Abstract

This thesis is a narrative exploration of parents' experience of a group parenting intervention in which consciousness of 'value' is explored as a possible aspect of change. Within this broad topic I have identified two questions for exploration: how do parents come to know what is 'good' in parenting? What helps them to put into practice what they know to be 'good'?

I open the thesis by making a case for exploring consciousness of value and the value-seeking of parents. Drawing upon philosophy and fiction I contextualise the practice of parenting within a wider social and emotional frame. I propose that parenting like other experiences risks 'absurdity': in adversity a person's sense of life's meaning and purpose can become undermined.

Through a critical analysis of the psychological theory traditionally applied to parenting programmes I question to what extent psychology can explain any change identified as taking place within them. I extend this analysis to consider how ideas circulating within culture, more generally, might influence, and perhaps undermine, a parent's efforts to achieve value in their relationships with their children. I make a case for a 'reflexive' approach to parenting as opposed to a 'technical' one. In order to account for this 'reflexivity' within an exploratory theory of psychological change I suggest an alternative ontological and epistemological position to that implied (although perhaps not always made explicit) by traditional psychology, may be required. To this end eco-systemic theory, existential-phenomenology and neo-Vygotskian theory are examined in relation to value, agency and change.

Narrative analysis, using a Labovian method, is applied to produce a thematic account of each parent's experience, analysed through the theoretical lens described above, and in relation to the research question. Each parent's account is represented in some detail so as to facilitate 'voice', and with the aim of preserving the authenticity of the stories produced. My hope is that this will allow the reader to engage with some directness to parents' experience.

In the final chapter of this thesis I examine parents' accounts more explicitly in relation to theory and the research question. Within idiographic accounts a complex picture emerged of parents' attempts to seek value in their relationships with their children alongside other important purposes. Dilemmas and compromises were exposed. An exploratory theory of change is proposed, drawing upon an existential and phenomenological ontology, eco-systemic and neo-Vygotskian theory. This theory can be summarized as follows: through an embodied engagement with a particular ideology of parenting, within a supportive community context, parents experience alternative ways of 'being' with their children. Associated with this appeared to be parents increased consciousness of value, increased reflexivity and a greater sense of agency. Implications for the practice of educational psychology are considered, in particular the need to provide relational support to those engaged in a process of change, and the importance of engaging with each person's unique perspective upon value, in order to intervene safely and effectively in the lives of children.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the thesis

1.1 <u>Beginnings and coming to know my research question</u>

Consider why families as a phenomenon are reflected back to us through the medium of television. In the advert break families lounging on sofas, wired into broadband, eating dinner with Bisto gravy, on the beach in a sunny haven, in the kitchen cleaned with anti-bacterial spray. In the dramas, families reconstituted, breaking up, on a journey towards happiness or tragedy, relationships reconfiguring against the background of other plots. When we watch, what do we see? In the documentaries, or in practice, a father and mother who don't seem to know that a crying baby needs soothing not anger, or that regular feeding is important. Animal excrement is on the floor, children are ignored and social workers patiently advise and take notes. Or, individuals design, build or improve their own homes, struggle to create the 'ideal' space in which to live and perhaps bring up a family. When we watch what do we see? Who do we feel ourselves to be in relation to the people presented to us on the screen?

It is clear that TV adverts and other media speak to us of value. Our yearning for value surely begins very early in life. We look for it, take it, throw it away, lose our sense of it, fail to appreciate it, share it, or have it confirmed. What we value 'out there' is intertwined with what we value in ourselves. Knowing what is 'good' is surely a dialectical process. Making life 'good' may well be our defining human preoccupation (Aristotle, 350 B.C, 1996).

However, the importance of perceiving value and how we react to these perceptions is something we may be nervous about acknowledging. This nervousness might be operating in

different spheres with different effects, for example in a professional setting and in a private setting.

In this research I explore parents' experience of value in the context of a group parenting programme in which I am professionally involved (see the box below for a summary of this intervention of which the group parent programme was part).

School Term One:

Weekly attendance for ten weeks, parents with their children, at 'Butterfly Centre'. Shared activities supported by staff. *In the afternoon parents and children separate and parenting group programme takes place.*

Weekly consultations take place in the home.

3 days training for school staff.

Two sessions (morning or afternoon), teacher supported by a member of Butterfly team, in school.

'Good news' meeting in school.

School Term Two

Fortnightly home consultation.

One session weekly in school.

School Term Three

Consultations in the home on request.

Consultations in school on request.

Closure meetings at the end of Term Three.

Figure one: Summary of Butterfly intervention.

Despite there being a great deal of psychological research into parenting in Western culture, and a critique of its value laden cultural bias (Burman, 1994:77), I have found no psychological research in which value, or a search for value, is explored as an aspect of parenting. A google internet search of ' value and loss of value' for example produced a site proposing a return to Christian family values, a charity highlighting the monetary costs of suicide to society and scholarly articles related to existential philosophy. Value has many dimensions. To talk of value may be to risk confusion about your subject as well as your moral-philosophical or political position. Perhaps it is easy to think that our ideas about what is 'valuable' in life are shared, perhaps universal.

In her phenomenological analysis of 'The Human Condition', Hannah Arendt describes speech as a form of action in which the self is revealed to the other. It is in the revelatory act of speech that we feel our paradoxical commonality and uniqueness in relation to others. 'With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world' (1998:76). So, to speak of value is to expose it in the social domain. Perhaps exploring the value of relationships, parent-child and parent-professional, the focus of my practice and my starting point in this thesis, brings to the fore an aspect of existence that might cause us anxiety when we address it directly. As psychologists in the helping professions we may, with good reason, prefer to put value as a construct to one side and talk instead about 'well-being', 'functionality/ dysfunctionality', 'resilience', 'depression' etc; psychological constructs which speak indirectly of some form of individual alienation or loss of value, but not at all of what is strived for. We may feel uncertain about talking about value for fear of imposing what we ourselves value upon others (BPS, 2009:10). However, in doing so we may be avoiding, and possibly disavowing, a central aspect of our experience as human beings. Our efforts may

also be illusory, based upon a fallacy that psychology itself can be value-free, that our theories about development, well-being etc are disconnected from underlying assumptions about human nature and the disciplinary agenda of the state (Osterkamp, 2009). I will consider the origins and status of psychological ideas around parenting later in chapter 2 of this thesis.

1.2 Defining the terms of this inquiry: Value, values and ethics

Despite this avoidance of value in research relating to parenting, working within this intervention over a number of years I have noticed that parents are very clear about their purpose in parenting and in joining the intervention. They have a general sense that things are not 'good' in their relationships with their children. They also say how difficult it is to make changes. They unequivocally wish things to be different. I have also noticed that the parents, when given the time and encouragement to talk, rarely isolate their purposes and values about parenting from other aspects of their lives. Parenting, like other practices, it seems, is embedded within a matrix of personal and social meaning that has clear reference points in the present, in the past and either hopefully or despairingly in a projected future.

Although I have a strong sense of the experience that I wish to explore in this thesis as I try to write I find it difficult to be clear about my terms of reference. For example, 'value', used as a noun (value/values), implies a moral construct, perhaps even a rule. It seems to take me in the direction of a study of moral reasoning, or a study of psycho-social values and how they might inform parenting (Kohlberg 1984). Although I am certain this is relevant to my inquiry, it is not central. My interest here is more general, or perhaps it is deeper. I am interested in parents' efforts to live the 'good life', a life that they value, and

how they come to know what is 'good' and how they go about achieving this. I have found Aristotle's concept 'eudaimonia', often translated as 'the state of flourishing', a helpful starting point in my thinking as it highlights the contingency of life, and that flourishing is difficult under adverse circumstances.

> But the accidents of fortune are many and vary in degree of
> magnitude; and although small pieces of good luck, as also of
> good fortune, clearly do not change the whole course of a life,
> yet great and repeated successes will render life more blissful,
> since both of their own nature they help to embellish it, and also
> they can be nobly and virtuously utilised; while great and
> frequent reverses can crush and mar our bliss both by the pain
> they cause and by the hindrance they offer to many activities.

> Aristotle, 1996, p190

In this passage Aristotle seems to recognise that the experience of stress and trauma undermines us and can alter the relationship we have with what we value, as well as what we value. Within Aristotle's thinking 'virtue', that is, 'good' feeling, thought and action, is oriented towards purpose (teleology). Virtuous action and virtuous purpose take their meaning from one another. Although what is 'good' may be different in different realms of experience, and within different contexts (Aristotle,1996:10), this underlying relationship is maintained as we seek to achieve a state of flourishing.

> This applies to something different in each different art- to health
> in the case of medicine, to victory in the case of strategy, to a
> house in architecture, and to something else in each of the other
> arts; but in every pursuit or undertaking it describes the end of
> that pursuit or undertaking, since in all of them it is for the sake
> of the end that everything else is done.

For Aristotle, intelligence and virtuous character were inseparable (Macintyre, 2007: 154). He proposed that it was through reflection that virtuous feeling and thought could be nurtured and, thus, achieve its expression through virtuous action. This may be particularly meaningful to educational psychologists, particularly at a time when emotional learning is viewed as an important focus of their work. What is 'known' about ourselves, others, and our relationship with the world is likely to be influential in how we maintain the value of these relationships. This is an idea that has currency across several psychological paradigms which theorize our experience of relationships within a developmental framework (Schore 1994, Damasio 2010, Perry 2006, Slater 2007, Goleman 1995), specifically within educational contexts (Bomber, 2007, 2011), and within our culture more generally (McLaughlin, 2008). The purpose of facilitating emotional learning informs many of our interventions (Evans et al, 2004). As educational psychologists it is clear that we have much to say about 'knowing' what is 'good' in behaviour and relationships, although we might use a different vocabulary to describe it, for example, 'cognition', 'processing', 'understanding' or simply, 'learning'.

Within Aristotle's teleological scheme ethics is the discipline which enables man to realise his human potentiality (Aristotle, 1996: 3-24) and therefore might seem relevant to contemporary educational psychology. Alasdair MacIntyre, a contemporary philosopher much influenced by Aristotle, sees 'ethics' as constituted through practice in the context of a moral tradition in the teleological framework of an individual's unified 'life narrative' (2007: 204-225). In MacIntyre's thesis, individual purpose, value, cultural context, and everyday practice, are phenomenologically interdependent. It follows from this that acknowledging, through dialogue, the philosophical orientation of our clients, their constructs of 'the good',

where they come from, and their efforts to make their lives 'good' within the context of their lives, may help us understand more fully their experience, and vice-versa.

Aristotle also expresses something striking about causality: that 'purpose' (telos) can be considered the 'cause' in some cases (Watt, 1996: xviii). This perspective on causality is in sharp contrast to that often expressed in psychological research in which the emphasis is upon first causes, that is, psychological pathways that emerge in response to circumstances, triggers, traits etc. However it does find expression in some psycho-therapeutic approaches, for example, narrative practice (Epston and White 1992, Winslade and Monk 1999) and psychotherapy with an existential focus (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2011). Within these frameworks the capacity for agency and choice-making emerges as a consequence of the client's conscious deliberation, within the therapeutic relationship, on questions of value and purpose.

Miltenburg and Singer (2000) argue that the 'good' must be 'known' to the client if she is to develop a valued purpose towards which she can aim. 'Knowing' can be an outcome of enhanced consciousness of the meaning of personal experience. Their work with 'survivors' of abuse suggests that agency can emerge from this kind of deliberation, '....sorting out moral issues in a therapeutic context can help adults to maintain a distance between themselves and the violence of their childhood' (Miltenburg and Singer, 2000:504).

What these perspectives suggest to me is that philosophical reflection upon the experience of 'value', its personal meaning within a person's life narrative, in the context of their life-world, is integral to a process of change and in some respects may be the cause of change. Therefore my use of the word 'value' in this thesis refers to this wider meaning of the term

9

My experience working with parents has highlighted for me the pervasiveness of the need for a valued purpose in life. This 'existential' aspect to value is explored in Cormack McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2010). In this story a father struggles in an extreme, adverse, post-apocalyptic America, to achieve his own and his son's survival. The novel is an exploration of life's meaning and purpose and provides a scenario in which everything is lost except the possibility of survival itself. However the boy's father has the additional purpose of protecting his son, a purpose his mother rejects by taking her own life. 'Survival for what?' she asks as she justifies her choice of suicide (McCarthy, 2007:57). This is the existential question around which the haunting and poetic prose of this novel revolves.

In this novel the father's actions are consistently oriented towards protecting his son, meeting his basic needs and ameliorating the harshness of the reality around him.

> He held the boy close to him. So thin. My heart, he said. My
> heart. But he knew that if he were a good father still it might well
> be as she had said. That the boy was all that stood between him
> and death.
>
> McCarthy, 2010, p29

In this respect he conforms to an ethical purpose which might generally be considered universal: a parent prioritises their child's needs above their own, this being core to their purpose in life. In the story the child asks for something more, however, a reassurance that there is a purpose to their existence beyond survival. His request is for reassurance that there is a 'goodness' to be striven for, to be experienced still, a goodness which is, perhaps, an extension of what he has come to know in his relationship with his father. The dialogue is

particularly affecting, I feel, because of its ordinary style, representing something easily recognisable, and perhaps universal, a child seeking sense-making explanations from a parent that help him to feel safe in a world, or community that he hopes is fundamentally 'good'.

> But we wouldn't [kill others for food].
> No we wouldn't.
> No matter what.
> No.No matter what.
> Because we're the good guys.
> Yes.
> And we're carrying the fire.
> And we're carrying the fire. Yes.
> Okay.
>
> McCarthy, 2010, p136

I refer to this novel as it is, in some respects, a study of parenting, parenting under conditions so testing and challenging there are exposed two possible perspectives from which to view it: as an experience essentially valueless and driven only by necessity, or as purposeful and defined and shaped by a goal, a goal which has meaning beyond survival. The second perspective, sensitive to context, value and meaning, is vulnerable to the destructive effects of trauma and disaster, 'The frailty of everything revealed at last' (McCarthy 2007: 28).

In the story, for the sake of his son, the father holds ambivalently and heroically to some sense of a moral purpose beyond survival, and at times of weakness is held to this by his son. So, they will only kill in self defence and at times they share their food with strangers. This is the hopeful claim of the novel, perhaps, that a concern for the other and a shared human

purpose can remain, despite the destruction of 'the human artifice' of culture (Arendt, 1998:167). In the novel this hope and the possibility of its fulfilment is an implied consequence of mutual love and care between parent and child. It is because of their relationship that the son cannot tolerate the thought of a life in which there is no community and that the father is shielded from a complete sense of existential nothingness.

In this way the novel explores the paradoxical 'absurdity' of human existence, a perspective which would have implications for a person's sense of value. This idea has been explored by the twentieth century French philosopher Albert Camus in his novels and his essay, 'The Myth of Sysyphus (2006). Camus's thesis was essentially thus: whether life is meaningless or meaningful is dependent upon the purpose of the individual and the extent to which it is authentically realised in the context in which the life is lived (Cox, 2011: 15-16). This existential philosophical view on the value of a life is central to McCarthy's narrative.

I feel this perspective may be relevant to parents struggling with adversity and engaging with our parenting programme: as well as being a matter of survival is it also an attempt to rescue meaning from meaninglessness? Within this wider and deeper philosophical perspective McCarthy also has something to say about what is 'good' within the parent-child relationship, what is good in the practice of parenting in this context, and what this means for individuals and for the human community. Specifically, the meaning of goodness emerges in relation to an experience of a social context, and also the development of the father's and son's shared human 'purpose', caring for themselves and each other.

These themes revolving around survival, the search for 'value', for what is 'good', and all the struggle associated with this, parallel my experience of working with parents in our

parenting programme over several years, my 'reading' of their experience. My observation has been that the parents who choose to become involved with the programme are struggling to an unusual extent with significant adversity. They often report an anguished love towards their children and an intense ambivalence in relation to the experience of being a parent. In their narratives, the *frailty of everything* is often revealed. Often a sense of loss is salient, around their relationship with their child, or other relationships. My observation has been, previous to embarking upon this research, that over time, within the programme they often seem to experience a stronger sense of purpose and are more able to articulate what it is they value in their relationships and lives and what they hope for in the future. I am therefore interested in how this shift in experience comes about, and what it means.

In existential theory and existential psychotherapy, value is conceived as functionally related to motivation and agency (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2011). Merleau-Ponty has described the 'pathology' of embodied experience that results from too many unsuccessful interactions between ourselves and the world, when in reaching out we too often fail to connect (Felder and Robbins, 2011:358-362). Sartre has described the 'bad faith' which we can use to distract from our sense of life's absurdity, or as a substitute for authentic value, for example an excessive love of material things, a concern for reputation, or dependency on drugs and other addictions (Cox 2010:9-10). For Kierkegaard a Christian faith was necessary to give life meaning and to give people courage (1985: 49-52), although Kierkegaard's 'leap to faith' is often interpreted in a secular way. Kierkegaard's philosophy suggests that the meaning of life cannot be rationally established, therefore to live as though life had purpose is a matter of 'faith' (1941).

Existential philosophy, literature and psychotherapy, and Aristotle's virtue ethics seem to support my thinking that parents' experience with their children, pre-conscious and conscious, and the form that this takes, is connected to their sense of value in a fundamental way. This is the philosophical perspective I will explore in this inquiry in which I define 'value' as a profound and encompassing aspect of experience with intellectual, affective, social and cultural dimensions.

1.3 Value, epistemology and reflexivity in psychology.

In my practice, with parents who say they are struggling to live well with their children, psychology meets with this elusive question of value in a very intense way. This is probably the source of my enthusiasm and discomfort. As an educational psychologist I feel I have something to say about how to live well with children, or at least I have a view on the kinds of environments, relationships and experiences that children need in order to thrive. However, I am aware that I am careful in the way that I apply psychological meanings to the lived experience of clients, sensing perhaps an epistemological and ontological chasm that requires some respecting in my professional relationship with them. From a social-constructionist perspective parenting is a personal and social practice that has been subject to psychology's disciplinary influence (Gergen 1999: 33-61, Parker 2005: 5). Psychology itself has been accused of avoiding theorizing personhood (Martin et al 2003: 43-44). Parents may therefore risk a denial of their subjectivity and that of their children in opening their experience to psychological interpretation. As I mentioned earlier in this discussion 'value' has not been explored in the literature relating to parenting. Subjectivity may also be relatively unexplored (Smith 2011, Suissa 2006).

In this work I explore three parents' experiences of a psychological parenting intervention. I examine their experience through the lens of 'value' as I hope to discover whether this is a productive stance to take as a practitioner facilitating change, or a person seeking change. However, I also take the view that language partly constitutes experience (Gergen, 1999). It follows from this that the psychological ideologies/theories which are expressed in the intervention, and more widely in culture, are part of parents' experience too. The psychological theory I explore, in chapters two and three, is wide-ranging, as I hope to capture the discursive range of ideas in culture relating to the experience of parenting and child-care. In the intervention we promote most strongly psychological theories of nurture and attachment, but reference others. In particular I am interested in whether parents' experience of our particular narrative of parenting supports a process of change, or whether it constrains their attempts to achieve what they value. Is the psychological knowledge we share emancipatory or oppressive (Freire 1997: 19-28)? Since I am interested in the process of change I also explore psychological and philosophical theory which seeks to explain change. I will examine parents' accounts in relation to this theory in an effort to understand how change does or does not take place.

In critical psychology it is suggested that the value of psychological research and practice may depend upon philosophical reflexivity (Parker 2005: 25-35). Although, in a modern context, this reflexivity has a political dimension, a concern for epistemological coherence has deeper roots. Spinoza and Aristotle speak of the importance of our understanding being in accordance with nature, and this is essential to notions of 'ethics'. If our ideas are not 'adequate' our reasoning will be false (Spinoza, 2001: 45-46). These thoughts connect to philosophical questions about the status of knowledge and also the nature of reality, which are fundamental to psychology, yet perhaps lack visibility in practice. Making sense means

connecting observed phenomena to underlying principles: epistemology derived from ontology. Knowledge gains its meaning and value from the underlying assumptions made about the nature of the world and what it is to be human. To distance psychology from its philosophical roots, or to fail to acknowledge what these roots are, is to risk creating a psychology which is meaningless or untrustworthy. These concerns connect to my criticality in relation to psychological theory and practice. An exploration of value and experience within a psychological intervention may be an opportunity to critique psychological theory, and to consider what kinds of psychological knowledge offer ontological coherence.

1.4 Focus of study, parents' experience of value

What I have identified in this chapter is a unit of study which can be described in the following way.

This thesis is an exploration of parents' experience of a group parenting intervention in which consciousness of 'value' is considered as an aspect of possible change. In this broad topic I have identified two questions to explore:

How do parents come to know what is 'good' in parenting?
What helps them to put into practice what they know to be 'good'?

In formulating these research questions I have sought to remain open to the possibility that participants will wish to reflect on value in a general sense, rather than only in relation to their family relationships. My hope is that they will feel free to explore in directions that are meaningful to them.

1.5 Chapter summaries

   In chapter 2, I consider to what extent 'value' and 'purpose' (gaining what is valued) is conceived within the psychological theory informing the parenting intervention, which is the focus of this research. Theory will be linked to practice within the intervention. In this discussion ideas of what is thought to be 'good' in parenting practice, within psychology and within culture will be critiqued from a philosophical perspective. In chapter 3, I invite the reader to consider in more detail aspects of our praxis, in particular how the structure of the experience and the patterns of relating might require an alternative ontological and epistemological position to that implied (although perhaps not always made explicit) by traditional psychology. In this discussion eco-systemic theory, existential-phenomenology and Neo-Vygotskian theory will be examined in relation to value, agency and change.

   In chapter 4, I explain my reasons for adopting a narrative method in this research, and my location of this inquiry within a critical-realist ontology. The procedures involved in the research and its claims to be ethical and trustworthy are then outlined in the following chapter, chapter 5. Chapter 6, presents a thematic account of each parent's experience, analysed through the theoretical lens described in chapters 1- 4, and in relation to the research question. In this chapter I have sought to represent (in some detail) parents' 'voices', with attention to the completeness and shape of their 'story', so as to allow the reader to engage with some directness to their experience. In the final chapter of this thesis I examine parents' accounts more explicitly in relation to theory and the research question, and consider the implications of this research for educational psychology practice.

Chapter 2: A critique of 'good' parenting (how do we 'know' what's 'good'?)

2.1 Introduction to chapter

  In chapter one I suggested that a person's search for value and meaning in their life is achieved in a dialectical relationship with culture, and that this search for value is an unexplored aspect of parenting within psychological literature. An assumption guiding this inquiry is that a philosophical perspective in which the meaning of the experience of being a parent is centralised might have implications for educational psychology theory and practice: if we understand parents' experience, and as a consequence, their purposes, we might be better able to support them. My research questions, 'how parents come to know what is 'good'' in their relationships with children', and 'how they can be supported to achieve the 'good'', might therefore be seen as occupying a conceptual space somewhere between psychology and philosophy.

  This research is located in Western culture and I think it is likely that parents' accounts of their experience in the intervention will include psychological explanations which are widely available in this culture, and that this may inform their reflections (Rose, 1989). Using an example from literature I proposed in chapter one that a philosophical perspective might be part of parents' experience too; that these ideas also circulate and may be profoundly meaningful and influential. This relationship between psychology and philosophy interests me, perhaps because I find them both meaningful and useful, yet am unsure which to reach for at times. I am conscious that an aspect of my own purpose in this research is to achieve some understanding of how these different ways of thinking about human experience may be reconciled. All research involves some form of intellectual journey, and perhaps often begins with some form of puzzlement, something which cannot be made sense of. Looking forward,

if I try to imagine where this study will take me in my understanding of 'parenting', I can see no clear synthesis. However, it seems possible that in examining how the practice and experience of parenting is constructed in cultural discourse, and how different ideas compete for dominance within culture, I may make a case for privileging the ethical, in the Aristotelian sense, over the psychological in relation to parenting. Alternatively I may try to argue for an educational psychology practice which orientates towards ideas of value. That is how it seems at present. With this wider purpose in mind, and to begin, as Vygotsky advises, with what is known before moving towards what is not known, I will, in this chapter, examine closely the mainstream psychological literature that informs the intervention experienced by parents in this research. In particular I will consider to what extent the parent is conceived as a person with purpose seeking value, and what is constructed as valuable in the discourse. I will preface this however with discussion relating to a philosophical critique of parenting discourse circulating in culture, a discourse which to a greater or lesser extent owes its existence to the discipline of psychology (Foucault 2002: 375-422).

So as to orientate the reader to my own reflexive position, I open this chapter with a personal narrative from my own experience as a parent, as an example of how the discursive reality of culture can be constitutive of experience (Willig, 2007).

2.2   '…parenting casts our whole being into uncertainty' (Smith 2011: 171)

The underlying premise of this exploratory inquiry is that 'parenting', or, 'being a parent', is more than a 'technical' matter, that, 'It cannot be thought of as no more than a set of techniques or skill' (Smith 2011: 171). Smith suggests that parenting is an 'ethical' experience, ethical in so far as it relies upon reflexivity, far more than the confident

application of ideas and procedures that might be expected to increase parent 'effectiveness'. Perhaps my experience as a practitioner in a parenting programme, necessarily engaged in delivering 'training' designed to teach parents how to 'manage' their children's behaviour, has given me an inside perspective on the complexity of this process and in particular made me conscious of how much reflective and reflexive dialogue this 'training' requires. Unable to find an acknowledgement or explanation for this reflexive activity in the parent training literature I have turned to philosophy and fiction for acknowledgement of the uncertainty involved in the experience of being a parent . However, Smith's observation reminds me that it was experiences in my early days as a parent which awoke me to the paradoxical aspects of 'parenthood', the many contradictory, oppressive and emancipatory meanings circulating in culture suddenly tangible to me through the experience of having a child. There have been many aspects to this personal consciousness-raising, but I will recount a particular experience I had when my second child was six weeks old so as to introduce ideas relating to being a child, and being a parent, the focus of discussion in this chapter.

At six weeks old my partner and I took my son to have his routine check at the doctor's surgery. The situation was quite ordinary and will be familiar to most parents in the UK. My son was a healthy baby. He put on weight quickly (an important marker in the baby-monitoring discourse), and seemed alert, interested in the world and comforted by me (perhaps important markers in a parent's). However, he was increasingly experiencing pain shortly after food and the periods of pain, with crying, were extending to fill up most of his time when he was awake, as well as disturbing his sleep. It was as if his crying, and I'm not sure this word captures the embodied totality of his feeling, was becoming his main experience. I had heard about 'colic', but could not find a satisfactory definition of what this was, its vague but wide reference to all sorts of infant pain, and also, rather speculatively,

temperament, was not sufficient explanation enough to put to rest my anxiety. We had no computer and access to the internet at this time and I relied upon the wisdom of relatives and friends and professionals I came across. Unfortunately it seemed that the word 'colic' was a reassuring explanation for everyone except for me. I hoped to talk about this with the GP.

In the surgery my son was weighed, measured, and then his limbs were manipulated by the doctor. He was 'checked'. He was 'fine'. In fact it was clear that he was growing at an impressive rate. I told the doctor my worries. I stuck to facts, that is, I described what happened around feeding, the ferocious hunger, the 'wind', the writhing, then the screaming', his inability to sleep lying down. I did not tell him how this made me feel, how empathising with a crying infant was inevitable and exhausting, or how worried I was. Perhaps already acquainted with a certain kind of evaluation around 'mothering' I wanted the focus to be on what my baby was experiencing. I finished my description with what I believed was the essential observation. I said, 'food, digesting food seems to hurt him'. In a patient and sympathetic way the doctor repeated what he had said about him putting on weight, that this indicated he was well, that there was 'nothing wrong with him'. Then he looked at me for a little while without speaking. I felt he was frustrated. He turned to my partner and said, 'I think it's because he's breastfeeding successfully and she is not used to that. It's different from bottle feeding'. With my daughter feeding was difficult and after a few difficult weeks we had changed to bottles. This had been discussed in the consultation. My partner nodded and looked rather nervously at me. We gathered everything up: I felt to persist would have been to seem overanxious, difficult, perhaps concerning.

As we left the surgery the health visitor stopped us to ask me to fill in a questionnaire. At the top of the questionnaire it said, 'Post natal depression assessment'. I was given a pen. I

ticked boxes about sleep, conscious of how this would all be evaluated. The last question asked me if I had thoughts about harming myself or my baby. I started to feel quite irritated, perhaps unreasonably as I understood that the purpose of the questionnaire, identifying mother's experiencing distress, was probably 'good'. While my children were very small I was thinking I would like to become an educational psychologist in the future, to use psychology myself when working with others. An inner voice spoke up at that moment, 'not like this'. Thankfully I hadn't had such desperate thoughts of violence. I ticked 'never' and then handed the questionnaire back to the health visitor who put it on a pile next to the changing mat and the weighing scale. I gave back the pen. My partner attempted a joke, 'Do I get one of those questionnaires to fill in?' The health visitor laughed but I thought her eyes did not. We left.

The next day the health visitor came round to our house. In the night we had given our son a bottle of formula milk hoping to reduce his wind and he had been sick and in a lot of pain. We were of course very tired. The health visitor said, 'I know what Dr X has told you, but I think it might be a good idea for you to give up drinking milk yourself if you are going to carry on feeding him. Some babies' stomachs are sensitive to the protein and the sugars in cow's milk'. So, I stopped eating food with cow's milk in it and the intensity of his pain decreased within a week and gradually over a number of months his digestion improved. I understand now, that is, I understand more of the technical details: he was irritated in exactly the way she had suggested, and in the way I had intuitively known. This idea was supported seven years later when there was a recurrence of this sensitivity following a virus. A paediatrician explained to me, medical opinion had changed, and there was an acknowledgement that infants and children could have irritable bowels when exposed to certain foods.

I offer this narrative as I believe it demonstrates how the experience of parenting is constructed discursively, through every-day discourse and intensively through the intervention of government agencies, such as health and education, and how this, in turn, shapes up the experience for parents, and children. I would argue that in my narrative the application of dominant bio-technical discourses through the helping relationships of professionals, in this case the particular agenda of the six-week check, had the effect of marginalising my own particular narrative of my baby's experience. It required the slightly subversive actions of the health visitor with a marginal medical discourse of food intolerance (less marginal now) to rescue me from the sense of isolation and helplessness induced by the consultation, and to facilitate my resistance to the GP's formulation that everything was 'fine' with my baby and no action needed to be taken. Questions of knowledge, whose knowledge is privileged, the GP's, the health visitor's, parents', are in the foreground of this narrative, in a visible relationship with power (Winslade and Monk, 1999: 3). Less obvious perhaps are the constructions around mothers and mothering which seemed present and to some extent oppressive when I tried to advocate for him, to interpret and express his point of view. In this way discursive practice around parenting, child-care and childhood might be expected to have real effects on relationships and well-being.

When I consider that reality is constituted in everyday encounters such as this, I can imagine a different scenario, one in which my concerns were taken seriously by the GP. I might have been able to articulate my deeper concern, that the pain needed to be taken seriously as it was important that my baby had some periods of being happy and relaxed, where we could look at one another and smile and communicate, that the quality of his experience was of value, and perhaps crucially so. This concern might be characterised as, 'reflexive', relating as it did to relationships and ontological ideas about the nature of

experience, and in this way correspond to Smith's idea of 'ethical'. I would argue that it was also psychological, in that relationships between parents and children, children and their world, influence how they develop.

Aristotle's concept of virtue is also relevant here. As we set out that day to the GP surgery I was seeking medical advice to solve a problem and unconsciously adopted the attitudes and behaviour appropriate to this 'virtuous' purpose. If it emerged that his pain had roots in a problem that was not possible to solve, but instead had to be lived with, acknowledgement would have allowed me to develop an additional purpose, perhaps one of family coping, or even survival, until this difficulty passed. My attitude, emotions, and behaviour might have been different where this kind of courage was required (Aristotle, 1996: 3-24). Without acknowledgement of this purpose, the psychological and the ethical aspects of experience, the human capacity to understand, adapt and cope creatively with life's stressors, was, temporarily, marginalised, perhaps oppressed. This is the current direction of my thinking at present. Knowledge has the potential to be emancipatory, or oppressive, and to some extent this depends on the appropriateness of the framework adopted and the process of application (Freire, 1997: 26). Gergen's work would suggest that the process was necessarily relational, and that attention to how this was achieved would be central to emancipatory practice (1999: 33-58), a position supported by research evaluating the impact of therapeutic intervention (Lambert, 1992). This perhaps encapsulates some of my purpose in this research, exploring the relational context of psychological work, and the emancipatory potential of 'knowing'.

2.3   Cultural discourse: What is a 'good childhood' and what is 'good parenting' anyway?

Parents are smothering their children, leaving them unable to
cope by themselves as they grow up, the Prime Minister's

adviser on childhood has said. Claire Perry, the MP for Devizes,

said children's lives were too regimented with organised

activities, and parents were shying away from disciplining their

children. Perry, 48……said she was guilty of organising every

aspect of her children's lives…she said, many women subjugate

their own ambition into their kids.

Press Association/ The Guardian newspaper, 2013.

Embedded in this quotation are a number of discourses about children and parents which

illustrate some of the complexity of the narrative field around being a parent. In the text

children are represented as both undisciplined but over-controlled. They are subject to too

much parental attention, and yet are busy in activities which do not involve their parents.

Women are positioned as both sacrificing themselves, their own goals, but in a way that is

actually self-serving. They are 'guilty' of a kind of neglect that seems very unlike the kind of

neglect that leads to obvious child harm and social service involvement.

This discourse, coming from someone influential in Government, may be an indication of

the emotional and intellectual confusion which exists in the debate and discussion around

parenting in western culture at present.   Prominent within it, I think, is the sense that parents

(and especially women) are responsible for arranging developmental opportunities for their

children.

