (T5 4 9:55).

P4 refers to an increased sense of belonging in the school and the effect that this has made in taking part and making a contribution in lessons:

P4: *'I feel more part of the school. It helps me take part in lessons'* (T4 5 12:49).

P4 also recognises that support brings possibilities beyond what you can do for yourself:

P4: 'I think it makes a difference on people because they know that they can get support from their families and do what they want if they have that support'. (T4 6 13:05).

P6 enthusiastically expressed enjoyment emphasising the 'so much':

'It was so much fun, some of us already knew each other though a couple of us didn't know who each other were, so we were kind of nervous, but after the first hour or so, everyone was really happy and everybody I know would all love to do it again because it was all so much fun' (T6 1/2 20:03-20:06).

For P6, the 'Our Future' Project gave the opportunity for fears to be overcome and the confidence to want to have the experience again. Later in the narrative P6 makes further insightful points that are grounded in reality and practicalities, for example stating:

'Up to the school, they have to pay for everything. Up to the time and effort that the school needs to do, to do stuff like that (T6 7 22:08).

'Do more stuff like we did at the XXX (hotel). It made us all feel special, it made us all feel like we are actually doing something'(T6 7 23:00).

The uncertainty that change might bring if the project were repeated is not far from the thoughts of P6:

'If we were going to do something like 'Our Future' again, we should do it at the hotel because we went there, it is a safe and comfortable place to be. If we go to a new place it's going to be a kind of scary. It's going to be unsure. If we go to the same place and the same rooms, it's kind er we know the last time we went there we had so much fun so we know yer, we know it's gonna be good!' (T6 8 22:03 – 22:05).

How these feelings of psychological safety can be replicated for P6 would be part of the legacy of the enjoyment experienced by him in taking part in the 'Our Future' Project. However, alongside the legacy of the project P6 states:

'My parents, my parents give me the confidence. They give me the strength to come in every day because they are helping me so much and it feels really good when they are helping me' (T6 8 23:01).

'I know when I'm in school I'm happy here, any way once I'm here, once I'm in its okay' (T6 823:02).

This would suggest that the findings expressed through the narratives of P4, P5 and P6 point also to the legacy of the quality of the relationship between parents and pupils once the special event has passed, if long term outcomes for engagement are to be achieved.

5.7 Summary of Findings

The findings from the participants interviewed as part of the 'Our Future' Project suggest that, if a school provides an event that is seen by parents as something that will benefit their children, they are likely to engage if previously there has been difficulties with engagement. The research study also suggested that engagement is dependent upon the psychological demands it will make. The threshold of psychological demand will vary between parents and pupils as individuals. Engagement is dependent on how confident and motivated an individual feels to be personally effective in accessing events, learning new skills and taking risks beyond their perceived level of competence. The research study suggests that personal effectiveness is based upon a complexity of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and levels of inner conflict that can be experienced by individuals, depending upon the demands that will be made upon them. For one individual just walking into a school may be the challenge; for another, it could be about the uncertainties around the expectations that may be put on them if they do agree to take part in an activity. Therefore, engagement hinges upon the psychological accessibility (of the activity) for an individual, good communication (between school with parents and pupils, and between parents and pupils within the family) and the strength of the relationships that can be sustained between parents, pupil and school staff, and parents and their children once an event is over.

Parents and pupils appreciate and value the effort that schools make in doing something that is different for them. This is seen as supportive and enhances confidence and motivation resulting in empowerment, not just to take part in a special event but in the transferability to everyday activities of school life. The perception that individuals have about how a school meets their needs balances against the level of confidence they have in the school relationship. Therefore, if

they wish to engage with parents and make a difference for pupils, a school would need to be prepared to continually prove themselves to parents. The single event may be effective but only if change for a family member is sustained.

Pupils expressed that the 'Our Future' Project increased their sense of belonging in school, not just for the event but in their longer-term feelings of engagement and relationships with other people.

All participants would describe their experience of the 'Our Future' Project as enjoyable. It was an event that created a legacy of good memories and positive experiences.

Reflection

The narratives raise some key points that relate to the perceptions schools may have about the engagement of parents. These narratives reflect that parents have ideas, solutions and willingness for engagement but need to be heard in the right ways. It raises many thoughts about the role of the EP in providing the opportunities for parents to be heard. The EP role as researcher and the insights that can be provided through research can inform schools to work to the best effect in their engagement with families.

Chapter Six

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

Dunsmuir, Cole and Wolfe, (2014, p.6) state that,

political decision-making has been influenced by a growing body of research that reinforces the importance of parental involvement in children's education.

One purpose of this chapter is to consider the broad research question of this study within the growing body of research. It is also to discuss the wider understanding that exists about family diversity and school-based interventions to promote engagement. A further purpose of this chapter is to locate the findings of the research within previous literature and relate it to systemic practice and psychological theory. The means are discussed, in which the findings of the study illuminate and support existing literature and, arguably, may refute it.

The purpose of this research study was to try and answer the broad question -

What can be learned about promoting parent and pupil engagement with school from experiences of parents and pupils' participation in a school initiative, the 'Our Future' Project?

As a result, four superordinate themes were found through the process of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, two in common between parents and their children, and one unique to each group of participants. The superordinate themes in common between all participants were *'Value of Support'* and *'Legacy of Enjoyment'*. The unique superordinate themes were between parent participants *'Appreciation of Effort'* and for their children as pupils, *'Sense of Belonging'*.

Reference to quotes from the interviews with the participants that led to the superordinate themes ensures that authentic voices remain at the heart of the discussion. The chapter is arranged so that each of the superordinate themes are presented and discussed in turn, under the heading for each theme, alongside pertinent literature and psychological theory.

6.2 Appreciation of Effort

Fundamental to family engagement is the premise that families feel viewed positively (Totsuka et al... 2014). Where schools are prepared to offer an initiative that is bespoke to context (Harris and Goodall, 2007) for families then they are more likely to succeed. Parents involved in the 'Our Future' Project stated that they appreciated the effort on the part of the school through the increased participation and contribution that they were prepared to make, not just related to the Project but also in the way they continued to view the effort made by school to meet the needs of their children once the initiative was over.

6.2i Participation and Contribution

Appreciation of the effort made by a school is linked with the benefits that can be seen for the child (ren) of an individual family and also in the psychological shift of the empowerment that is experienced. Practical and confidence issues are reflected in the wider literature as to why parents would find school an intimidating place, especially if concerns are raised about the behaviour of their children (Bridges, 1987). Therefore, parents feel more or less able to participate or contribute. The 'Our Future' Project correlates with the finding of the wider body of literature about the feeling of being judged that can be evoked if your child is not compliant. In the 'Our Future' Project this tension was experienced by Participant 3: (T3 6 12:09 - 13:00) who stated that, as parents, they had felt under pressure because they had perceived that the school thought they were not trying hard enough to get their child into school. This family realised this wasn't actually the case, but I would argue that it illustrates broader themes; which include: being self-critical, having perceptions that a school is questioning your parenting, and feelings of alienation. These are broader narratives which would polarise families from engaging with school, participating and making a contribution as referenced by P3. This perception on the part of parents has been qualified through the broader findings of evaluations of parenting programmes (Moran. Ghate and van der Merwe, 2004). These evaluations reflect the sensitivity involved in creating relational change between schools and families and the negative feelings experienced by some parents and their perceptions of feeling stigmatised (Barrett, 2003). Other studies, such as Patterson, Mockford and Stewart-Brown (2005), have found that parents of vulnerable pupils have an inherent sense of feeling that they are 'bad parents' and as such are 'dreadful and useless',

often with low self-esteem. A finding of the 'Our Future' Project study suggested that families are able to engage, participate and contribute at different levels even if they have felt 'dreadful and useless'. In accordance with psychological theory, the psychological make-up of an individual, their beliefs and experiences would be contributory factors. Theory related to family beliefs offers an explanation of this complex connection of behaviours and emotions (Rivett and Street, 2009). A parent feeling a sense of pride in the success and contribution made by their son or daughter in the 'Come Dine with Me' experience had the potential to change a narrative for that family. The personal experience of successful feedback in a social environment provides an opportunity for a different view of reality to be experienced and discovered by them.

6.2ii Communication and Relationship

At the most basic level the 'Our Future' Project showed that parents recognised the value of being able to communicate with school. The transcripts from all three parents referred to the value of communication and the ease in speaking to someone on the phone, the length of time that it took for a call to be returned, and knowing with whom they needed to speak:

'Well, there's always somebody there who will answer the phone' (T3 1618:00).