Judith Suissa, a philosopher of education, perceives this construction of the parent as

manager and facilitator in the dominant discourse of 'behaviour management'. She interprets

such cultural discourse as promoting practices which are instrumental, their purpose being to

influence behaviour, to influence the way children develop (Suissa, 2013). She cites the

practice of 'praise' which is often recommended as a tool for reinforcement of desirable behaviours rather than a natural expression of approval for behaviour that contributes to the experience of community, essentially an ethical attitude. She believes that moral concerns are subsumed by an attitude of instrumentality. Smith (2011) suggests that this instrumentality around parenting achieves its full expression in discourse in which the relationship between parent and child is viewed as a tool to facilitate the effective 'management' of children's behaviour. These ideas, he believes, can interfere with a parent's intuitive connection with their own forms of knowing and being. Parenting is transformed into 'a series of tasks' in which the 'doing' is emphasised over the 'being', 'This takes their relationship into a form of governance that precludes intimacy' (Smith, 2010: 361).

One consequence of this might be that parents, unreflectively, orientate their sense of value and purpose towards ideology. Vansieleghem suggests that modern western discourse around parenting has come to deny parents' capacity to 'know' what is good and what is bad for their children without the support of expert advice or intervention. The 'figure' of the parent is one 'empty of content' (2010: 353-355). Like Smith she sees the dominant cultural discourse around parenting as contributing to a disconnection between parents from their own experience of 'being' a parent, through its reconfiguration of the role from one of care and protection to 'facilititator of self-actualization' (Vansieleghem, 2010: 353-355).

> Specifically, it transforms parents' responsibility for protecting
> their children from risk and facilitating their self-actualization
> into a problem of care for the self and managing this
> transformation.
>
> Vansieleghem, 2010, p354.

The effect of this is to take state control of 'parenting' beyond Foucauldian concepts of disciplinary power and 'normalization'. Instead parents self monitor against a background which is always in flux, like the culture it mirrors. She conceives modern Western parents as caught within a double bind, one that distances them from an intuitive sense of their value as parents. They are deprived of clear 'normative' standards of behaviour and development and yet always have a sense of not achieving the norm, a norm that is never clearly defined and yet continuously striven for (2010: 353-355). In addition parents are encouraged to always self-evaluate, to accept their lack of competence, to self-improve through the reflection and the seeking of information (Vansieleghem, 2010) and children themselves to evaluate the parenting they have received (Smith, 2010: 366). These writers critique modern western parenting discourse as alienating parents from themselves and their children through an excessive focus on instrumentality: doing rather than being.

> It could be said that the discourse of parental services has transformed parenthood into a mechanical process that lacks the ability to meet real needs.

> Vansieleghem, 2010, p354.

The tendency to conceive of the purpose and value of relationships between adult and child as a means to facilitate the control management of behaviour and the successful adaptation to cultural demands is also evident in education. An interesting tension exists in school discourse between disciplinary approaches that rely upon supervision, rewards and punishments and an internalisation of a self-monitoring Foucauldian 'gaze' (Scheer, 2011), and those which emphasise relational responsibility, for example restorative practices and the development of self-other awareness through emotional literacy (Gillies, 2011). Of course,

parents and teachers reference the same culture, although from different perspectives, and it is likely that this tension exists in families as it does in schools.

As with parenting these discourses and practices relate to changing ideas of childhood and what is valued in childhood (James et al, 1998: 3-34). The modern child is the focus of attention and investment and is subject to intense scrutiny but is also conceived to be autonomous and as possessing rights (James et al, 1998: 6-7). The contradictory pressures between practices that foster autonomy/ self-regulation, practices which insist upon control, and those which emphasise relational responsibility, are felt by children and adults (Hartas, 2011) and are unlikely to be the only source of confusion for those unsure about how to 'be' with children. It is likely that other ideas, more dominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, such as the 'evil child', wild and uncontained and needing strong moral education, the child as 'blank slate' needing to be taught the prescribed wisdom of culture, are also influential. Contrast this with Piaget's 'developmental child' who needs only the appropriate environmental experiences in order to develop 'naturally' (James et al, 1998: 13-18). The tension between these competing ideas can be seen in the school curriculum, for example The Early Years, where 'learning through play' is framed by a prescriptive regime of assessment and evaluation (DfE, 2013). In the context of this intellectual incoherence, and perhaps moral uncertainty, relationships and public policy evolve (MacIntyre, 2007: 1-5). To return to the quotation above, Claire Perry, the Prime Minister's adviser on childhood and parenting: the confusion of ideas expressed here, pedagogical, moral and political, may be in fact commonplace. Such confusion may help to account for the disempowered parent seeking the expert view of 'supernanny' which Suissa describes in her article (2013). It may help to account for the existence of our intervention. However it is also likely that this confusion is

expressed in the discursive content of our intervention, our particular narrative of parenting, and the conversations we have with parents.

Smith (2010, 2011) and Suissa (2006, 2013) envision as a solution to the conceptual confusion threatening to engulf the uncertain parent, as to what is 'good' parenting, and associated with this, what is a 'good' childhood: a parent who is able to be reflexive within their relationships with children. In their thesis it is not clear how a parent might make sense of the 'narrative soup' that surely cannot be ignored and is arguably constitutive of their experience. Rather, in appealing to 'ethics' they suggest that attitudes of protection, care and love, in families and in schools, can serve as an antidote to 'instrumentality', objectification and the bio-technical and capitalist discourses which in themselves they see as harmful. In my own narrative of 'resistance' I believe it was the need for this reflexivity that I came to understand early in my parenting, between the lived experience of a relationship with my children and constructions of childhood, and childcare 'out there'. In order to solve ordinary problems of 'being', illness, difficulties at school, friendship disputes etc, it was necessary to engage with the world, but to do so was essentially 'problematic' in that it required evaluation, of information, advice and experience. Although an attitude of care seemed fundamental I felt the need for more theory to make sense of experience, a psychology I was more comfortable with perhaps, an ongoing need and curiosity which is possibly driving this research.

2.4 Psychological Parenting literature: How are value, purpose and personhood represented?

2.4.1 *Introduction.*

The philosophical perspective on parenting previously examined encourages us to consider the phenomenology of parenting: the lived experience. A contrast between the 'doing' and the 'being' was drawn and the role of power and its expression in discourses of expertise was explored as constructing realities to which parents orientate. Vangsieleghem (2010) proposes that the modern parent seeks to inform themselves, is constantly in search of expert advice so as to know what to do, and perhaps also how to be. Parenting literature, in the form of books and manuals have been influential since the 1950's, for example, *Baby and Child* (2010), *Toddler Taming* (1985), *The contented Little Baby* (2006), and in Western culture at present there are many TV programmes and documentaries which take a perspective on how to deal with children's 'challenging' behaviour, for example, *House of Tiny Terrors* (BBC) and *Supernanny* (Channel 4).

If I were to examine any of these works closely it is likely that I would discover patterns of meaning that would reflect some of the cultural concerns of the time as well as the dominant psychological discourses available in culture. So for example, *Baby and Child* (2010), a parenting manual authored by Penelope Leach, first published in the 1970's, is likely to be viewed as more child/baby centred than *The Contented Little Baby* (2006) with its emphasis on routine and consistency. Perhaps reflecting the high degree of adaptation and flexibility required by modern capitalism (Vansieleghem 2010, Smith 2010), lack of consensus and controversy are also visible in media relating to parenting, as moral, pedagogical and psychological discourses jostle, combine and re-combine.

My purpose in this research is to examine the experience of parents participating in a parenting intervention. I am aware that the form this intervention has taken has been influenced by particular psychological literature. While I do not plan to undertake a genealogy of parenting my aim in this section is to consider how parenting, and parent-child relating, is constructed in the psychological discourse most obviously informing the intervention, how it's value and purpose, the doing and the being, are conceived. This analysis will, I hope, provide insight into an aspect of the parents experience in the intervention, their encounter with a particular narrative of parenting. As mentioned previously, it is generally acknowledged that psychology finds its way into culture, in various forms (Rose 1989, Parker 2005) and so the ideas explored and encountered in the intervention are also circulating more widely, although with varying visibility and status. This analysis may, therefore, speak of the phenomenology of parenting and child-care in the UK at present, more generally.

2.4.2   *Learning to behave: Social learning theory and behaviourism.*

I first came to know the intervention explored in this research when I was training to be an educational psychologist, on placement in the Local Authority I was later employed by. In the Authority, amongst schools and services, it was a highly regarded intervention generally and viewed as 'effective', but many psychologists in the service had reservations about the emphasis upon behaviourism and social learning theory in the practices promoted and the language used to explain these. Some colleagues felt it to be an inadequate explanatory model of parenting and to exist in a state of some tension with other models of practice that the service was promoting. My own impression when I joined the team for a day was that the intervention existed as a complex social situation in which a range of psychological and philosophical ideas were circulating.

In this section I will summarize some assumptions of behaviourism and social learning theory and relate them to the discourse and practice of the intervention. I will then summarize the well-developed critique of this psychological perspective and consider how it provides both dilemmas and possibilities for applied psychologists at the present time in Western society.

Behaviourism emerged as an alternative to biological determinism in psychology and has therefore been seen by some as having emancipatory potential as a discourse presenting a challenge to assumptions about racial and genetic difference (Gergen, 1999: 1-32). Ideals of equal opportunity were legitimised in a theory that emphasised the role of environments in determining behaviour. However behaviourists rejected the idea of 'mind', that it was necessary to theorise internal processes within the human mind in order to understand and predict behaviour, controlling and predicting behaviour being the 'valued ' outcomes of this theory (Ryle 1949, Gergen 1999: 1-32). As well as denying a structure to mind behaviourism rejected the idea that complex behaviour might emerge in an adaptive process between person and environment, and in this way support the organism's survival (Naik 1998:4). Skinner and Watson's root theory regarding human experience and development was essentialist and uncompromising: 'persons are nothing more than simple mediators between behaviour and the environment' (Naik 1998:1). In this version of determinism there was no room for free-will or an agentic self, a problematic position for those who understand 'a sense of self' to be integral to personhood.

In our intervention behaviourism is most evident in the 'reinforcement' practices. Parents are encouraged to 'catch the children being good'. It is stated that 'behaviour that is noticed

is most likely to be repeated' and tokens within a reward system are used to make the experience of 'doing the right thing' pleasurable for the children, gratification leading apparently to repetition (Appendix 1: 28-33). Negative reinforcement, however, is avoided so the almost ubiquitous 'time out', along with other punishments, is rejected, although disapproval of violent actions is communicated clearly, 'We never hit.' (Appendix 1: 73-75) However within the discourse of the intervention the classical conditioning shades into 'operant conditioning'. It is theorised that initially, at least, children do the right thing in the expectation of a rewarding response from the parent. The 'reward' then becomes 'generalised' and interactions with parent become rewarding and a more co-operative pattern of relating emerges. Providing further variety, constructs such as self-esteem, confidence and motivation, deriving from social learning theory (Bandura 1963), are also discernible and used in explanatory ways (Appendix 1: 19-25). In this way despite the behaviourist approach to practice and technique, a sense of self emerges within the discourse, a 'self' that experiences 'motivation' and makes choices and decisions based on previous experience, current need as well as environmental cues. Constructs of relationship are also used in the programme texts which give a richer account of a relational self (Appendix 1: 19-25) which I will discuss in a later section.

I would argue that this apparent medley of psychological paradigms is also apparent in educational discourse and more generally within culture. Within educational contexts a range of strategies are often recommended, from behaviourism, social-learning theory, cognitivism, humanism, and recently, attachment based approaches (Evans et al 2004, Bomber 2011). In this way, I believe, the intervention studied here, mirrors and contributes to school discourse. Each behaviour management perspective implies a different version of the 'self' and is often associated with a very different agenda. For example, behaviourism is often associated with

disciplinary control and humanism with relational quality and self-actualization. (Scheer 2011).

   In order to understand the ambivalence and competing interests that such eclectic application of ideas suggests it might be necessary to examine how behaviourism is critiqued within psychology. Since its emergence behaviourism has been criticised as failing to explain complex behaviour, including language acquisition and memory (Naik, 1998:1). Yet, as already mentioned, behaviourism continues to flourish in many contexts. Behavioural interventions which are very purist in approach such as Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) (Kazdin, 1993), a well know Autism intervention, have been criticised as normalising and unresponsive to individual need and worth (Hastings, 2013). Although the purpose of ABA might be viewed as uncontroversial, the promotion of adaptation and inclusion as valued outcomes, in failing to allow space for an agentic 'self', might come close to denying an individual's right to develop their own perspective on the world, or to resist certain rigours and routines (Hastings, 2013). For some this completes a process of pathologisation through which social exclusion is managed and legitimized (Billington, 2000). Although ABA may be considered an extreme example of a behaviourist approach in child-care, I think the dilemmas raised by it are to some extent relevant to all applications of this theory. An emphasis upon 'adaptation' seems to disavow the complexities of social life. For example, I think it is likely that any psychology which fails to conceive of self-hood and agency, risks imposing its particular valued outcomes upon persons. So, in behaviourism, prediction and control is privileged, and in social learning theory a habitual sense of competence and conformity in relation to the demands of culture. It might therefore be argued that such 'instrumentalism' denies alternative perspectives on value (Gergen, 1999: 33-58). In contexts where social control is privileged such ways of thinking may be viewed as desirable, or at

least convenient. It might also be argued that it assumes that all children will respond to the techniques, or that their best interests are served by doing so.

Behaviourism has also been criticised as failing to address underlying problems that may contribute to problematic situations. Although more recent versions of behaviourism allow that internal stimuli could be reinforcing, this stops short of a concept of self (Naik, 1988). Parenting interventions with a more cognitive approach often incorporate behaviourist thinking (DfE, 2011).In cognitive psychology the self is scripted and adaptive scripts are encouraged, often through behaviourist methods. The emphasis tends to be on what the child thinks rather than feels. Contextual factors are rarely the focus of examination.

What I hope emerges in this discussion is that different psychologies have different valued outcomes and conceive of persons, and crucially relationships between persons, differently. For Suissa, 'reinforcement', whether through rewards or the liberal application of 'specific praise', another practice our intervention encourages, risks an instrumental approach to relationships (2006, 2013). The intrinsic value of co-operation, or learning, for example, may become obscured or lost, along with the possibility of a moral or relational purpose. Suissa's position expresses a dilemma that is familiar to educators and parents, as well as applied psychologists. However, in the contexts in which we work the pressure to support adaptation to an ideal which is defined and often fixed by others is considerable. Compromises are likely.

In our documents and in our conversations with parents and teachers this discursive negotiation is, I believe, apparent in the way the psychological paradigms are blended. My search for a praxis which makes me feel comfortable is also visible. So, for example, we promote specific praise, but only after we have shared our narrative of 'attachment'. We

recommend and model the use of praise with tokens but describe it as a 'tool' for experiencing successful moments of relating. In this way we contextualize behaviourist approaches within psychology that allows for self-hood, perhaps mirroring integrative therapeutic approaches generally (Angus and McLeod, 2000). I am aware that in recent years in the intervention we have increasingly emphasised the personal over the technical, perhaps in a way that reflects the development of educational psychology as a profession. This change may also reflect the needs of the children referred to us in the programme. Often the children are struggling to relate to everyone in their world. My perception is that where a child does not feel cared about they cannot adapt to the expectations of others easily. Such adaptation seems untenable. Perhaps it has no value to them (Hartas, 2011).

Perhaps Suissa's and Smith's strongest point is that the parent conceived of in a psychology such as this values adaptation to the ideals of culture over the experience of a relationship open to more valuable or distinctive possibilities of being (Suissa 2006, 2013, Smith 2010, 2011). These values can be difficult to articulate in a culture in which discourses of achievement and other ways of talking about children and parenting are privileged. This criticism might also be applied to education with it's hegemony of targets and curriculum.

What I hope emerges in this analysis is the possible significance of the tension between behaviourism, social learning theory and other dominant psychological paradigms as they are played out in culture, and in the intervention at the centre of this research. In the following section I explore psychology which is more relational and consider how value may be conceived within this paradigm.

2.4.3   *Learning to love: The neuroscience of attachment.*

In my introduction to this thesis I mentioned that when I joined the intervention, as an educational psychologist, five to six years ago, I was sceptical that the psychology it claimed to apply (described above) accounted for the changes which seemed to be taking place in relationships. I was therefore unsurprised that the evidence base for similar programmes acknowledged that little is known about how change takes place, and few qualitative studies had explored the experience of participating in a parent programme, from the parent's or child's perspective (Moran et al 2004). It seemed likely that in order to account for changes in relationship, relating needed to be theorized and social learning theory and behaviourism did not seem to allow for this. I was also observing through practice that a great deal of dialogue took place in relationships, between professionals, parents and teachers etc, and this concerned the nature of relationships, and how the children interpreted their experience of the world. It seemed reasonable to explore theories of attachment and in particular an emerging synthesis between developmental neuroscience, attachment theory, developmental psychology and psychoanalysis (Schore, 1994), and to make these ideas more explicit in our discussions and the training sessions for parents and teachers.

As we (my colleagues in the team, and I) searched for ideas and words that would help us centralise and operationalise the value of 'good relationships' between parents and children in the training we drew upon the work of a number of writers/ practitioners (Perry 2006, Sunderland 2006, Bomber, 3007, 2011). In particular we drew upon a book by Margot Sunderland called, *What Every Parent Needs to Know* (2006). This publication is described on the back cover as a 'practical parenting book' and was particularly useful to us in that theory (the synthesis mentioned above), was operationalised in descriptions of relational

encounters in the text. In the introduction to the text the author makes the claim that many problems, 'in people and in communities' are the consequence of, 'everyday parenting'. Implicit in her title and the text is a truth claim: 'good' parenting can be reduced to a number of practices that are universally good, and well-adjusted, resilient people will be the result. Although I do not take this position myself I am aware that this view is held by many, and that I have at some level some realist assumptions about what children need. This will be an issue that I will explore further in chapter 4 of this thesis when I consider the ontological assumptions underpinning this intervention and this research.

Central to the claims of those working from a contemporary 'attachment' perspective is the representation of childhood as a vulnerable period for brain development, and that good care in childhood is necessary for this development to take place (Perry 2006, Schore 1994, Sunderland 2006). Sunderland refers to studies which claim to show how brain-chemistry affects mood and behaviour in human beings, for example, opoids with calmness, and high levels of cortisol with pain and distress (Panksepp 1998). Much of Sunderland's neurological thesis is derived from the work of Jaak Panksepp, who proposes that there are emotional systems embedded in the lower brain which are dominant in infancy and early childhood. The systems are: rage, fear, separation, distress, seeking, care and play (Panksepp 1998: 41-58). One of the core assumptions in this field of inquiry is that it is how parents respond to the emotional experience and expression of their children that determines how integrated these brain systems become and how emotionally regulated a person is able to be. Sunderland recommends, in contrast to some other child-care 'experts', always responding to a baby or small child's distress with soothing and holding, making explicit links between parent behaviour and a child's neurological development.

> With consistently responsive parenting like this, your child's
> frontal lobes will start to develop essential brain pathways that
> will, over time, enable him to calm these alarm states in his
> lower brain.
>
> Sunderland, 2007, p24.

Perry (2006) describes the process of brain development and emotional regulation as integrated and dependent on particular parent behaviours. Sunderland also cites evidence that too much stress and 'unresponsive parenting' has consequences for the development of brain structures.

> In the brains of children who have suffered intense uncomforted
> distress, the hippocampus appears somewhat shrunken because
> of cell death within it's tissues……….Adults with a shrunken
> hippocampus score lower on memory and verbal reasoning tests.
>
> Sunderland, 2007, pp 42-43.

In Sunderland's book the 'effective' parent is frequently described as responsive, responding to and making sense of a child's emotional experience. This is highly valued practice. Mutual enjoyment is vividly described and the value of just 'being' with your child is promoted. Even in difficult circumstances such as when a child is in a rage Sunderland can describe 'what to do' and 'how to be'. The value of a parent just 'being there' (available) is theorized in psychoanalytic terms as 'containment', the capacity of a person to accept and feel the emotion of another (Douglas 2007). Ideas of embodiment are also discernible in this discourse. The boundaries between persons are permeable, and relational responsibilities are perhaps thus amplified.

If your child is experiencing a distress tantrum she will need your
help to calm down again. If you hold her in your arms, your
mature bodily arousal system will help to calm her immature
one. Speak to her softly, using simple soothing words. Your child
will begin to feel very safe as she realizes that you can help her
with her very big feelings.

Sunderland, 2007, p 124.

This type of discourse can perhaps be seen as offering resistance to behaviourist discourses
of 'reinforcement', perhaps leaning towards existential philosophy, allowing that grief,
disappointment etc may be 'givens' that need to be experienced in order to be known and
endured, and that, paradoxically, we learn to be independent through our dependence on
others (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2011). They also allow for a parent who is not always
showing, guiding, teaching, but is sometimes only an empathic companion, as well as
someone who enjoys being with you. I have the sense that this would correspond to Suissa
and Smith's concept of the 'ethical parent', in a state of 'being' with their child.

However, in her text Sunderland weaves a number of psychological perspectives together
around a central idea, loving your child will optimize their development, and it is this
pervasive sense which Suissa identifies in *What Every Parent Needs to Know* (also published
as *The Science of Parenting*), as 'instrumentality' (2006). The impression is perhaps created
that a parent relating to their child ought to have as their purpose the boosting of their brain
development. In a sense Sunderland, while writing persuasively of the importance of good
relating, undermines its intrinsic value in the same text. As I worked with Sunderland's text,
taking out what I 'valued' to share with parents, I was aware that she may have been
attempting to make a case for more sensitive, developmentally attuned care for children, and

considered it was necessary to make instrumental links so as to promote the value of this

approach. In our training we also make this link (Appendix 1: 19-26). Whilst centralising the

value of enjoying being together we also highlighted supporting self-actualization as a valued

purpose with valued outcomes, for example in relation to learning through shared play

(Appendix 1: 34-41). From this it might be possible to infer that as psychologists we may

also speak to culture when we speak of children.

2.4.4 *Psychodynamic perspectives*.

   Psychodynamic concepts are interwoven through many contemporary parenting

interventions and discourses connected to parenting. In this intervention we explicitly

described and deliberately applied Bion's concept of containment and Klein's concept of

'projection' (Bion 1961, Klein 1988, Douglas 2007) (Appendix 1: 19-20). As well as

providing us with a metaphor, a means of talking about the emotional communication

between parent and child, 'containment' has allowed us to place ourselves, in theory as well

as practice, in meaningful relationship with families. This is expressed in literature from the

Solihull Programme, an intervention Hazel Douglas developed and promoted, which also

draws upon several psychological paradigms, developmental, psychoanalytic and behaviour

management (NHS, 2006).

> Containing a baby's anxieties is difficult just because it so easily
> connects with parents own anxieties. There are often real causes
> of anxiety, birth difficulties, as with Luke's mother, or fears
> perhaps that a baby will died during the night. This kind of fear
> is based upon grim reality; everyone has heard of such tragic
> events. Talking through these fears and experiences makes them
> manageable. When the mother meets the baby's anxieties during

the night it no longer connects to her infinite dread and she can

respond to it appropriately. It seems as though my work involves

directly containing the mother's anxiety so that she can go back

to the baby and contain it for the baby……….

………..The infant passes on/ projects overwhelming feelings,

which he doesn't understand and cannot manage. A receptive

parent holds onto these feelings and tries to makes sense of them

for the child. By a calm and thoughtful response, a mother

conveys the feeling that the anxieties are tolerable and

meaningful.

Solihull approach trainer's pack, NHS,2006, p4.6

2.4.4   *Critique of the contemporary attachment paradigm*

As psychological and cultural texts, the emerging paradigm, developmental, neuro-

scientific, psychoanalytic, can be critiqued in a number of ways which expose the cultural

values relating to parenting embedded in them. The references to research from neuroscience

are firmly rooted in the positivist tradition. In Sunderland's text the original references make

limited conclusions from which Sunderland might be said to have constructed a plausible

meta-narrative, a theoretical account of the parent-child phenomenology. In her account there

is an alignment of very powerful discourses, scientific and psychological, and these can

perhaps be seen as reproducing an older narrative in which mothers, and perhaps also fathers,

are solely responsible for their children's development (Burman,1994:77-93). The parent is

constructed as powerful in the developmental/psychoanalytic account in determining the

course of their child's development, however, in such a distorted (distorted by omissions)

account of parenting there seems little scope for consideration of alternative or additional

influences, either neurological variance or socio-economic stressors, for example. Examined in this wider framework a parent's power may no longer seem so unequivocal.

In the parenting literature, intended for parents to read, parenting is portrayed as existing in emotional lacunae, or through a 'dance', in which problematic encounters with community and culture are not evidenced. In this way Sunderland's narrative can be seen as a continuation of Bowlby's attachment theory, and therefore subject to the same critique, as culturally biased and too focussed upon the mother/parent–child dyad (Burman 1994: 77-93). In this new paradigm, however, attachment discourse achieves a higher status, is perhaps reified through alliance with neuro-scientific constructs made visible through brain scans. I was particularly mindful as I was drawing from her work that Sunderland constructs and promotes in her narrative a particular style of parenting that values emotional experience and communication in relationships, in families (Stefansen and Aarseth, 2011). It occurs to me that in Gergen's representation of social constructionist thinking (1999), a relational focus may naturally counter any tendency towards rigid application of techniques or skills (Smith, 2011), However, by failing to acknowledge the role of history and culture (family, society) as constitutive of experience, it may be experienced by some as invalid or unliveable and therefore oppressive (Freire, 1997: 19-31).

This version of the parent-child relationship can therefore be critiqued as culturally biased knowledge construction imposed through application in contexts in which dominant ideologies operate to define the parameters of experience. However it might also be argued that this discourse allows for a parent whose purpose is to interpret meaningfully their child's experience and mediate between them and the world, a purpose in contrast to one of 'discipline', or education through 'reinforcement'. With its emphasis upon meaning and

experience it can perhaps be viewed as compatible with philosophical frameworks such as phenomenology. Furedi's suggestion that 'reverie', the value of simply being with a child in contemplation of a shared reality, is undervalued within western society, comes to mind (Furedi, 2001). A particular dilemma of interpretation emerges through this contrast. This foregrounding of inter-subjectivity might also apply to our own purpose as practitioners in which the value of working alongside parents, interacting with the children at home and in educational settings, is integral to the structure and discourse of the intervention. This might be viewed as essential to ethical practice (Mercieca, 2011). Similarly 'containment', in Bion's sense (1961) might also be seen as providing some reflexive space in which multiple meanings can be evaluated, perhaps facilitating some resistance to oppressive discourses so ready and available for application within our culture. Finally, bringing psychological theories of relating into practice may allow us as practitioners to foreground empathy and care, the possible benefits of which are represented I think in the following quotation.

> Occasional comments which show that you can put yourself in their shoes are helpful and containing……You need to try and listen attentively and with interest, even if you have things to say or feel you have identified the difficulty or solution. For example you could suggest a sleep programme without any hope of success if you have not understood a mother who is terrified of her child dying, or perhaps experienced the loss of a sibling or even a child of their own.

> Solihull approach training pack, NHS, 2006, p 4.7

2.4.6 *Living a life in complex environments: Ecological perspectives*

Educational Psychology has adopted Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory as a framework for practice (BPS and DECP, 1999). I will describe briefly some of the assumptions of this theory and how it has influenced the development of the parenting intervention experienced by the participants in this research. I will also discuss some research which has investigated aspects of parenting in an ecological systemic paradigm. From each standpoint, that of practitioner and researcher, I will consider how the parent experience is conceived in this theoretical paradigm.

Bronfenbrenner's theory proposed that human behaviour was best understood as the consequence of an individual's interaction with the systems in which they found themselves, their contexts (Bronfenbrenner 1979). He identified the contexts as the micro-system, meso-system, exo-system and macro-system. In later re-workings of his model he placed a greater emphasis on 'time' as a crucial dimension of experience (chrono-system) and also greater emphasis on the characteristics of a person, developing over time, and how this influenced their interaction with contexts, the process (Bronfenbrenner 1999). Although each person's relationship with contexts is unique it is thought that patterns can be identified in research using the model (Tudge et al 2009). Transitions between systems were viewed as particularly important for development in Bronfenbrenner's earlier model (1979): for example, starting school, having children, divorce etc. It is acknowledged that different systems have different rules, or make contradictory demands upon a person, for example, family and school, community, culture, and that this might be problematic for some (Kelly et al 2008: 26-28).

It has been argued that educational psychology has gone further than other helping professions, eg clinical psychology, and social work, in embracing this way of understanding

the individual and their experience (Kelly et al, 2008: 9). Practice guidance suggests that educational psychologists should seek to 'intervene' at any point in an individual's relationship with context in a way likely to lead to positive outcomes for a child (BPS and DECP. 1999). This adoption of ecological systems theory may have arisen because the eco-systemic framework supports collaborative problem solving, or is compatible with a social-constructionist approach to theory (Kelly et al 2008: 26-28).

The parenting intervention was very influenced by clinical psychology models (in particular a parenting programme devised by Swindon Community CAMHS), however, in seeking to work with parents, children and schools, across contexts, greater coherence between systems in patterns of relating was sought. 'Rules' for relating were established through the training and visits to school and home. Transitions between systems were attended to, through visits to school and home and negotiated practices to support these. In this way it could be argued that eco-systemic thinking transformed a 'typical' parenting intervention, acknowledging within its structure that interactions across systems as well as within systems are likely to impact upon a child's development (Appendix 1: 2-5).

I would like to suggest that working across contexts around a child makes visible the discursive content of interactions and that this might lead to a re-negotiation of meaning. In Gergen's terms, with reference to Wittgenstein I think, new, 'forms of life' might emerge (1999: 35). In an ecological perspective it is acknowledged that children can behave differently in different contexts: they might be viewed as achieving differently, as having different expectations and perceptions and emotions, or as subject to different interpretative frameworks. A multiplicity of 'selves' might therefore emerge in the discourse (Gergen 1999: 70-72). In this wider, interactive perspective the purpose and values of a parent may

also seem different. For example, they may be recognised as managing the systems around their child, rather than as 'parenting' only within the dyad. Their purpose may be expressed in multiple ways that may not be easily discerned from within a simpler model consisting of linear causal mechanisms (Kochanska et al, 2008).

Tudge et al (2009) evaluate several studies that can be considered relevant to parenting and child development. These articles attempt to identify the interactive processes between persons and systems, family systems and society more generally. Issues of power, the influence of ideology, and the interests associated with this, are often exposed in such research, although this might not be the explicit aim (Tudge et al, 2009:198-199).

Despite being an important model in EP practice ecological systems theory does not theorize psychological agency. Although 'characteristics' of the parent eg 'psychopathology' are considered, the parent, as a person with purposes, aims, values etc, is not. Although it is allowed that people, positioned within an interlinking network of contexts, subject to culturally and biologically derived rules, evaluate and make decisions based upon multiple variables in multiple contexts, their values and purposes, beyond 'survival', are not considered (Tudge et al, 2009: 204-208). This causes me to wonder to what extent an exploration of parents' experience of value, and their potential identity as reflexive agents managing complex systems, might inform an eco-systemic approach to intervention and research. Is it possible to conceive of a parent seeking 'the good life' and freedom from adversity within such a model? Would it be possible to integrate rather than simply 'add-on' the discourse of relational psychology available through contemporary attachment theory, which is what I sense I do in my practice. This may require a psychological theory of

personhood, an ontology, which theorizes explicitly how embodied persons engage with the

physical and symbolic world. This possibility will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Psychological theory relevant to the experience of change.

3.1 Summary of chapter content

   In the previous chapter I described and critiqued the psychological theories prominent

within the narratives of 'parenting' and 'child-care', informing our intervention. My aims

have been as follows: to provide some sense for the reader of the discursive content of the

intervention, to make more visible the origins of ideas which we proposed to parents and

teachers, and to consider how these ideas might speak, or not speak, of value in parenting, the

subject of this inquiry. I referred to my discomfort with behaviourism and social learning

theory as well as my engagement with contemporary attachment theory, an engagement

which I think may be understood as my attempt to centralize the relational experience of

parenting in our dialogue. I preceded this discussion with a philosophical critique of

psychological discourses of parenting so as to foreground certain dilemmas I perceive in

relation to psychological theory and associated practices, in particular traditional

psychology's tendency towards the privileging of adaptation to culture over agency, a

position which may be interpreted as oppressive (Parker, 2005).

   In this chapter I invite the reader to consider in more detail aspects of our praxis, in

particular how the structure of the experience and the patterns of relating might require an

alternative ontological and epistemological position to that implied (although perhaps not

always made explicit) by traditional psychology, and the theories explored in the previous

chapter. My purpose is to develop a theoretical context I hope will help me make sense of

both the discursive and enactive/embodied aspects of the parents' experience within the

intervention, thus reflecting the dual emphasis in the programme: the experience of doing

things differently and understanding things differently. In previous chapters I have described

my dissatisfaction with a psychology empty of 'mind' (behaviourism), and dualist theories which disavow the importance of context in determining experience. My aim now is to move towards a more holistic conceptualisation of personhood, that is, the experience of being a person. To this end, in the following exploration of theory, the themes of agency, selfhood and change will be examined in relation to value. My aim is to create a conceptual space in which psychology and philosophy can co-exist comfortably, and thus perhaps allow 'adaptation' and 'value' to speak to one another, as I think they may do in our practice in the programme.

3.2   Family Therapy: Cybernetics and the Milan Group.

3.2.1   *Principles of Milan Family Therapy*

In the previous chapter I identified ecological-systems theory as influential in the design of the intervention. I would now like to extend this discussion to consider some connections with the theory and practice of Milan Family Therapy.

In Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic theory, problems arise within systems as a consequence of the interactions between levels of the system and between sub-systems (1979, 1999). In family therapy Bateson and the Milan Group developed practice and theory around improving communication and patterns of relating within the family and between the family and wider systems (Bateson 1971, Becvar and Becvar 2003). In doing so, it might be said, that they emphasised the importance of meaning-making as an aspect of the systems function, and by implication, as integral to a process of change. Although improved 'function' was the shared aim of systemic intervention, families defined for themselves, through discursive process, what improvement might mean and were also conceived as

50

agentic in this process: consciousness and a capacity to make choices and decisions emerging together within the therapeutic process (Jones, 1993: 55-76).

In these models of practice, intervention is conceived as acting like a catalyst provoking some form of re-organisation within a system (Jones 1993: 1-30). Bateson (1971) expressed his view that all intervention (and non-intervention) has effects; that it is impossible to avoid manipulation, and therefore it is reasonable to advise and prescribe particular courses of action. Some 'prescriptions' might not be expected to improve situations, but rather, unsettle the system and patterns of relating. It is thought that in re-discovering equilibrium, a family system might change (Bateson, 1971). As with Bronfenbrenner, in his later work, the Milan model acknowledged the importance of time, the *history* of a situation, as contributing to the patterns experienced in the here and now (Jones, 1993:1-30).

These ideas are, I believe, suggestive of a reflective and reflexive process, provoked by a disruption to ordinary, habitual and taken for granted ways of being. In the following section I will consider how our intervention might be understood to operate in ways analogous to Milan Family Therapy.

3.2.2   *Practice in the intervention examined in relation to the principles of Milan Family Therapy*

As can be seen in the 'summary of the intervention' on page 2 and the intervention Handbook (Appendix 1: 2-8), our intervention is a staged process involving prescribed activities, in schools, with parents and children, in a community setting, in a training group and at home. Initially parents are invited in an educational group context to consider psychological ideas around relationships and the needs of each member of their family, in

relation to some of these ideas. Before this the parents/carers are also invited to consider their family history and the complex patterns of relating that this might have involved. A process of reflection takes place over a period of two weeks. This involves two three-hour parent-group sessions and two home visits before work directly involving the children with their parents begins. In this period school staff experience three days training and then work is begun in school.

As might be predicted by cybernetic-systemic theory (Becvar and Becvar 2003, Bateson 1971, Jones 1993), we have noticed in previous groups that these experiences can unsettle the family situation and sometimes the school context too, perhaps confirming a social-constructionist epistemological position, that mental events are also social events (Willig 2007). Sometimes 're-organisation' (Becvar and Becvar 2003: 104-126) in the family system is reported at this early stage too, for example, less punishing by exclusion or an effort made to spend more time together.

In the following discussion I will examine our practice of recommending 'strategies' to parents in relation to the principles of Milan Family Therapy. As can be seen in the figure representing the staged model (Figure 2, and Appendix 1: 7), parents are advised to practice particular 'strategies', each presented within an explanatory model of 'relating'. The focus of the 'training' is initially on relationships and emotional well-being (parent and child). The aim is to repair relationships, and increase empathy and warmth towards the child. Everyday communication is then explored in the context of ordinary parenting experiences. Particular 'scripts' and responses are taught and practised, the aim being to help parents consistently communicate with their children in non-aggressive ways, even when under emotional pressure.
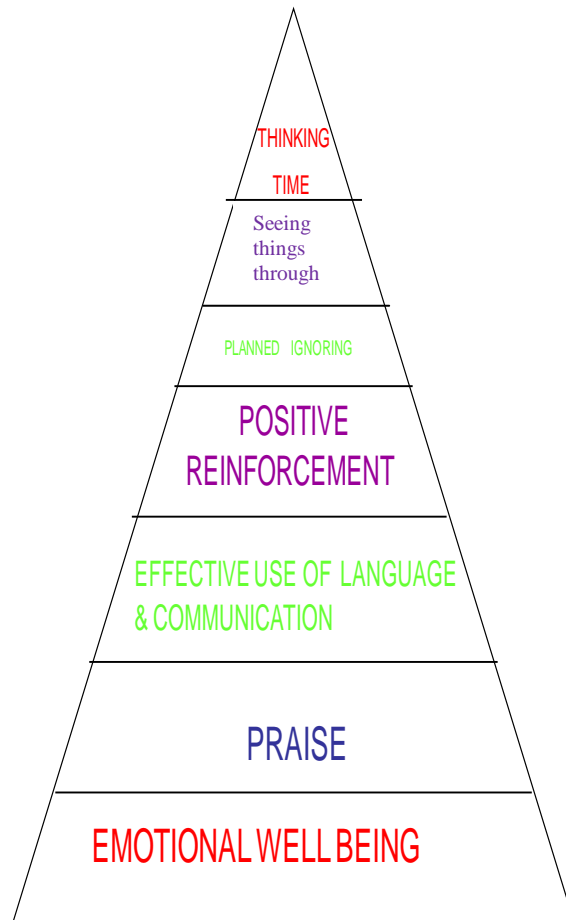
52

Butterfly pyramid

Figure 2: The staged model

As we present each strategy we discuss the possibility that it might provoke unsettling change within the family situation. These 'prescriptions' can perhaps be likened to Milan interventions, where families are advised to apply certain 'rituals', such as family meetings, outings without some members, ignoring certain transgressions of rules (Becvar and Becvar 2003: 107). This was consistent with Palazolli's likening of patterns of family relating to 'games'.

> The main purpose of ritual was to point the family **game** in a
> different direction to its current course….[to] cut through the
> knots of the game even when [they] had not re-framed it.

> Palazzolli et al 1989, p17

The strategies practised in the intervention, for example, 'planned ignoring, specific praise', the use of language scripts (Appendix 1: 27-78), meetings including the child in which only 'good news' was exchanged, (Appendix 1: 5), might also be reframed as 'rituals' likely to change the course of the family game. An existential-phenomenological interpretation may also be relevant here, one which resonates in particular with the enactive/embodied aspects of the experience of following particular strategies: a 'ritual' which disrupts contingent responses may alter a person's experience of the world in a fundamental way. For Heidegger such disruption could create a consciousness of 'being' from which a sense of personal agency could emerge.

> ..the call of conscience….The process is as follows: 'Unveiling'
> a revealing to oneself the possibilities of being….To the call of
> conscience there corresponds a possible hearing. Our

> understanding of the appeal unveils itself as our wanting to have
> a conscience.

<div align="center">Heidegger, 1978. p270, in Han-Pile, 2011: 12</div>

The implication is, that simply by doing things differently, in a conscious reflective way, insight can develop. This insight might widen the range of possibilities, ways of being, available to a person (Han-Pile (2011: 12).

However, as Palazzolli's comment implies, if familiar patterns alter, the contingent nature of life becomes amplified and this can create a sense of insecurity, as well as discovery, for those experiencing it. Mindful of this in the intervention we explain to parents that they might not fully understand the rationale for these strategies until they have completed the 'training' and learned them all. This has been the regular feedback from past parents. In this way 'uncertainty' is acknowledged and toleration of uncertainty encouraged, a particular aim of existential therapies (Felder and Robbins, 2011).

This intensified experience of uncertainty raises ethical issues, and these may emerge in the accounts of parents. Milan therapy rituals have also been criticised as purposeless (Hayward, 2003: 184), and therefore destructive of trust within the therapy context. Our rituals were, however, clearly linked to the narrative of parenting we presented. For example, we explained how 'planned ignoring' of 'low-key' troubling behaviour', might help to restore relationships (Appendix 1: 66-67). Perhaps, in this way, a degree of transparency and coherence has been achieved.

3.2.3 *Making sense of change: Dialogical process within and across systems.*

As previously stated in the introduction to this discussion, communication, within and across systems, is an important aspect of Milan Family Therapy. Perhaps indicative of an orientation towards interpretative methods within educational psychology, ecological systems theory is often applied alongside social-constructionism. In the following section I will consider how these two paradigms may be linked conceptually to provide an inclusive theoretical framework for this intervention. My aim, one I will return to in later sections, is to keep in mind, my own and the reader's, the dynamic relationship between language and action, and ideology and structure.

Concepts of 'feedback' and 'recursiveness' are essential to a theory in which there is no closed system (Jones, 1993: 6). In systemic therapy families are encouraged to reflect upon the effects of rituals and to evaluate the advice they have been given. From such reflection hypotheses emerge and are considered (Jones, 1993: 55-76). The approach we adopt in our 'parent training' is quite similar. We present our 'narrative', our advice, and then spend time discussing and evaluating this, in the parent group, on home visits, and in the classroom when the advice is enacted and everyone is together. Questioning and feedback are encouraged, and hypotheses are generated and explored. Often our 'narrative' provokes parent narratives which contain a different perspective to ours.

Although we refer to this aspect of the intervention as 'parent training' I think it is experienced as a dialogical process, that is, a process of meaning making in which many 'voices' are called upon to interpret experience (Todorov 1984, Gergen 1999). 'Training' suggests a didactic process, when in fact it feels much more like a negotiation, one which

extends beyond the immediate context, in time and space. In the following quotation Todorov comments on Bakhtin's notion of inter-textuality, written in the 1930's (1981). I feel that this is relevant to the experience.

> The most important feature of the utterance, or at least, the most neglected, is its dialogism, that is, its inter-textual dimension… Intentionally or not, all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject, as well as with discourses yet to come, whose reactions it forsees and anticipates. A single voice can make itself heard only by blending into the complex choir of other voices already in place. This is not only true of literature, but all discourse.

> Todorov, 1984, p 'x'

The social meaning of the process, that is, the close relationship between systemic patterning and dialogical process is perhaps most clear where there is a threat of breakdown. Where feedback indicates that some aspect of our praxis is not useful (functional), we consider alternatives, with parents and teachers. However, sometimes different perspectives cannot be accommodated and some kind of break, or disengagement, can occur. Although this often means significant problems continue this might be conceived as a family (or school) system breaking off in order to survive (Tucker, 2013). It occurs to me that, in order to survive, a family may have to isolate itself from 'voices' which cannot be incorporated within its sense-making patterns.

3.2.4 *Knowing what's important: Destabilisation creates consciousness of value.*

This emphasis on 'functionality' is an important aspect of cybernetic systems theory and has, I think, special relevance for this research, in that the intervention may provide a liminal space in which parents can consider what 'works' and what has 'value' to them. Within the praxis I have outlined, highlighting the conceptual link to family systemic theory, what is 'valued' within the intervention might be conceived as subsumed beneath a concern for what 'works'. There are two issues I wish to explore here as they are central to my purpose in this research. The first relates to parents' experience of value, 'the good' and how this is known to them, and the second to what helps them to attain this value.

In cybernetic systems theory 'functionality' and 'dysfunctionality' exist in a paradoxical relationship to one another (Tucker, 2013), for example a family seeking intervention might conceivably want a problem to be solved, while also wish to keep a system stable and unchanging (Tucker, 2013). A requirement to 'change', and do things differently, involves a risk of destabilisation, a system breaking down into chaos, and a therapeutic intervention is generally viewed as providing a containing structure within which a process of change can be managed (Hayward, 2003: 185). If this polarity between dysfunction and function is highlighted through some de-stabilising experiences it might be expected that members of a family become more conscious of what they value, what is 'good' within the system and for whom (Jones, 1993: 55-76). Fundamental to an eco-systemic framework is the idea that change cannot be isolated within one system. Therefore it is likely that consideration of value would extend to other systems in recursive, circular patterns of dialogue and interaction (Bronfenbrenner,1979,1999). It is likely that consideration of value within a family system might involve value more generally, within temporal and spatial dimensions. In this way it is possible to hypothesise that a parent's experience and consciousness of value may be

causally linked to processes of change and their experience of constraints and barriers across systems.

3.3   Constructing agency and self-hood 'within the realm of meaning (Smith, 2011)': writing change into systems.

3.3.1   *The absence of agency within traditional psychological theory.*

I have described the structure of our intervention in relation to systemic theories of therapeutic change and made some links with phenomenology (Han Pile 2011), and social constructionism, specifically in relation to the dialogical process in which parents and professionals seem engaged (Todorov 1984). As discussed in chapter 2, some theories of mind and personality, popular within cultural discourse and applied psychology, are difficult to operationalise in relation to agency or environments (Ryle 1949, Martin et al 2003). In the following discussion I will explore ideas of agentic selfhood that seem compatible with the eco-systemic, dialogical and phenomenological theories outlined so far, with their emphasis upon the experience of change.

3.3.2   *Narrative, self-hood and experience.*

As explored previously, language is thought to be an aspect of systemic change in eco-systemic theory, '…new meanings needed to be written within a family system in order to affect change' (Tucker 2013: 3). An inescapable aspect of the experience of working together in the intervention is an on-going dialogue, the evolving narratives about how things are, were, and how things could be. In these narratives there is always a self, an 'I' as well as 'other'. In attempting to explain the importance of selfhood and why 'we portray ourselves

through stories', Bruner, suggests that conceiving of selfhood allows us to 'take a perspective' on experience.

> Selfhood can surely be thought of as one of those 'verbalized
> events' (Slobin 2000), a kind of meta-event that gives coherence
> and continuity to the scramble of experience.

> Bruner, 2004, p7.

In a de-stabilised situation in which 'intervention' alters familiar patterns of interaction it might be expected that our parents feel the need to talk, to reconsider, and re-configure their experience of 'self', and their relationships with 'others'. Bruner suggests another aspect of transformation which such narrative offers. In his book *Actual Minds Possible Worlds* (1986: 47)', he explores the effect of 'surprise' on our perception of the world, when patterns no longer correspond to implicit rules that we have come to accept and our mental models are no longer adequate. I think the following description might apply to our parents' experience of joining our intervention/community, seeing the way we do things and encountering our version of 'parenting'.

> My mental model of how traffic moves in New York or London
> is built up of many such encounters. I have developed a feel for
> what to expect and I usually see what I am looking for, no matter
> what else I may miss. I use my model to guide my behaviour and
> drive or walk defensively in terms of that model. My
> defensiveness also regulates what I take up as input. The
> surprises I encounter are most often generated by others violating
> the usual or doing something 'against the rules.

> Bruner,1986, p47.

It seems that when our world is disturbed we are forced to construct another. Bruner (1986, 2004) suggests that 'selfhood' is integral to a transformative process in which another world is conceived through an inner search of memory and experience and an appraisal of the meanings available in culture. In our temporary community we offer alternative meanings, and encourage parents to reflect and comment upon them. We ask them to do things 'differently', and in a more conscious way. Through reflection new versions of 'self' and 'other' may emerge in narratives of experience.

3.3.3 *Consciousness of the 'good' as an aspect of change*

In this chapter I have referred frequently to 'change'. An acceptance of contingency is implicit in eco-systemic and phenomenological theory, change is inevitable and largely unpredictable (Arendt, 1998:1-21). Doing, talking and thinking differently might be assumed to be part of the process of change, and it is this possibility which this research is exploring. However, the envisioning of a transformative process of change is counter to the commonly expressed view that psycho-social problems tend to continue within a life-span, or across generations within a family.

> Mainstream psychology…is based on the 'doctrine of continuity': if you have a history of child abuse, your adult life will be continuous with your early life, that is, defined and marked by affective-behaviour disturbances, re-enactment of abusive forms of interaction and so on…

> Miltenburg and Singer, 2000, p 504.

This continuity is also expressed in the diagnostic narratives which often attach to children as they move through the various systems. For example 'problems' of behaviour, that is,

behaviour with effects that are not valued culturally, perhaps not even by individuals themselves, are often understood as emotional, cognitive, or personality disorders, in a positivistic realism (Miltenburg and Singer 2000: 516-518). Medical diagnoses, such as ADHD, conduct disorder and ASD feature in the discourse around the children we work with in educational psychology, and this is a matter of some controversy (Billington, 2000). Parents in our intervention often refer to them, they feature in our dialogue and, I would suggest, the general polyphonic 'reality' educational psychologists engage with in their work (Todorov, 1984: 'x').

Despite there being a considerable amount of research identifying factors associated with resilience it has been argued that psychology does not account well for discontinuity in trajectories of development, why some break free from problematised identities, or a history of abuse in childhood, for example (Miltenburg and Singer, 2000:504-508). In trying to explain 'discontinuity' and 'resilience', these authors explore aspects of thinking and feeling which may allow a person to conceive of value, and orientate towards this with some degree of agency. They theorise a role for 'moral commitment arising from a germ of knowledge of the good (2000: 504)'. From this 'germ' experienced, they propose, a valued future oriented narrative can be constructed. They propose that,

> …children who have been abused can draw the strength to
> survive from moral precepts and social commitments and that the
> moral development of survivors deserves to be an important
> focus of attention in therapies.

> Miltenburg and Singer, 2000, p 504.

However Miltenburg and Singer also propose that a more self-defensive process of meaning making can undermine the development of agentic selfhood. Drawing on Vygotskian theory they outline particular reasons why those who have experienced troubled lives might be confused about what is 'good'. They propose that coming to 'know' what is 'good' is a complex process in which emotion (affect), powers a social and linguistic process in which adaptive responses develop. The experience of affect, guides which 'procedural responses' are internalised (2000: 508-510). However this may not always occur in ways that are easy to understand. They suggest that human beings have a tendency to 'dissociate' experiences which are contradictory at a deep emotional and cognitive level, for example where a parent is unpredictable, sometimes loving and sometimes frightening. Some responses may become automatic over time (2000: 510). One particular consequence of this dissociation is that the narratives of those exposed to such traumatic experiences can be chaotic and may emerge as incoherent sense of purpose (Dimaggio and Semerari, 2004: 263-264).

Chaotic narration may have consequences for the 'agentic self' conceived by Bruner (2004: 3-5). For example, where there is an uncertain and confused relationship with experience people may struggle to resolve the moral dilemmas that occur in life. In Miltenburg and Singer's theory (2000), evaluation of what is 'good' and 'bad', in a supportive context in which commitments can be acknowledged, facilitates agentic identity. Drawing upon Vygotsky's theory that development proceeds through emotional mastery of cognitive schemas Miltenburg and Singer describe how through exploration of 'how things happen' as opposed to 'why things happen' clients are able to achieve some mastery over 'cognitive schemas' (2000: 508).

> A person may] gain more insight and control over his or her own
> psychological system….[and] the capacity to retain experiences

63

of the good at the conceptual level, independent of the frequency

and duration of those experiences, in this way 'a concept

becomes a passion (Vygotsky, 1978).

<p align="center">Miltenburg and Singer 2000, p501</p>

In this account of therapeutic transformation, emotion, in particular emotion connected to

valued purposes and experiences, creates agentic possibilities within dialogic exchange. An

important outcome of a therapeutic process such as is this might be a coherent narrative

through which the complexity of a person's unfolding experience, past and present, can be

purposively contained. Relationship and dialogue are therefore likely to be central to any

theory of change emerging from this research.

3.3.4   *Community: The crucible of change?*

Choosing to join a group intervention such as ours may itself have effects. Miltenburg and

Singer refer to research which suggest that changes in life circumstances, such as new

purposes and relationships, can trigger new commitments. They point out that children cheer

themselves up by imagining themselves in a 'good place' and that 'positive roles, such as

caring for a sibling, or a belief in God can also sustain people' (2000: 505). In this neo-

Vygotskian theory, commitments, in so far as they express or construct self-hood, value, and

belonging, restore trust in community, around an ideology. I suggest this is what may be

achieved in our intervention, that within an eco-systemic framework we provide 'a nurturing

peer culture' (Miltenburg and Singer, 2000:505). I also hypothesise that it is this experience

of community which allows for and sustains the dialogical therapeutic process theorised

previously.

> Shared meanings are constructed at both the conceptual level (of
> goals, values, explanations) and in behaviour (collective action,
> rituals, lifestyles).

Miltenburg and Singer, 2000, p505.

It may now be possible to consider psychological agency as an aspect of a community-based, dialogical therapeutic process. In a Vygotskian framework, the ability to master cultural rules that enhance participation in a positive social life enhances the freedom available to a person. Thus, having an awareness of their own moral position, as well as the 'mental skills' required in order to put this into practice (Miltenburg and Singer, 2000: 522), would seem an essential existential pre-requisite to emancipatory transformation. In this way the pressures of adaptation can perhaps be reconciled with the psychological experience of agency. In narrative theory 'story-telling', 'self-making' and adaptation are integral.

> Story-telling as an articulation of subjectivity combines functions
> of psychophysical regulation (restoration and re-organisation)
> with communicative functions of episodic self-construction and
> the procedural making of personal history and personal
> continuity (event-evoking or actualization and social integration.

Boothe and Wyle, 2004, p284.

Thus, a person supported in telling their story, in relation to their unfolding experience, past, present and future, may become more able to 'choose' how they respond to ongoing events and the constraints and available within the systems and culture in which they find themselves.

3.4. <u>Being and becoming: An ontological psychology accounting for the existence and the development of agency</u>

3.4.1 *Martin and Gillespie's theory of personhood (2010)*

Martin and Gillespie (1994, 2010) present an account of personhood I believe to be compatible with Miltenburg and Singer's neo-Vygotskian account as well as the dialogical and systemic perspectives explored previously. These authors theorize the 'emergence' of an agentic self within an 'ontogenic relationship' between person and world (Martin and Gillespie, 2010: 32-33). I will describe this theory in some detail as it allows me to bring together several theoretical strands which have been introduced in this chapter as well as themes central to this research: agency, change and systemic-reflexivity.

In previous work Martin has theorized a situated, emergent and deliberative agency drawing upon a Heideggerian phenomenological ontology (Martin et al 2003: 103-129). In keeping with an existential perspective agency is conceived as central to any psychological theory of personhood. For Martin and his fellow authors the self cannot be reduced to biological or social determinants. Such determinism, they suggest, denies the agentic capability of persons. They propose that agency is prior to, but dependent upon, other aspects of being-in-the world, experiential, biological and socio-cultural.

Drawing on Mead's (1934) work, Martin and Gillespie (2010) develop a theory in which agentive personhood emerges through ordinary experiences of interactive perspective taking. In this theory agentic selfhood *emerges* from a pre-reflective phenomenological engagement with the world. A developmental sequence is outlined in which the developing person (infant to adult) increasingly engages with aspects of possible human experience. This is presented

66

as follows: the physical reality of being in the world quickly extends into turn-taking interactive experiences which incorporate linguistic structures and social practices with increasing complexity of meaningful sophistication.

> '… it is the positioning and interactivity of the developing individual, with others and objects within conventional social practices and processed containing different perspectives that fuels the emergence of selfhood, psychological forms of perspective taking and agentive self-determination. Such emergence is a very gradual process…..The processes that we describe are social, interactional, and institutional supports that scaffold and guide this emergence, coaxing it on to evermore abstract forms.

Martin and Gillespie, 2010, p14

These authors suggest that their model represents an emergent (not pre-existing) 'scaffold' for a person's phenomenological engagement with the world throughout their life. Ordinary experience provides repeated opportunities for the development of psychological means for meaningful engagement with the world. Agency emerges as a function of a person's ability to consider multiple perspectives whilst embedded within a 'flux' of experience. Past and present experience, as well as an imagined future, would be likely to influence the formation of a person's ontological connection to the world. The following description provides a possible understanding of how, for example, the experience, (and memory of), trauma, or lack of nurture and care in childhood, might undermine a developing capacity for sense-making and agency. I also find it suggestive of the kinds of experience which might be supportive to parents, experiences which might be provided within an educational or community setting.

Such basic embodied, embedded, and enactive forms of repetitive, conventionalized, and co-ordinated interactivity provide concrete, relatively immediate experience of being in more than one perspective or action framework at more or less the same time. The awareness of actions, habits, memories, and anticipations associated with a given situation while occupying and acting in a related situation is the hall-mark of co-ordinated position exchange and pre-reflective perspective taking.

Martin and Gillespie, 2010, pp 18-19.

Parents in our parent group often speak of traumatic childhoods characterised by a lack of nurture and care. They are also often situated in stressful present circumstances. Such adversity can seem insurmountable. As with systems theory and Miltenburg and Singer's Neo-Vygotskian perspective (2000), Martin's theory allows for 'discontinuity' as well as 'continuity' in a person's psychological development. Agency is 'emergent' and prior to other aspects of experience. Implicit within the theory is the possibility of on-going development.

To return to our intervention, I think it is plausible to suggest that by providing 'enactive forms of repetitive conventionalized and co-ordinated interactivity' (Martin and Gillespie, 2010: 18), as we work alongside parents with their children we may be providing experiences which support parents towards a more agentic position. In our weekly sessions with parents and children we have routines involving meeting and greeting, playing together, making snack, eating snack, tidying up etc, relatively ordinary experiences within the life-world of parents and children within Western culture. Although there is a linguistic aspect to this shared experience, phrases to use (Appendix 1: 43-48), it is also 'embodied' and 'enactive'.

These examples of 'co-ordinated interactivity' may become, if they are valued experiences, the habitual rules of relating operating repetitively within a family system. Perhaps facilitating this process, verbal explanations given in context or in reflection may operate as interpretative narratives. To use Martin and Gillespie's constructs, it could be said that parents take on a 'role' in each situation and in doing so take on a 'perspective'. With guidance and support parents may experience a 'position change' (2010: 18), a change which opens up new possibilities of being.

3.4.2   *Parenting in the context of culture: To what extent does reflexivity in the intervention embrace the complexity of multiple perspectives in culture?*

   In the training session, as described previously, this exploration of multiple perspectives, ours, parents, the discourses of parenting we share and the stories from other contexts, school, grandparents, clubs etc, is intensely dialogical. Our aim is to encourage parents to be reflexive, that is, to think about their experience and to consider alternative meanings and apply alternative interpretative frames (including those offered by ourselves). The patterns of our conversations extend outward to include the multiple systems in which we are all embedded. Martin and Gillespie's theory offers an account of agency and reflexivity which resonates with the eco-systemic Milan family approach discussed earlier in this chapter, with its emphasis upon functionality.

> Within this ability to reflect from multiple perspectives persons
> are able to choose to distance themselves from perspectives and
> systems that have been found not to work….to make space for
> new forms of consideration and action.
>
> Martin and Gillespie, 2010, p19.

These authors, like the Milan theorists discussed previously, also suggest that consciousness of dysfunctionality, a failure to connect with the world in familiar ways, would in itself trigger an agentic search for a way of being that was more valuable to a person. This capacity to evaluate has a developmental dimension: the end-point of childhood development being a version of personhood which is ontologically social, pre-disposed towards inter-subjectivity, agentic and purposeful.

> At this point in the development of individual and collective agency, adolescents are immersed in a matrix of perspectives that they use purposefully to generate possibilities for enacting projects and plans that they associate with their individual and collective identities. Narrative structures and content derived from many sources may be drawn on to integrate and co-ordinate spatially and temporally distant perspectives to envision possibilities and form plans in the pursuit of what are rightfully regarded as important life-projects.

> Martin and Gillespie. 2010, pp 25-26.

I am reminded of Smith and Suissa's observation that our culture is saturated with 'perspectives' on parenting. From a philosophical perspective they argue against discourses of parenting which encourage 'instrumentality'. They are suspicious of government initiatives which encourage this type of positioning and suggest that such perspectives are merely operating as a covert form of disciplinary power (Smith, 2010). Suissa suggests that a parent more focussed on 'being' rather than 'doing would be able to resist the confusion of multiple perspectives (2013). Smith values the experience of 'uncertainty', seeing this as an inevitable aspect of the parenting experience, and one which offers the possibility of personal meaning and freedom (Smith, 2011): the uncertain parent is more likely to be reflexive. In Martin and Gillespie's theory (2010) reflexivity is required as an aspect of 'being', though

this process may be hard work at times and require a form of community in which new possibilities can be encountered and explored productively, thus nurturing agency.

The implication of such thinking might be that to intervene with psychological integrity would require acknowledgement and respect for the embodied, situated and emergent nature of personhood.

3.5 Dilemmas of practice: Accounting for ourselves

3.5.1 *Introduction*

Before concluding this chapter examining theory in relation to practice, I would like to examine issues which emerge from a reflexive attitude towards my practice in the intervention, and by extension, this research. When I examine my presence, I encounter the various ways that I represent and exercise power. Some of this power is structural, in that it is associated with my role, within a government agency, affiliated to a professional body, subject to a particular code of conduct operating within my Local Authority. I would also claim that some of this power relates to the theory I apply within my practice as this influences how I am, and the kind of influence I exert. In particular psychology expresses powerful ideas about people, ideas which have powerful effects (Parker 2005), and it is this which perhaps presents the most intense dilemma for psychologists. Some of these dilemmas are considered in the following discussion. My aim is to foreground the ontological tensions which lurk beneath what may be a certain kind of pragmatism in practice.

3.5.2 *Professional power*

It is clear that in our temporary community we (as professionals) communicate ideas and that these ideas may become amplified through our relationship. Using the language of Martin's theory, we attend to the 'scaffold', formulating the bridge between what is known and what seems possible. In this reflexive 'flux' value may be an aspect of experience which orientates us all towards purpose: in Vygotsky's words, quoted by Miltenburg and Singer (2000: 503) 'a concept becomes a passion'. Although, we are, I hope, in our intervention, sensitive to feedback from parents, it is evident that we have the *power* to select from available psychological discourse and construct the particular narrative of parenting which we introduce to the culture of our temporary community. In addition we have professional links with other state agencies such as Social Services. Although we try to locate ourselves within this social and governmental matrix in a way which is transparent, and to make space for a relationship which is non-oppressive and empowering, parents may experience us as a threat and act accordingly in self-protective ways. The 'tensions' implicit within this process may emerge in parents' accounts of their experience (chapter 6 of this thesis).

3.5.3 *Engaging with culture: competitive claims about truth and value.*

Educational psychology has developed practices, in particular relating to consultation, to address the dilemmas associated with power, and its propensity to dominate discourse and define reality (Kelly et al, 2008: 23-28). Gergen offers a way of thinking about value, truth and how this is constructed through language and relationships, which may contain and make sense of the dilemmas we have experienced within the intervention, which have arisen through our commitment to a therapeutic empowerment of parents alongside a commitment to certain ideas about relationships, the development of children and the experience of

childhood. Gergen's ideas may also say something of the way we 'care' in the intervention, for ourselves and what we value, the children and the parents we work with and what they value.

Gergen grounds his theory in Bakhtin's Dialogism and Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, a philosophy which might be simply stated in the following way: words are attached to objects in a social game in which language is deployed so as to achieve outcomes. In this way language and action are synonymous, as opposed to language and truth. From this perspective we can evaluate the effects of words and the 'realities' they create. Drawing upon Wittgenstein, Gergen invokes the metaphor of 'the game', and considers how language is deployed, within the game, to achieve effects. He proposes reflection at this level.

> Here we find we can abandon concern with the hidden reservoirs
> of motivation or ideological bias said to be lurking behind
> people's words. We need not impute evil intent to the other…
> Rather our attention moves to the forms of life that are favoured
> (or destroyed) by various ways of putting things. If physicists
> define people as 'nothing but atoms' for example, how does this
> characterize function within society; how do we come to treat
> people within this form of life; how will our actions differ if we
> characterize people as 'possessing a soul?' What kinds of people,
> institutions, laws, and so on are favoured when we speak in one
> set of terms as opposed to another; what traditions or ways of life
> are suppressed or destroyed?
>
> Gergen, 1999, p38

Gergen's ideas here may seem somewhat paradoxical, but also rather emancipatory, in that he seems to propose we evaluate ideas, and not people. He suggests that we put aside our

73

concern to establish a foundational truth and instead acknowledge that what we may be doing is negotiating through language what 'reality' is and what ought to be considered of 'value', and how reality is constructed, de-constructed and reconstructed so as to function as our generally agreed 'truth' . He proposes a form of reflexivity.

My concern in the previous section was with the power differential between ourselves as professionals and the parents who engage with us. Gergen acknowledges the role of power in the Foucauldian sense, in shaping how value and reality are constructed through discursive activity. Gergen proposes that a particular attitude towards language can address the power differential in relationships, and make visible the meanings embedded in the language used. He suggests that through relating, and through dialogue and the genuine expression of points of view, in so far as tensions are exposed within a supportive context so as not to be destructive, something new can emerge: ideas or enactments that create new 'forms of life' (1999: 34). Through this process we come to know who we are and what we value, in relation to others.

3.5.4 *What implications might an ontological psychology have for the educational psychologist role?*

In this chapter I have explored a number of theories in my efforts to provide a plausible framework to interpret the accounts of parents' experience in the intervention. I am aware of a tension between social-constructionist theory, (for example Gergen), and theory which presents selfhood as constructed through experience and as therefore to some extent shaping experience. Miltenburg and Singer's neo-Vygotskian perspective, and Martin and Gillespie's phenomenological ontology, emphasise the psychological importance of memory and

emotion in interpretation. These theories orientate my thinking towards critical realism, in so far as memory and emotion are conceived as real phenomenon.

For some, social constructionism and critical realism are incompatible positions (Martin, 2003: 17-44) ,although an emerging critique offers possibilities for synthesis (for example, Nightingale and Cromby, 2002) . Martin (2003: 43) acknowledges a tension between their position and that of Gergen. He maintains, however, that it is necessary to acknowledge the existence of a self, albeit one that is 'emergent' in relation to context. To do so, he suggests, allows psychology to respect clients' orientation towards value and their agentic efforts to seek value (2003: 43-44). Critical realists reject the social constructionist claim that selfhood has no existence other than in relation to contexts, that it is multiple and variable and transient (Nightingale and Cromby, 2003). Martin accepts that there is a risk that an 'embodied, situated and emergent self' might be misconceived by some as 'determined', as therefore without agency, thereby denying the possibilities for change and personal emancipation which agency implies. There may be a value in a social constructionist method which interrogates language and resists the claims to truth that the powerful can impose through dominance of discourse (Martin et al 2003: 43), a particular concern for educational psychologists perhaps, working in communities and schools.

Significant dilemmas for psychological practitioners, regarding power and knowledge, can perhaps be formulated in the following questions. To what extent (and to what effect) can we put aside ontological claims about the nature of the self in educational psychology, and engage only with the constructions of language in a reflexive awareness of the workings of power? What effects do our psychological theories have in the contexts in which they are applied, for example, in this intervention examined in this research? These questions speak

to an-ongoing debate concerning the ontological and epistemological basis of our research

and practice (Bird, 1999), a debate I will explore in more depth in the following chapter

when I describe my research methodology.