The young people also commented on this when speaking about their parents,

'Sometimes my mum gets quite angry and says school never listens but I suppose like on the other side of it they do help, they do listen' (T5 4 9:61).

Contrary to the perception sometimes given by schools about the willingness of parents to communicate and relate to them, the 'Our Future' Project suggested that parents were more inclined to want to discuss their children with school than is sometimes thought. However, this is also related to the parental view of issues. The 'Our Future' Project reflected the views of two of the participants (P2 and P3) who refer to issues about which they would always communicate with the school as being; to ensure that their child got the necessary help needed, (T2, 1 5:00) and bullying (T3, 4 11:02). References to the wider literature showed that families, "wanted professionals to understand their realities" (Morris, 2013; p.205). It also connects with the wider literature in terms of the IPA methodology used in this study, where participants were provided with an opportunity to state their realities and give

professionals an insight into their 'lived world'. However, where parents are confident to communicate with school about issues, it is also important that these are managed, and more formal frameworks have become necessary in order to communicate and relate with parents and to provide them with an opportunity to have a voice. The Team Around the Family (TAF) process (DfE, 2012) is one such example of a framework used by professionals in managing and addressing family needs. In the 'Our Future' Project this framework was endorsed by both the Parent (P3) and Young Person (P6) as an approach that enabled them to communicate and tell their story and effect change through increased engagement and improved attendance,

P3: *'.....and went into the TAF and urm, he was asked 'what did he* want' and 'what did he* want to do (had previously been out of school) and he* wants to go to school....'* (T3 6 12:04 – 12:06).

P6: *'I can't really remember how. I think it was starting to get better at the start of the year and then it got worse, really really bad. It was really bad and I was starting to battle it even more'. 'That has been a real challenge. Things got so bad, I just refused to come in'*

I: Is there anything being done in school to help you about that?

P6: *'Yes lots, TAF meetings, CAMHS, Psychologist.....'* (T6 1 20:03).

How comfortable parents feel in their communication and relationship with school will affect willingness to engage resulting in subsequent change for pupils in that family. This is illustrated by P1 in the 'Our Future' Project (P1 7:212-216) who relates her views on the importance of good communication, but having also the confidence and competence in an area such as baking that provides empowerment for this individual. The DfE, (2011), placed an emphasis on improving parental confidence. Comment made on page 19 of the literature review stated, 'that by implication this opens the way to greater innovation in practice'. The 'Our Future' Project achieved 'greater innovation in practice' by pupils relating to someone (P1) in school at their own competence level. It would suggest a positive outcome in the way the parents and pupils felt more comfortable with school. This translated into the children's increased confidence to communicate positively with teaching staff.

On the part of the school the 'Our Future' Project showed initiative to 'extend professionalism' (Bessant and Tidd, 2011) and to use 'experience and knowledge of what works with their client population' underlying the literature of the 'bespoke' proposed by Harris and Goodall, 2007.

Literature such as McGowan, (2014, p.25) insists that school-based family-minded practice should ensure that children feel safe in the relationships between them, the parents and professionals, "before we can take risks in our exploration of change". This reflects the understanding within the complexity that is necessary in order to have the confidence of families to effect change and promote engagement, relationship and communication. Sanders and Ralph (2002), and Crozier (2012), promote the message that a 'one size fits all' approach is not the answer if change is to be effective. Within a social constructionist perspective (Burr, 1995) partnership with parents and how comfortable a parent feels in their communication with professionals challenges the power relationship (Mc Queen and Hobbs, 2014). In a respectful and non-blaming approach people are enabled; they feel psychologically more comfortable. Therefore, a space that allows for alternative voices and meanings opens (Burnham,1992). In this space, new meanings can be made and change can take place that will bring about improved outcomes for young people (Moran et al. 2004). The 'Our Future' Project was an original approach for this school population. However, Staines (2014) goes on to propose that originality and relational approaches alone are not sufficient if ongoing engagement is to be achieved. A careful response to feedback from parents is necessary for ongoing engagement. This, too, was substantiated by the 'Our Future' Project. The voices of all participants had narratives which stemmed from the need for the impetus created through the project to continue if it was to remain effective. It is summed up through the voice of P3 who emphasises;

'It doesn't raise me for one event. Yes, they loved it, I understand it and I think quite a few of the kids that were in X's group that evening all got something out of it and they all went away quite chuffed with themselves but it was a singular event' (T3 13 16:05).

'If the school would ask me, I would say the same, I wouldn't have any qualms right, I just wish the whole thing would be extended some more' (T3 18 19:04).

All participants had feasible ideas about the way in which the concept of a 'bespoke initiative' could be extended. It would suggest that a solution-focused approach which underlines the importance of the idea of the resourcefulness of the client (de Shazer, 1985) could be adopted with the necessary conditions in place to respond carefully to parental feedback about interventions. The EP would be well placed to have a proactive role in empowering schools to develop skills, so that parents are actively involved in providing feedback and their perspectives taken into account (Roffey, 2013). This confirms to parents that their responses are valued and built upon, rather than being an area of missed opportunity.

Reflection

I was encouraged by the ways in which the voices of the participants of this study are contributing to both the historical and current body of the literature. This is also encouraging from the perspective that it fits with the aspiration, stated by Yardley (2000), within the broad principle of 'something interesting and useful'. It would also add to the validity of this study towards answering the research question.

I felt that the psychological complexity that underlies the challenges faced between school, parents and pupils to engage is also a strong narrative running through the discussion. In both these aspects the hermeneutic circle is extended as the psychological narrative 'thickens'; i.e. the research question through the interpretative stance is applied to the discussion.

6.3 Sense of Belonging

'I feel more part of the school' (T4 5 12:49).

Goodenow, (1993, p.80) describes school connectedness as:

The extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included and supported by others in the school environment.

The value of having a sense of connectedness or belonging has been well documented over time in psychological literature, (Shochet, Dadds, Ham and Montague (2006). Reviews of connectedness and sense of belonging have been

widely researched in the school context (Anderman and Freeman, 2004). The impact on good mental health functioning, and the correlation between pupil academic motivation, school performance and adjustment are also well documented (Furlong, Whipple, St Jean, Simental, Soliz and Punthuna 2003; Goodenow, 1993), as are links between students' sense of belonging, attitudes toward school motivation and achievement (Osterman, 2000). Findings from the 'Our Future' Project adds to the literature that is representative to each of these areas. Evidence from the interviews referring to change is evidenced through examples of changed behaviour:

P5: *'I was always naughty then after I like started behaving and I think my behaviour has got better now you know since the 'Our Future' Project'* (T5 1 9:40).

Attitude towards school:

P6: *'I was coming into school even more. Yes I was more keen...'* (T6 4 15:56).

Motivation:

P4: *'It helps me take part in lessons'* (T4 5 12:49:),

and achievement:

P5: *'Well I do some courses, urm, I go to Aspire and we do ASDAN. I'm working to my Level 1....'* (T5 3 9:63).

The pupils' experience of a 'sense of belonging' is also substantiated by references throughout the transcripts referring to increased confidence. Increased confidence is represented through examples of pupil participation during the event such as taking a lead: Pupil 3, *'I was Head Chef, supervised all the other foods'* (T6 5 21:07); trying new things such as cooking fish, *'I hadn't cooked anything like that before (fish) but it was dead good'* (T5 39:50) and in transference of skills beyond the Project such as *'joining in in class'* (T4 7.12).

It would therefore appear that feelings of competence in what can be achieved had increased for these young people. Considering this systemically, the intervention by school staff provided a context for change for this group of young people. Parents recognised that their children had undiscovered skills and competences. The systemic concept of circularity (Penn, 1982; Cecchin, 1987) could be applied here, describing how responses to interactions occur. Circularity here is found where feelings of competence meant that each young person had felt able to take risks and

as a result their confidence had increased. Positive feedback from both school staff and their parents had resulted in their increased confidence to participate. Arguably this created change within the pupils who felt enabled to contribute. A willingness to contribute creating an increased sense of belonging to the school system.

Reflection

As I wrote this part of the chapter I felt that a purpose of the 'Our Future' Project was evident. The achievements of the individual participants in an event and the longer-term effectiveness of the project highlighted by the sense of belonging that was experienced by these pupils.

6.4 Value of Support

Families appreciate when someone truly tries to get to know them and understand the factors affecting them (Totsuka et al. 2014). The literature also suggests that in being viewed positively, families respond when professionals are relational and reflective (Jordan, 2008). The values, ideas and beliefs held by a family are presented through the way in which they operate in the world (Palazzoli et al. 1978). Therefore, the value placed by families on the way in which a school seeks to engage with them for the benefit of their children arguably also reflects the values held by them. The findings of this study reflect that, when a school is supportive, both parents and young people value this. The reasons for valuing the support of school in providing an intervention and in addressing the individual needs of pupils are seen as enabling and empowering. Parents report change for the better in their children, such as increased confidence (P1), improved motivation (P2) and better school attendance (P3). P6 and P4 illustrate the value of support, by parents (P6) *'Their support helps me every day'* (T6 722:07:), and that of school staff (P4), *'Like help you with stuff.... Say if in English the teachers would come over'* (T4 8 19:58). As has been suggested in the findings of this study, support begins with knowing that concerns will be heard and that phones will be answered. It is in these ways, the study suggests, that parents measure whether or not a school is supportive to them and whether their needs are being met. Fundamental to human need is feeling valued and having some influence or power (Long, 2009). Therefore, if perceived as

being supportive, the tensions and challenges of partnership with families are eased (Crozier, 2000; Roffey, 2013) and the support is valued. Family members become more accessible to each other and to schools. This was illustrated in several ways through the findings of the 'Our Future Project' study, such as the recognition of spending quality time together, '*it was something that we could do with them in school*', '*it was nice to have individual time*' (T1 4 116); realising that their children had benefitted, and providing time to reflect that '*X High School is definitely more helpful than any other high school I know, definitely*' (T2 8 13:6).

Generational experiences of school under achievement are highlighted by Crozier. Initiatives are therefore required to address barriers, such as dispelling the myths created by the experiences of family members of what a particular school was like a generation ago and going to classes to learn how to help children with subject homework (T11015). Initiatives are crucial if trans-generational scripts are to shift from 'replicative' to 'corrective' and the narrative is to be reinterpreted for better outcomes for current and future generations (Byng-Hall (1995); White, 2007).

The wider implications of this are the ways in which families 'feel validated and experience a supportive school environment' (Bowman and Goldberg, 1983). In finding that the perceptions of all the participants of the 'Our Future' Project study are appreciative of the support provided to them by this particular school, the benefits of a supportive school appear to be understood. It would suggest that those parents and pupils feel validated in their experience of being supported. There is evidence that the element of 'risk' experienced by the individual participants is reflected through their narratives, and examples would include the sharing of ideas but not feeling able to follow up with participation (P1) and the feelings of pressure experienced by P3.

The value of support experienced by pupils overcoming and taking risk is reflected through examples of empowerment (P1) '*I can do it myself*' (T4 2 20:40); and is particularly illustrated by P3 in overcoming anxiety, from, '*that has been a real challenge. Things got so bad, I just refused to come in*' (T6 1 20:01) '*the first day (of the project) I was really panicking'....'I was scared*' ...to '*If I had the chance to do it again I would*' (T6 2 20:06).

Experiencing psychological safety is crucial to the creation of a supportive environment and the well-being of the individual. Seligman's work about boosting positive emotions summarises a route to discovering strengths and overcoming challenges.

Positive emotion leads to exploration which leads to mastery
and mastery leads not only to more positive emotion but to
the discovery of your child's signature strengths

(Seligman, 2003, p.231).

The meeting of new challenges, as illustrated, revealed each participant having taken a risk. It could be about as a parent turning up to a meeting, or a pupil who finds the confidence to 'have a go'. P3 recognised signature strengths in her child;

'he does seem to have these leadership qualities about him.....chuck him in a situation like that and he just seems to erm, thrive, and find strengths within himself' (T3 12 16:00), this substantiates the view of Seligman. Linking emotion to the discovery of strengths, P3 also describes her son in ways which could infer that negative emotions mean a 'downward spiral', such as the avoidance of new challenges.

'He can be a wee bit glass half empty rather than a glass half full you know. Sometimes 'I can't', we keep going though' (T3 12 15:09).

'We' above, emphasises the element of support given by parents and required at such times by parents for their children. Support could be thought of in systemic theory as the 'feedback' (Bateson, 1972) provided by individuals to each other. In the extract above, P3 recognises the strengths and qualities of her son and provides him with support when 'the going gets tough, to keep going'. I would also consider that an example of the belief system for this family is revealed in this statement. It is reflected by the son, (P6) who requires support to enable increased confidence to occur to enable him to attend school. *'Their support helps me every day. I just don't want to come anymore but they help me, they give me the confidence to come in. You can tell I'm here today'* (T6 622:07).

Reflection

The ethos and culture of a school to promote inclusivity and provide a supportive environment is emphasised through the findings of literature. I was pleased that this study provided further evidence of the fundamental value of support. On a personal level I understand how valuable the support of family, friends and colleagues is. Such support provides emotional resources to overcome challenges and to achieve. The way in which the discussion about the value of support emphasised the family belief system, and the role of emotion in motivation and discovery was an unexpected development of the discussion.

6.5 Legacy of Enjoyment

Lumby (2008) highlights the strong link between enjoyment and learning. If therefore, as the narratives of the participants of the 'Our Future' Project suggest, positive feelings or emotions have been evoked, resulting in increased achievement, increased confidence and meeting new challenges, then this research would contribute to that body of knowledge.

Legislation such as the Children Act (2004); Children and Families Act (2014); initiatives such as SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning) (DCSF, 2005) and programmes such as ELSA (Burton, 2009), which have been promoted and delivered by Educational Psychology Services provide background to the understanding of the role and importance of social, emotional and relational aspects of learning (Tew, 2010). Carr (2004b), for example, proposed several components that constitute happiness in children and young people. Findings from this study would suggest that the experience of the parent and pupil participants would identify with those components in the following ways:

1. Shared activity; the skills to relate positively and to feel part of a group is a strong source of well-being.
2. A school that feels safe and caring, with opportunity to learn in an emotionally secure and enjoyable manner.

3. Comparisons where schools can provide fair and reasonable reference groups for pupils will cultivate positive self-esteem.

In providing a reference group for the participants of the 'Our Future' Project in a shared activity, learning was achieved and well-being enhanced. Evidence from the participants would go on to suggest that this has left a legacy as indicated through the subordinate themes of 'personal effectiveness' and 'creating good memories and positive experiences'. Arguably, it would mean the ingredients of sustainability are present and indications from parent participants would suggest that this is so. The pupils, in recognising change within them-selves, would also reflect this sustainability as part of the legacy of enjoyment. This would be described as enhanced and sustained levels of confidence, increased social opportunity, talking with other people who were previously not known, being '*so much fun*' (T6 320:08-20:09), and improvement in behaviour, '*my behaviour started to change*' (T5 69:70).

IPA, as the chosen methodology for this study, substantiates the qualitative aspect of gaining insight into the constructs of an individual. The constructs of an individual when interacting with systems in this study are with teachers, parents and peers. It is recognised that there are many complexities in describing a personal construct such as 'well-being' associated with one described as 'enjoyment'. However, when adopting a systemic perspective, psychology's traditional emphasis on the individual is challenged in terms of the understanding of the wider and systemic considerations. The perspective shifts to the 'what', 'how' and 'when', rather than the 'why' and the process of the interactions that are taking place. This, in my view, justifies the stance that a 'legacy of enjoyment' is both proved by the individual narratives of participants as they talk through the 'what' they did, 'how' they participated in the activities, and the 'when' of the engagement of shared experience. This consequently enables them to identify internalised attributes such as enhanced confidence, changed behaviour and the emotional engagement with an activity in developing their skills which they describe as 'fun'.

Reflection

This part of the chapter enabled me to consider a framework in which Educational Psychologists come to understand their role. Sue Roffey, in her article, describes the conversations on well-being that Educational Psychologists have ‘at all levels’, not just in advocating for children and young people, but also in the support of teachers and in providing in-service training’ (p.21). This will be an area that I wish to discuss in greater depth later in the chapter. As the understanding of current legislation and moves to promote well-being amongst children and young people in schools continues to evolve, SEAL (2005), TAMHS (2009); (Targetted Mental Health in Schools) Project and in 2015 Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) the EP is provided with a key role. As a result of reflecting on my own position and part played in these initiatives, I realised how not only was it about my role in promoting psychological well-being to both school staff, parents and pupils, but also amongst my own colleagues and my own well-being. It is therefore about ‘looking after the systems’, and how well the individuals in systems are cared for. In order to promote well-being personally and professionally, how well do I model emotional literacy and maintain my own psychological well-being? Of course, unless I do, then my own curiosity and creativity will be compromised.