Chapter 4: **Researching experience: The ontological and epistemological issues.**

4.1 Introduction: Locating my research and practice within 'critical psychology'.

 I discussed in previous chapters how my curiosity about the intervention's 'value' and the 'value' sought by parents, has grown alongside unease as to the psychology influencing us in the programme. Paradoxically the more I think I understand about each particular child and family the less comfortable I am in taking a 'knowing' stance, or reducing situations to an account based on the theories that circulate at present in mainstream psychology (see previous critique in chapter one). In fact I find I cannot easily refer to them. Perhaps theorizing seems too impersonal: it can feel quite disrespectful to take an objective stance in relation to a person's story after all. Perhaps I also sense that the theoretical frameworks are incomplete and misrepresent the experience we have all shared.

 These anxieties concerning the making of generalised claims and the potential misrepresentation of participants' voices are much discussed in certain strands of qualitative social science research. This debate has contributed to the development of diverse and creative methods of accessing, interpreting and representing the accounts of participants, as well as a critique of 'traditional' forms of psychological research making positivistic claims and using positivistic methods (Gergen 2002, Martin 2003, Polkinghorne 1995). This is also evident in an emerging approach to educational psychology research in which psychologists explore aspects of their own practice in relation to theory, sometimes using participatory methods (Billington and Todd 2012, Warham 2012).

In educational psychology two aspects of the practice context seem to me to be powerful in determining practises and the theories we draw upon, as well as orientating us towards greater critical reflexivity: our social embeddedness and our direct experience of multiple contexts and perspectives. These aspects are intensely present in the intervention being researched here. Perhaps because many aspects of our practice in educational psychology require dialogue, negotiation and collaboration between ourselves and those who directly support children, there are calls in our profession for a greater recognition in practice and research, of the institutional and linguistic determinants of meaning (Todd 2009: 21-23). There is also a developing focus on research that accesses the experience of clients (children) (Billington 2009: 3-9). These perspectives might be viewed as contributing to a psychology which has a political and radical dimension in that they privilege individual voices and also offer a potential critique of theory and its origins and functions (Parker 2005: 1-12).

To summarize, this inquiry adopts methods which may reflect an intellectual shift within the profession of educational psychology, from a positivist, a-political position towards social constructionist, phenomenological and participatory methods in research. Narrative methods and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (for example IPA) are becoming popular, perhaps because they offer a framework within which language and experience can be examined together, with an emphasis on the particular, the experience of the individual rather than the abstraction of the generalised 'other', features associated with practice-based evidence (Hall 2008, Warner and Spandler 2012). It might also be said that, in research with a social constructionist orientation, a process of linguistic deconstruction exposes the superficial and incoherent constructs of personhood and agency that permeate commonly applied psychological theories (Gergen 2001: 33-61, Martin 2003: 17-44). Questions of ontology and epistemology are likely to be pervasive, although perhaps are not very visible,

in theory and practice. For example, how 'personhood' is understood may influence the practices that professionals adopt. Consider the example of behaviourism in schools discussed in chapter two (Scheer 2011). In the intervention researched here I am conscious of the many forms of subjugation and exclusion experienced by struggling parents when they ask for, or accept, offers of, psychological support (Sayer 1990, Kenny 2009). I am also aware of the oppressive psychological discourses they might encounter (dysfunctional, deprived, depressed, abusive, neglectful, personality disorder etc) when they do so; discourses which are viewed by critical educational psychologists as undermining efforts to achieve social justice and improved outcomes for our marginalised and vulnerable client group (Bird 1999, Foucault 1977).

Conscious of these issues I intend to locate this inquiry within a broadly phenomenological ontology and epistemology, using a narrative method. I have made this choice as it provides congruence in important ways, most significantly in relation to how person-hood is conceived. In doing so, I hope to address my research questions in a way which foregrounds the meanings and perspectives of parents, my aim being to contribute to an on-going critical psychology project, examining, interrogating and perhaps 'revisioning' educational psychology practice (Bird 1999: 31).

This chapter will therefore explore the ontology and epistemology within which this inquiry sits. In the following chapter I will describe the method I have used to explore my research question. To this end I will explore phenomenological and narrative approaches in research. This will include a critical examination of the importance of 'self-hood' within these frameworks, as a construct involved in explaining human agency and psychological

change. These issues are central to my research question. I will then link this discussion to ideas around personhood within a critical realist ontology and epistemology. I will argue, drawing upon Jack Martin's critical realist rationale for researching therapeutic change, that this inquiry can be located within a critical realist perspective (Martin 1994 and 2003). Martin proposes that a critical realist framework allows us to theorize explanatory 'generative mechanisms' operating between persons and social environments. This corresponds with my purpose in this inquiry. Martin's emphasis upon researching experience supports critical psychology's emphasis upon 'facilitating voice', and so I will link Martin's rationale to narrative research to justify the particular method of inquiry which I will then describe in the following chapter. I will begin this discussion by considering how an emphasis upon voice can address the potential power imbalances between clients and professionals in research and practice.

4.2   Research which empowers those who are marginalised: Facilitating 'the voice'

Phenomenological and narrative approaches to research have developed in settings where the individual's 'voice' is viewed as a counter-point to powerful and potentially oppressive social and institutional hegemonies. For example, in health research the accounts of patients provide alternative perspectives on illness and treatment. In this way practices are exposed to critical examination and possibilities for a more empowering 'care' for the person with illness can be considered, for example Frank, 1995. I am hopeful that this research will be able to capture and validate the unique perspectives of parents who are struggling in our culture to live well with their children.

Telling one's story is thought to have value at many levels, for the teller, and the listener. The potential for 'therapeutic', effects is claimed, by practitioners in psychology and psychotherapy (Angus and McLeod, 2004: 367-374). This belief also operates more widely in culture, for example, where the dialectic between what is said publicly and felt privately is played out on confessional TV (Plummer, 1995: 3-17). Perhaps relevant here is Parker's advice to researchers, to be mindful of the potential for doing harm through eliciting 'painful' stories (2005: 83). However, facilitating the 'voice' is often viewed positively, as a political action, a means by which injustice and abuse of power can be exposed through eloquence and authenticity (Chase, 2005: 663-667). The phenomenological stance is one in which the 'voice' once facilitated can challenge the available meanings of culture (Willig, 2007). This challenge can be outward, for example to understandings of aspects of the life-worlds of parents and they can be inward, a challenge towards the parents' 'sedimented' understandings of their own history, culture, child development etc (Felder and Robbins, 2011: 357), understandings which are perhaps influencing my participants' relationships with their children. In this way psychological inquiry may have the potential to become 'action research', a means of subjects/participants developing consciousness and agency, allowing them to alter their relationship with the social context in preferred ways (Parker, 2005: 86).

Of course, there are many competing 'voices' in culture, and greater power belongs to some more than others. As discussed in chapter two this is evident in the power and hegemony some narratives of child-rearing or education have in particular contexts. For example, embedded within the countless narratives of parent advice and skill culturally available is the assumption that children need to become self-regulating autonomous individuals and that it's their parents' task to apply techniques of parenting that will achieve

this, and to monitor their own success and need for self-improvement as they do so (Smith 2010, Vansieleghem 2010). Smith's article suggests that the dominant form of 'knowing' about 'parenting' largely disavows the knowledge experienced through relating. In this dominant narrative 'relating' and 'being' are subjugated to 'doing' and 'achieving': it is not difficult to see where perceived value lies within such a narrative. I think it is likely that this narrative of parenting and parent responsibility is so pervasive that it has a taken for granted status that renders it invisible to many. Parenting narratives for example are often intertwined with the mechanisms of consumerism, consider advertising and competitiveness around life-style etc (Smith, 2010). Other available narratives, less prominent perhaps, with greater emphasis upon relationships and the protective role of parents also circulate but may struggle to achieve credibility in disputed contexts, for example in schools and Government agencies, particularly when 'norms' are violated (Winslade and Monk, 1999). In society as well as in families it matters what stories are told and which stories are held to be true. There are, in all likelihood, dangerous or undesirable narratives for all of us, and perhaps the greatest danger lies in not realising this. Eliciting parents' narratives of experience may therefore provide some counterpoint to hegemonic cultural narratives.

4.3 Researching practice: Justifying insider position within narrative research.

The facilitation of voice raises practical issues which need to be addressed in determining the authenticity and the trustworthiness of the narratives produced (Chase, 2005: 663-669). Story-telling and narrative have varied forms and functions in life and in research. In contemporary narrative research, however, a shared assumption is that the purpose of the story-teller and the purpose of the listener prefigure and permeate the meaning making (Frank,1995). Stories are 'shared', therefore they are constructed with the 'other' in mind

(Bruner, 2004). This conceptualisation has grown to form what some consider to be a 'framework' for contemporary narrative research (Squire et al, 2008, Frank 1995), although see Atkinson (1997) for a critique. Central to this framework is the idea that narrative 'sharing' is not an 'exchange' but rather,

> .....a negotiation of shared narrative unity…interpretation of two
> or more spheres of experience [in which] relationships are joined
> by the narrative unities of our lives.

> Connelly and Clandinin 1990, p3

This view of research requires a particular set of rules and principles. For example practices relating to ethics and methodology are seen as evolving from a symbiotic exchange between praxis (theory and practice) and the relationship (Connelly and Clandinin 1990: 3). A parallel might be made here to practices in psychotherapy where the reciprocal and respectful alliance between client and therapist is thought to be a precursor to a productive experience (Epston and White 1992: 12-14, Martin 1994: 108-109). The encouragement to articulate a 'voice' would seem to be guiding principle from which all else is negotiated.

This is echoed by those engaged in 'insider research' where the difficulties of establishing trust and a genuinely collaborative dialogue are addressed by locating the researcher in the field as a member of the community being researched. This reflects my own position as a research-practitioner researching my own practice.

> To generate trustworthy knowledge of a cultural group it is both
> necessary and sufficient that the producers of such accounts are
> also members of the community.

> Vicars 2008, p 95.

Vicars claims that narrative research 'rapidly erases the boundaries between the researchers and the researched' (2008: 95).

The case for 'insider research' highlights that the task of eliciting and locating the narratives in discourse is not necessarily straightforward; researching from the outside can create barriers to communication. Chase makes the point that the way the story is invited is crucial to the story that is told, for example sociological questions invite sociological answers, the general rather than the particular (2005: 658). Vicars notes that the messiness of talk in genuine relationships can yield stories that are more personal and reflective. In the following extract he quotes one of his participants/friends.

> I think the stories will come if you let us talk, that may mean
> endless eons of tape, but I think the stories will come when we
> are talking.
>
> Vicars, 2008, p101.

Frank develops the ethical and epistemological rationale for hearing stories in the context of relationships characterized by psychological attunement and empathy.

> A standpoint both reflects one's own unique experience and
> asserts membership in a community of those who understand
> shared experiences in mutually supportive ways.
>
> Frank 1997, p356.

This all involves feelings of connectedness, equality and mutual purpose: feelings I hope are present in our 'community'. I hope to extend this ethos into the research interview context.

4.4 <u>Phenomenological and narrative approaches to practice and research.</u>

4.4.1 *Taking a position about being human*

My research question relates to what and how parents can 'know' what is of value to them, the 'bad' and the 'good', as well as questions of agency and 'change'. Therefore any theoretical knowledge I can gain through this research about these aspects of experience will be closely bound to theories about knowledge, experience and selfhood. These are questions which I began to consider in chapter three of this work, my understanding being that in order to achieve a coherent 'praxis' it is necessary to be clear about assumptions such as these. In this way ontological and epistemological concerns are foundational to this research and are likely to determine ways in which any findings can be interpreted and applied. This section will provide an exploration of psychological theories of self-hood beginning with my experience of practice. Additionally, in starting from this point I aim to support the reader in understanding the particular interpretative stance I apply in my analysis of parent's accounts in chapter six.

4.4.2 *Experience, selfhood and narrative*

It occurs to me that I express my experience of 'selfhood' through language structures saturated in theories of causality. So, for example, the way pronouns and verbs relate to one another in a sentence defines 'what happened' as well as 'how' (Bruner 1986: 11-13). Human narrating of events, of experience, brings together what might be considered aspects of human consciousness as well as cultural and moral concerns, and yet, leaves interpretation relatively open (Bruner 1986: 11-43). This perhaps reflects (or generates) our ordinary understanding that selfhood, causality, and the relationship between ourselves and others is

something emergent and always a matter for speculative review (Bruner 2004: 11-43, Martin 2003: 3-14).

This speculativeness around experience is of course also an inevitable aspect of practice and research. For example, despite the structured and established pattern to the intervention being researched here, I liken my experience with each parent group to being in a small boat out at sea. I feel the metaphorical waves and have a sense of the activity around me. I know when there is turbulence and respond automatically. I have some ideas to guide me, with which I am familiar and comfortable, but there is much I do not know. I am conscious of the sea of meaning as full of unknowns and am reasonably comfortable with the idea that some of my responses are based on 'knowledge' which exists in forms that cannot be easily, if at all, explained or accessed.

Spinoza describes human experience of causality in quite similar terms, and perhaps my mental image came from reading the following:

> And…..we are driven about by external causes in many manners,
> and that we, like waves of the sea driven by contrary winds,
> waves unaware of the issue and of our fate….
>
> Spinoza, 2001, p145 in Berger, 2011, p 45)

This uncertainty is perhaps the reason many psychological theories, especially since psychology became established as a social science, have excluded subjectivity from inquiry and theorizing. However some psychologists have made subjectivity central.

Both my description and Spinoza's resonate, I think, with James's phenomenological description of consciousness. For James, consciousness was characterised by a sense of unity and flow within which there exists,

> subworlds of experience, like those of the senses, science, philosophical beliefs….each with its own special and separate style of existence.
>
> Stevens 1996, p 155-156.

Through the 'inhibiting agency of attention' (James 1950: 288), whether automatically or deliberately deployed, James proposed that we experience the world as complete, but accessible in different ways, through our shifting focus of awareness. In this way we can build up our knowledge of the world.

James' radical empiricism was developed at the beginning of the century by Edmund Husserl who developed a method through which he believed it was possible to access the reality of another person's experience, their 'lifeworld', through a systematic and empathic reflective engagement with it (1931).

Kvale describes phenomenological inquiry in the following way.

> It studies the subject's perspectives on their world; attempts to describe in detail the content and structure of the subjects consciousness, to grasp the qualitative diversity of their experiences and to explicate their essential meanings.
>
> Kvale, 1996, p53

Of course, consciousness and selfhood are not necessarily synonymous, and neither are consciousness and narrative. However, James' descriptions are suggestive of psychological mechanisms which may organize experience and contribute to sense-making. This relationship between sense-making and experience may parallel the relationship between phenomenology and narrative approaches in psychology. In the following section I will explore this idea and consider how narrative might give us entry to the life-world.

4.4.3 *Phenomenology and narrative inquiry: Exploring the space between a person and their worls*

   Willig (2007) in her critique of phenomenological analysis identifies a binary within phenomenology which is useful in identifying its practical and philosophical elements: its emphasis upon both description and interpretation. Through the facilitation of voice and descriptive analysis she believes 'premature interpretative closure' can be avoided, while asking the question 'how is meaning made' allows for exploration of the relationship between the person and the world. The method can therefore allow for ontological questions about how subjects experience the world and ontic questions about how their reality is constituted (Willig, 2007: 223)**.** As mentioned previously, narrative theorists suggest that an examination of the content and structure of narratives can contribute to the 'ontic' level of analysis, allowing for a further dimension of criticality, inwardly towards aspects of consciousness and outwardly towards culture (Bruner 1986, Riessman 1993: 1-5, Squires 2008). However the process of interpretation cannot be separated from the relationship context in which the research takes place. Blumenfeld-Jones (1995: 27) believes that narrative research acknowledges that the 'triangular relationship' between person, researcher, contexts (multiple) is the particular stimulus for the story told. In remaining 'true' to this relationship as a check to interpretation the researcher can maintain 'fidelity' to the intention

of the narrator as well as the experience of being narrated to (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995: 26-28). Both Willig and Blumenfeld-Jones highlight the researcher's task of representing the non-closing hermeneutic nature of such dialogue. Within the intervention this hermeneutic triangle is also ever-present in the practice. I find that the dialogue is relentless and never reaches a point of closure. We hear accounts of what has happened and from this position we are privileged to witness patterns of meaning making and to engage in further dialogue about what, how and why meaning is so constituted. Such is the community context in which we work together it is hard to imagine our relationships prospering if we behaved differently.

4.5 Ideas of self which allow for agency and change through experience

4.5.1 Narrative theory and the embodied self: exploring worlds and searching for what matters.

Another aspect of this dialogue in the intervention is the evaluative meaning-making which seems profoundly connected to parent's self and self-other constructions: their relationships. Bruner suggests that we come to 'know' through 'the endowment of experience through meaning' (1986:12). Phenomenology seeks to understand the 'structure' of the experience between person and world (Felder and Robbins, 2011). For some narrative theorists that relationship is embodied in narrative. It is assumed that as experience accrues, it becomes storied, something for the body to relate to. Thought, language, the body and culture are therefore objects of study that are hard to isolate in any research that focuses on narrative material.

> The inseparability of character, setting, and action must be
> deeply rooted in the nature of narrative thought. It is only with
> difficulty that we can conceive of them in isolation.

> Bruner 1986, p39.

Bruner also highlights uncertainty about causality in relation to 'selfhood', an uncertainty I perceive in cultural, (sometimes intensely competitive), discourse around children and 'parenting'. He asks the 'chicken and egg question' which parallels questions about the ontology of selfhood:

> Is our sense of selfhood the *'fons et origio'* of storytelling, or
> does the human gift of narrative endow selfhood with the shape it
> takes?

> Bruner 2004, p7.

Although causality is not clear, Bruner suggests that we come to know and evaluate who we are in a conscious way through narration (Bruner 2004: 17). This evaluation may be contained by the linguistic structures which narrative offers.

There is a general emphasis in narrative on how 'reality' is constructed (Riessman 1993). It is thought than when hearing a story we perceive an organisation which includes a coherent account of a sequence of events and characters with values and intentions etc. (Bruner 2004: 6-13). In this way culturally available narratives may become incorporated within our 'selves' through meaning-making dialogue in the context of the social world.

I raise these points as they justify a search amongst narrative for answers to my question about how value is known and how choices come to be made in a life in relation to what is valued and how this relates to self-hood and agency.

> An acceptable story must first establish a goal, an event to be
> explained, a state to be reached or avoided, or more 'informally',
> a 'point'. This point is typically saturated with value; it is
> understood to be desirable or undesirable.
>
> Gergen, 1999, p69

Thus, value has to be intelligible within the context that is described. Events are told in relation to the 'endpoint' (Gergen 1999: 69). Selfhood orientates towards events and never exists in isolation from contexts, cultural, historical and embodied. It seems that narrative and knowing are so closely connected it might be reasonable given such ontological enmeshment of narrative, experience, selfhood and consciousness to re-frame my question to consider 'how value is storied, and how the knowing of value is storied'. Since my primary concern in this research is with exploring the experience of parents I have prioritised this within my title and question. However, I hope my position is clear. As with IPA, the knowledge gained through analysis of narratives is interpretation (Larkin, 2006). This interpretative stance will be explored in the following section.

4.5.2   *Uncertainty in our 'knowledge' of selfhood gained through analysis of experience*

Narrative offers many (perhaps an infinite number) of perspectives to the researcher examining experience: the story told may be one of many possible versions (Bruner (2004: 4). Another uncertainty that the research must contain is that some of the 'knowing' may be explicit and wrapped up in issues of identity and choice and some may be emergent and

embedded within experience that is narrated. Narrative researchers acknowledge that the urge to narrate as 'inchoate', that is, all experience pre-figures and orientates towards some form of narrative expression (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995: 29). For the purpose of this inquiry it is important for me to consider the pre-figurative as well as the clearly related forms of 'knowing' expressed by my subjects. This will involve me searching in their story for links to theory as well as context in order to re-tell their story in a way which reveals further meanings (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995: 29-31). I will also provide the reader with access to full transcripts, as well as an analysis incorporating excerpts from transcripts. The creativity and authenticity required in this process, for myself as writer, and also for the reader, will be discussed in chapter 5. In the following discussion I will pursue the issue of self-hood towards, what I hope is, a clear ontology and epistemology which I hope will contain the issues so far raised.

4.5.3   *A phenomenological ontology of selfhood*

In an article exploring the function of the self narrative Bruner refers to Samuel Beckett's distrust of the well constructed self narrative, a 'straitjacket' which Beckett believed constricted experience (Bruner 2004: 9). Others view the self narrative as a potential act of personal and political resistance, the action of an individual striving for autonomy (Beverley, 2005: 555). In our dialogue with parents I notice there is often an emotional sense of restriction, autonomy, liberation and resistance, all jostling within discourse for a place. I have a strong sense that an aspect of the process of personal change is an inner as well as an outer dialogue in which complex moral and emotional imperatives adjust so as to co-exist in an equilibrium that can be lived with.

Mindful of Beckett's metaphor of the 'strait-jacket' self narrative I wonder if phenomenology may offer a more encompassing theoretical construct, one which contains the inchoate, not yet formed narrative as well as the well-rehearsed and evaluated one that may be ready to a shift to something newly 'known'.

In Heidegger's existential phenomenology the self is 'embodied' and relational. Consequently its essence cannot be captured and understood in ways which exclude the presence of any aspect of the world, for example, culture, history, sensory input.

> At the heart of this argument lies Heidegger's view of the person as always and indelibly, a 'person-in-context'…..In short we are a fundamental part of a meaningful world (and hence) we can only be properly understood as *a function of our various involvements with that world*), and the meaningful world is also a fundamental part of us (such that it can only be properly disclosed and understood *as a function of our involvements with it*).
>
> Larkin et al, 2006, p106.

This conceptualization of selfhood takes us far away from epistemic and individualised accounts which perhaps dominate in certain practice contexts. It also encompasses the pre-figurative aspect of experience, the inchoate nature of narrative not yet formed (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995: 29-31)

> It is not a matter of perceptually tracking down and inspecting a point called the self, but rather one of seizing upon the full disclosedness of 'being in the world' throughout all the

constitutive items which are essential to it and doing so with understanding.

Heidegger,1978, p147, in, Han Pile, 2012, p15

Heidegger, and also, Merleau-Ponty, stressed the reciprocal and constitutive nature of a person's relationship within the world. These theorists developed a psychological ontology which sought to account for that fact that we largely experience 'being in the world' as an integrated phenomenon requiring relatively little deliberate thought and action from us (Felder and Robbins, 2011: 360). Merleau-Ponty conceived of the inter-connectedness of the body/world, the inner/outer as a 'folding' process through which complex and synchronous systems of relating formed. In doing so he rejects individualistic ideas of person-hood, dysfunction and unhappiness. Heidegger's and Merleau-Ponty's ontology is intellectually quite difficult to grasp, but through its appeal to our imagination it is, I think, intuitively accessible. Both use poetic metaphors to describe the pre-reflective strangeness of finding oneself in the world, for example, 'throwness…fallen-ness…flesh-pathology' and these help me to imagine and reflect upon the vulnerability and ambivalence that can easily arise for us when 'being in the world' is not straightforward. They express the sense of 'self' as follows' in a way which echoes Bruner's notion of the organising function of selfhood within narrative (Felder and Robbins, 2011: 358-360).

Let us therefore say….that the life of consciousness….the
cognitive life, the life of desire or perceptual life- is subtended by
an 'intentional arc' which projects about us our past, our future,
our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation,
or rather results in us being situated in all these respects. It is this
intentional arc which brings about the unity to our senses, of

intelligence, of sensibility and motility. And it is this which goes

'limp' in illness.

Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p162, in Felder and Robbins, 2011, p360

4.6 A phenomenological ontological stance: ethical and empowering

Felder and Robbins' view Heideggers's ontology of selfhood, as legitimating and embracing of the breadth and depth of a person's 'lived experience' within the therapeutic relationship, something which I am conscious of trying to achieve in our relationships with parents (see chapter three and our systemic therapeutic stance).

It interests me that, for Merleau-Ponty, these forms of relating are revealed at times of break-down and disharmony in the folds of the 'flesh-world'.

….the flesh of the body and the flesh of the world coil over each other as an entwining process of unfolding. Reflection upon one or the other is made possible through a dehiscence- something like a bursting open, as in a seed pod or another kind of rupture…

Felder and Robbins, 2011, p359

This evocative description provides a rationale for exploring the meaning making of those whose life-world is problematic, who find that life is not 'smooth'. For them (or you/ me/ us), in a particular situation, at a point in time, the relationship with the world may become exposed, first to themselves, and then through their descriptions, to others. For Heidegger it is through an increasing consciousness of this experience, the 'being', that a person's agency can emerge. In existential phenomenology agency (like selfhood) is no longer a causal event

in a straightforward sense. It is through an increasing consciousness, choice-making and small steps towards 'authenticity' that agency emerges (Han Pile, 2012). My research is with a group of parents who are conscious that their experience with their children is problematic. In fact they are explicitly communicating that it is 'not good' and there is further visibility and exposure to their lives as a consequence of their reaching out to the world for help. It occurs to me that this existential-phenomenological ontology accounts for my sense that parents are often required to be brave in their engagement with our intervention. Knowing and becoming conscious, with its inbuilt imperative towards agency and authenticity, might be challenging and problematic for them as well as potentially empowering.

4.7   Positionality in this research and practice

For the purposes of this research I consider Merleau-Ponty's and Heidegger's phenomenological ontology as containing the lived reality of the sensory and cultural worlds present and past as expressed within the narrative accounts of parents. In the following section I will connect this perspective to critical realism and also consider how existential phenomenology and critical realism might also be compatible with social constructionism, within which narrative theory generally sits.

4.8   The ontological and epistemological position of this research: Critical realism:

An important question to consider in practice and research in science and social science is the ontological status of the knowledge presented, including ideas about human experience and psychological phenomena. This uncertainty is often expressed as follows 'Is there a world independent of our representations of it?' (Nightingale and Cromby, 2002:701). We

might also ask, 'are our representations of the world real?' In psychology it may also be necessary to ask, 'is there a self independent of my experience of it', and, 'are our representations of selfhood real'? In this respect Cartesian thinking and mind-body, agency-structure dualisms (implicit in much psychological talk) are often contrasted with a strong social constructionist position, in which questions of ontology are put to one side, and the role of language, in constructing multiple realities, is granted primacy (Gergen 1999: 33-61). Different positions on this issue are taken in narrative research (Squire et al 2008: 1-21, Riessman 1993: 8-16). In psychological practice and research generally it is thought important to avoid slipping into 'naïve-realism', a position in which, for example I might be tempted to insist to parents that my formulations and theories applied to their experience had the status of foundational truth (Martin et al 2003: 17-24). To avoid such oppressiveness, as described in chapter three, social constructionists advise on-going reflexivity in relation to the versions of the 'real' that language provides (Gergen 1999: 33-61). However this position has been critiqued for its avoidance of ontological issues (Martin et al 2003:42-44, Fox 2011). Gergen suggests it is not necessary to argue about what is real but sufficient to engage in a process of deconstruction which allows alternative realities to be considered. However, other writers express concern that this position collapses into relativism as there is no means of establishing validity for any claims in a discursive field (Nightingale and Crombie, 2002). Martin proposes that psychology adopts a critical realist ontology believing that it is necessary to accept that psychological phenomena are 'real' in order to generate theories of causality (1994: 1-15) and to have a psychology in which there is an agentic self. I will explore Martin's framework for research within critical realism in the following section. I will first explore the relationship between social constructionism and realism as I believe it connects to a great deal of uncertainty around research and practice in educational

psychology, uncertainty which may be evident in the parents' accounts. I will explore this idea in the following section.

4.9 <u>Social constructionism and critical realist positions in practice</u>

   In psychological practice literature there have been on-going attempts to reconcile social constructionism and critical realism through acknowledgement that language co-constitutes reality through its interaction with biology and environment, structure etc (Parker 2005:5, Cromby and Nightingale 2002). Like Martin these writers see agency as emerging and enacted through this relationship. Whilst acknowledging Gergen's concern to avoid the oppressiveness and potential hegemony of realist claims they suggest that a realist perspective is compatible with a social constructionism which is ontological, that is, where reality is viewed as co-constituted in the following way. Nightingale and Cromby (2002), using a case example, demonstrate how the emotional responses and identities of children can be shaped through relationships largely determined by the social and linguistic 'realities' experienced, 'the constitutive potentials of social interaction' (2002: 706). Their theory, like the theory of Martin and Gillespie (2010) discussed in chapter 3, encompasses discursive approaches and neuroscience, weaving them into an explanatory account which they believe avoids determinism, in the sense that outcomes were not wholly predictable in such a complex causal field, and yet are determined.

> The notion of embodied subjectivity, we postulate is framed by a social constructionism that highlights the discursive co-constitution of individual subjectivity- both ontogentically, and from moment to moment in situated interaction.
>
> Cromby and Nightingale, 2002, p 709

Cromby and Nightingale make a point which is very relevant to this study. In their case study the effects of particular experiences were extremely destructive for the children concerned because the values (purposes, goals), embedded in the embodied and discursive structures in which the children lived, were so negative.

I believe it is legitimate to extrapolate from this situation to any community setting in which people relate to one another, where relating is situated, embodied and subject to a constant discursive negotiation. It is within dynamic, complex and ontogenic flux that the potential for change exists, and that 'value' is an important aspect of the direction such change takes.

> The social processes and biological mechanisms we highlight are
> not reversible such that individuals always bear the impress of
> their experience (see Smail, 1993). But neither are they
> exhaustible or fixed: the same mechanisms operating with
> alternative social processes enable transformation and
> amelioration.

Cromby and Nightingale, 2002, p 709

In our temporary community our stated purpose is the search for 'the good' in the experience of parenting. We express our view to parents in the beginning of the relationship that this process will include some examination of history, doing things differently and lots of discussion. We acknowledge what has gone before and do not deny the reality of the effects of history. What we imply is that 'selfhood', our experience of our relationships with others, and ourselves (the 'I' and the 'me' and the 'other') will change through this process. As they/we come to 'be' different they 'know' differently, and vice-versa.

In this section I have tried to demonstrate how critical realism, in bringing together ontology and epistemology, creates a conceptual framework in which my research and practice aims achieve coherence alongside my research title and questions. In the following section I will consider how critical realism supports my further aim, to explore the mechanisms by which change might take place.

4.10   Critical realism and research: generating theory in a therapeutic setting

Critical realism has emerged as an attempt to investigate psychological phenomena without adopting the positivistic methods of the natural sciences. Fundamental to this position is the belief that psychological phenomena are real, but not 'atomistic', that is, they cannot be reduced to atomic structures and manipulated in ideal conditions so as to discover their properties (Bhaskar, 1991: 9). Psychological phenomena do not exist out of social, cultural and linguistic contexts. Even in solitude, for example, our inner discourse, emotions etc exist in relation to a remembered, putative, social context (Martin1994: 6-7). It follows that we need to conduct psychological research in real contexts as it is in these contexts that psychological phenomena exist.

> The critical realist approach to the ontology of psychological
> phenomena eschews both positivistic criteria for reality in terms
> of operational definitions, and relativistic ontologies that would
> deny the reality of psychological phenomena. In critical realism,

social constitutionism (the belief that the psychological arises from the social-cultural) is married to a form of ontological realism (the belief that both the social and the psychological are real).

Martin,1994, p7.

The complexity and circularity of the interactions between variables are a problem in natural science, hence the research practice of isolating variables. As stated previously, as the social is prior to the personal, this is not possible in psychological research (Martin 1994: 11-15). It is therefore necessary to tolerate the 'causal noise' in research, in real world contexts, that is, multiple cause and effects, linear and circular. Martin provides a rationale for psychological research rooted in critical realism. He identifies psychological phenomena arising in social contexts, such as memory, belief, agency and describes a framework in which he believes it is possible to identify 'generative mechanisms' (1994: 12), within experience which will make sense of the relationship between these aspects of 'being' a person and the experience of 'being' in the world. I will describe this framework in some detail as I believe it can be applied to this research.

Martin proposes that we use existing theory to identify possible mechanisms and factors at work. Although, he suggests, it is not necessary (or possible) to establish mechanisms in relation to observed phenomena, it is important to theoretically link aspects of the experience, in this case experience in the parenting programme, with theory about the phenomena (parenting and relationships), and person-culture interaction etc, theories such as those outlined in chapter two and three. From this, likely causal/ generative mechanisms contributing to therapeutic change, might be inferred. Willig (2007: 222) suggests that in exploring the relationship between person and world some understandings can be achieved

which have universal value. Martin's 'generative mechanisms' may therefore achieve some predictive utility, perhaps not in a straightforward way across cultures that have developed different linguistic constructions in relation to experience but in a general heuristic way. For example, in this research, it may be possible for me to hypothesise from parents' accounts how they have engaged with cultural narratives around parenting, or ideas and experiences connected to 'value', experienced within the intervention and more widely. This may have relevance to other contexts where different ideologies dominate.

However, although Martin suggests that it is possible to go beyond hermeneutic interpretations, a hermeneutic process is integral to his version of critical realism. For example, such research is necessarily idiographic because in open systems, complex real life systems causal mechanisms 'are unlikely to reveal themselves with regularity'. He suggests that it is necessary to constantly relate psychological phenomena to contextual factors and interpretative theory. The process of meaning-making/ theory generation is circular and non-reductive. So, although relationships will be sought amongst material, obtained in different settings and different ways, 'None of these data ultimately are directly reducible to the personal memories, theories, and changes postulated in the theory of psycho-therapeutic change being tested' (Martin, 1994: 11).

I understand Martin's position in the following way: theory will always be uncertain in its application. Where the theory is not well developed, perhaps as in this research, the study will be explorative, generating further hypotheses. I may be able to construct a direction for theory through analysis of the idiographic accounts of parents' experience. In time this process could lead to theory which had 'heuristic fertility' (theory with enough internal and external coherence to generate hypotheses for testing), and 'semi-predictive utility' (it might

be possible to find similar situations in which to look for supportive or unsupportive

evidence) (Martin 1994, p 12-13). In this way Martin outlines how a research programme

might operate, perhaps offering a model for use in educational psychology.

Chapter 5   Description of Method: Theoretical rationale and procedures

Words are important in creating our lives in these ways but they gain their significance in the way they are embedded within patterns of action, material conditions and social institutions.

Gergen, 1999, p64

The cultural elision of the sensual underpinnings of signification may have the effect of fore-closing the emergence of latent meanings that are other wise brought forth through the dialogue between embodied subjects and the things in the world….the world then ceases to speak….scientific discourses hide from us in the first place the human world…

Felder and Robbins, 2011, p358

5.1   Eliciting narrative accounts

Narrative research is a creative and diverse approach and perhaps as a consequence there are a great many tensions within the field (Squire et al 2008: 1-21). There is no clear agreement for example, as to what counts as a narrative or whether it is important to identify distinct narratives within accounts (Chase, 2005: 651-656). A similar binary exists in relation to analysis: some researchers focus on the content and structure of narratives, examining narratives as texts, and others focus on the function of narratives, seeing them as performances in relation to contexts (Patterson 2008: 23). Some researchers are sensitive to the integrity of a story told and are distrustful of analysis and researcher interpretation (Frank, 1995: 1-25), while others are mindful, as in the above quotation of what is 'inchoate' and unarticulated within stories and their sometimes elusive but important relationship with

contexts (Blumenfeld-Jones, 1995). Although controversy embraces issues of validity, authenticity and debates about positivism and post-modernism it is clear that researchers adopt an approach which helps them to answer the question they are asking. I hope to have outlined my own position clearly on these issues in the previous sections. My hope is that a narrative method will reveal something of the relationship between my subjects and their life-world, in particular their experience of the intervention, narratives being a constitutive aspect of their experience.

My particular interest in this inquiry is in eliciting stories from parents in relation to their experience of 'value'. I am particularly interested in their *evaluative* perspective. A key question I will ask them is how they 'know' what is good in their lives as parents, and then, towards the end of the intervention, 'how have things changed?'. I expect these questions to elicit stories of events which have personal meaning to the parents.

5.2   Analysis of narrative accounts

As a consequence of my focus on 'events' and my interest in parents' evaluation of their experience I have chosen to adopt (and adapt) a Labovian method of analysis (Patterson 2008). This method demands a rigorous organisation of interview material into distinct narratives according to the following structure.

In the method speech clauses are organised in transcription into a six-part model (Labov 1972, p360). I have adapted this model slightly, to exclude Labov's final category, 'Coda', as I felt this did not emerge as a significant feature of the dialogue between myself and the parents.

Abstract (A): ' What is the story about'…. ' often at the start of the narrative'.

Orientation (O): 'Who, when, where?'…. 'providing a setting in which the events of the story will be told'

Complicating action (CA): 'Then what happened?'…. 'clauses relate the events of the story'

Evaluation (E): 'So what?' 'Riessmann (1993: 21) refers to evaluation as 'the soul of the narrative', expressing both the point of the story and, crucially, how the narrator wants to be understood' .

Result (R): 'what finally happened'……. 'how the story ends'.

Patterson, 2008, pp 25-27.

Labov viewed 'evaluation' as permeating narratives (Patterson 2008: 22-23) and this corresponds with the perspective of several writers: narratives function to contain and express our moral concerns, the purpose and meaning of our lives (Bruner, 1986: 12). I anticipate that in delineating narratives in this way I will be able to identify important narratives, in the sense that they are significant to individuals producing them as well as relevant to my research question.

In order to support this process I will use a technique in my transcription described by Gee (1991). Gee emphasised, in transcripts, words which were vocally stressed in the recording, assuming that such stress indicated that the word or idea expressed was both central to the

meaning of the narrative and also indicative of emotional meaning to the subject. My concern here relates to the facilitation of voice referred to earlier in this chapter. For ethical and epistemological reasons it seems important to keep my interpretations rooted in the communicative intensions of my subjects. In this way I aim to achieve the phenomenological empathy recommended by Husserl, as well as a respect for the 'text' of the narrative constructed by my subject (Patterson, 2008: 41-43). Emotional significance is suggestive of an orientation towards value, which is the focus of my inquiry as well as my practice in the intervention. Therefore, in several ways this approach will help me to achieve the ethical and epistemological rigor I seek in analysing the narratives. I will explore this issue more fully in the following discussion when I consider interpretation in relation to issues of validity more specifically.

5.3   Analysis and authenticity

The desire for 'authenticity' creates a dilemma for qualitative researchers in relation to the analysis and interpretation of participants' stories. For some researchers the integrity of the story is its form and content. As previously stated, for some, it is enough for the researcher to sensitively to bring it forth and present it (Frank, 1995).To analyse the story is to risk appropriating meanings, perhaps through the applications of theories and discourses that belong to the researcher, not the subject (Chase, 2005: 663-666). Interpretation might cause us to ask, 'whose voice?' and undermine the validity of the knowledge claimed. Frank (1995: 1-25) suggests greatest authenticity and trustworthiness is achieved by preserving the shape and content of the narrative presented, whereas, Holloway and Jefferson (2008) favour searching for the unconscious narrative of the 'defended' subject, exploring narrative from the perspective of psychoanalytic theory.

For Husserl facilitating the 'voice' was merely the first essential step towards gaining a 'real' understanding of another person's reality (1931). He believed that through immersing oneself in an account of experience and becoming conscious of, and putting aside one's own assumptions etc. it was possible to grasp the 'essence' of another's experience.

Mindful of the danger of losing the integrity of the subject's voice through analysis and interpretation I decided to construct from the Labovian/ Gee (Gee, 1991) analysis an 'empathic' account through which I aimed to stay close to the communicative intension of the narrator (Frost, 2007: 2). I also hoped this would ground the analysis in relation to theory in the experience of the parent. This shift of perspective, between narrator intension, and theory and cultural contexts has been likened by Chase (2005: 656-657) as the application of different theoretical lens.

In this inquiry I aim to explore subjects' perspectives on value. As discussed earlier in this chapter this is likely to involve stories of identity, exploration of self, and self-other relationships, as well as fundamental existential concerns. Since these aspects of experience are deeply contextual, self 'speaking' of culture (Riessman: 2003: 8-16), for example, as well as its own history, I aim to take a micro and macro perspective (Emerson and Frosh, 2009: 59-86) in relation to narratives produced and to do this in a flexible way. I hope to be able to weave connections between the narratives produced and my research questions, as well as to look more deeply at the meanings contained in stories. To this end I intend to move from an empathic engagement with the text in which I will comment and interpret through several hearings and readings (Husserl 1931, Larkin et al 2006), towards an organisation of the delineated narratives into themes, for each subject (Frost, 2007). I will take an hermeneutic

and idiographic approach rather than seeking coherence between subjects, so as to respect the individual experience and meaning making of my subjects. However, having analysed each account I will compare them, exploring differences and commonalties as hypotheses regarding change may be generated from this. Emerson and Frosh, (2009: 59-86), also recommend a multi-level approach to analysis, in particular they suggest that a close linguistic analysis can contribute to the thematic search. I intend to take this approach where it seems important, that is, through a hermeneutic process in which I search in accounts, and within narratives for a coherent interpretation in relation to theory.

5.4   Validity: Authenticity and fidelity by any other name

Validity is a concept that has its origins in positivist inquiry. Many qualitative researchers see its application to inquiry which is hermeneutic and idiographic as problematic (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 2-6). Where interpretation is central to the construction of knowledge some writers have likened the process of qualitative research as closer to art than science (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2006: 28-31). In this perspective all interpretations are in essence co-constructed narratives. Authenticity and trustworthiness are achieved by remaining as aware of the situated context in which narratives are produced, as well as finding means to respect the intensions embedded within the narratives (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2006: 31-33). This highlights for me the inter-relatedness of ethics, authenticity, as well as rigorous epistemology. Blumenfeld-Jones quotes William Earle, 'Is not one's fidelity to objects really a fidelity to others and oneself about objects?' (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2006: 27).

The construct of fidelity recognises the creative and personal process involved in interpretative analysis but situates it i relationships which are empowering (for the subjects) and respectful. Blumenfeld –Jones links this directly to the process of analysis. The

following quotation brings together many of the issues I have discussed in this and the previous chapter: the value of insider research, the turn to subjectivity for useful truths about experience implied by critical realism, and the window narrative provides to the researcher interested in exploring experience in a rigorous yet respectful manner.

> ….fidelity….refers not only to the inter-subjective bond between original teller and narrative inquirer but also to the perceived interaction of the original teller and the context of the narrative. Here the narrative inquirer must act with fidelity by being true to the situation of the teller by recognising, constructing and establishing linkages between events, small and large, immediate and distant, immediate and historical. An attempt at fidelity illuminates the way the world is a web within which actions are performed and motivated and understandings are directed.
>
> Blumenfeld-Jones, 2006, p28.

This ethical and practical convergence of meaning and purpose with its everyday imperative of keeping things working through interactive adjustments seems to describe the social context and therapeutic orientation of our intervention. To omit, or to assume the voices of participants might amount to a disavowal of their experience which seems contradictory to the purpose of my research and the purpose of my practice. Once again epistemology, ontology and ethics seem to converge upon method.

5.5   Research question

My research title is as follows:

Knowing bad and making good: exploring consciousness of value with parents in a parenting programme.

In this focus I have identified the following research questions:

How do parents come to 'know' what is 'good'?
What helps them to put into practice what they know to be 'good'?

5.6 Structure of interviews

In order to capture possible change in parents' experience in relation to 'value' as well as their beliefs about what is of value to them I arranged to interview my subjects near the beginning of the intervention and towards the end. The gap between the interviews was approximately six months. I had already formed relationships with my subjects by the time the first interviews took place and, as I explored previously in the previous chapter, this may have helped to create the empathic conditions necessary to encourage parents to talk.

Some narrative researchers recommend a very simple interview question which the subject can then respond to in a self-directed way (Riessman, 2003: 30-34). My intention was to stay as close as possible to this position so as not to de-limit the direction of people's narratives. However I was anxious not to create conversational conditions which seemed unnatural, and different in feel to the many other conversations that we had had. I was also expecting our conversation to stray at times into territory that we had previously explored in our relationship. So, throughout the interviews I used paraphrasing and reflection to maintain some natural reciprocity within our conversation as this was typical of my interactions

generally, in practice. I also adopted a Narrative Practice orientation and followed my genuine curiosity in the conversations (Morgan, 2002: 86-87). To this extent the co-constructed nature of the narratives produced in the interviews, is undeniable. However it is the perspective of several narrative writers that the experience of another's genuine curiosity supports subjects to develop narratives that are meaningful to themselves (Morgan, 2002: 86-87).

In the second interview I asked more than one question so as to explore value and the experience of change. I used a 'turning point' question as 'turning points' as thought to be a feature of western cultural narratives of change (Riessman, 2000). In order to elicit some direct 'evaluation' of the intervention from the parents I also asked them what they thought was 'good' and 'bad' about the intervention and if they would recommend the programme to other parents, and if so why.

 I asked the following questions in all the interviews.

First interview

How do you think we know what is good in family life, and what are you trying to achieve in your own family?

Second interview (approximately six-months later)

Can you tell me what, if anything, has changed in your life while you have been taking part in this intervention?

Can you tell me what aspects of the intervention you have found helpful, and if there was anything that was not helpful to you?

Was there a particular 'turning point' in your efforts to bring about change in your family?

What would you say to another parent who was having some trouble in their relationship with their child and perhaps thinking of taking part in an intervention like this?

5.7   Recruitment of participants

   In our first session, with our new group of parents, I explained that my dual role as research-practitioner. I described my aims in research, to learn more about how parents' experience the programme and what value it brings to their lives. I described my own perspective, my curiosity (Morgan, 2002: 86-87), and also something of my witnessing of change: the determination and bravery that I witnessed in parents' struggle to achieve what they wanted for their families. I deliberately introduced the idea of 'narrative' in this explanation as I wanted to give 'permission' for the telling of stories, rather than answers to questions. I said that during my work with the intervention (over 6 years) I had heard many stories and these stories had given me some ideas about what might help people to bring about change, and this is what I wished to explore.

After this introduction I gave out a written document describing the research and a consent form (Appendix 3). I explained that I would understand fully if people felt unable to participate as I realised that there were many pressures and demands upon their time. Out of nine parents in the group (including a Mother and Father partnership) three agreed to take part in the research: Sally, Elly and Rachel. I have changed their names for the purposes of anonymity.

5.8   Ethics

In narrative research ethical issues are viewed as integral to research quality (Chase, 2005: 660-667). This may be particularly so within qualitative research in which the relationship between researcher and participant is so crucial to the quality of the material obtained. Where 'ethics' is 'constructed' within the relationship, issues of power, honesty and openness about the purpose of the research and respect within interactions, are crucial (Chase, 2005: 660-667). As previously discussed, my role, as research-practitioner, made these ethical/relationship considerations particularly evident. Although I did not position participants as co-researchers explicitly, our shared purpose, improving relationships and family life, and exploring how this might come about was transparent and I believe this contributed to a sense of partnership. Aware that participants might feel empathy towards me and my personal and professional hopes I presented the research as part of a process of developing and improving practice, as a piece of 'action-research' (Parker 2005: 123-133). I tried to communicate a sense of curiosity so as to encourage parents to be honest about their experience in the programme.

Fox and Rendell suggest that when working with vulnerable people a particular focus of concern is the endings. 'People may think, where are we going from here?' (2002: 66).

Endings in the intervention studied, took place approximately 3 months after the second interview. This allowed me to continue to offer support where needed and to stay involved in the narratives shared in the research interviews, a level of on-going involvement which may of course have had some influence upon my interpretations. A significant dilemma for me was to what extent I should re-visit the narratives with my subjects after analysis, to check and share my interpretations and so achieve a degree of transparency in relation to interpretation. I was concerned that to do so was to implicitly invite a further narrative, about how things had changed again. Since each narrative is situated in time and place I felt there was an argument for respecting the integrity of the original narrative. I was also aware that my participants might find my theoretical analysis of their story alienating, or somehow incongruent with our relationship. For these reasons I chose not to take the narratives back to the participants.

Throughout the process of conducting this research I have kept a research diary and although I have not analysed this, or referred to this text, in the research write-up, the diary provided me with an opportunity to reflect upon the research experience and the many influences upon my interpretations of accounts. My aim has been to achieve the 'fidelity' described by Blumenfeld-Jones (1995) whilst remaining conscious of the ethical dimensions of my relationship with the parents taking part in the research.

Chapter 6   Analysis of accounts

6.1 Research questions

The purpose of this research is expressed within the following title:

Knowing bad and making good: Exploring consciousness of value with parents in a parenting programme.

Within this focus I have identified the following research questions:

How do parents come to 'know' what is 'good'?
What helps them to put into practice what they know to be 'good'?

6.2 The purpose of chapters 6 and 7

In chapter 4, I referred to Arthur Frank's work, *The Wounded Storyteller* (1995). Within this text Frank identifies a tension in qualitative research between empirical rigour, the need to present something coherent, and the desire to avoid losing the intended meaning of participants. Once analysed, he suggests, it can be difficult for the reader to appreciate how a person's narratives co-exist, or how they might function in the context of the interview and the context beyond the interview.

I am conscious that in this research I have adopted a structuralist/ Labovian method of analysis (Patterson 2008, Gee 1991). Although this helps me to organise my material and allows me to acknowledge the linguistic level of meaning making (Riessman 2008: 151-155), and themes to emerge from the 'bottom up', I feel there is a risk that imposing a structure in this way forecloses upon possible meanings (Patterson 2008: 33-37).

In order to address these potential problems I have sought to represent parents' accounts in some detail. In doing so, I have hoped to allow the reader to appreciate the context of the narratives, in terms of their holistic nature and multiple referents, as well as their dual construction (Salmon and Riessman 2008: 80-83). My experience, talking with the parents, was that each account had a shape, an aesthetic quality, which may have been expressive of their (or our) intension in communicating. I have wished to preserve this while also avoiding any misappropriation of the parents' stories (Salmon and Riessman 2008: 80-83) which might have arisen through my own meaning-making, and construction of theory. With this in mind I have, at times, included lengthy quotes from the interviews. My hope is that this will allow the reader to account for, and interrogate, my interpretations, and formulate their own.

Chapter 7 examines the parents' narratives more explicitly in relation to the theory explored in chapters 1 to 4, and the research question. It is, therefore, analysis at another level, with the more explicit purpose of answering questions about consciousness of value and change: does change take place, and if so how?

6.3 <u>Introduction to analysis of themes</u>

In this chapter I have sought to represent in a coherent and accessible form the outcome of a narrative analysis of parents' extended accounts. I interviewed each participant twice and for each interview produced the following, within this text: a table listing the over-arching themes identified in the analysis, a written summary of the interview, structured around the over-arching themes, another table showing the narrative themes contributing to the over-arching themes, and a more extended written analysis of these. I hope that the interview summaries will provide the reader with a holistic overview of each interview and support their interpretation of the more detailed analysis which follows.

In each participant's account, interview one is followed by interview two, which took place approximately six months later. This may allow the reader to gain a sense of time passing and contribute to an understanding of any change which took place.

In the extended analysis I have explored identified narrative themes. These themes emerged from an organisation of individual narratives into clusters which seemed meaningfully connected. I coded each narrative identified through the Labovian method as belonging to a particular theme, and over-arching theme. Some of the themes overlapped and consequently some narratives are identified as belonging to more than one narrative theme. See Appendix 2 for a record of how individual Labovian narratives (LN) were organised into over-arching themes. The narratives belonging to each theme are indicated within the analysis. The reader can find summary descriptions of these individual narratives in Appendix 2. The de-lineated individual (Labovian) narratives are marked on the interview transcripts (Appendix 3) The diagram below summarizes the process of analysis.

```
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Interview transcribed, text │
│ read several times          │
│ and annotated.              │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Individual narratives       │
│ identified using the        │
│ Labovian  method.           │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Through hermeneutic         │
│ analysis narratives         │
│ clustered into themes.      │
└─────────────────────────────┘
              │
              ▼
┌─────────────────────────────┐
│ Narrative themes            │
│ organised into over-        │
│ arching themes.             │
└─────────────────────────────┘
```
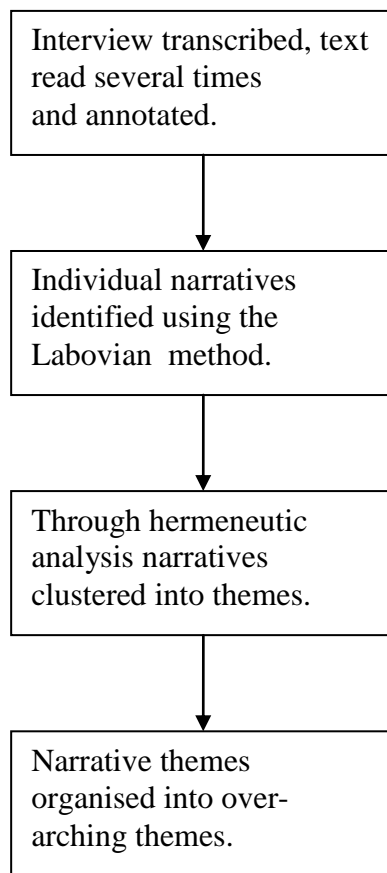
Figure two: Steps in narrative analysis.

6.4 Sally's story, first interview, over-arching narrative themes.

   As explained in Chapter 5, and above, I organised the parent's accounts through a 'bottom

up' and 'top down' hermeneutic analysis. From this process I constructed the following

broad, over-arching themes from Sally's account.

<table>
<tr><td>**T**</td><td>*The good and the bad in relationships.*</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>**T**</td><td>*Contradictions and paradoxes around choice-making and responsibility: No looking back.*</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>**T**</td><td>*Troubling questions of identity: Am I being just like my Mum?*</td></tr>
</table>

6.5 Summary of Sally's story, organised into over-arching narrative themes

The good and the bad in relationships

Sally described what she valued in relationships, and what she didn't value, in stories about her relationships with her Mother, her Nana, her previous partners and her present partner Steve. She spoke about wanting a relationship with her children that was different to what she had had with her own Mother. She remembered happy times with her Mum but this changed when her siblings were born and her Mum began to drink and was less and less loving and caring towards her children. She remembered good times, with her Nana as loving and of feeling secure and happy in this relationship. She cared for her Nana when she became old and sick. As a child, as her Mum became less and less able to cope, Sally felt exploited rather than cared for. This experience of transition from good to bad was repeated in her relationships with men. She described the ways she felt she was exploited, or let down, and how this went against her own sense of how you should treat the people you are with.

120

Contradictions and paradoxes around choice-making and responsibility: No looking back

In her relationships with her Mum, and with partners she had had children with, Sally described herself as putting up with a great deal, up to a point where she knew very clearly that there was no value in the relationship and that she would be better off on her own. At these crises points she described herself as making choices that were inevitable.

Sally explored choice-making and the responsibility she felt people had to make choices. She expressed the view several times that people had to take responsibility for their own choices, even when the consequences cause them pain. Her own Mother had, in her view, failed to take responsibility for her own choices, for example having children, and staying with a man she didn't love. Failing to take responsibility meant she blamed others for her choices, and did not make changes to improve her life. Sally also described several times when she had made choices, and this was usually in the context of crises, or after a long period of dissatisfaction. She also described herself as making choices in the context of compromises, compromises that were intended to maintain relationships. This meant that she sometimes went against what she knew to be 'good' or right, for the sake of maintaining her relationship. An example of this was her involvement with an online interactive computer game which she pursued to avoid feeling resentful towards her partner who played the game obsessively. She felt that she had become very pre-occupied with the game and this caused her to become less aware of, or unable to meet, her responsibilities as a parent. At times Sally presented choice-making as a simple matter, at others it seemed more complex and difficult.

Troubling questions of identity: Am I being just like my Mum?

Sally opened her interview by stating that her purpose in taking part in the intervention was to become 'the complete opposite of my Mum'. She described several situations in which she appeared troubled by her identity, considering similarities and differences between herself and her Mother, in the ways she had behaved and in the choices she had made. She was troubled that she found herself also living with a man she did not love or respect. She described herself as having different ways of being, rather quiet and unconfident at times or loud and domineering at others. She explored, a little, what this apparent contradiction might mean.

6.6 Thematic analysis

* **T** *Indicates over-arching narrative theme (see appendix 2 for complete lists of narratives in relation to over-arching themes)*

<div style="border:1px solid black;">

Identified narratives and over-arching narrative themes

T   ***The good and the bad in relationships.***

How to make relationships good.

People are good and then they turn bad.

Epiphanies of 'knowing'.

</div>

T *Contradictions and paradoxes around choice-making and responsibility: No looking back.*

'Putting up with' and 'standing up to' what's 'bad' in relationships.

Taking responsibility, 'no regrets'.

T *Troubling questions of identity: Am I being just like my Mum?*

Just like my Mum

Quiet and subdued, or loud and obnoxious.

Key for transcripts:

LN = Labovian Narrative and number (see appendix 2 for chronologically numbered narratives).

(1s) = No of seconds paused

/ = End of clause, beginning of next clause.

PE: Researcher/ Interviewer

*6.6.1 Over –arching narrative theme : **<u>The good and the bad in relationships,</u>***

In common with all the participants Sally answered the question, 'How do you think we know what is good in family life, and what are you trying to achieve in your own family?*'* by narrating her own experience of being parented, before exploring other significant relationships in her life.

How to make relationships good   LN's (Labovian narratives, see Appendix 2) 1. 2. 4, 10, 15

Sally gives only a few accounts of the 'good' (Miltenburg and Singer, 2000), of how she believes people should be in close relationships. She describes happy times as a child with her Nana. The 'good' she presents is experienced as enjoying 'being' with someone, the 'bad', as being used by someone, to meet their needs, or simply taken for granted.

> *'When I were YOUNG she was QUITE STRICT but*
> *FAIR…Euhm (3s) she taught me how to IRON (2s)/ she had a*
> *rocking chair which was AWESOME…I just ENJOYED BEING*
> *with her.'*
>
> <div align="right">LN 2, p3</div>

This care was nurturing and reciprocal.

> *'And LATER ON in LIFE when I it my TEEN YEARS I did have*
> *to LOOK AFTER HER quite A LOT cos she was doubly*
> *incontinent.'*

<div align="right">LN 2, p3</div>

Sally also presents 'listening' as fundamental to relationships. Steve's (her partner, and her daughter's father) failure to 'listen' to his young daughter Tilly, is presented as making his value as a father non-existent,

> *'I've been HOLDING ON to STEVE for the SAKE of 'ER but e'*
> *IGNORES 'ER.'*

<div align="right">LN 15, p 13</div>

The value of relating is perhaps implied (Nightingale and Crombie, 2002) within narratives which describe negative experiences Sally has had, some of which are discussed below.

People are good and then they turn bad,   LN's 3, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31

In Sally's descriptions of significant relationships in her life a repeating pattern was clear: initial warmth and fulfilment was followed by harshness and disappointment. This pattern of transition from 'good' to 'bad' in relationships is first described in relation to her Mum. She describes feeling important within the family, until a sibling was born when she was seven,

> *'Cos as far as I was concerned/ They used to call me Princess*
> *Pepsi (2s)/ the world revolved around Sally.'*

<div align="right">LN 3, p5</div>

This transition is depicted as a loss of a warm relationship in which she experienced being valued

> *'baking every weekend…I'd sit there for HOURS brushin' her*
> *hair an plattin 'er hair and stuff like this.'*
>
> LN 3, p5

This experience of loss accompanied by painful consciousness,

> *'It was DIFFICULT because I was OLD enough to sort of*
> *REALISE what were GOIN ON…'*
>
> LN 3, p5

As she grows up Sally has to take responsibility for caring for her siblings as her Mum begins to drink and neglects her own responsibilities as a parent. This narrative of disappointment and exploitation sets up a pattern repeated in Sally's account of her relationship with three men she went on to have children with. In all these relationships Sally initially feels valued but then the relationship changes. Both her fourteen year old son's father, Sean, and her current partner Steve, she describes as letting her down by being irresponsible with money. The following excerpt relates to Steve who inherited money from his parents.

> *'You KNOW (3s) when he GOT IT I were/ like 'cool' / we're*
> *gonna have a deposit for a HOUSE/ I'll LET him buy his*
> *CAR/ the car he wants to (1s). We can have a deposit for the*
> *HOUSE (2s) you KNOW/ (2s) you KNOW (2s) get some*
> *work/ get a MORTGAGE and buy a house and then we don't*

> *have to WORRY about where we are going to live and being*
> *EVICTED annnnnd/ blah blah blah…..'*
>
> <div align="right">LN 26, p22</div>

The loss of emotional security is strong in Sally's account of her relationship with her Mum, but the loss of financial security dominates in her account of her relationship with her partners. The repeated 'you KNOW' perhaps invokes a cultural narrative, as Sally associates herself with what might be viewed as canonically 'good' (being careful with money, and, perhaps, having male providers).

Epiphanies of knowing LN's 9, 12, 31, 34, 35, 36, 37

Sally's agency emerges within her account of her life when the exploitation and disregard become extreme, and where some significant loss is inevitable. In the following extract she appears conscious of who she was 'attached to' while she witnessed a row between her Mum and Step-Dad and it seemed as though her Step-Dad might leave the home.

> *'I mean, I remember when I were about (1s) pheew (1s) eight,*
> *maybe nine(1s)/ I were supposed to be asleep but I got woke up*
> *with the SHOUTING (2s) and/ euhm/ I went out into the*
> *HALLWAY, went to the TOILET and I could still here then*
> *SHOUTING and she were effing and blinding at him….And then*
> *I heard the back door open and then me Mum shouting 'Yeah*
> *that's right run of back to your Mother' (1s)/ And I stood there*
> *thinking 'if HE'S going I'm going WITH HIM'. I'm not staying*
> *with HER (2s)/ And this were my Step-dad, not even my REAL*
> *DAD'.*
>
> <div align="right">LN 9, p9</div>

In a different narrative, relating to her termination of her first pregnancy Sally realised that she was 'alone' and unsupported by her Mum.

> '...one sentence that ma Mum SAID to me made up my MIND (3s) 'it's me FAMILY 93s) or THAT (2s)....so THAT REALLY DID make me FEEL like I would be COMPETELY (1s) ON MY OWN.'
>
> LN 34, p31

However a tension between 'knowing' and 'not knowing' is perhaps evident in Sally's account of how she had to manage her feelings in order to go through with her termination.

> SA: Ah WAS (2s). It was the TRUTH. Ah was very COLD and very HEARTLESS about it but I HAD TO BE (3s) otherwise I would have got up and WALKED OUT. (3s)
>
> PE: you were in a situation where you had to put/ squash your FEELINGS?
>
> SA: Yes (2s) I HAD to / EVERY EMOTION THAT I FELT (5s) I had to just NOT FEEL IT/...
>
> PE: Mm
>
> SA: ...to not feel ANYTHING.
>
> PE: (3s) Mm hmm (4s) /in order to do the THING which you thought was RIGHT.

SA: Yeah (1s) . I/ to DO (1s) what I HAD TO DO AT THAT
POINT IN TIME. (2s) Yeah?

PE: I UNDERSTAND (3s) yeah.

SA: (2s) And part of THAT WAS just (1s) COMPLETELY going
AGAINST (2s) INSTINCT (1s) FEELING (1s) EMOTION.

PE: Mm (2s) mm hmm.

SA:/ and to just STOP it ALL (2s).

<div align="right">LN 35, p31-32</div>

I think Sally suggests here that she had to work hard not to 'know' loss at this time, but the knowledge could not be completely repressed. Despite complying with her Mum's demands Sally describes becoming aware that she felt too much resentment to stay with her, she had lost all sense of being valued. This consciousness led to her leaving.

In these narratives, it might be suggested, significant moral dilemmas were resolved through intense consciousness-raising experiences.

6.6.2 Over-arching narrative theme: <u>**Contradictions and paradoxes around choice-making**</u>

<u>**and responsibility (No looking back).**</u>

'Putting up with' and 'standing up to' what's bad in relationships. LN's 5, 6, 8, 9,12, 21, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37.

Sally's narratives describing her relationships with her Mum and her male partners contain many examples of her recognising but accepting poor treatment and bad behaviour until a point is reached where she tolerates no more and 'stands up to it' . When tolerating the bad behaviour Sally presents herself subtly as having 'no choice', almost as a passive observer in her own story. The following excerpt, describing the situation around her pregnancy with her first child Cameron, is an example of this.

> SA: 'The THING with DION was. I was SEEING Dion for six
> weeks and it was a VERY INTENSE six weeks (2s) and then I
> thought to meself, 'this guy is an ARSEHOLE [sally giggles 4s}

> PE: Did you?

> SA: So I FINISHED with him

> PE: Yeah

> SA: ...and I was / like/' GO AWAY LEAVE ME ALONE'……then
> a few weeks later I found out I were PREGNANT………I didn't
> INTEND on TELLING him (3s) but then he turned UP OUT of
> the BLUE (4s)/ euhm….and I thought (3s) 'ah can't HIDE it
> from him

130

PE: Ye-ah

SA: 'and he's got a
RIGHT to KNOW (2s)

<div align="right">L29, p25-26.</div>

Sally's motivation within this narrative emerges as ambiguous. She doesn't acknowledge her possible vulnerability or agency in this situation but presents instead his 'right to know', appealing to a cultural narrative of paternal entitlement perhaps, as the moral imperative driving the action. My own feeling is that this emerges as unconvincing within the overall account. I wondered whether the value Sally sought within her relationships was predominantly oriented towards survival, that this was the value 'implied' within her account. I wondered whether such a position would be difficult to acknowledge, if it were the case.

Taking responsibility: no regrets   LN's 5, 21

Sally's narratives around the choices she makes in relationships are often presented as inevitable, as in the case above, as though she had no choice or agency, yet at other times she states that it is important to take responsibility for choices made. It is implied, I think, through her judgement, that in this way she is different from her Mum and her partners.

PE: Yeah (2s) yeah (1s) it was like/ (1s) she's made some
CHOICES hadn't she?.

SA: Yeah (3s) /you know/ we were like/ she'd MADE some CHOICES and you've got to LIVE with the choices that you MAKE.

<div align="right">LN 5, p7</div>

SA: Euhm (2s)/ Before I MET HIM (2s) he (2s) got into LOADS of DEBT and HIS DAD sorted out his FINANCES . He didn't pay is debt off (1s) but his wages went straight to his Dad ….

PE: Right

SA; …and his Dad gave him an allowance and SORTED OUT his DEBT. So he didn't even have to take responsibility for that because he had his Mum and Dad PROPPING HIM UP.

<div align="right">LN 21, p19</div>

However, in relation to her description of her Mother's regretful and blaming attitude, Sally's view is that there is no point in regretting choices made.

SA: I'm (3s)/ I always say to people 'I don't regret. I've got NO regrets (1s) and everybody's like/ 'you've got to have SOME REGRETS. Everybody/ they regret SOMETHING.

PE: (2s)Yeah.

SA: But I don't see the point in LIVING your life WITH REGRET because you can't change it. You can't go back and CHANGE IT.

PE: No.

SA: YOU MADE (1s) the RIGHT CHOICE (1s) FOR

YOURSELF AT THAT POINT IN TIME. (2s)

Sally expresses a more complex position in relation to the termination she had when she was

eighteen. Together we co-constructed this situation as a moral dilemma, a 'Hobson's choice'.

SA: Yes (2s) and/ euhm/ I'll be HONEST with yer NOT ALL the

CHOICES 've made in my LIFE have been GOOD CHOICES

(2s).