6.6 Further Discussion

This study was designed to explore engagement with school through the experiences of parents and pupils who took part in a school initiative. It looks at how each of the superordinate themes arose and substantiates understanding of the underlying questions of this research. It also examines how the findings of the study might add further to the evidence base of the wider body of literature and professional practice. The interview questions, whilst designed to “provide a detailed account of the experience under investigation” (Smith et al... 2009, p. 59), also enabled the participants to talk at length and provide detailed accounts of their experience. This approach also addressed my personal interest to consider family-minded practice and how a framework taken from systemic theory and practice could be applied to research. This study charts unfamiliar territory, contributing to the

growing evidence base related to family-minded practice. It also broadens the literature from education practice as proposed by Brandon and Connolly (2012), who are exponents of drawing upon experiences of a multi-agency context to 'think family'.

6.6i Were the Objectives of the Research Study met?

The first objective was to 'evaluate the experiences and perceptions of parents and pupils with school engagement; the second, to 'gain insight into the effectiveness of the initiative from parent and pupil perspectives'.

The accounts of the parents and pupils clearly suggest that the 'Our Future' Project was worthwhile. References are made by the participants that suggest this school is seen as a place that was welcoming and aimed to meet their needs, not just because of the 'Our Future' Project but more widely in addressing the needs of individuals. The school was identified as one that listened. It acted upon what it said it would do at several levels, it made an effort for positive outcomes for the pupils involved and thereby endeared themselves to the parents. The evidence that suggests a legacy from the enjoyment derived from the experience of the initiative is strong. Whilst one of the parent participants (P3) provides divergence from the strength of this narrative in the comment that *'it doesn't raise me for one event'* (T3 13 16:05), this participant, as well as the others, was able to provide examples and insight into how initiatives could be developed and extended. The ideas provided were all mindful of cost both in time and resources, suggesting that they need not be ambitious in order to satisfy need and meet the objective of engagement. This realistic opinion reflects a reference in the literature to how individuals are 'experts of themselves' (Rose 1996, p.59). This also illustrates how, by listening to individuals, solutions are there to be found. It would suggest that this study supports the premise that by asking parents (Day, 2013) barriers are reduced. Although schools could see this as problematic it also presents them with possibilities (Yeatman, 1994). In seeing through the lenses of reframing and solution-focused thinking (Ajmal and Rhodes, 1995; Murphy and Duncan, 1997) a paradigm shift can then take place. Instead of narratives such as 'hard to reach' the alternative rhetoric can come to the fore and 'new meanings' (Bowman and Goldberg, 1983) can be made. Narrative approaches promote 'co-constructed intervention'; they recognise that each person is an expert in their own lives and someone who is capable of change (White and

Epston, 1990). Connotations surrounding the rhetoric and narrative of disengagement and vulnerability means that instead a possibility perspective is created (Freedman and Coombs, 1996; Hanko, 1999).

The decision to conduct this research in the framework and guidance of an IPA methodology was well considered. However, it is acknowledged that there are limitations. The small sample size of three families is arguably a limitation. However, because IPA is concerned with the detailed lived experience of the individual, the sample of three parents and three pupils was sufficient to generate a considerable amount of data, from which meaningful points could be made. The issue of generalisability from the findings of a small sample is a limiting factor of the research. Smith et al. (2009) refer to this and discuss 'theoretical-transferability'. In recognising this limitation, I have discussed the interpretations by illustrating them with the voices of the participants shown in the transcript extracts of the findings and discussion. Readers are able to judge for themselves the applicability of the context and also to identify where they would generalise or transfer the findings given their own existing personal knowledge and that of the wider literature. The study was guided by the framework suggested by Smith et al. (2009). I also used the checks and balances of Yardley's principles, and the validity guidelines as suggested by Yin (1989). As such, there is transparency in the stages for the reader to follow 'the chain of evidence' (Yin). Therefore, although I am able to justify my own interpretations and analysis, readers, too, can clearly consider for themselves alternative interpretations and applicability to the context of the findings. It is recognised that limiting factors could be the possibilities that the interviews could be perceived as being on the shorter side of forty to ninety minutes, alternative interpretations, the appropriateness of the examples and choices of extracts to illustrate points. As such, the extracts could be used across several points and this has the potential for some to be over-used, others to be missed and the depth of yet others not to be fully explored. Also, had I biased a tendency to 'convergence' and limited 'divergence' through the manner in which I had conducted the analysis? I have, by approaching this study in a reflective and reflexive way, tried to reduce the limitations of bias in analysis, and also in personal bias when meeting with parents and pupils, and in communicating with the school staff. I tried to remain neutral when interviewing the participants, although I recognise that there are some times during

the interviews where it could be argued that I had the potential to influence interviewee responses. It was by responding reflexively that I was able to recognise this. I was a novice to the IPA research framework and, although certainly enthusiastic, may not have been as persistent and curious as I might have been and therefore less effective than the more experienced researcher. The multiple possibilities of the different perspectives and levels of meaning, and interpretation brought to the research is an exhilarating prospect. However, there is the potential that something has been missed and the interpretation and analysis of the participants' stories are 'thin' and are not as 'thick' as might be intended.

The 'Our Future' Project is an example of a vehicle designed to change the concepts and views about a group of pupils. Although the stories of the three families who spoke in the study would suggest that the project changed parental views and the reality for those pupils to more positive narratives, there are of course the stories of the other twenty-three families that were approached that have not been heard. The next step to be considered is how the '(ask me) how to reach' perspective can be embedded so that the narrative of possibility becomes a reality for staff and pupils alike. This will give meaning to enable goals of possibility to be achieved that are valued by this school community.

The Literature Review in drawing upon historical and political perspectives, locates the role of the Educational Psychologist, and, as such, it enables an examination of the EP role in the support of schools working with families. In having some insight into what works best when working with families, the EP can work from an informed basis and introduce innovation within their practice into the school context. Dunsmuir, Cole and Wolfe (2014) provide a timely update of the review of literature of the collaboration and intervention of EP practice in working with families. Pertinent to the objective of this research is the way in which the role of the EP to work with families has evolved. It is with increasing diversity and with the expectation that professionals are expected to respond to the opportunities and challenges that this brings. It is a prospect filled with possibilities. Within my own local authority context, for example, there has been, over recent years, a commitment towards supporting training in skills to work systemically to include a range of professionals such as social care colleagues, which promotes multi-agency working. In examining the role of the EP to support schools in their work with families, I would advocate that

the literature and personal experience support the view that working with parents is central to good practice and planning. Delivery and evaluation of family interventions (direct and indirect) has become accepted as appropriate to psychologists' scope of practice (Dunsmuir et al. 2014, p.7).

A timely addition to the literature is 'Universal Psychology and Systemic Approaches to Practice' (Educational and Child Psychology: 32:1, 2015). This publication reflects and strengthens the scope and the unique position that we have as educational psychologists in promoting change within systems. This scope includes supporting schools in their work with developing the well-being of individuals (Roffey, 2008; 2015) and thereby improving outcomes for young people and their families. The role of the psychologist has the scope to

apply psychology in promoting health and quality of life, fostering
learning and raising achievement, enhancing work satisfaction
and motivation and fostering harmonious communities
(MacKay, 2001, p.467)

through a systemic perspective where "without context, words and actions have no meaning at all" (Bateson, 1972, p.15).

It is important to reflect that no understanding of the EP role would be complete without understanding the role of the educational psychologist in the context and Zeitgeist of these times and the political and economic changes of recent years. How such changes are considered to be affecting the infrastructure of our civic society and their influence on the way in which the psychologist's work is then shaped within services (Rouf, 2015). Working in a local authority framework to provide services to the most vulnerable and challenging in a non-stigmatised way, while staying true to the underlying values and principles of social justice at the heart of the EP profession, could be described as 'an ethical balancing act'. Maintaining balance, I would argue, is the 'bed rock' of the EP having a flexible understanding of their role and from where innovation in practice begins.

The contribution of the pupil voice is also beneficial to staff, organisations and communities (Kendal, Straw, Jones, Springate and Grayson, 2008). The positive effect of the pupil voice in feedback to staff was an unanticipated outcome of the research. However, as such, this study adds to the evidence base of the wider literature and documentation, and it provides further validation to studies that report

on the impact of the pupil voice. Studies such as those by Cullingford (2006), Reid, Challoner, Lancett, Jones, Rhysiart, and Challoner (2010), and Sellman (2009) highlight the invaluable messages conveyed to researchers and policy makers as well as in the empowerment of children and young people.

Reflection

I was excited by the two new publications that illuminate ways in which working with families and systemic practice has evolved within EP practice. The participants of the 'Our Future' Project intervention should be proud; they too have made their contribution.