PE: Right

SA: Euhm (3s). From OTHER PEOPLES points of VIEW (2s)

You KNOW when I was EIGHTEEN I had an ABORTION (2s)

but that was something that (1s) I (1s) FELT at that TIME I HAD

to DO THAT.

PE: Mm Hmm.

SA: Not just for MESELF but for the CHILD I was EIGHTEEN. I

had NOWHERE to live. I had NO JOB. I'd NO BOYFRIEND. He

was in the WIND .

PE: Yeah

SA: As soon as he FOUND OUT he WENT.

SA: Yeah

133

PE: So THAT was really the ONLY CHOICE that I HAD. I could've gone THROUGH with the PREGNANCY and put it up for ADOPTION ……

[37 secs, sally looking after Tilly who had drunk some of her Mum's cold coffee and didn't like it]

PE: Yeah / and I GUESS that's a CLASSIC moral DILEMMA really/ isn't it? Where there's no CLEAR OBVIOUS good thing to do because….

SA: Yeah /I mean/ it WEREN't as CLEAR CUT. I were in TWO MINDS about it (1s)/ euhm….

<div align="right">LN 33, p30-31</div>

I wondered if, for Sally, preferring not to regret choices made also meant she did not reflect upon them, and that she was not very aware of how she had come to make them. Her contradictory position in relation to her own decision making, ie responsible but not often agentic, and her determination not to 'regret' her own decisions, may have prevented her from becoming more conscious of how she was relating to her world. On terms of Miltenburg and Singer's neo-Vygotskian framework (2000) and Martin's phenomenological psychology and model of therapeutic change (1994), such lack of consciousness would impair agency.

6.6.3   Overarching narrative theme: *__Troubling questions of identity (am I being just like__*

__my Mum?)__

Just like my Mum LN's 4, 14, 29

Sally opens the interview with the statement,

> *'I (2s) want to get to a PLACE (2s) where I am a complete*
> *OPPOSITE to MY MUM.'*
>
> LN 4, p1

She then goes on to describe, in narratives distributed across the interview, ways in which she feels she is like, or different from, how she perceives her Mum to be. Like her Mum she views herself as being with a partner she doesn't love or respect, she feels she has been not been a good parent at times, in particular to John, while she was heavily involved with World of Warcraft (an interactive online game). However she also describes making a special effort to protect her oldest son from feeling rejected when her second son was born in contrast to her own experience.

SA:..... which was WHY when Cameron (2s)/ when I got PREGNANT with
*   John when Cameron was SEVEN I was a bit like.....*

PE: You were worried what it would DO TO HIM...

SA: ....Yeah I were a bit like/ (1s) and when I were PREGNANT I SPENT as
*   MUCH TIME with Cameron as I COULD.*

135

PE: Mmm…

SA:…And I (4s) sort of tried to make him feel like he were a PART OF IT.

PE: Yeah…

SA:…you KNOW…

PE: ….so it wasn't a big/ the SHOCK (1s) that it sounds like it was for YOU.

<div align="right">LN 4, p6</div>

Quiet and subdued or loud and obnoxious   LN 45 and 46

Earlier in this interview Sally describes her Mum as losing friends through her confrontational and self-centred behaviour (LN 13). Although Sally does not explicitly identify with her Mum's harshness towards her children she explores this aspect of her identity in two narratives towards the end of the interview. She considers what she describes as a contradiction between herself: she is subdued and unconfident in some situations (LN 45) and domineering and aggressive in others.

> *SA: Well/ I think it DEPENDS actually because / SAYING THAT/
> BUT years and years ago (1s)/ euhm / I went to a PARTY and
> there was NOBODY THERE apart from the girl that I WENT
> with who I KNEW/ well/ I knew her BOYFRIEND ASWELL.*
>
> *PE: Yeah*

SA: And I was LOUD and I was OBNOXIOUS

PE: yeah/ I REMEMBER you TELLNG me about this / (1s) you were like that when you were YOUNGER.

SA: But that was BECAUSE/ the REASON I was LOUD and OBNOXIOUS was/ around these PEOPLE that I didn't KNOW was BECAUSE I KNEW (3s) was what SHE perceived of me and what HE / her BOYFRIEND perceived of me (1s) / from being in her flat ? so I had to PUT THAT ON for the party because they said, 'Oh Mick is going to be there and he's going to give you a RUN for your MONEY/ and I said. 'WHAT do you MEAN ?' and they were / like/ 'well/ he's just as GOBBY as YOU ARE…

<div align="right">LN 46, p43</div>

Sally's ambivalence about her ability to 'put on' an aggressive front is evident as she describes finding it difficult to pull back from a confrontation with this man at the party. In the following excerpt her uncertainty is again evident I feel.

SA: You KNOW/ I'm not really / I'm never this NASTY to people I don't KNOW/ (2s) YOU KNOW (2s) / euhm/ (2s) I've always said to people ' If I TAKE the PISS out of you it means that I LIKE YOU' (3s). If I DON'T feel COMFORTABLE around somebody I wouldn't / not take the MICKEY out of them…

PE: yeah/ yeah…

SA: …because I wouldn't feel like…

PE…on solid ground/ yeah [simultaneous with…]

SA:…the BOUNDARIES THERE/ so./ you KNOW / like/ (2s)

LN 46 p43

Taking responsibility: Being the opposite of my Mum LN 1, 4, 7.

Sally states that she wants to feel like she's the opposite to her Mum and presents her Mum as perhaps an extreme case. Within the interview in particular in relation to her Mum the themes of relating, choice-making and identity interweave. They converge in a poignant narrative in which sally recalls the emotional pain caused by being the object of her Mother's regret, perhaps the ultimate failure of parental responsibility constructing her child as without value to her.

SA:…..And then she started TURNING ON US saying stuff to us like 'You kids ruined my LIFE'.

PE: Oh (1s) oh RIGHT.

SA: YOU DON'T SAY THAT TO YOUR KIDS…

PE: No, (2s) no….

SA: … I mean 'I could have MADE SOMETHING of MY LIFE if it weren't for YOU KIDS'/ Well if you had kept your LEGS SHUT (2s)

[Both laugh briefly].

Sally presents herself as someone who does not say such harsh things to her children, in fact she maintains that she has 'no regrets'. It occurs to me that such discourse may function to help Sally maintain an identity distinct from her Mum.

6.7 Sally's story: Second interview, overarching narrative themes.

Overarching narrative themes

T **The search for value.**

T **The search for value undermined.**

T **Identity- not being like my Mum**

T **Reflections on the process of change.**

6.8 Summary of Sally's account organised into themes.

The search for value

   When asked what had changed in her family through involvement with the intervention Sally talked about changes in her relationship with her children. She described ways of being

with them that were relaxed and enjoyable and contrasted this with how things used to be and how she felt parents generally were with their children. Sally also described how she had changed her relationship with the online game, World of Warcraft. This was partly because she felt disillusioned with relationships in the game and gained more satisfaction from being with her children. However the game could provide her with a sense of achievement, adventure and agency and she felt drawn to the potential for escapism in the online world as opposed to the monotonous tasks and frustrations of the real world.

The search for value undermined

Sally described aspects of her life which undermined her attempts to make things 'good' in her family and in her life. Her relationship with her partner Steve was still unsatisfactory. He didn't interact with the children much and shouted at them when they were noisy, undermining her efforts to use the approaches advised in the intervention. Although Sally said she had given up her role in World of Warcraft, only playing short games, she described it as addictive for her as well as a burden at times to the extent that it had felt like a demanding job. In the game she had sometimes felt exploited in relationships. Now she had time to do the housework but this felt unrewarding to her, her efforts being undone by the children making a mess again.

Identity: not being like my Mum

Sally declared at the start of interview one that her purpose was to feel she was 'the opposite' to her Mum. This identification with her Mum seemed to relate to how she expressed power in relationships. Initially in the intervention she had felt disempowered when she stopped shouting and using punishments etc. However when she began to use particular language forms and scripts consistently to manage conflict with the children she was able to feel powerful in a more positive way. This liberated her from an oppressive identification with her Mum in her way of relating to them.

Reflections on the process of change

Reflecting on the process of change Sally described herself as motivated to make difficult changes when school voiced their concerns with her regarding Steve and Cameron's (her 14 year old son) aggression towards the younger children. They had spoken of involving Social Services. Sally described herself as ensuring Steve and Cameron respected the 'rules' of the approach from this point. Sally also described herself as realising through the intervention that her over-involvement with World of Warcraft had caused her to neglect John. She felt motivated to make up for this experience.

Sally described the process of change as involving inevitable loss, for example, loss of aggressive power, although this allowed her to build a new way of being powerful. and loss of the game world which allowed her to relate more to the real world.

Reflecting upon her relationships with ourselves, as professionals in the intervention, Sally said she needed to believe that we could help her in order to make changes that were difficult. She felt that she had no choice but to 'have faith'. It was also helpful to her to hear the stories of other parents in the group. Together these relationships encouraged her to have hope that things could change. In contrast to this supportive experience she described John's permanent exclusion from school at the start of the intervention as a significantly negative event, causing her to feel abandoned and isolated at a time of need.

6.9 Thematic analysis

Identified narratives and over-arching narrative themes

T   The search for value.

Being with children

Being in 'World of Warcraft'

T   The search for value undermined.

Poor relationship with Steve (lack of co-operation).

Sally's struggle with obsession/ addiction.

The futility of labour.

T   Identity- not being like my Mum

Using power differently: Being powerful in q different way.

6.9.1 Over-arching narrative theme**: <u>The search for value</u>**

Being with children   *(LN's 2, 17, 18)*

Sally describes her ways of relating to her children as changed. This seems to bring her satisfaction as well as some pride.

> *SA: Yeah (2s)/ euhm (2s)/ euhm (3s)/ I FEEL like the situation*
> *between ME and JOHN is A LOT/ A LOT BETTER (2s)/ euhm*
> *(3s)/ like/ I was SAYING to TRUDY (home visitor) YESTERDAY*
> *(3s) / WITH JOHN (1s) it's ALL ABOUT (3s) HOW you TALK*
> *to him*

> *PE: Mmm*

> *SA: (2s) HOW you COMMUNICATE with him (2s). / IF (4s) you*
> *can MAKE it (4s)/ KIND of / LIGHTHEARTED/ a LITTLE bit*
> *FUNNY*

> *PE: Mmm*

143

SA: ...he RESPONDS to it.

Sally gives several examples of interactions which are loving and also seem to incorporate her son John's perspective. In a way which echoes Suissa and Smiths descriptions of 'being' rather than 'doing' parenting, Sally seems to recognise and enjoy her children's experience in these narratives without feeling the need to 'discipline' them or shape or restrict their activity.

SA: (3s) you know/ when the kids are running round the bus station (2s) and (4s) /SOMETIMES/ I can / just / STAND THERE and WATCH them (3s)/ just / LET THEM PLAY.

In a continuation of this narrative she also takes a perspective upon her own experience, seeing herself through the eyes of those observing her.

SA: Euhm (2s)/ yeah. John will get TOO GIDDY and he'll RUN OFF TOO FAR and Tilly will be OFF CHASING him (4s) and THEN I'll HAVE to use the STRATEGIES (3s) /AND/ I can SEE people LOOKING at me as if to say (3s) ' if that were MINE I'd GIVE them one of THEM (4s) / YOU know

PE: Do you THINK there's A LOT of THAT ABOUT? (2s)

SA: OH/ I've seen parents in TOWN EVERY DAY/ 'ROOAAAR' at the KIDS (2s)/ an' ah / just/ LOOK at them and think 'that USED to be ME and I don't DO that any MORE and look how well BEHAVED MY kids are [4s laugh]

<div align="right">LN 17, p25</div>

Martin and Gillespie (2010) theorize that perspective taking in this way is an aspect of the developing agentic self. Sally positions herself as resisting what she perceives to be dominant ideas of parenting in which the parent role is to impose restrictions in a domineering and aggressive way. In taking a perspective she rejects a way of relating to children that she previously endorsed. Within the narrative she connects this change to the ideas, 'rules' about relating she encountered through the programme, 'I'LL HAVE to use the STRATEGIES'. I think it is possible that Sally's consciousness of an alternative way of relating is functionally connected to her perspective taking, that there is some synergy between the two. In conceiving of, and enacting, an alternative way to be, she is perhaps more able to evaluate and determine her own ways of being.

Being in World of Warcraft   (LN's 8, 12, 14)

Sally expresses some ambivalence about the value of participating in the online multi-person interactive game World of Warcraft. Although it has provided status and perhaps a sense of personal purpose there is a suggestion within this narrative that Sally has felt exploited once again, that she has given more than she has received.

> *SA: Then people / sort of/ EXPECTED (1s) AND REQUIRED*
> *(1s)/ an OFFICER to be (1s) ONLINE (1s) as MUCH as*
> *POSSIBLE (3s)/ and I was ALWAYS SORTING OUT*
> *PROBLEMS for other PEOPLE and / blah/ blah/ blah*

> *PE: Yeah (3s)*

> *SA: It's like a JOB.*

Sally describes an additional value to the game however. Within World of Warcraft she has greater agency than in her real life. The game world provides a contrast to her real world as well as a potential escape. Sally suggests that within this alternative world she experienced greater emotional reward through relating to others, the experience of being nurtured by others, a sense of freedom and the opportunity to make choices and achieve fulfilment. Towards the end of the narrative she identifies the irony of her choice for a virtual sunset over a real one. Within Merleau-Ponty's and Heidegger's existential psychological ontology (Han-Pile 2011, Felder and Robbins 2011) and Martin and Gillespie's theory of personhood (2010), reaching out into the world, and connecting is an act of emerging self-hood. Sally's account suggests that for her this can be achieved in a virtual world with greater efficacy than in the real.

SA: I THINK A LOT of it is ESCAPISM (1s)

PE: Do you THINK so?

SA: Yeah (2s)/ because the/ you know/ LIFE CAN be MUNDANE

PE: Yeah

SA: Life CAN be (1s) MONOTONOUS and BORING

PE: Yeah

*SA: ...and it's / it LITERALLY (2s) TAKES you into a
DIFFERENT WORLD because it IS a WORLD (2s)*

PE: Yeah

SA: They've BUILT a COMPLETE WORLD/ well/ not just ONE but a FEW

PE: Yeah

SA: WORLDS (1s)/ PLANETS

PE: Yeah

SA: I can GO OUT and EXPLORE and go to DIFFERENT ZONES and you…

PE: ..and you CAN EXPLORE it/ that's the THING/

SA: Yeah

PE: …whereas A LOT of the TIME in the REAL WORLD/ you/ just/ you CAN'T

SA: Yeah / you CAN'T GO OUTSIDE JUMP on a GRIFFIN and FLY OFF…………

SA: It LOOKS BEAUTIFUL and when the SUN's SETTING (1s) it's FANTASTIC (3s) and I would SIT there (2s)and/ you know/ they would give you NOVELTY THINGS/ like/ PICNICS and things like that /and/ you'd put DOWN and SIT (2s). so / I'd SIT there with the PICNIC (2s) watching the SUN go DOWN/ and/ I'd just think to meself (4s) 'If I open them CURTAINS [2s laugh] I could WATCH the actual REAL SUN going DOWN

PE: Yeah

SA: Now (1s) / I'll just CARRY ON watching THIS [2s laugh]

PE: THAT'S FUNNY

SA: You KNOW (3s)/ but/ it's

PE: That is REALLY

*SA: You KNOW (2s)/ it/ it's A LOT to DO with the ESCAPE/ uh/
ESCAPISM.'*

LN 14, p21-22

*6.9.2 Over-arching narrative theme***: <u>The search for value undermined</u>**

Poor relationship with Steve (lack of co-operation)   (LN's 4 and 5)

Sally presents herself as very dissatisfied with her relationship with Steve, her partner. She represents him as avoiding, or preventing interaction with her and the children. He is disconnected. This is contrary to her idea of the 'good', the reciprocal relationship she described with her Nana in interview one and which seems to be emerging in her relationship with John and Tilly.

*SA: …… what he doesn't UNDERSTAND is/ he seems to think
that I should be ALLRIGHT with the FACT that he COMES
HOME from WORK / SITS at his COMPUTER (2s)/ he doesn't*

LEAVE it until he GOES to BED. He doesn't TALK to anybody/

he doesn't/ he SITS THERE with his headphones on.

LN 4, p11

Sally represents Steve as undermining her efforts at achieving what she values in the family. She identifies his aggression in response to the children's boisterous behaviour as contrary to the 'rules' of relating she is trying to establish within the household.

SA: Yeah? (3s) / and (2s)/ I KNOW / I KNOW when Steve's in a
BAD MOOD (4s)/ Yeah?

PE: hmm

SA: (3s) and (2s)/ KIDS are KIDS and they RUN ROUND /
they'll PLAY/ they'll LAUGH and they'll SHOUT and they'll (1s)
BANG/ blah/ blah/ blah

PE: Yeah (1s) yeah/ yeah

SA: And I'll KNOW when THAT

PE: Mm-mm

SA: ….HAPPENS and Steve's in a BAD MOOD (1s) that he'll
(2s)/ he WILL SHOUT (4s)

PE: Yeah

SA:…AND (3s)/ I keep TELLING him (3s) 'ALL the WORK that
I'VE PUT IN this WEEK (2s), ALL the PRAISE

149

PE: Mm mm

SA: and ALL the (1s) ENCOURAGEMENT

PE: Mm

*SA: and everything that I'VE DONE THIS WEEK (2s) YOU have
just UNDERMINED (2s)*

PE: Yeah

SA: ...by SHOUTING. (3s)

PE: What does he THINK about THAT? (2s)

*SA: He/ he/ he/ he DIDN'T even TAKE it into CONSIDERATION
(3s)/ you KNOW (2s)*

<div align="right">LN 5, p 12-13</div>

In a previous narrative (LN 1) Sally also expresses frustration that John's school have not been using exactly the same language and strategies as recommended in the programme. It seems likely that Sally is conscious of the systemic principles promoted within the programme. As well as valuing the non aggressive style of relating she values the consistency within and across systems which might support her efforts.

Sally's struggle with obsession/addiction   (LN's 7, 10, 13)

A strong desire, perhaps a compelling sense of obligation, and a need to be involved in her online world is central to Sally's explanation of what she identifies as her over-involvement in World of Warcraft. She describes taking a break from it, and then struggling to re-connect.

> *SA: (3s) And OBVIOUSLY within that six months things would*
> *HAPPEN/ you know/ WITHIN the GAME (2s) so I'd / sort of /*
> *fall behin'/ so I'd SPEND the NEXT (3s) forever LONG trying*
> *to CATCH UP (2s)*
>
> LN 7, p14

She expresses ambivalence about its value to her, however, reflecting upon her relationships in the game compared to her real relationships with her children.

> *SA: Yeah (1s)/ I get A LOT MORE OUT of spending the TIME*
> *with the CHILDREN (1s) than I DID (2s) in W.O.W.*
>
> *PE: Yeah*
>
> *SA: because W.O.W (4s) / and/ and I've KNOWN this for a*
> *LONG TIME (2s) the PEOPLE who PLAY W.O.W. / they SAY*
> *they're your FRIEND (2s)/ they BEHAVE like they're your friend*
> *but when it ACTUALLY comes DOWN to it they don't give a*
> *CRAP*
>
> LN 10, p17

Sally's disappointment in her relationships within the game concerns a lack of reciprocity. As in other relationships she has felt exploited: she gives but does not receive, and in a sense is

deceived. In contrast, the time she now spends relating with her children she describes as experiencing as rewarding, in a reciprocal way.

When she describes those who play W.O.W. at work Sally constructs a moral case against this kind of behaviour, whilst at the same time stressing its compulsive quality.

> *SA: It's a BIT like/ a bit like a DRUG ADDICT (2s)*
>
> *PE: Yeah/ I was thinking that..*
>
> *SA: SHOOTING UP At WORK*
>
> *PE: Yeah (1s)/ it must be SOMETHNG [simultaneous with]*
>
> *SA: You DON'T EXPECT them to DO it. (2s)*
>
> <div align="right">LN 13, p20</div>

Sally does not identify with those who play online games at work in this narrative, 'you DON'T EXPECT them to DO it'. In this way she is able to assume a moral position in relation to them, perhaps protecting her own identity.

The futility of labour   (LN 6)

A sense of vulnerability in Sally's orientation to the 'real' world, as opposed to the game world emerges in her description of her experience of 'domestic labour.'

SA: I mean/ it/ it's/ it's MONOTONOUS (2s) but HOUSEWORK
(2s) at LEAST it gets DONE now.

PE: Yeah (2s)

SA: It's STILL MONOTONOUS and I THINK to meself (1s) ' I
did this a few DAYS ago and I'm DOING it AGAIN (1s) and the
KIDS are going to come in and they're going to TRASH it.

LN 6, p13

This description of housework, as repetitive and futile, leaving no permanent trace or object suggests that Sally finds this aspect of her life emotionally challenging. Hannah Arendt, in her book, 'The Human Condition', identifies 'labour' as human activity with paradoxical value: it can provide us with an organic connection to the world, or confront us with the absurdity and meaninglessness of our own existence.

'However, the daily fight in which the human body is engaged to
keep the world clean and prevent its decay bears little
resemblance to heroic deeds; the endurance it needs to repair
every day the waste of yesterday is not courage, and what makes
the effort painful is not danger but its endless repetition.'

Arendt,1998, p101

Sally conveys that housework is not meaningful for her, and yet, that she sees it as an aspect of her changed approach to family life and relationships.

Woven into these narratives concerning what Sally values and what undermines her search for value is, I believe, her struggle to achieve meaning, in relationships, and in everyday experience.

6.9.3 Over-arching narrative theme: **Identity (not being like my Mum)**

Using power differently: being powerful in a different way   (LN's 1, 15, 16, 17, 18)

Sally describes feeling very disempowered initially in the programme when she stopped using overt and aggressive expressions of power to influence her children's behaviour, ie shouting, punishments and threats of punishment. Initially she viewed 'strategies' such as praising and 'planned ignoring' and playing with the children (see Appendix 1: 27-33, 66-67) as weak, as 'pandering' to them, however over time began to experience power differently, in a way she valued more.

> *SA: and I got further and further INTO it (3s) it REPLACED (2s) all*
>
> *PE: (3s) the negative*
>
> *SA: the NEGATIVE POWER that I HAD (2s) with POSITIVES*
>
> *PE: Mmm (2s)*
>
> *SA: You KNOW/ which (4s) WORKED so much BETTER.*
>
> LN 15, p23

Bruner, making a link with Vygotsky, sees language as a scaffold which can be used to solve practical tasks (1987:72). When I asked Sally what helped her to feel more powerful in this positive way she identified the stage in the programme where we advised the parents to use some particular language forms to guide their children. Parents in the programme have usually experienced this situation as stressful and confrontational, and the language forms are a script they can practice and then enact when under pressure. I think it is also possible to view the language as expressing a rule of relating, one in which parents do not lose their temper and children allow themselves to be guided and directed. Miltenburg and Singer suggest that once internalised this understanding is in itself motivating, 'to carry out the rule is a source of pleasure (2000: 511)'. It is our observation in the programme that after a period of adjustment, in which effort is made by the parents to spend positive time together, children seem to recognise that a new 'rule' is being practiced and often co-operate happily with it, and this is what Sally describes.

> *SA: Yeah (1s)/ the WEEK that we did the LANGUAGE (2s)*
> *which*
>
> *PE: the 'YOU NEED TO'*
>
> *SA: YOU NEED TO (1s)/ yeah (1s) and/ 'there/ asking them*
> *three/ ASKING them TWICE and then SAYING (1s) 'do it*
> *yourself or I will/ Mummy will HELP you'. I STLL USE THAT.*
> *ALL the TIME/ and it WORKS EVERY TIME. It's BRILLIANT/ I*
> *use it with 'ER all the time.*
>
> LN 16, p24

Power, and the compliance of her children seems still central to Sally's identity as a mother.

SA: yeah / so/ what I am ASKING you to DO (2s) WILL get
DONE (3s) regardless of whether you DEFY me or NOT (3s)

LN 16, p24.

However, achieving this through less aggressive interpersonal communication has liberated her from an oppressive experience of identifying with her own Mother.

PE: So/ you FELT POWERFUL AGAIN but was this powerful in
a DIFFERENT WAY

SA: Yeah

PE: It FEELS DIFFERENT/ just/ the way you TALK

SA:Yeah/ yeah/ I felt like/ it was / euhm (5s) / I DIDN'T feel like
my MUM ANYMORE.

LN 16, p24

This seemed a very important moment in our conversation: Sally cried briefly, and I also felt moved. In her previous interview she had stated that her purpose was to become different to her Mum in her parenting. Her account suggests that she felt she had achieved this through experiencing relating to her children in a different way.

SA: …….. : you KNOW (2s) /AND / we ARE having these
MASSIVE TICKLE FESTS and STUFF [3s laugh] / you KNOW

(2s)/ and/ euhm / (3s) YEAH/ he doesn't / JUST/ SEE me as his MUM now (2s)/ so/ I'm NOT / just / the WOMAN that SHOUTS at him ALL the TIME. (3s)

<div align="right">LN 18, p27-28</div>

*6.9.4 Over-arching narrative theme: **<u>Reflections on the process of change</u>***

Motivation to change (LN's 1 and 3)

In my analysis of Sally's first interview I wondered if Sally made important choices and decisions in moments of crises, and at these times what she valued was survival, survival for herself or her family. She opens the second interview with a similar narrative about making 'hard choices': her partner and older son's aggression towards John is causing concern at school and they let Sally know they are considering making a referral to Social Services. This seemed to motivate her to assert herself more powerfully in the home.

SA: So I SAID to them 'If I am going to be stuck in the MIDDLE of this WAR that's going ON in this FAMILY

PE: yeah (2s)

SA: ... then I'M going to STEP UP (2s). I'm going to PUT me FOOT DOWN (2s)

PE: yeah

SA: and I'm going to set the RULES and if you DON'T LIKE it then the DOORS THERE

PE: Mmm

SA: Feel FREE to LEAVE

PE: Right

<div align="right">LN 1, p2-3</div>

Cybernetic systemic therapy highlights the likelihood that making changes within the family system risks destabilising it (Jones, 1993: 55-76). In this situation Sally contemplates change in her significant relationships. The possibility of a greater loss perhaps, the possibility of her younger children perhaps going into care, seems to help Sally to take this risk and to take the steps to change the family system in the ways we advised.

Sally also identifies consciousness raising, seeing her world differently, as an outcome of her involvement with the programme, in particular in response to the initial sessions where we shared our psychological narrative of child development with parents. Within the following extract she expresses her understanding that John did not have the experience of relationship in his early years that she had valued for her older son.

SA: It MADE ME (3s) OPEN MY EYES (2s)

PE: Right

SA: I started to /I/ THINKING ABOUT (4s) WHAT my LIFE was LIKE when it was just ME and CAMERON (2s)……………………..

SA: (2s) and (3s) Cameron had ALOT MORE (2s) ATTENTION (3s). He had A LOT MORE (4s)/ I was THERE for HIM (2s)

PE: Yeah (3s)/ yeah (2s)

SA: ...but for JOHN for TWO YEARS I was stuck in a
COMPUTER GAME (2s)

<div align="right">LN 3, p9-10</div>

To lose is to gain   (LN's 11, 15, 16, 19)

A paradoxical experience of loss is central to Sally's explanation of the change process she

has experienced. For example she describes herself as realising that World of War-craft did

not give her what she valued in terms of relationships. She likens her break from it to a

relationship break-up. She represents her disillusionment with the game as so great as to

make giving it up a liberation.

SA: That's no GREAT loss in MY EYES. That's NOTHING to
LOSE REALLY. You're GAINING from LOSING/ that/ because
you're FREE to MOVE ON and FIND somebody who WILL love
you (1s)

<div align="right">LN 11, p18</div>

Similarly, when Sally described the challenge her sudden loss of power presented her when

she stopped using coercive parenting strategies I suggested perhaps this was too sudden, the

loss of power too great, and we perhaps needed to reconsider this approach. However Sally

maintained that she needed to lose power in order to develop an alternative way of being a

parent.

SA: It's/ euhm (2s)/ I THINK it's a NECESSARY PART OF it.

PE: Do you THINK?

SA: I REALLY DO.

PE: Right

SA: Because/ UNTIL you've ACTUALLY STRIPPED that POWER AWAY

PE: OKAY (1s)/ THAT'S INTERESTING (1s)

SA: ...you CAN'T REPLACE it SUFFICIENTLY with

PE: Right (1s)/ THAT / THAT'S HELPFUL to KNOW (1s)

SA: IF you SEMI DO it (1s)/ it's / just/ gonna be MIXED

LN 19, p30

Sally's account seems to support the Milan perspective: a degree of de-stabilisation may be necessary in order to highlight how systems are operating, and to promote reflection as to how things might be different. Such destabilisation may contribute to the raised consciousness, perspective taking and self-other awareness Martin and Gillespie (2010) theorise as integral to agency.

The importance of relationships: faith and hope in a community   (LN's 19, 20, 21).

   Sally describes her engagement with the programme as dependent upon the quality of her relationship with us, as professionals, as well as her confidence in our 'knowledge' and ability to help her. She also represents herself as having no choice other than to have faith, a position suggestive of both fear and hope combined.

> *SA: (2s) Yeah (2s) / Euhm (3s)/ so (3s)/ THAT (5s) AND (3s)/ y/ you/ yeah/ it's / just a MATTER of FAITH. (4s) / I HAD to HAVE CONFIDENCE (1s)*

> *PE: Mmm*

> *SA: .....that YOU as a PSYCHOLOGIST and HER as a SOCIAL WORKER and EVERYTHING ELSE that she's DONE (2s)*

> *PE: Mmm*

> *SA: ....in her LIFE (2s)/ KNOW what you are TALKING ABOUT (1s)*

> *PE: Right*

> *SA: UNDERSTAND (3s) the ISSUES*

> *PE: Mmm*

> *SA:...and CAN HELP*

> *PE: Right (1s)*

SA: I didn't have ANY other OPTION

The experience of hope also emerges within the context of the group, from witnessing other's experiences, in particular their experience of change.

SA: (6s) There were PROS and CONS to the GROUP (2s)/ I've BEEN/ on ONE hand I DIDN'T FEEL (2s) as COMFORTABLE to EXPRESS (4s) what (2s)/ YOU KNOW (1s). to GO as IN DEPTH (1s)

PE: mm

SA: INTO it (2s)

PE: As you WOULD on the HOME VISIT

SA: Yes (2s) / but/ on the OTHER HAND/ the FACT that I can SIT there and I can LISTEN to the OTHER PEOPLE'S STORY and

PE: Mmm

SA:....actually REALISE that (2s) it WASN'T JUST ME

PE: It wasn't JUST YOU

SA: ...It WASN'T just JOHN (1s)

PE: Yeah

SA: Euhm (2s) /there ARE OTHER PEOPLE OUT THERE with
SIMILAR (1s)/ if not WORSE/ SITUATIONS (3s)/ then that helps
to KEEP the FAITH (1s) that things CAN IMPROVE

PE: You're NOT on your OWN (4s)

SA: EACH WEEK (3s) the PARENTS saying/ well/ 'this is what
it WAS and THIS is what it is NOW

PE: mm-mm

SA: just REINFORCES the fact that THESE things DO WORK
(2s)

PE: And that it can CHANGE

LN 20, p 32

In Narrative Practice the witnessing and circulation of stories provides multiple perspectives which offer alternative meanings to those enmeshed within a negative narrative, for example, pathological child, or bad parent (Epston and White 1992, Winslade and Monk 1999). However, the experience of belonging to a group, a temporary community, of not being on her own, as well as the quality of relationships achieved within the community, are likely to have supported Sally's engagement with other parents' stories and the stories we told as professionals, about psychology and relationships etc. Her 'faith', the faith she needed to have in order to take the risks that brought about change, may well have depended upon this.

Within the intervention the temporary community extends to include the school system. John's school permanently excluded him just after agreeing to join the intervention. As

163

previously described Sally described herself as gaining strength from the collective approach and the consistency of rules it promoted. In the following extract she describes the impact of being excluded from the school community just before the intervention began. Multiple meanings of exclusion are embedded within this narrative: rejection and abandonment, being labelled as a problem, as well as sudden and inexorable isolation.

SA: Euhm/ so / Yeah/ all the OTHER PARENTS they HAD (4s) the SUPPORT of the SCHOOL (2s)/ whereas/ basically (2s)/ I DIDN'T/ I DIDN'T HAVE the SUPPORT of the SCHOOL/ the SCHOOL basically turned round and said 'well/ we DON'T CARE'

PE: Mmm (3s)/mmm

SA: I mean/ I SAID to you at the TIME 'I FELT / like/ she'd pulled the RUG out from UNDER me (2s)

PE: Mmm

SA: YOU KNOW / she were/ like/ 'oh yes/ we'll DO this/ we'll DO that/ and one thing or another

PE: Mmm

SA: ..and then when it ACTUALLY came DOWN to it they were / just/ like/ 'CAN'T be BOTHERED

PE: Yeah

SA: 'GO AWAY' (3s)/ 'It's NOT MY PROBLEM'

LN 20, p33

6.10 Elly's Story: First Interview, over-arching narrative themes

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<u>Overarching narrative themes</u>

T Striving for the good life and the happy home.

T Ideal 'relating': smooth, secure and loving..

T Struggling with a sense of loss.

T Reflections on the process of change,

6.11 Summary of Elly's story, organised into over-arching narrative themes.

Striving for the good life and the happy home.

Elly described her childhood experience as very positive. Her parents were 'traditional', her father worked and her Mum looked after the family. She describes her family as content, as spending a lot of time together and rarely arguing. She also describes her home with her first husband as being ideal in a material sense, as a place which she greatly misses. However, although she had many friends around her she was not happy in her relationship with her husband.

Although making the 'happy home', for her daughter is very important to her, Elly also describes valuing the achievement of education, career and independence. A career, she believes, brings freedom. Her previous husband had undermined her efforts to achieve this in the past. Elly values friendships with people who share her appreciation for the 'good' life at home. Relationships are important to her. She very much wants to re-create her own child-hood experience of harmonious family life. Everyone got on well together and conflict was rare.

Ideal relating: smooth, secure and loving.

Conflict with her daughter Anna is very upsetting to Elly. She hopes that through the intervention Anna will become more compliant and conflict can be avoided. She also wants to have a relationship with her daughter which involves being loving and talking about feelings. Despite feeling secure and loved she thinks she did not have this kind of closeness with her own parents. Being able to manage feelings is very important to Elly. As a child, there was little expression of 'bad feeling' in her family, despite there being step-siblings etc. She disapproves of her ex-husband's family who have been hostile towards her since their

divorce. She believes that her ex-husband's hostility towards her new partner undermines their daughter's security.

Struggling with a sense of loss.

Elly continues to struggle with a sense of loss for her previous home, where she lived with her ex-husband. She had made her house was very comfortable, exactly the way she wanted it, and she felt secure there. Thinking about the loss of her house makes Elly feel very sad.

Elly describes how she became increasingly aware that her relationship with her husband was not good. She became depressed and then realised that she needed to leave. Making this decision empowered her and at this time she felt very sure about what she wanted to achieve, to make her 'happy home' again.

Conflict with Anna can trigger an overwhelming sense of hopelessness within Elly. At such times she feels that nothing is of any value and she worries that nothing will change for the better. Sometimes she can distract herself from this feeling by focussing on making the house nice, or by going to work.

Reflections on the process of change.

Becoming aware of how unhappy her relationship with her husband made her gave Elly the strength to make decisions and to take charge of her life. She knew what she wanted, and changed her life by taking small steps towards her goals. She views the intervention as giving her the same opportunity, with her relationship with Anna. Having the support of family is important to Elly. Being able to live with her parents for a while gave her a secure place to be when she left her husband.

6.12: Thematic analysis.

Identified narratives and overarching narrative themes

T Striving for the good life and the happy home.

The happy home.

Beyond the home.

No bad feeling.

T Ideal 'relating': smooth, secure and loving.

The secure child and harmonious relationship.

No bad feeling.

T Struggling with a sense of loss.

The loss of home.

Accepting loss of value.

The loss of hope.

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*6.12.1 Over-arching narrative theme<u>: **Striving for the 'good' life and making the 'happy**</u>*

<u>**home.'**</u>

The happy home LN 4, 5

When I asked Elly how she knew what was 'good' in family life she described her own experience growing up in very positive terms. Within her account she represents her childhood home as stable, with her parents enacting traditional male/female roles and where everyone was content.

> *EL: ……. I did get an awful lot of love and affection, from me*
> *Mum and Dad,/ you know/ they were,/ I never felt insecure as a*
> *child. I had a really good upbringing.*
>
> *PE: Right.*
>
> *EL: You know/ a very loving (1s)/ just a loving family. You know/*
> *they did everything with us/ like/ we went on holiday every single*
> *year/ We mad/, everything was about HOME.*

PE; Right.

EL: Mum never worked. Dad went to work. But everything was about home. So there was no/ like/ (1s) there were no arguments in front of me or anything like that. Maybe once or twice I heard a few things, and I always remember those, but never a bad thing/ I never remember a bad thing about home………
EL:……… It was a real (1s)/ And that's what I want for Anna, I want her to have a nice happy home. Really/ euh/. So (1s)/ yeah…

LN 4, p4-5

Elly goes on to reproduce the tone of this description when talking of her previous home she shared with her ex-husband. She represents herself as having had everything she valued in this setting, in a material sense, but not the relationships she wanted.

EL: But everything else was absolutely wonderful. The house/ I loved my house, I loved my garden. I got my house how I wanted it, I got my garden, I'd got my chickens in my back garden, and lovely garden. I had all my friends around me/ you know/ euhm/ (1s) it was just where we lived and everything was/ we just loved it. It was just that element that was missing, (1s).

PE: The relationship.

EL: the relationship that was missing/ so (1s)

LN 5, p6

References to the idyllic home etc might be viewed as invoking cultural narratives of the 'ideal family', towards which Elly orientates, and evaluates herself and her experience against. Within her account Elly seems to privilege the ideal home over other available narratives such as the 'ideal relationship'.

Beyond the home LN's 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 24

Although Elly valued her parents traditional roles and their investment in home life she also describes wanting a life beyond the home, including education and a successful career. She makes a link between having freedom and having a career.

> *EL: Yeah/ I felt that when I was in the marriage I had a set role*
> *that I had to fulfil, but, I wasn't given any freedom to make a*
> *choice about other things/ you know/ maybe progress/ I was a*
> *MOTHER so I could not progress in my CAREER, or/ you know/*
> *I felt I was held back quite a lot from doing that. And I feel that*
> *you should be able to (1s) develop your own (1s) interests…*

> *LN 11, p13-14*

Elly also describes herself as valuing friendships with people who endorse the same values, a commitment to home life. Drawing upon her own history and the culture in which she lives she presents herself as striving to create a world in which she has a meaningful and valued life at home and at work. Possible strains or challenges within this narrative are not brought forth or resolved. Instead a perhaps unrealistically harmonious existence is both remembered and aspired to.

171

EL: Happy home/ having our tea together, watching a bit of telly,

going for nice walks, having chickens in the garden, ...

PE: Yeah

EL: It's exactly how things were when I was a child.

LN 11, p14

No bad feeling LN 6,7,8,9,10.

A significant strand within this theme is Elly's description of a strong desire for emotional harmony within relationships, and an absence of conflict. She depicts 'bad-feeling' as antithetical to the experience of the 'happy home' and suggests that it is possible and desirable to avoid the expression of bad-feeling within family life. This is discussed in more depth in the following theme.

*6.12.2 Over-arching narrative theme: **Ideal relating: smooth secure and loving***

The secure child and harmonious relationship   LN 1, 2, 3

Elly describes, in this interview, feeling very upset by conflict with her daughter that has often been triggered by Elly asking her to do something, for example at bed-time (see following theme: struggling with a sense of loss). In the following excerpt she describes her hope that through the intervention her relationship with Anna will become more harmonious. Harmony, it is implied, will be achieved through Anna's compliance.

172

EL: With Anna/ euuhm/ I just want her to (1s)/ to do as I ask/ you know/ to have that respect for me,

PE: yeah

EL: where, she will do what I ask her to do STRAIGHT AWAY..

PE: Right

EL: That is the issue with Anna, and (2s) it really does make things difficult when you are trying to get things done when she doesn't do as you ask, so that, is the main thing that I want her to do, and another thing obviously is to CONFORM with what the teachers are asking her to do….

Although disliking anger and resistance in Anna, Elly also describes her wish to have a relationship in which emotions are freely expressed, this corresponds to something she feels was lacking in her own relationships with her parents as a child.

EL: And it's good, I don't want her to be a child where she can't express her feelings. I want her to be able to say things like that and not feel uncomfortable because when I was a child (1s) there was none of that really. There was lots of love and cuddles, but there was noth../ you didn't really, couldn't really tell your Mum and dad how you were feeling.

PE: How you were feeling/ yeah.

EL: No/ as much as they were loving there was no/ there was not that depth of relationship really, that, Anna/ I want Anna to have.

173

Elly gives an example of her being with Anna that may have reassured her that she was experiencing the type of relationship that she valued: emotionally secure, expressive and co-operative.

> *EL: And it just felt really really good/ that/ and she was/ I dunno/*
> *just all those little things she was saying to me made me/*
> *thought/ aaaw/ she's happy now.*
>
> *PE: Right.*
>
> *EL: She's going to go to bed feeling happy.*
>
> *PE: She's going to go to bed feeling happy and it feels right.*
>
> *EL: It feels right.*
>
> *PE: Yeah.*

<div align="center">*LN 3, p3-4*</div>

Elly in her accounts draws on narratives of childhood which might be considered contemporary within Western middle-class culture. This modern child is self-regulating and co-operative, perhaps in the contexts of relationships that contain a high level of emotional communication (Stefansen and Aarseth, 2011). Within this thesis the relationship becomes a subtle instrument of governance, in which adult power is expressed covertly and without conflict. It might be viewed as another form of the instrumentality which Suissa (2006, 2013) so distrusts. It may be an idea that we communicate within our intervention. I think it is likely that Elly is searching for a way of being with her daughter in which negative emotion

can be minimized, perhaps eradicated altogether and the narrative she constructs expresses this hope.

No bad feeling LN 6, 7, 8, 9, 10

Drawing upon her own history Elly describes how important she feels it is to avoid the expression of 'bad feeling' within relationships. As a child she says she 'felt-secure' and attributes this to the harmonious atmosphere.

> *'........there was never really any bad feeling in the house, or*
> *anything/, you know/, and there was a lot of us, there was eight*
> *of us.*

<div align="center">

LN 6, p6

</div>

Within her family there were some family tensions, for example between her step-sisters and her Mum but these were not openly discussed, and Elly approves of this way of managing such situations.

> *EL: Yeah/ and/ and everybody got on. Everybody m-managed to*
> *get along/ you know/ and/ like/ weird/ but my Dad's/ euhm/ ex-*
> *wife/ that everybody came to the do's/ you know/ and the family*
> *parties.*

<div align="center">

LN 6, p7

</div>

Elly expresses frustration that her ex-husband and his parents do not share her perspective on the with-holding of negative thoughts or difficult feelings. She makes an explicit link between her home-making values and her relationship rules. Within this narrative the giving of home made cakes are intended to heal wounds, perhaps, or to discourage the expression of bad-feelings. Elly expresses her belief that witnessing harmony amongst adults is crucial to a child's sense of security.

> *EL: Well/ and/ you know/ and/ I just think if they'd come here/*
> *you know/ I've made them cakes and stuff/ I mean/ just to be*
> *getting along with everybody/ Cos I love making CAKES, and*
> *I've always sent some for THEM and if they came here I'd say oh*
> *come in. I always ask/ you know/ if (James- partner) isn't here*
> *I'll say to her Dad, 'come in. Do you want a cup of tea'/ just to*
> *be RIGHT. So that she sees that things are right.*

> *LN 8, p9*

> *EL: Yeah/ I mean/ I like it to/ you know/ Iike people to just to*
> *GET ALONG/ Euhm/ (2s)*

> *LN 10, p11*

*6.12.3 Over-arching narrative theme: **Struggling with a sense of loss***

The loss of home LN 5

   As previously described, the home is central to Elly's construction of meaning and value in her life. In the following excerpt she describes her slowly developing realisation that she wanted to leave her husband and her on-going intense sense of loss for the home she had had at that time. The intensity of Elly's longing reminds me of the crippling sense of nostalgia Kierkergaard described in his book 'Sickness unto death' (2004). For Kierkergaard this nostalgia was irrational, (though human) and prevented a person from perceiving the value in their present life or in their future.

> *EL: And that/ you know/ for ten years, that's how it was/ it was just/ (1s) obviously that, there were just/ (2s) you know/ there were things that just didn't happen/ really/ that was really disappointing. That was why I didn't/ you know/ it took quite a/ it was a very hard decision to leave the house. Because everything was there, the house was there. Everything was secure and comforting and so it was a very (1s) big/ (1s) that was the hardest thing to do was to leave that home environment (1s)/ really/ because of that…..*

> *LN 5, p6*

Accepting loss of value   LN 14

Elly describes gradually coming to know and accept that she did not value her relationship with her husband. She presents this awareness and acceptance as empowering, as shifting her from a passive 'depression'…..

> *'I had been feeling really, really depressed, I/ euh/ I even went to the doctors, and I ended up on/ euhm/ on prozac….*
>
> *LN 14, p16*

……into a more agentic state.

> *EL: I kind of knew because for/ when Anna was/ I mean, my ex-husband was quite controlling and/ (1s) euhmm/ (1s). He was just one of these people who didn't take other people's feelings into account (1s), and he was quite a SELFISH MAN, and there was things that he did throughout the whole ten years that we'd been together that REALLY bothered me. And I just thought if you can't accept that person for who they are (2s)*
>
> *PE: Mmm*
>
> *EL: You can't live with them, if you can't accept their faults…*
>
> *LN 14, p17*

The loss of hope   LN's 14, 15, 21, 22.

Although Elly had taken many steps to secure a future she valued for herself she described an intense and disabling struggle with feelings of loss and hopelessness triggered by conflict in her relationship with Anna her daughter. In Elly's description of her emotional state around this conflict it seems difficult for her to retain any sense of value in her life: all seems lost.

EL: Yeah/ no/ but, I / Yeah, I do, but/ yeah/ it is a little bit but then sometimes, I feel like I'm FALLING BACK AGAIN, when we have a BAD DAY.

PE: Yeah

EL: You know/ I just/ I just feel like (1s)/ then it completely CRASHES DOWN on me. I feel like a COMPLETE FAILURE.

PE: …Right…

EL: Everything's NOT going to WORK..

PE: Right..

EL: CAN'T COPE/ kind of thing.'

LN 21, p23

EL: YES. Yeah (1s) and I still do get to that point cos I / that's what I/ I OVER THINK everything.

PE: Yeah..

EL: OVER PROCESS THINGS.

PE: (1s) in the like, / is it like, then because it's like THIS, and then THIS will happen…

EL: yeah.

PE: And then that will lead to THAT and then and …

EL: And then I get that SINKING FEELING, and then I start to feel REALLY DOWN and (2s) I just think OH GOD, I hate this PLACE that I'm IN NOW/ you know…

<div align="center">

LN 22, p26

</div>

When Elly feels this way she cannot retain a sense of value, or conceive of her relationship with her daughter being restored. She can however be distracted a little by thinking of other aspects of her life she values, making her home beautiful, for example, or by going to work.

EL: But when/ If I were going into the OFFICE I would feel like I were GETTING OUT OF THE HOUSE, I were going/ you know,

PE: Yeah/ (1s) turn our mind to something else…

EL: …. Or MOTIVATED onto something else, or GETTING AWAY from it all (1s)

<div align="center">

LN 21, p24

</div>

*6.12.4 Over-arching narrative theme: **Reflections on the process of change***

Knowing what you want LN 11, 14, 15, 18, 19, 20, 23, 25.

Within their neo-Vygotskian theory of therapeutic change Miltenburg and Singer (2000) propose that people can gain some emotional mastery and sense of agency over difficult situations through coming to understand them more fully. Elly describes herself as stronger when she has come to know what she wants, for example in relation to her marriage.

> *EL: You know/ I didn't ever come out of the relationship with insecurity about what I wanted.*
>
> *PE:: You weren't lost.*
>
> *EL: I weren't lost at all. I knew that was still what I wanted….*
>
> *EL:……… I felt/ I felt I got a lot more confidence about what I wanted as well, because I was given more/ that was it/ because I was on my own. I had the FREEDOM to CHOOSE…*
>
> *PE: Right..*
>
> *EL: ….About what I really, really wanted.*
>
> *LN 11, p13*

Elly suggests that she needs to set herself small goals within a larger aspiration, and that only within a meaningful framework can she make changes. Within the interview I suggest that Elly's approach to life, is similar to the structure of the intervention.

> *EL: So if I want to go on training/ you know/ to study LAW FURTHER I know that that's exactly what/ THIS is what I NEED*

181

TO DO., and/ (2s) that is/ such a thing will help me GET
THERE. (2s) You know…

PE: That, /and / you've got that same attitude abut Butterfly,
haven't you …?

EL: Yeah…

PE: I think it really suits you because (1s) it's like a
PROGRAMME…

EL: [simultaneously] PROGRAMME , and I know that that's….

PE: It's a PYRAMID/ and this and this and this/ and it builds one
on the other…

<div align="center">

LN 23, p29

</div>

Felder and Robbins (2011) suggest that altering our contingent responses disrupts our
experience. They believe this can lead to insight. However, too much disruption might
overwhelm our capacity to make sense of experience. Elly's emphasis upon 'small steps'
may reflect her awareness of this possibility.

Needing the support of people and familiar places LN 16

Having a supportive family, and a 'place' to go to, also facilitated Elly's agency.

EL: ……And I was given A LOT of SUPPORT and/ you know/
even though we were sleeping in my Mum and Dad's dining

> *room for sixth month, you know it kind of still helped, you know,*
> *I wasn't in a DILEMMA/, oh WHERE AM I GOING TO GO/ so*
> *it was a bit easier*

<div align="center">

LN 16, p18

</div>

Within a phenomenological ontology it is through reaching out to the world to others that a person experiences self-hood (Martin and Gillespie 2010, Felder and Robbins 2011). I think it is possible that Elly needs to imagine herself securely in another place in order to experience herself as an agentic person. Her preoccupation with 'home' and making the home lovely, just the way she wants it, may express the same need.

6.13 Elly's story: Second interview, over-arching narrative themes

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<u>Over-arching narrative themes</u>

T *From discipline to nurture: A different view of children.*

T *A struggle with loss, depression and other difficult feelings.*

T *Reflections on the process of change*

6.14 Summary of Elly's story, organised into over-arching narrative themes.

From discipline to nurture: a different view of children.

Elly describes herself as having a new perspective upon children's behaviour. She is more likely to pause and to consider what her daughter is thinking and feeling in difficult situations. She asks herself what her daughter needs and tries to think about this. Elly also does this with other children. She believes that TV programmes, such as 'Supernanny', give advice about behaviour management and do not demonstrate a nurturing approach. Elly also feels more able to accept Anna's negative feelings. She believes that her daughter is sensitive and that she will always be this way.

A struggle with loss, depression, and other difficult feelings.

Elly describes her on-going sense of loss for her old home. She misses the sense of belonging to the community she used to live in. She describes herself as 'insecure' and sensitive, and believes she and Anna are alike in this way. The early stages of the intervention were very difficult for Elly. When Anna protests, and there is conflict she finds it difficult to cope. At these times she struggles with a sense of failure and hopelessness about the future. The group sessions are supportive, and help her to feel more optimistic again. Moving house has been an additional pressure. Although she feels Anna is less challenging now and her own emotions are levelling out she has begun to worry about the future in other ways, for example, she worries about what would happen to Anna if she were to die. Elly describes how she tries to structure and organise her time, and plan good things, to help her deal with these anxieties.

Reflections on the process of change.

In the past Elly has found the many conflicting ideas about parenting broadcast by the media and in books confusing and oppressive. She has found herself changing approaches and always questioning herself. Commitment to the approach we suggested has allowed her to be consistent. She feels she is able to step-back and think things through in difficult situations because she has confidence that she now knows what she will do. Attending the group, and hearing others stories has also helped. In the group Elly has been able to hear others ideas and feel less alone with her emotional struggles. Receiving reassurance from the trainers, that she is doing the right things also helps her. The structure of the course, making changes gradually over time, allows her to learn, rather than trying to do everything at once and becoming overwhelmed. Elly has noticed that she has also become more able to make decisions and plans in other areas of her life. An aspect of this is being able to choose not to do things to the very high standard she values, if she feels this would cause stress within the family.

6.15 Thematic Analysis

Identified narratives and over-arching narrative themes

T *From discipline to nurture: A different view of children.*

'Knowing' from the child's point of view.

'Being' not 'doing': 'in tune' and accepting of negative emotion.

T *A struggle with loss, depression and other difficult feelings.*

The need to belong to a place.

A struggle with helplessness and hopelessness.

The struggle with uncertainty.

A struggle with a need for 'perfection'

T *Reflections on the process of change*

Commitment to an ideology of parenting and child-care, consistent across systems.

The importance of gradual change.

The emancipatory value of change.

6.15.1 Over-arching narrative theme: **_From discipline to nurture (a different view of_**

children)

'Knowing' from the child's point of view.   LN's 1, 3

   Elly describes herself as gaining knowledge and understanding about children, through the programme, which enabled her to be more reflective and reflexive in her ways of relating to her daughter.

> *EL: I think it was / I think it's because you DON'T (4s)/ It's VERY DIFFICULT really because as a PARENT you don't actually LOOK at things from the OUTSIDE (1s). You / just/ LOOK at what your SITUATION'S like. You don't look at children in GENERAL.........*
>
> *EL: ...and how they (2s)/ ARE and (2s)/ so it/ kind of DOES give you MORE of an IDEA (1s) and it ALSO (2s)/ for ME (3s)/ it's GIVEN me a lot more CONFIDENCE in terms of how to deal with OTHER KIDS ASWELL/ so (1s)*

LN 1, p2

Suissa (2006, 2013) and Smith (2010, 1011) suggest that the most useful 'knowledge' in parenting is developed through reflexive awareness. Within the following description Elly seems to express a growing capacity to think about how she is being in situations and to think about how she is thinking and feeling when under pressure. Through engaging with our ideology of parenting Elly may have become more able to make more conscious choices about how she wants to be (Miltenburg and Singer, 2000).

> *PE: ...a BIT MORE OBJECTIVELY*

187

EL: YEAH (2s)/ yeah (1s)/ yeah/ you / kind of UNDERSTAND IT
[simultaneous with]

PE: you STEP BACK

E: you STEP BACK and you/ kind of/ LOOK and you think
'WHAT do they NEED?'

PE: Mmm

EL: and it (2s)/ you KNOW what children NEED

LN 1, p2

Like Sally, Elly describes her own reflectivity and reflexivity, in relation to cultural narratives of parenting demonstrated by other parents she meets and observes, and in relation to TV programmes such as 'Supernanny'. She makes a distinction between the 'attachment' discourse we promoted and the more 'behaviourist' approach she believes the programme advised. In the following excerpt she comments on another parent's handling of some challenging behaviour (a neighbour), then makes a link to how she believes such situations are handled by 'Supernanny'.

EL: .....but when I/ you KNOW/ cos I THINK/ well/ you
SHOULDN'T be DOING THAT (1s)/ cos / that's NOT/ they're
not NEEDING what (3s)

PE: The TIME OUT / stuff

EL: Yeah (1s) / and I/ just/ think/ LOOKING at it I/ just/ think
(2s)/ wull (3s)/ they're NOT LOOKING at what the kiddy really/
really WANTS (3s)

EL: yeah. It's a MANAGEMENT

PE:…sort of/ APPROACH

EL: MANAGEMENT approach/ it's NOT a NURTURING
APPROACH

LN 3, p6

'Being' not ' doing' : 'in tune', and accepting of negative emotion'.   LN's 4, 5, 6, 7

Elly connects her new relational perspective, her reflexivity and increased awareness of her
daughter's 'personhood', to her more accepting attitude towards Anna's expression of
negative emotion.

EL: Euhm (5s)/ well/ we / just /have a/ we've CHANGED how we
DEAL with EVERYTHING (2s)/ and how we / you know/ we/
we're CERTAINLY/ A LOT MORE (2s) IN-TUNE with what
ANNA is LIKE as a LITTLE PERSON
                                                          LN 4, p7

EL: THAT'S what she's LIKE (1s)/ We/ YEAH/ I mean/(1s) the
THING is/ we / we (1s)/ there was a TIME when I would think/
oh/ I WISH/ she wasn't LIKE this/ but that's HER (1s)

PE: Yeah

EL:...and THAT'S what she's LIKE and (1s)/ you KNOW/
YEAH/ we have to ACCEPT it/ DON'T you/ cos/ they're NOT
going to (1s) CHANGE (2s) THAT WAY

PE: Noo

EL: They're going to ALWAYS be SENSITIVE

<div align="right">

LN 5, p9

</div>

I think it is likely that Anna's 'sensitivity' and her desire for 'independence' are what Elly understands as the source of the emotional outbursts she described as being so difficult for her to cope with in the previous interview. The following excerpt may indicate that she still finds this difficult. Elly describes relying on the 'strategies', our 'rules for relating', in this case, 'following through', despite protests, rather than backing down under pressure. In this way the strategies/rules may be empowering for her (Appendix 1: 70-71). However, Elly's use of the word 'procedure' is, I feel, rather distancing, perhaps indicating some ambivalence, or inner conflict, at these times when social and interpersonal harmony is jeopardised.

PE: Oh right/ and she DOES THINGS/ you know/ there (1s)/
VERY FEW TIMES I have to FOLLOW THROUGH

PE: Yeah (2s)

EL: a PROCEDURE (1s)/ really.

6.15.2 Over-arching narrative theme: __A struggle with loss, depression and other difficult feelings.__

The need to belong to a place   LN's 11,12

Elly describes her on-going sense of loss for the secure 'place' she had when she lived with Anna's father and her increased sense of security now that she had bought a house and moved in.

EL: There was a (1s) bit of GRIEF THERE (1s) and I COULDN'T (!s) / I STILL get when I go to LANGTON when I see my FRIENDS (2s)/ I'll GO there and I'll get that FEELING AGAIN (3s)

EL: (3s) Euhm/ I KNOW it's NOT a BIG DEAL/ because/ LOTS of PEOPLE rent houses / DON'T they/ but/ (1s) I (1s)/ I WANTED something that I FELT I BELONGED to (2s)

PE: Yeah/ yeah (2s)

EL: You know/ I felt a LTTLE BIT INSECURE (2s) / cos/ AGAIN/ I'm LIKE ANNA/ and Anna/

PE: Yeah/ yeah [simultaneous with]

EL: you know/ I'm very much like that/ I'm VERY INSECURE/
and I can be VERY INSECURE/ but I'm STARTING to FEEL
SECURE now (3s)/ euhm (2s)/ and because Anna's (3s)/ you
know/ she DOES have her MOMENTS but ON the WHOLE she's
really GOOD (2s)/ I FEEL like I've got a BIT of a level / I'm
LEVELLING OUT a little bit (1s) now.

LN 11, p15

A struggle with helplessness and hopelessness LN's 17,19

When I asked Elly about how she had experienced the programme and the expectations of it, like Sally, she described finding the initial stages very stressful. I was concerned that doing things differently triggered off a disabling experience of helplessness for her. Through dark times she found the supportive presence of others of some help. However, Elly's account suggests that the intervention was potentially overwhelming, in particular in the context of other stressful life-circumstances, a house move.

EL: It's REALLY/ REALLY DFFICULT (1s). I found it VERY/
VERY (1s) TOUGH and I FELT quite DEPRESSED (3s)/ if
that's the RIGHT WORD/ euhm (4s) and I had the SUPPORT
from James ....
.
EL: …. and EVERYBODY ELSE / you know/ euhm (3s)/ and /
yeah/ I found it VERY/ VERY HARD (1s)/ and there'd OFTEN be
DAYS where I'd be in TEARS because I'd/ just/ think/ 'WHAT
the HELL am I MEANT to DO (2s)

EL: ...MOMENTS now (1s). I DO (1s)/ I think because this ANTICIPATION of the MOVE (2s) THING has BEEN on the CARDS/ and has for such a LONG TIME/ that was REALLY GETTNG to ME. NOW we've done the MAIN THING (1s) FEEL LIKE a BIG WEIGHT has been LIFTED

PE: Right

EL: so I DON'T get as MANY of THOSE/ like (1s)/ THINGS/ like/ I FEEL everything's (2s)/ the ONLY WAY I can DESCRIBE it's/ as being like/ there's BLACK AROUND ME

PE: mm-mm

LN 19, p27

The struggle with uncertainty   LN's 19, 22, 20, 21

Existential therapists suggest that our anxieties over the practical aspects of life often connect with fundamental existential anxieties (Van Deurzen and Adams 2011). Elly's struggle to organise her life and to alter her ways of being with her daughter may have triggered deep anxieties of an existential nature.

EL: ..... I've ALSO / like/ recent/ RECENTLY/ I DON'T know whether it's because things have been HAPPY I'm TRYING to PERSUADE my mind t'OTHER WAY/ to ANOTHER way/ I've been thinking of AWFUL things/ like/ WHAT if anything happens

to ME/ what's going to happen to OLIVIA/ and/ (1s) I've been
having NIGHTMARES about THAT .'

From an existential perspective Elly's emotional struggle with difficult feelings might, I think, be understood as derived from a more fundamental struggle with the experience of uncertainty. Van Deurzen and Adams, drawing upon the work of Heidegger and Kierkegaard, convey some of the anguish (or mystery) uncertainty can bring to the human experience.

Some things, few things, are knowable and these are likely to be physical, factual and everyday. When enquiring into existence and meaning, however, we need to suspend, and not negate what we think we know. We temporarily become unknowing…this is often experienced as doubt and self-doubt, for in this process everything is in question.

Van Deurzen and Adams, 2011, p153

In her account Elly describes her attempts to create certainty out of uncertainty. She seems to value, in particular, the certainty the 'strategies', promoted on the programme, would seem to bring to the business of parenting (see below, 'Reflections on the process of change').When I asked Elly what helped her to cope in these dark moods she described attempts to make life 'good', achieving something which connected to what she valued, as a strategy for dealing with intense feelings of depression and worthlessness etc

EL:Yeah (2s)/ It's VERY DIFFCULT/ you know (2s) / but/ like/
DOING SOMETHING/ like/ TODAY/ I've DONE (2s)/ I've GOT

194

RID of the FRIDGE/ you know/ it's LITTLE / it's LITTLE THINGS/ but / I've GOT (1s) RID of some of the STUFF I WANTED to get RID of (1s) from the HOUSE (1s) and I KNOW that we are getting a STEP CLOSER to getting that PLAYROOM READY'

<div align="center">

LN 19, p28-29

</div>

Kierkegaard (1985) has theorized that the experience of 'faith' in everyday life in necessary to make us brave enough to contemplate action. This idea is important in existential psychology.

> Faith is at the root of every meaningful action. We need to have a personal value system that guides our actions and meanings. The paradox of faith is that we can never become certain of anything but we have to act as if it is so, in full knowledge that it may not be. This produces anxiety which we try to reduce by seeking certainty.

<div align="center">

Van Deurzen and Adams, 2011, p152

</div>

I think Elly may be suggesting that her focus upon doing what she values can provide her with the faith she needs to continue in the face of doubt and uncertainty.

> *EL: I START BAKING (2s)/ I FEELS quite (4s)/ DON'T KNOW (1s)/ I / just/ if I START DOING something that I really / really ENJOY/ like/ maybe (2s)/ MEETING with my FRIENDS (1s)/ for a COFFEE/ GOING for a MEAL with my FRIENDS on an EVENING/ or something (1s)……*

EL:…… (1s)Yeah (3s)/ YEAH/ I feel. It's/ like/ that
CONTENMENT

LN 20, p29

Similarly she engages with another dimension of our existence, time and temporality by

planning her future, from the present. She describes her determination to make decisions well

in advance, for example, where to have Christmas, and to have a schedule for the weekend.

PE: Yeah (1s)/ so YOU are/ kind of/ like/ a person who PLANS
AHEAD

EL: FORWARD PLANNING......

EL: ....Yeah (1s)/ and THAT adds to the SECURITY THING/
it's KNOWING (3s)
LN 21, p30-31

Once again existential psychology may help to make sense of Elly's desire to imagine a

future that is 'good'. 'Temporality is the quality of living time. We do not have or use or

waste time, we are time' (Van Deurzen and Adams 2011: 155). By projecting herself into the

future Elly may be creating a more secure sense of self in the present.

A struggle with a need for 'perfection' LN's 26, 27, 14

196

Elly believes that she has a tendency to focus upon achieving very high standards in relation to what she values. Therefore, what is often her coping strategy, focussing on achieving the 'good', can become an oppressive experience where she feels compelled to achieve this 'good'. In the following excerpt she recognises this oppression as causing her to become stressed. Elly demonstrates some insight and agency in relation to this aspect of her experience, perhaps gained through her struggle to do things differently (Becvar and Becvar, 2003).

> *EL: (2s) I BOUGHT the teachers gifts for YEAR END/ (2s) but/ I WAS WANTING to DO CUP-CAKES (3s)' ....' You WON'T MAKE/ they've GOT to be PERFECT/ cos/ THAT'S /just / ME/ there's NOT to be/just/ a few BITS of BUTTER-CREAM on/ they'd HAVE to be a WORK of ART (2s) . DO I NEED to put myself UNDER that sort of PRESSURE? (1s)No/ you DON'T/ you've GOT MORE IMPORTANT THINGS to DO ...'*

> *LN 26, p36*

*6.15.3 Over-arching narrative theme: **<u>Reflections on the process of change</u>***

Commitment to an ideology of parenting and child-care, consistent across systems   LN's 3, 9, 15, 18, 24

Vansieleghem (2010) suggests that multiple discourses relating to parenting, circulating in Western culture, confuses, and dis-empowers, parents: parents are the oppressed recipients of too much conflicting advice. Elly voices the same perspective.

> *EL: I / just/ think there's SO many CONFLICTING PARENTING*
> *ADVICE/ you KNOW / you get the SUPERNANNY/ you get JO/*
> *you know you get/ euhm/ mmm/ BABY WHISPERER/ you get*
> *ALL them KIND of BOOKS*

> *PE: yeah*

> *EL:...and ALL that / kind of / THING and you READ them ALL*
> *and you think/ well/ WHICH is the RIGHT WAY*

> *PE: yeah*

> Once again Elly seems to reject advice which restricts itself to
> the 'doing' of parenting, she values a more reflective and
> reflexive approach.

> *EL: I don't think they give you ANY UNDERSTANDING/ I think*
> *it's (2s)/ I THINK (3s) what they're TELLING you IS (5s)/ it's /*
> *like/ the SUPERNANNY THING. They DON'T TELL you what a*
> *CHILD NEEDS*

> *PE: No*

EL:… REALLY

PE: Right

EL: They say/ well/ this is how you're gonna DEAL with THAT BEHAVIOUR

<div align="right">*LN 3, p6*</div>

PE: You/ you/ it's NOT/ just/ about WHAT you DO / it's about HOW YOU THINK (2s)

EL: Yeah (4s)/ you HAVE to STEP BACK a BIT

<div align="right">*LN 24, p34*</div>

This ideology, and Elly's commitment to it, may have provided her with a sense of certainty in situations where she previously felt unsure. Her understanding of, and commitment to, certain ideas around parenting, seems to support her agency (Miltenburg and Singer, 2000).