6.6ii The Lessons Learned

The objective of the research study to identify and inform the future work of this particular school context has been explored through the evidence provided by the individual pupils and parents. It is not only about the lessons learned for a particular intervention but the wider consideration of school engagement. It could be argued that validity is supported because of the parallels drawn with evidence from the wider literature. Feedback from families is important if schools are to work effectively, and also what may be successful one year may not be with a different set of pupils and their families. Harrison and Goodall (2007) talk about initiatives 'being bespoke to context' and Sanders and Ralph (2002) how 'one size does not fit all'. The 'Our Future' Project, I would argue, was one that fits with these descriptions. It was an example of how innovation was used with a particular client population and an example of how professionalism can be extended (Bessant and Tidd, 2011). In making this claim this school and others are supplied with more information in order to inform them of what can be built upon for working with families and vulnerable pupils. It also provides information to them about optimal direction of resources. The premise of this thesis was based on a project designed to promote engagement with families in order that relationships and communication could be strengthened, with a view that this would be a key factor in the ongoing engagement of the pupils with school once the project was over. The evidence gathered from this study is useful in

not only addressing the premise of the thesis but in providing the school with insight into the effectiveness of their Project.

There are also lessons to be learned about conducting research with vulnerable populations. The difficulties of identifying a sample are referred to in the research construction chapter. However, in an IPA study the sample is meant to represent a perspective rather than a population (Smith et al. 2009). The three families that agreed to be interviewed were self-selecting and this has the potential to provide a positive message for the research outcome. However, I would argue that this needn't necessarily be so. Participants could have self-selected because they have a negative narrative that they wish to promote. The idiographic approach of an IPA methodology is concerned with understanding particular phenomena in particular contexts (in this study, school engagement in the context of an intervention). Homogeneity was achieved because the participants had all experienced the 'Our Future' Project. Had only one family volunteered to take part the possibility was that the research would have become a case study. IPA studies are not intended for broad generalisations but to add to the body of knowledge with the broad principle of providing something interesting, important or useful (Yardley, 2000).

6.6iii Supporting School Staff

How may school staff be supported to reflect on their roles in the initiative? Such support is important for the future sustainability of work with vulnerable pupils. The opportunity to meet with staff in order to initiate reflective conversations, consultation, solution circles and the Burnham Quadrant provide examples of systemic tools that could be used by the educational psychologist in the role of supporting staff. Working in this way with school staff provides not only designated time to evaluate their work, but also to give consideration to their own well-being. In acknowledging their work, "teachers' sense of effectiveness and well-being are then raised" (Roffey, 2012, p.16). The decision not to include the perspectives of the staff involved in the research study was a strategic one agreed with my Supervising Tutor due to the length of the thesis and constraints of time. I acknowledge that including the perspectives of the school staff may have added further richness to the study. I also remain curious but can only hypothesise about how the study would have developed had the staff voices been included.

6.7 Findings and Principles Consistent with Systemic Theory and Practice

Principles consistent with systemic practice in schools were identified in Chapter One, page twenty-two as:

- collaboration between parent, pupil, school and family
- how families perceive the welcome and acceptance they receive from school staff
- not seeing the young person in isolation but in the context of the school and family system.

The findings of this study substantiate the principles consistent with systemic practice and are useful to the practitioner working to promote school engagement in the following ways:

- a) The 'Our Future' Project was by its nature designed to promote collaboration. How the families in this study perceived welcome and acceptance from the school staff was expressed in the superordinate theme 'Appreciation of Effort', the subordinate themes of 'Participation and Contribution', 'Communication and Relationship'. How the parents and pupils describe their perception of participation and contribution reflects how individual this can be to each family. This is useful to the practitioner as it calls to mind the bespoke nature of promoting engagement with families as substantiated in the literature (Day, 2013).
- b) The reduction of the isolationist and 'within-child' model is illustrated through the research as it embodies the principle of the importance of experiencing a sense of belonging. The pupils increased sense of belonging substantiates a principle of systemic practice that although an individual is part of a system they need also to have a reality that they belong to that system. The participants in the study began to experience change as they gained in confidence and motivation. They were then inclined to participate and contribute. The pupils experienced the circularity referred to by Cecchin (1987) that when change was created that enabled them to participate and contribute they did so, this then increased their sense of belonging. The practitioner can reflect on how they can work to increase with pupils that

sense of belonging and community. Tools such as the 'sense of Belonging Scale (Frederickson and Cline, 2005) could be helpful to promote reflective discussion, to identify how support can be increased and if necessary to evaluate progress. The implications of a superordinate theme such as 'Legacy of Enjoyment' relates also to the sense of belonging, experiencing an event that created lasting positive memories. This was reflected not only in the pupil accounts but in the staff response.

- c) Part way through my evaluation of the 'Our Future Intervention' study I provided the school with a headline document (Appendix Seven). In sharing the headlines that reflected the outcomes for students and parents as part of the 'Our Future' Project, the school staff were encouraged and surprised. The school staff were encouraged, because all the effort of the intervention had suggested that it had been worthwhile. They were surprised, because they did not realise the impact that working with the pupils and their families would have. To elicit change was the intent and purpose of delivering the intervention. Nevertheless, to realise the extent to which this had been effective as shown in the three families interviewed, was a revelation to them. The sharing of 'soundbites' (in confidence to the participant) from the parent and pupil voices to supplement the headline findings had the most effective impact. Hearing directly from the voices of pupils is well documented as proving beneficial to promote positive outcomes for children and young people (Lyle, Hendley and Newcomb, (2010). Therefore, this study supports the view that practitioners should be mindful of the ways in which they listen to the voices of pupils and parents and how in their power collaboration can be promoted.
- d) It would suggest for school staff how, being part of the system, feedback is important to them too, not just for the future development of their practice but also for their motivation and confidence. With the consequence of reflecting on their own sense of belonging in the school community.
- e) The perception experienced by the participants in the 'Our Future' Project was that the school staff were more interested in them. This continued beyond the

project in the experience of pupils in the class room by teachers. For practitioners to ensure that pupils and parents feel valued is an ongoing challenge.

- f) At its most simplistic systemic communication the effectiveness of a measure of how much a school cares being described by P3 as the way phone calls are handled. Such an observation may provide a basic but useful insight to the practitioner concerned with developing engagement between schools and families.
- g) As an Educational Psychologist Practitioner working with a school to promote engagement with families the research informs ways in which systemic principles can be promoted. The practitioner would reflect on how collaborative, for example, the process of consultation is.
- h) The practitioner can explore with school staff the ways in which they consider they are perceived by parents and pupils, is there true collaboration or is an agenda of power prevalent? This can be explored through formal supervision of school staff.
- i) Systemic practice can offer a way of conceptualising the behaviour of individuals in a social system. The interconnectedness between the school and family can be explored and sense made of the complexities between the two. How the EP in their role can develop this way of working was seen by the support given by the EP throughout the 'Our Future' Project intervention. The ongoing reflective conversations with a key staff member and input through the collaborative process using the Burnham Quadrant to facilitate staff towards the focus of the 'Conference' days.
- j) The revelation about the power of the voice of the child provided positive messages for school staff. The research process caused staff to pause and consider the effectiveness of their contribution to the project. As the EP, to consider how pupil / parent voice can be encouraged and staff feedback provided in the future in other settings.

In discovering 'what next' with the staff group following an intervention as ambitious as the 'Our Future' Project models such as solution circles and reflective methods would be practical tools. How the 'Our Future' Project as a model might evolve, would be dependent upon resources not only in terms of finance but in the resilience of staff to continue to engage with the model. Other factors would be those posed by the environmental aspects of school organisation. Factors would include the demands of time and the constraints of the curriculum, the meeting of targets and by examination schedules at Key Stage 4.

Reflection

I thought that two areas in particular make a valuable contribution to the way in which the role of the educational psychologist can be understood in their support of school intervention. The first is the way in which skills can be applied when working with schools, young people and families. Secondly, outcomes such as facilitating how narratives can be changed from 'hard to reach' to 'how to reach'. This excites me because, as Hanko suggests, it opens up new possibilities. New possibilities make new meanings, and this means that outcomes can be changed and improved.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to draw together the main findings and observations of this study. The limitations of the research are discussed. Recommendations for the practice of Educational Psychology and for further research in the field are made. Concluding remarks and reflections complete the chapter.

7.2 Summary and Conclusions

The overriding message of the research is that if schools can adopt a rhetoric which is not problem-saturated, and will adopt a solution-focused attitude then possibilities open up. 'Hard to reach' becomes woven out of the narrative and a 'how to reach' narrative of possibility can emerge towards improved outcomes for vulnerable young people.

The findings suggest that in adopting a systemic perspective to promote engagement between school and family, individuals are empowered. Thinking in this way provides an approach that means schools and families can explore common ground to work together. A sense of empowerment then motivates the individual to participate and contribute in a meaningful way to activities and learning. The study highlights the need for interventions to be tailored. It proclaims a 'one size does not fit all' message. A main lesson learned for the school in this study showed the one-off event to be considered to be effective for the participants in the study; however, parents and pupils could see that smaller, less ambitious ongoing events may have greater potential to sustain change. Although an event such as 'Our Future' is successful in producing positive outcomes for pupils, and is appreciated by participants, it can also evoke feelings of inertia for pupils once the event is over. Careful response to feedback from parents is vital for on-going engagement (Staines, 2014), and parents were found to have some valuable insights into the initiative. However, the failure to plan for participant feedback and to incorporate it into future approaches to engagement is a short-coming of the 'Our Future' Project, which had otherwise shown great potential and many successful characteristics.

This research study draws on a qualitative methodology. As a qualitative methodology IPA was chosen because it afforded flexibility within a proven structure,

following the guidelines of Smith et al. (2009). It is a methodology that was considered best to address the answers of the questions posed by the thesis. It is a methodology that is congruent with my personality and professional skills and is sympathetic to the underpinnings of systemic thinking and practice. The research is located in a social constructionist paradigm and therefore one which enables constructs to be reconsidered and reframed where the language that embodies the constructs can be 'problem-saturated' (White, 1989).

The historical perspective and context of schools and families working together highlights the shift from the meritocratic days, where intellectual superiority held power, to thinking that upholds the individual becoming an expert of him or her-self (Rose, 1996). Underpinned by the legislation of successive governments parental rights and responsibilities, social inclusion and the driving up of educational standards has become the current climate (Crozier, 2000). The study also recognises the balance and tensions of working within a local authority framework where public services are shrinking (Rouf, 2015).

The definition of family and parents has also evolved over time and therefore the definition that family is "a network of people in the child's immediate psychosocial field" (Carr, 2013, p.5) was adopted to provide a common understanding in the study. This is reflected in the demographic of the participants in the study, for example, one of whom was a kinship grand-parent carer. This definition also values the diversities that can be found in families such as gender and generational difference. Definitions of family, school and child were identified from sociological and psychological perspectives.

The population of the study was designed in accordance with the definition for the particular school in the study, taking their description of those whom they regarded as vulnerable or challenging pupils. The school's selection of who they deemed fitted the description of vulnerable is a decision to be taken with care. Such definitions are multi-layered and have the potential to alienate. Definitions can create barriers and have unintended consequences for families in how they perceive their sense of belonging in the school and the community (Santin, 2014; Hanko 1999). However, as Burnham (1992) suggests, definitions can provide professionals with 'specialist shorthand'.

The school and parent partnership also raises issues of power. Power can be perceived as marginalising, with the education system and the school seen as the institution that holds the balance of power. It is considered that the progressive school will seek to reduce marginalisation, facilitate liaison and empower parents (Roffey, 2013). The 'Our Future' Project provides an example of an 'out of the box' approach to liaison with parents and vulnerable pupils. In contrast, schools' traditionally have had linear approaches in their partnership with parents (Bastiani, 1993) and, in terms of a 'think family' agenda, the partnership has become more 'circular'. The notion of 'circularity' is a term familiar to the systemic practitioner (Penn, 1982; Cecchin 1987) and indicates a willingness on the part of a school to connect from an equal base by starting on 'common ground'. Common ground usually means that schools and families want 'the best for the child' (DFE, 2011). Identifying what is 'the best' for children and young people is, however, not always straightforward, as schools and families can view what is best from different belief systems. Clarity on what is the 'curriculum of the home' has become the vogue. Parental participation in their child's education (DfEE, 1997; 1998 and 2000) has become the main element to raising achievement although there is evidence that families continue to be polarised in the education system because of 'working class values' (Crozier, 2000).

A key finding from the 'Our Future' Project study, which is supported by the literature of family participation, suggests that it is not apathy at the root of parental engagement with their child's school, but practical and confidence issues that prevent participation, particularly at the secondary stage of their child's education (Day, 2013). It would follow that if practical and confidence issues were addressed, then parental engagement would be enhanced. This was a finding, evident in the voices of the participants in the 'Our Future' Project. The environment and willingness to change in a school culture has, therefore, the potential to redefine narratives. The biggest challenge to this research study was securing parental involvement. Securing the involvement of participants is echoed as being a challenge throughout studies working with 'hard to reach' and vulnerable populations (Gorin et al... 2008). Participant involvement caused the greatest threat to the progress of the study substantiating that 'real world enquiry' can be messy (Robson, 2002). Once they had agreed to consent, however, participants were genuinely

pleased to be a part of the study. This was also observed by Gorin et al... (2008) in their findings about research involving vulnerable populations.

In meeting the objectives of this study there were a wide range of findings. According to Smith et al... (2009), with an IPA study, and looking at small samples in depth, it is possible to think in terms of theoretical transferability of findings rather than empirical generalisability. The reader is, therefore, invited to evaluate the transferability of this study to “persons in contexts which are more or less similar” (Smith et al. 2009, p.51). Amongst the findings, the reader may like to consider that this study was found to identify with the wider literature in many ways. From amongst the parent/carer participants, lessons were learned about participation. The study found that participation and contribution could be encouraged if practical and confidence issues were addressed, and the activities of the intervention were truly accessible to both parents and pupils. This can be a challenge to schools because the study recognised that individuals are able to engage, participate and contribute at different levels. If an area of common interest can be identified by the school with parents, it means that parents have something to which they can relate and which is psychologically within their ‘comfort zone’. Parental inclination to participate was increased if parents could perceive benefits for their children. Invitation to participate in a school-led activity also has risk as well as possibility attached. Parents can feel alienated if they perceive that their parenting is being questioned. It can polarise families from engaging with school, participating and making a contribution.

Several indications were made about ways in which parents perceive good communication with a school. The parents in this study identified the characteristics of good communication and relationships in terms of knowing who to contact at school, and the confidence in the school to follow up with action. They will do something that they have said they will do, for example, to provide effective support for their child. To be able to communicate with a school about particular issues is regarded by parents as being important. Knowing that they are listened to inclines parents towards becoming proactive in their engagement with school. Parents did not mind communicating with the school using the phone. When parents perceived that a school was being supportive they were more likely to do their part, for example encouraging children to complete their homework. The study found that parents may be more willing to discuss their child’s learning than teachers often believe. Time

given to discussing their child was appreciated because it allowed for more time than at a parents' evening, which was perceived by one participant as rushed. A caveat here would be the agenda of the discussion, if, for example, it was about issues such as poor behaviour then this may polarise rather than engage.

Findings from pupil voices in the study emphasised that pupils need to feel that they belong and are connected to a school community. A personal focus and a sense of purpose provided pupils with a strong motivation to be engaged. Pupils need to know that they are listened to, and experience feelings of psychological safety and comfort. If these conditions are met then they are able to communicate with, and relate more readily to others. Increased confidence through the participation of an intervention equates with a greater likelihood of a pupil taking risk to participate in an activity as part of that event. This participation has the potential to translate to increased confidence and motivation to take psychological risk, resulting in improved attendance at school, reduced exclusion, the learning of new skills and the ability to participate in class. It was found among the pupils that the opportunity to have new experiences means increased interest and increased confidence. This interconnectedness can be described as being circulatory. It indicates that because young people have increased motivation and confidence they then begin to feel empowered. Increased empowerment then leads to success which increases motivation and confidence.

Findings that were highlighted by both parents and pupils relate to enjoyment and positive memories. Enjoyment of an activity enhances school engagement and empowers individuals to become personally more effective. They then have increased confidence and competence to respond in pro-social ways rather than responding in ways that can be regarded as isolating and self-excluding. The findings suggest that school engagement hinges on accessibility, communication and a relational approach. The maze of inner-conflict can be experienced to differing degrees, dependent upon the complexity of thoughts, feelings and beliefs held by an individual and collectively by a family or school staff. How this will then translate into responses by parents and pupils to participate and contribute is complex. One way that is found to help is if individuals are involved in their own decision-making, because they then become empowered as they were in the 'Our Future' activities.

School events can provide an opportunity for families to experience and build shared memories. Parents and pupils are more willing to be part of solutions than is often perceived by schools. They are able to contribute feasible ideas that show reflection and understanding of the implications of putting on events, such as costs in time and finance to a school. Evidence from the 'Our Future' Project might suggest that families can be 'wowed' by one event but ultimately the quality of the relationship between the child and whoever is in their 'immediate psychosocial field' is what matters. Although teachers sometimes fulfil this role, for most young people this critical function is served outside of school by their family members (Roffey, 2015). Children need the support of family if long-term improved outcomes for engagement and success in school is to be achieved.

7.3 Limitations and Recommendations

This research study was slightly unconventional in that it was not co-designed or destined from the outset in working with the school as an evaluation of their 'Our Future' Project. The school Senior Management Team had set up the project independently and the decision to work with them and to evaluate their project came later. Opportunities to work with schools to evaluate interventions are a way in which the EP can change perceptions and practices (Roffey, 2015) and 'scale up' interventions (Roffey, 2015; Dobia, et al., 2013). The role of the EP can be to support schools to embed evaluation as part of its culture. Therefore, had this been the case, decisions about how the 'Our Future' Project was designed and orchestrated, how the sample of participants came to be identified and how definitions such as 'vulnerable', 'challenging' and 'hard to reach' were applied could have been discussed more thoroughly between us.

Working directly with the school to embed evaluation as part of the project from the outset would have included research into the early relationship building between staff, parents and pupils rather than a focus on the two days of the 'Conference' and 'Come Dine with Me' experience. Insight into the early engagement experiences could have gathered staff perspectives and experiences. A focus group of the staff is a time – effective way in which this could have been facilitated,

In promoting systemic practice the research would have gathered the views of each part of the system, school staff as well as pupils and parents/carers. Through

examining these exchanges insight would have been gained into the processes used by individuals to engage, and, from this themes in common to inform practice could have been identified.

Feedback ideally would include the EP relating the findings of the study to the school during a time protected for the purpose. It would mean face to face contact with all those involved and other stakeholders in Senior Management who have invested time and resources to an intervention. It would also involve working with them to debrief about the intervention and to discuss next steps as a consequence of the intervention. This opportunity was limited through the constraints of time on the part of Senior Management and resulted in a feedback document (Appendix Seven). This is a limitation of the research and impacts the effectiveness of the longer-term gains of the 'Our Future' Project. The EP role, in providing a school with feedback will be how they can progress to develop their own skills. To consider how, in the future, this school can structure evaluation and work directly with feedback that they could self-generate from initiatives. To work with the school Senior Management Team to support them to embed evaluations of their work into their practice as part of a whole school strategy.

The school had invested a year of staff time, energy and resources into the project. Families had tasted engagement in a way that did not focus on negative discourses and pupils had discovered that school can be a positive experience. As discovered through this research project the parent and pupil voice had a rich contribution but was closed down through not having an avenue outside of the research to tell its story. As a result, the school lost many pearls of insight that would have informed future and ongoing engagement with both these and future families. The tension experienced by my view that much of the impetus and energy of the 'Our Future' Project was lost has caused me to reflect on how the EP role is perceived in the school.

It is recognised that within core EP work with schools there are expectations and tensions about the understanding of the role and what the EP can offer (Fallon et al... 2010). In focusing on the limitations of the impact of the research and the 'Our Future' Project as a practitioner, I question the priority by Senior Managers towards an understanding of the role of the EP and my communication of what the role could offer. Yet, time identified for the reflective conversations that ran through the work

between EP and the Family Liaison Worker suggests that value is given to the EP role.

The recognition given to the Family Liaison Worker by the School Senior Leadership to lead family work within the school is a success. Appreciation of the role of this colleague suggests that priority is placed on investment in long term systemic engagement with families.

My experience of frustration in the delay in meeting the families and pupils for interview highlights that trust and relationship is fundamental to promote engagement, as suggested in the literature (Hogue, et al...1999).

The timing, however, meant that the longer-term impact on the intervention was captured rather than just the immediate. In consideration of timing this proved in retrospect to be positive for the research. Data collected a term later provided data that an intervention such as the 'Our Future' Project lasts beyond the event itself. The research gives voice and an evidence base to that impact which would have otherwise been missed.

In the longer term, school data collected through the school record tracking systems was discussed, (at my suggestion), with the Family Liaison Worker. This data substantiated increased attendance and improved grades through the autumn term following the intervention. However, this was all retrospective. Under ideal circumstances continuation of the research study could have been to include this data. Both avenues of data complementing the findings of this research and effectiveness of the 'Our Future' Project.

Although the impact of evaluation on the influence of future policy to engage families within the school was not fully considered by Senior Management, it must be recognised that for the three families represented in this research they would say that impact was positive. In the short-term we know, one term on, that impact remained effective. I would argue from the experience of this research that the main barrier to having a robust evaluation process as part of the 'Our Future' Project was the tension of the time that it would demand of the Senior Manager.

In terms of long term commitment to systemic change, main barriers are likely to be time and compromise of role amongst Senior Managers and the demands of conflicting roles on staff. However, the kudos given to the Family Liaison Worker role

suggests, for this school, that the intention to achieve long term engagement with families reflects a commitment that is fundamental to its values whether or not embedded in an evaluation culture.

A limitation of this particular study is that, although the demographic was homogenous as participants in a project, it was a White British almost solely female sample. As researcher, I too, was a White British female. Therefore, to extend the study of engagement of schools with families to encompass a broader demographic would provide insight into how parents and pupils of other groups perceive and experience engagement in their relationship with schools. The demographic could not only include variations in ethnicity and gender but also specialist populations, such as young people with SEN and those in specialist settings, such as units for young people who are vulnerable because of severe mental health and behavioural needs.

How EPs apply systemic theory to their work would be another area for further research. Discovering the spectrum of systemic work involving the Educational Psychologist and their spheres of influence would enhance the development of systemic practice in schools. Where EPs do apply systemic theory to their work, further research could evaluate their practice. Systemic approaches to practice is becoming more widespread amongst EPs in more diverse ways (Mackay and Lindsay, 2015). Therefore, further research would be recommended in order to raise the awareness of the potential of applying systemic theory in EP practice, and also in extending the theoretical evidence base underpinned by practice-based evidence.

Beyond the immediate scope of applying systemic thinking to EP practice it would be the interest of other professional bases, such as those represented by the Association of Family Therapists, who would welcome further research into the scope, diversity and application of systemic thinking and skills (AFT, 2015).

Exploration into the views of the members of staff involved in the 'Our Future' Project initiative would develop this study. In order to extend this study, it would be an area for future research to gather the perceptions and experiences of individual staff members and to see how those perceptions and experiences aligned with those of the parent and pupil participants. It would be an area of future research interest to discover how the narrative of possibility has been embraced by the staff involved.

Further research might look to the long-term progress being made through the narratives that staff are promoting through analysis of their 'everyday talk' to pupils and their parents.

Recommendations for further research that arise directly from the 'Our Future' Project would be to discover the stories from a further group of participants. In the context of the 'Our Future' Project there are twenty-three other family voices that remain unheard. Whilst I believe that the research design is replicable, the phenomenon of participating in the 'Our Future' Project is particular only to the context of this school. The wider applicability for further study and research could, however, be extended to school engagement with families of 'vulnerable or challenging pupils' in other schools.

A further facet to this would be to link areas of particular psychological direction, such as staff self-efficacy and well-being, to their role in the project and, in general, to their work and relationships with parents and vulnerable pupils. The role of the Senior Management Team in line-managing such a project (amongst their other responsibilities) would provide valuable lessons in understanding the management and motivation of staff involved in engaging with families.

Another interesting direction that this study could have taken would have been to explore the pattern of beliefs and values found in families, and the ways in which such beliefs and values are manifested by pupils in the school environment. Research in this area would provide the evidence of contemporary studies to add to the body of literature relating to the links between academic outcomes and 'the curriculum of the home'.

Exploration of beliefs and values is at the core of systemic thinking. When schools in their role are working with families it is important to place the beliefs, behaviours and emotions of pupils in context. In their work with families, schools are well placed to introduce new information into the (family) system (Carr, 2000). Systemic practice is about introducing 'difference' into family systems, and when this difference is enough change will occur (Bateson, 1972). Studies that inform about generational patterns, vulnerability and resilience would promote change towards improved outcomes for challenging or vulnerable pupils. Information from such studies can then lead on to well-informed and effective ways of working. It will mean that bespoke interventions

and ways of working can be developed that are grounded in an understanding of family meanings and realities.

A direct response to further research from this study would highlight the role of the EP in working with schools to ascertain how they could best evaluate their interventions. This would provide a robust and effective piece of work. It would enable any school to compile a record of its work, not just about the immediate study, but about future work from patterns that could be recreated amongst families. It would also support them in their communication with wider stakeholders, in quality assurance awards such as 'Investors in People', and in inspection frameworks such as OFSTED.

7.3i Tensions within Evaluation Research: Dilemmas and Pitfalls

Educational psychology practice refers to facets of the EP role as a researcher and as a facilitator of good practice. There may be instances when these aspects of the EP role may involve challenge. Evaluation research could be described as embodying all these facets of the EP role. Evaluation research, a tool of the EP for the evaluation of their own work and projects, and, used for promoting an evaluation culture, best practice, and sometimes an evidence base for challenge within schools. Evaluation research can provide information about outcome and process (Fox, Martin and Green, 2011). It can provide insight into the effectiveness and impact of the 'Our Future' intervention and into an understanding of the way in which the intervention was conducted. A challenge for the EP as evaluation-researcher is for a school to commit to the merit of evaluation as promoting 'good practice'.

Cole, Aslanyon, Dunn, Boyd and Bates (2014) refer to participation (in evaluation) equalling ownership. Where a school experiences that it 'owns' the evaluation then they are more likely to learn from their work and to act upon the findings.

A pitfall of the evaluation research of the 'Our Future' Project was that it was added to the Project as a separate piece of work rather than being integral to it. Therefore, the effectiveness of the evaluation research was for the school, diminished. Priority wasn't given to an opportunity to agree on the purpose and process of the project or the evaluation of it. As the Researcher, the opportunity to reflect on these ideals, suggests that tensions can be overcome when reflexivity is a goal. As Abma, (2002, p.9) states, 'reflexivity is inextricably part of a discourse that reproduces meanings'. It

reflects the response of the author (researcher) to extend beyond the narrative of the evaluation. As such, it reflects the meaning making of systemic practice.

Within evaluation research there the potential for the impact of an intervention such as the 'Our Future' Project to be part of a body of evidence (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). The school can accumulate evidence to inform effectiveness and to use the information to challenge and support what it is doing. A dilemma can be how less than favourable outcomes will be addressed. How individuals who may have invested a lot of time and energy into projects will be supported. Evaluation research used effectively is designed to create change and this suggests risk. How Management will respond to the information gained also poses a dilemma. Evaluation research demands constructive response and accountability (Mayne, 2009).

Evaluation research, like systemic practice, employs hypothesising (Cecchin, 1987, Pawson and Tilley, 1997). The hypotheses to be tested in the 'Our Future' Project was an idea that parents and school staff working together with pupils would create change and difference for pupils. In this research, the research questions parallel to serve this purpose. Had the 'Our Future' Project been evaluated as a school evaluation with EP, Senior Manager and Staff working together, an initial step would have been to clarify and examine their hypotheses. Their hypotheses that outcomes for vulnerable young people would be changed if school and parent / carer engagement changed. Clarity of hypotheses would mean that direct questions (as in research questions) would be created and can be answered. Dedicating time to identify purpose can be easily compromised. It is a tension, but a necessary priority for such exploration.

Schwandt and Burgon, (2011) state that, in an evaluation that aims to capture 'lived-experience' there is the potential to be largely descriptive. This is a pitfall, but, arguably, if context and examples are not provided in detail then it is difficult to ascribe meaning to the evaluation.

In an intervention where the 'lived-world' of the relationships between individuals is to be examined it is important to ensure that the authentic voices are heard. This study was designed to discover the perceptions of pupils (and parents) through listening to them, and as such, the findings are based on those voices.

Educational Psychologists, as this study has shown, are in a good position to elicit the views of children and young people. Gaining the voice of the pupil is an aspect of the EP role that is perceived to be of value to schools (Ashton and Roberts, 2006). Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010) state that, when engaged in research related to interventions underpinned by psychology, it is important for the EP to consider ways of eliciting the voices of children and young people. Young people are said to feel empowered and their confidence and self-esteem enhanced when their voice is taken into account (Lyle et al. 2010). The pupils who gave their consent to participate in the evaluation of the 'Our Future' Project were confident enough to meet with me to share their views and ideas. Pupil 3 was keen to talk about his confidence to come in to school because of the support of his parents and the difference made to him by the project. He stated cheerfully, *'You can tell I'm here today'* (T6 722:07).

Critically, in capturing voices there is the tension and dilemma that individuals may say what they think researchers may want to hear especially amongst vulnerable populations. In systemic theory and practice all participant accounts would be included and respected as partners in the process. Prevailing perceptions of power, and a mistrust of whether value really will be given to 'circuitous, hesitant, or questioning expression' (Young, 2000, p.51), is a tension, one that requires reassurance that those voices will be heard.

Wilkinson, (2000) talks about participation in evaluation with young people involved in the actual design of an evaluation. Hypothetically, had an evaluation of the 'Our Future' Project been participatory, issues of equity of voice and challenges to the power relationship would, as far as possible, have been addressed. Arguably, because participants are involved in the design of an evaluation process it would exemplify that the evaluation is consistent with systemic thinking and practice.

Rogers and Williams (2011) state that an impression can be given of collaboration in evaluation research as being unproblematic. The 'Our Future' Project research shows, in the EP role, that, a commitment to evaluation is a tension and a dilemma of the "messy chaos of the lived world" (Smith et al., 2009, p.55).

7.3ii Concluding Remarks and Final Reflections

By listening to pupils and their parents from three families we learn, through their experience and perceptions of a school intervention, that they have realistic ideas and solutions to offer. Although not attempting to make broad generalisations, the ideas and solutions that were captured have insights that might be used to inform further work to promote engagement between schools and families. The study revealed that engagement between school and family is filled with psychological complexities, and found that practical and confidence issues, rather than apathy, are more likely to be barriers to engagement with school by both pupils and parents. The findings supported the idea that if schools ‘think outside of the box’ then they are more likely to be successful in their endeavours to reduce barriers and build strong relationships with parents and pupils. A solution-focused approach that introduces possibility into a family narrative is recommended. The educational psychologist is well placed to support schools in promoting possibility in their ways of working systemically with parents and young people. The pupils from the three families in the ‘Our Future’ Project felt supported by the school in their endeavours to engage with them, and also their parents were appreciated for the support that they gave to their children. It was realised that parental support is what sustains the shifting attitude of pupils to participate in their school community once an event is over.

A quotation from one of the pupils, P5 (T5 49:55), epitomises the premise that systemic support makes a difference because as individuals we are connected with others. It reflects the ripple effect that when an individual experiences change through the expectations of those around them they can then benefit from their own narratives:

‘I think if you have support from people you feel more happier, more confident. You just like feel better about yourself.’

7.3iii My Practise: Impact and Implications

The impact this research has had on my practise through all that I have learned through the process and the findings of the study by its nature has become a part of who I am.

As a result of the rigour of the study process as an EP I have become more critical in the evaluation of my own work. When talking to schools I have become bolder in raising questions about how they will evaluate the work they are doing.

Reflectively and philosophically I have learned to question and to be more curious as part of my practise.

I am energised in looking at ways in which issues can be addressed from a systemic perspective, for example, how I can question those who seek to close down the possibilities rather than find solutions. Reflecting on how others can be enabled through my role continues to influence how I facilitate within a practice model such as consultation.

Opportunities through a traded model of working are timely in the ways in which my future work with schools and families can be developed. Training through a workshop approach reduces the focus on the EP practitioner as 'expert' to one in which individuals within organisations are facilitated to process, reflect and develop. Preparation is in hand for a series of workshops on challenging behaviour, for example. How change and difference can be created through the consideration of the impact of systemic influences on behaviour will be one such way that my future work with schools and families will progress.

Learning from such theories as attachment theory (Bowlby, 1952, 1969, 1973, 1980) and how attachment needs may affect relationships in school and families is an ongoing and evolving direction of my work. How, within an understanding of attachment needs, the systems of school, family and other professionals can work together for improved outcomes for children and young people who are adopted and in care. Work with Foster Carers and Social Care colleagues is a future direction through training and direct work.

Understanding change in organisations has come to the fore with a remit of service delivery on my role to impact change in specialist settings. Thinking systemically influences my approach to group supervision and reflective team approaches to explore and promote change.

Representative of my place and influence as an EP within and between systems I am mindful of my accountability and relationship within a local authority organisation, to clients, and through statutory work. As a professional I have systems of checks and balances on my work through regular supervision, peer review, CPD and membership of professional bodies. Systems thinking enables me to have a self-reflexive stance that underpins my continuing evolution as an EP practitioner

Final Reflections

On this research journey, there have been tensions and challenges. At such times, the research diary has come to the fore. The diary has provided me with a tool to utilise visualisation and metaphor as ways of providing me with support. These techniques have also helped me to take a reflexive stance on the research process. Foucault (1988b, p.27) talks about writing 'in the culture of taking care of oneself, taking notes on oneself to be re-read and keeping notebooks in order to reactivate for oneself the truths one needed.'

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