EL:…cos there's SO MANY CONFLICTING/ there's SO MUCH CRITICISM about certain (1s) WAYS AROUND it and I think/ well it's QUITE SIMPLE (2s) / really/ what you NEED to DO

PE: yeah

EL: (2s)/ it's / just/ you being ABLE to SAY/ right/ OK. THIS is what I NEED to DO and I need to STICK to this WAY of

PE: mmm

EL: ..PARENTING and (1s)/ I think (3s)

Elly also identifies the consistency and communication across systems (Becvar and Becvar, 2003) as supporting the change in the pattern of relating between herself and Anna.

EL: …….....THAT MAKES a DIFFERENCE because (2s) when I hear good reports BACK (from school) / then I FEEL GOOD/ and if I FEEL GOOD the SHE feels GOOD/ the SHE gets her TREATS and it's LIKE a BIG CIRCLE.

However, changes in thinking and ways of being may depend upon processes of meaning making that involve relating within a discursive and embodied community. Elly describes the importance of attending the weekly group session. She expresses an appreciation of the opportunity to 'make sense' of her experience within an empathic social environment where multiple perspectives were considered. This experience may have facilitated her emergent agentic selfhood (Martin and Gillespie, 2010)

EL: with ME/ I NEED to (2s) ATTEND something and (2s) be GIVEN that / ACTUAL/ REASSURANCE from a PERSON (1s)……

EL:…… (1s) and ALSO/ because/ there were OTHER PEOPLE going through the SAME/ kind of/ (1s)/ the / SIMILAR / kind of

PE: Mm

E:: (2s)/ PROCESS as ME

PE: Yeah (1s)

*EL: and THEY were COMING ALONG with the SAME
QUESTIONS (1s)*

PE: Mm……

<div align="right">

LN 15, p21

</div>

*EL:…… THAT was what it was LIKE really (1s) /
COUNSELLING SESSION*

*PE: Yeah (!s)/ because/ EVERYBODY'S TALKING about THEIR
EXPERIENCES/ and then that helps you to (1s) MAKE SENSE
of ….*

EL: Ye-ah……

PE: ……YOURS

EL: Yeah (2s)/ YOU know/ you're NOT on your OWN

<div align="right">

LN 18, p26

</div>

The importance of gradual change   LN's 16, 23

Like Sally, Elly described feeling stressed and rather powerless in the initial stages of the
programme where the emphasis was upon increasing nurturing interactions, through warmth

and shared play, and reducing negative and coercive interactions. Central to this experience was a loss of power.

> *EL: Yeah/ because/ I felt OLIVIA still HAD the CONTROL*
>
> *PE: Yeah (2s)*
>
> *EL: because I DIDN'T FEEL that I could DO anything.*
>
> <div align="right">*LN 16, p22*</div>

However, like Sally, she described this as a necessary part of the process of change. It seems that altering her contingent responses to situations, and perhaps a change in her ways of being powerful, was achieved in a gradual and systematic way and this may have allowed Elly the time to reflect, and to understand the situation which was emerging.

> *EL: NO (3s)/ and at the TIME I was/ I wish/ I would have said/*
> *'oh / I / just / need to KNOW what to DO/ I NEED*
> *EVERYTHING and it ISN'T HERE/ but/ you DON'T ABSORB it*
> *PROPERLY/ it's like trying to LEARN SOMETHING (3s)/ it's*
> *like trying to DO (4s)/ LEARN to BE a MECHANIC in a DAY*
> <div align="right">*LN 16,*</div>
> *p23*
>
> *EL: Yeah/ you've got to THINK about what you actually DO and*
> *you've got to GO THROUGH a WHOLE WEEK/ say/ (1s) and*
> *think/ 'wull /OK (2s)/ that's what I DID (2s)/ now I can maybe*
> *DO this a little bit BETTER because I UNDERSTAND a bit*
> *MORE about what's GOING ON (2s)*
>
> <div align="right">*LN 16, p23-24*</div>

The emancipatory value of change   LN',s 25, 27

Elly described herself as being more able to manage other practical tasks as a result of being involved in the programme. This change also seemed to relate to reflexivity: an increased consciousness of her thoughts and feelings and how to manage them.

> *EL: … cos I used to/ like/ just/ get ALL WORKED UP about/ I*
> *mean I still GET worked up about things/ but/ I used to get*
> *worked up about SILLY LITTLE THINGS…*
> > *LN 25, p35*

> *Yeah/ I do A LOT of SELF-TALKING (1s)/ which is a BIT*
> *INSANE (1s)/ and / yeah/ I TALK to myself A LOT about what I*
> *NEED to DO*

> *PE: Yeah*

> *EL: …and I think/ 'RIGHT/ what's the MOST IMPORTANT*
> *THING you NEED to DO*

> > *LN 24, p35*

Elly describes being more aware of how she is 'being' when she is 'stressed' and of how this might be communicated within her relationship with her daughter. The following is a complex narrative in which Elly links her sense of responsibility to her attempts to monitor and protect her emotional well-being. What emerges is a conflict between different valued experiences: having things 'perfect' and having a less stressful relationship with her daughter. Within the co-constructed narrative Elly and I explore the possibility that her

increased consciousness of these dilemmas helps her to manage them. As in previous

narratives Elly stresses the importance of 'knowing' what to do.

> *EL: cos I get STRESSED (2s) and then SHE gets STRESSED*

> *PE: Yeah/ yeah/ yeah / it's HARD being the (2s)/ it's NOT/ just/ the MUM is it/ MUM OR DAD (1s)/ y/ you/ you/ euhm/ if YOU go DOWN/ EVERYONE ELSE GOES DOWN*

> *EL: [simultaneous with] EVERYONE ELSE GOES DOWN*

> *PE: Yeah/ it' it's a REAL RESPONSIBILITY/ isn't it*

> *EL: IT IS)2s)/ and it is (1s)/ YOU know (2s)/ it's WHAT YOU DO that MATTERS for EVERYTHING ELSE / so (1s)……*

> *LN 27, p37*

> *EL:…….. but that's VERY DIFFICULT for ME because I DO (1s)/ because 'It's GOTTA BE PERFECT' (2s)*

> *PE: Yeah (2s) BUT/ you SOUND / you SOUND / like you're VERY AWARE*

> *EL: Oh I KNOW it's that…*

> *PE: …and that MAKES you VERY AWARE/ and that/ THAT gives you that ELEMENT of being ABLE to MANAGE (2s)*

> *EL: YES*

> *PE: …YOURSELF (1s) and THINGS BETTER (3s)/ cos you're AWARE of what you t'/ TEND to DO*

204

EL: Yeah (3s)/ yeah/ you know/ and it's/ I/ just/ I KNOW that /
WHAT I've GOT to DO now (1s)/ so

LN 27, p38-39

6.16 Rachel's Story: first interview, overarching narrative themes.

6.16.1 Comment on Labovian Analysis in relation to Rachel's story

In contrast to Sally and Elly, Rachel's narratives were less descriptive and I was aware that many of them were significantly co-constructed as I tried to support her to tell her story. I was also aware in the interview, and through analysis, that sometimes I needed to think carefully about Rachel's intention in narrating. Although challenging I felt the process of identifying narratives and organising them into themes contributed to the excavating of Rachel's story. By asking myself where stories started I was also intensely aware that I was asking, 'what is this story about?'

Over-arching narrative themes

T *Making life good.*

T *Trying to make sense of Daniel.*

T *The stress of the situation with Daniel.*

6.17 Summary of Rachel's story, organised into over-arching narrative themes

Making life good.

   Rachel believes it is very important to her to have to have a clean and tidy house, although this can mean it is difficult to find time to play with her two sons. She describes trying to resist the urge to clean but finds this difficult as she has strong feelings about it. She finds it rewarding to care for others, such as her Dad. She feels upset if she thinks he is not eating properly or wearing old clothes, despite his lack of love and attention towards herself as a child. She values his appreciation of her care now.

   Rachel values communication in relationships, and appreciates Andy, her partner spending time with herself and the children. She would like to have the kind of relationship with her children in which they will talk with her, and hopes one day they will look after her. However, keeping things clean and tidy is fundamental to making family life good.

   Lack of money and lack of time cause Rachel considerable stress. When she compares her family to others, she wants to be as materially comfortable as other people are. This means a constant struggle to find money. In order to meet the competing demands of work, house and children Rachel has to be extremely organised. She has routines, but this does not get rid of the stress. There is pressure to buy things and money is needed for this.

   Rachel describes herself as very determined. She values this, as she feels it helps her achieve what she wants. However she is aware that her determination can cause stress, for example her decision to change her body, to have cosmetic surgery, cost a significant amount

of money. Rachel believes that doing well in education is important if you want to live well. She did not do well in school and regrets this, as well as having a family so young. She hopes her children will do differently. In the future she hopes that she can get work which is more rewarding to her, for example, caring for people, perhaps the elderly.

Trying to make sense of Daniel.

Since beginning the intervention Rachel has become conscious of the need to praise Daniel when he has done something 'good'. This has been a change for herself and Andy, her partner. She has also been showing him more affection, and Daniel has been responding with affection. In the past he would reject kisses and cuddles.

Sometimes Daniel can seem to be trying to please and do the 'right thing'. Rachel feels confused that at other times he seems to 'choose' to do the wrong thing. Rachel sees this as a confusing contradiction. She explains to him how it is wrong to hurt people etc. and is confused that despite this he continues to do so. Rachel describes some of Daniel's fears, for example, of the dark, and his teddy staring at him at. She also had these fears as a child.

The stress of the situation with Danie.

Rachel feels very stressed and angry with Daniel when school phone her regularly about his behaviour. She feels that other parents in the community judge her harshly, although

some might look at her with sympathy and empathy. It helps her to feel appreciated by the school: she thinks they need her support.

Rachel expresses doubts about the intervention. She describes Daniel as not liking the member of the team supporting him in school. She worries about what will happen if the intervention is not successful.

6.18 Thematic analysis

Identified narratives and over-arching narrative themes

T *Making life good.*

The importance of having a clean and tidy house.

The importance of caring for others.

The stress of not having enough money or time.

Being determined.

Limited opportunities and opportunities wasted.

T *Trying to make sense of Daniel.*

A shift towards 'nurture'.

Why can't he 'choose' to be good?

T *The stress of the situation with Daniel.*

Struggling with anger and frustration.

Trying to maintain positive identity and a sense of belonging to the local community.

Struggling to trust professionals.

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*6.18.1 Over-arching narrative theme: **<u>Making life good.</u>***

The importance of having a clean and tidy house   LN's 2,3,4,5.

When I asked Rachel how she came to know what was 'good' in family life she described how important it was to her to have a clean and tidy house. In our initial conversations when she joined the programme Rachel told us that when Daniel was born she had been extremely pre-occupied with cleaning, spending a great deal of time doing it. She believed her Mum was similar, and her paternal Grandmother. In the following excerpt she describes a tension, between spending time cleaning and being with the children and seems to reflect upon the possibility of change in relation to this.

> *RA: I know me GRANDMA'S a bit (2s) of a CLEAN FREAK /*
> *and stuff/…*
>
> *PE: Yeah…*
>
> *RA:…so I don't know if I GET it from 'ER (2s)*
>
> *PE: Yeah*

RA: (1s) That's me DAD's side (3s) Euhm (2s)/ BUT / I THINK the only thing I need to IMPROVE ON is/ like YOU say/ is to have MORE TIME FOR THEM. (1s)

PE: Yeah (2s)

RA: More SITTING (2s) FORGET EVERYTHING ELSE/ (2s) just/ (2s)

PE: yeah (2s)

RA:…/you know/ that'll be DONE LATER (2s)/ and gonna PLAY with the KIDS.

The value and meaning of cleaning within Rachel's life emerge as fundamental to her sense of well-being, and her positive sense of identity. Perhaps implied within the following account is the possibility that failing to provide a 'clean house' means that you are 'disgusting'. Rachel expresses strong feelings in relation to cleaning and it is easy to understand how compelled she might feel to follow them.

PE: WHAT do you THINK (4s)/ you know how we're / like when you DO THINGS (1s) you're trying to MAKE LIFE GOOD (1s)/ do you / do you think that's what you're doing when you're TIDYING and CLEANING?

RA: Yeah/ like / l want the CHILDREN to LIVE in a NICE CLEAN HOUSE YEAH?

PE: Yeah

RA: You know/ I've been into SOME PEOPLE'S HOUSES and I think / you know/ HOW do you LIVE LIKE THIS? And I think, 'Oh DON'T TOUCH THAT'/ you KNOW…

PE: Mmm

RA: …/ And I want my KIDS to be able to (2s) have a NICE CLEAN HOUSE and (4s)

PE: So when YOU GO / if YOU SEE someone's house in a MESS what do you THINK?

RA: I think they're DISGUSTING.

LN 3. p3

In the interview Rachel described herself as knowing she needed to 'change' and as having already made changes which she found very hard to make. She describes how incorporating 'cleaning' into routines, through this self-understanding, has allowed her to feel less overwhelmed by her urge to clean.

RA: Cos I KNOW that that's when it's GONNA GET DONE instead of the (2s)/ I'm not as BAD as I USED TO BE (2s) LIKE/ DOWN 'ERE I'll clean a few times a WEEK but UPSTAIRS / sometimes I think/ 'I'll do it NEXT week/ I'll do it NEXT WEEK/ it's not ACTUALLY THAT BAD'.

As with Sally's relationship with World of Warcraft Rachel's description of herself cleaning is suggestive of compulsion, she seems to feel she has little choice but to do it. The

temptation to 'do everything' is strong. It is possible that cleaning offers psychological rewards, for Rachel, that are perhaps difficult to find in other areas of her life. In doing a thorough job, value in life can perhaps seem more assured.

> *RA: (4s) Euhm/ (1s) or I'll just give it a VAC instead/ instead of actually doing the WHOLE (2s) LOT. When I go INTO it I do the WINDOWS. I'll DO EVERYTHING (3s).*
>
> *PE: Yeah.*
>
> *RA: Euhm (2s) I/. euh/ I (1s)/ ROUTINES just (2s)/ so I know that that's when it's gonna get DONE (2s).*
>
> <div align="center">*LN 5, p5*</div>

The importance of caring for others. LN's 9,10, 21.

Rachel describes the relationship between her own parents as 'not good' and her Dad as distant and unloving towards her, '…he used to tell me to SHUT UP all the time (LN 9, p11).' She identifies her partner's interactive involvement in family life as something she values.

> *RA: Whereas Andy's completely the OPPOSITE. He's ALWAYS in the HOUSE wi' us (1s) DOIN stuff.*
>
> <div align="center">*LN 9, p11*</div>

However, despite her Dad's attitude towards her as a child, she describes herself as making an effort to care for him now. She cleans and shops for him and feels concerned that he might be eating poor quality food, have an untidy house and wear old clothes. As well as being pleased she can make things 'nice' for him, being appreciated for her efforts seems important to her.

> *RA: No (2s). He's having a HARD TIME at the moment and stuff*
> *and so (2s) I try and HELP him all I CAN. (2s) He THANKS me*
> *for it and RINGS ME UP (3s).*

<div align="center">

LN 10, p12

</div>

> *RA: Like/ his CLOTHES that I've been washing have got HOLES*
> *in them. I'm ready/ I'm ready to go out and buy some MORE and*
> *SURPRISE him. I like to SURPRISE PEOPLE and MAKE*
> *THINGS NICE/ you know.*

<div align="center">

LN 10, p13

</div>

Rachel describes talking and communicating within relationships as important to her, however her emphasis on cleaning etc, on *making things nice* suggests that looking after people in this sense is fundamental to her rules of relating (Becvar and Becvar, 2003). Her expression of hope that her children will reciprocate in the future is poignant, and supports this interpretation, I think.

> *RA: I want a GOOD RELATIONSHIP with m' KIDS ASWELL /*
> *to / like/ I want them to be ABLE to TALK to ME*
>
> *PE: Right (2s)*

213

RA: And (4s) look after me [says quietly and half laughs]

The stress of not having enough money or time   LN's 1,2,6,21,26

Rachel describes a situation in which the need for money, and the need for more time, co-exist in relation to each other in a reciprocal way. This situation exists in relation to a cultural context in which others have, in a material sense, what Rachel feels she does not have yet.

RA: ………cos when you LOOK at OTHER PEOPLE as well and
it (1s)/ what their/ what THEIR (2s)/ you try and COMPARE
yourself to THEM / what YOU'VE GOT and what THEY'VE
GOT………
RA:…… I don't know/ I just want MORE MONEY and to be
MORE COMFORTABLE……

Routines seem to help Rachel organise all the competing demands upon her time and energy, so that she can manage her need to work so as to earn money, and to clean in her home.

RA: Cos I think that if I DIDN'T WORK (3s) I wouldn't have
much of a ROUTINE in PLACE (2s)

PE: Allrght/ okay/ (1s) yeah.

RA: COs I would think/ OKAY I can DO THAT WHENEVER. I can do that on THAT DAY NOW (2s). Cos I TRY and NOT DO MUCH on the DAYS that I'm WORKING (2s).

PE: RIGHT (3s). So/ so WORK HELPS YOU to KEEP LIFE (2s) in a ...

RA: Well it DOESN'T HELP. It makes me MORE STRESSED BUT (2s) I / I plan my things around WORK.

LN 6, p6

The need to earn money to buy the goods that are necessary to allow Rachel to feel she lives what is perhaps a dominant cultural narrative of the 'good life', as others do, causes her significant stress. When I ask her about what money means to her Rachel represents herself as having no choice but to earn and spend in the ways suggested to her by culture. She seems caught up, perhaps unreflectively, and perhaps not unusually, within a cultural narrative of material aspiration, and material self-worth.

PE: I guess MONEY s (2s) money GETS you SOMETHING (2s) I'm HEARING from you. WHAT would it GET YOU (2s)

RA: Not STRESSING over MONEY (2s) and being ABLE to GET what we WANT

PE: Without STRESSING

RA: MONEY is A BIG THING (2s) It STRESSES You OUT

PE: It CERTAINLY DOES

RA: If you 'AVEN't Got MONEY you're STRESSING how to get it/

LN 26, p29

Being 'determined'.   LN's 7, 8

Rachel identifies herself as being, like her own Mother, 'determined', and describes the 'good' and the 'bad' aspects of being this way. Determination seems integral to agency. However in Rachel's description of her decision to have cosmetic surgery following drastic weight loss she expresses something of the anguish and stress that her determination to achieve what she values (in this case a particular 'body image') might bring.

RA:……… I'M very DETERMINED. If I've got SOMETHING IN my HEAD (3s) I'll DO IT. (2s)

LN 7, p7

PE: So (2s)/ WHAT do you think that GETS YOU. Do you think that's a GOOD QUALITY/ do you think? (3s)

RA: It IS and it ISN'T. (3s)

PE: RIGHT. (2s)

RA: Like. I said to MESELF 'I'm gonna get a JOB' (2s). I RUNG ROUND. I got TWO INTERVIEWS and I got a job STRAIGHT AWAY THAT DAY just cos I thought/ you know/ euhm (4s)/ but

then you know/ other THINGS/ it's like (3)/ if it COSTS MONEY
and it's not SO GOOD if I've…

PE: Oh RIGHT

RA: ../like THESE/ NOW/ I WANT 'em DOING. I WANT 'em
DOING (laughs for 2s)/. And so I were / like/ I HAD THEM
DONE/ (referring to her breast implants) and that were/ like/
five and a half grand down the POT/ INNIT? (2s) So… (2s)

PE: But you were DETERMINED so it MUST have MEANT A
LOT to YOU.

RA: YEAH.

<div align="center">

LN 8, p7

</div>

Limited opportunities and opportunities wasted. LN's21,22,24,25.

Reflecting on her concerns about Daniel's education Rachel describes herself as wanting

her children to avoid what she views as her mistakes. She describes learning in school, in

particular, writing, as very difficult for her, but clearly links a good education to economic

prosperity in later life. She suggests that through her educational failure she missed

opportunities to live a life of greater value. I think the following excerpt suggests that Rachel

feels the life she lives, of striving for material comforts, and bringing up children in stressful

circumstances, is not ideal.

RA: I've ALWAYS (3s)/ yeah (3s) / I USED to GET AGITATED
in class ASWELL/ just/ like/ SAT THERE for AGES (2s)/ it's /
like/ ' FOR GOD'S SAKE……….'

RA:…… Yeah I want them to get a GOOD EDUCATION so
THEY'D be COMFORTABLE (2s). I DON'T want them to get
pregnant at SEVENTEEN/ well/ GET somebody pregnant at
seventeen and /uh/ (2s) I just DON'T want them to DO that (2s)/
and LIVE THEIR LIFE FIRST cos I haven't LIVED mine (1s)…'

LN 22, p26

Although Rachel generally states that she aspires to material comforts, a life in which she does not have to strive so hard, in a narrative exploring how she might develop her skills in the future she seems to try to articulate other dimensions of value, of creativity and self-expression, and of care.

RA: I USED to be allright (1s) 'eh / mm/ haven't DONE it for
YEARS (2s)/ I LIKE to SIT and DOODLE (2s)

PE: Yeah (2s)

RA: So / like/ ARTISTIC stuff/ like [1s laugh]

LN 24, p8

RA: I want MONEY BUT (4s)/ I just don't know (2s). I THINK
I'm gonna go back into CARING for the ELDERLY. I LIKE to
CARE for people and stuff (2s) but I don't think I WANT to DO
IT at the HOME cos at the HOME it's NOT RIGHT

LN 25, p28

218

*6.18.2 Over-arching narrative theme: **Trying to make sense of Daniel***

A shift towards 'nurture' LN's 11,

My first interview with Rachel took place five weeks or so into the programme and in that time we had shared our psychological theories of 'attachment and nurture' and encouraged parents to adapt their style of relating in line with this theory. As with Elly and Sally, Rachel describes this approach meaningful and rewarding. She describes being more reflective and mindful of Daniel's point of view.

> *RA: The PROGRAMME'S HELPED me/ helped me LOOK at things DIFFERENTLY (3s) / like (2s)/ HOW CHILDREN actually THINK. You DON'T think they THINK like that…….*
> *……ah PRAISE a lot now whereas BEFORE (1s) I thought/ I EXPECT 'em to be able to get dressed and do all this but (2s) not PRAISE 'em for it.*

> *LN 14, p11*

Rachel describes Daniel and herself as more affectionate towards each other. She also describes his previous rejection of her. Although Rachel does not explicitly say that she felt hurt or confused by this rejection this was how I interpreted her at the time. I wondered if Rachel valued the change that had taken place but did not really understand what it might mean within their relationship.

RA: But now (2s) ah praise A LOT an' / eh/ ah show a lot more LOVE as well an' give 'em a CUDDLE and a KISS an he's started doing it BACK 'as Daniel

PE: Oh has he? THAT'S good. [simultaneous with]
RA: So 'e does it off 'is own BACK. He just comes and gives me a (1s) KISS and a CUDDLE……

RA:…… Yeah because BEFORE 'e were a bit/ he gets a bit BASHFUL

PE: Yeah

RA: He didn't used to LIKE it. He'd be /like / stick 'is TONGUE OUT at me/ make a WEIRD FACE.

LN 11, p14

Why can't he 'choose' to be good., LN's 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20

Rachel's confusion is evident in several narratives where she explores with me possible reasons why Daniel behaves as he does. Rachel states her view that Daniel could 'choose' to be good if he wanted. This is an understanding of the child, the rational 'choosing' child, which is, I believe, quite prevalent in culture, in particular in schools. Within our dialogue I countered with my view of personhood, suggesting that Daniel was often acting in response to his view of the world and the feelings this provoked in him.

RA: But he keeps SAYING to me (2s) ' I'm TRYING to be GOOD'.

220

PE: Yeah (3s)

*RA: AN I'm / like/ [breath out] it just FRUSTRATES me. I jus'
don't understand why he's DOING it and why he's not like that
at HOME (2s)*

                                                              *LN
12, p15*

*RA: I KEEP TELLING HIM (2s) . I KEEP TELLING HIM (2s)
it's NOT ACCEPTABLE*

*PE: But I've got/. Well/ he CAN'T/ well / you KNOW THAT/ he
CAN'T UNDERSTAND that / can he?*

*RA: It's /LIKE/ he KEEPS TELLING me that he CAN'T stop (4s)
and that/ it REALLY (2s) drives me INSANE (2s)/ I MEAN it's/
like/ WHY CAN'T you STOP/ DON'T HIT 'IM…*

                           LN 14, p17

Rachel evaluates Daniel with reference to his behaviour, but struggles to reconcile

contradictions, for example the situations in which he manages well.

RA: He's NOT a BAD KID.
                    LN 18, p20

   Within our dialogue I suggested that Daniel experienced unmanageable anxiety at times, in

particular at school. This reminded Rachel of fears she shared with Daniel as a child herself.

*RA: He's just got/ just got OBSESSIONS with (1s(certain
STUFF/ like (1s)/ PETRIFIED of FIRE (3s)/ things LIKE THAT
an' I don't know where he GETS IT FROM……..(Rachel then
goes on to describe her own fears of fire as a child)….*

*RA:…… He's GOT a THING at the MOMENT/ as WELL/
DANIEL/ with TEDDY BEARS (2s)/ he'll TURN it the OTHER
WAY (1s)/ and I DID THAT when I were YOUNGER/ I could
NOT STAND (2s)*

PE: Ooooh RIGHT

*RA: Being in a ROOM with TEDDY BEARS LOOKING at YOU
(2s)………*

*PE: ………..So YOU . some of YOUR WAYS of COPING are a
bit LIKE DANIEL'S/ AREN'T THEY? (1s)*

RA: Mmm

LN 18, p21-22

Despite these examples of empathy, and her account of experiences of shared affection I
felt Rachel was strongly oriented to the moral narrative within which violence, in a child was
'not acceptable', and perhaps by implication should not, or could not, be explained away. I
had a sense that my narratives which described a complex and emotional inner-life for Daniel
did not completely make sense to Rachel, that I did not manage to make them convincing. I
wondered if what was 'known' to Rachel through experience was too upsetting and
confusing to be integrated within the narratives that she had available to her, and as a

222

consequence she switched between narratives ('nurture' and 'moral') in a way that seemed quite contradictory, or, in Miltenburg and Singer's terms, dissociated (2000).

6.18.3 Over-arching narrative theme: __The stress of the situation with Daniel__

Struggling with anger and frustration LN 13

Rachel described being regularly phoned by school staff to take Daniel home because he had hurt someone in school (see theme'Trying to maintain positive identity and a sense of belonging to the community', for further discussion).

I think the following excerpt expresses Rachel's frustration towards Daniel and school staff.

> *RA: It's HARD though/ but what he's DOING is REALLY getting*
> *you ANGRY and SCHOOL is ringing me up every TWO*
> *MINUTES (2s).*

> *LN 13, p15*

Trying to maintain positive identity and a sense of belonging to the community.

When viewing herself through the eyes of the other (Martin and Gillespie, 2000) Rachel may be conscious that her own identity may be compromised, within the school community.

223

She represents herself as being 'needed' by school and this may allow her to maintain a positive sense of self in what is likely to be a threatening personal situation.

> *RA: I think they're thankful for me/ that I AM on call ALL of the TIME when they NEED ME.*

> *LN 13, p16*

Rachel expresses mixed feelings in relation to the perspective of other parents within the school community. She perceives that she is likely to be judged harshly by some. Rachel's experience of 'self' is, within Martin and Gillespie's theory of personhood, to some extent dependent upon the compassionate evaluation of others. She seems to hope for, and to construct from, her experience a sense of collaboration with school staff and other parents in the community. She represents the school attempts to 'explain' the situation to parents as supportive.

> *RA: Well EVERYBODY KNOWS/ they LOOK at me/ like/ CRAP/ some of them (3s)*

> *PE: Yeah….*

> *RA: An I just KEEP SMILING and CARRY ON./ I mean/ what CAN I do?......*

> *…… They LOOK at me some of 'em / just like/ mm/ you know what I mean/ like / they KNOW what I'm GOING THROUGH*

> *LN 13, p16*

RA: Yeah. I think the TEACHERS were trying to EXPLAIN to SOME of them what I'm GOING THROUGH.

Struggling to trust professionals

Rachel describes feeling doubtful about the approach used in school and the likelihood of the programme's success.

RA: He's got a thing for SYLVIE (Butterfly role modeller) at the moment. He DOESN'T LIKE her.

PE: Oh doesn't he?

RA: Mm

PE: Oh right (3s)

RA: He GOES IN and if he SEES her then he's / like/ (4s)

RA: I don't know/ he says / ALL she does is DRAG ME (2s) and SHOVE me on THEM CHAIRS (4s). I said/ WELL/ she DOES it because you're HURTING PEOPLE.

RA: What HAPPENS? What happens if this doesn't WORK? (4s)

Perhaps as a consequence of the on-going turbulence at school, and in contrast to Sally who expressed her 'faith' in the programme, and her need to commit to it, Rachel seems uncertain, perhaps understandably so.

6.19 Rachel's story: Second interview, over-arching narrative themes

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<u>Over-arching narrative themes</u>

T ***Doing things differently, and thinking differently.***

T ***Still trying to make sense of Daniel.***

6.20 Summary of Rachel's story, organised into over-arching narrative themes.

Doing things differently, and thinking differently.

Rachel describes thinking about things differently, and doing things differently as a consequence of her involvement with the intervention. She responds to Daniel's 'challenging' behaviour in different ways, and she also is more patient in some situations. In general she and her partner are more positive with Daniel, praising him when he does the

226

'right' thing. They are all more affectionate with each other. She gives an example where Daniel prompts her to give him a kiss and cuddle.

Rachel describes herself as being very busy and stressed, and as putting off meeting Daniel's need for attention, to get jobs done. She believes his life has been trauma free, although she feels that her intense preoccupation with cleaning when he was a baby may have affected him. The family moved five times in his early years and this might also have affected him.

Thinking about Daniel's experience of school Rachel empathises with his communication difficulties, as his language development has been delayed. She thinks that he often feels 'stupid' and 'frustrated', and cannot communicate this in an acceptable way. She remembers when he was a baby her own Mum left the country to live abroad. This upset her and she wonders if her being upset affected him.

Still trying to make sense of Daniel

Rachel considers the ways that Daniel's needs have been met in the past and how this makes it therefore difficult to understand his present difficulties. He has been read to, had good food/cooking, toys, and rewards for his good behaviour. She wonders why with these experiences he then 'chooses' to misbehave. She is not sure to what extent he can control his behaviour, and feels confused about this. She suggests that Daniel has something, 'wrong' with him. Rachel gives a long description of a recent incident on holiday when he behaved in an intense and emotional way which made no sense to her. This is discussed, and at the end

227

of the story she wonders if possibly he was just tired etc, although this may be a response

provoked by alternative explanations I proposed within the interview.

6.21 Thematic analysis

Identified narratives and over-arching narrative themes

T ***Doing things differently, and thinking differently.***

Doing things differently.

Meeting Daniel's needs.

The way I am affects him.

T ***Still trying to make sense of Daniel.***

Daniel has had all his needs met.

Too complicated.

Pathological child, or child struggling with anxiety or unmet need?

6.21.1 Over-arching narrative theme: **Doing things differently, and thinking differently.**

Doing things differently LN 1, 3, 10, 12

 Rachel describes relating with Daniel in ways that are in accord with the 'rules of relating' promoted by the programme. Like Sally and Elly she says that the programme gave her a different perspective on how to 'manage' the everyday interactions of parenting.

> *RA: Euh/ it MADE ME LOOK (2s) at STUFF in a DIFFERENT*
> *WAY/ if you KNOW what ah MEAN.*
>
> *LN 1, p1*

Within the programme the parents are encouraged to use particular phrases in situations that are often challenging (Appendix 1: 43-48). Rachel describes herself as finding Daniel's, 'back-chatting' difficult to deal with and as often arguing back with him. The phrase, 'we're not talking about that any more (Appendix 1: 67)', seemed to allow her to relate to Daniel in a less adversarial way in this situation, without just ignoring him.

> *RA: Or/ you know/ like/ this BACK-CHATTING BUSINESS (2s)/*
> *I've/ eh/ (2s) he goes ON and ON and ON and I just say*
> *'RIGHT' (2s)/ 'we're NOT TALKING about this NO MORE (2s)*
>
> *LN 1, p2*

Similarly, in the following extract there is some recognition and acceptance, of Daniel's need to get dressed slowly in the morning which seems to reduce the potential stress of this situation.

229

RA: I'll ASK him and I'll LEAVE him THERE and he DOES (1s)/
he's SLOW at doing it but at least he DOES it and he's READY.
(2s)

PE: Yeah

RA: He DOES it while I watch some T.V. and [2s unclear]

LN 3, p 4

Rachel describes the programme's emphasis upon the practice of giving specific and meaningful praise (Appendix 1: 27-31) as raising her awareness of she and her partner's negative pattern of relating with their son. In the psychology of the programme described in chapter's 2 and 3, the following representation corresponds to a behaviourist explanation of behaviour, and I think it is possible that it is this level of thinking which Rachel feels most confident about.

RA: We GIVE/ er/ Yeah/we NEVER used to PRAISE/ like/
ANOTHER thing with BUTTERFLIES/ we didn't / think/ like
(2s)/ we DIDN'T think (2s). the way that/ you KNOW/ you
always/ TELL EM (1s) when they're BAD (2s)/ givin' them
attention when they're BAD

PE: Mm

RA: But you never (1s)/ praising them for the GOOD.

LN 12, p10

As in the previous interview Rachel describes increased affection between herself and Daniel. She describes this as coming about through her efforts to praise him and show him warmth. However, perhaps revealing some ambivalence in considering her own role in her relationship with her son, she identifies the situation as Daniel's 'issue'. Rachel's reflexivity, in this narrative, her capacity to think about how she is 'being' with Daniel might be described as emerging, I think. Although she makes connections between her behaviour and Daniel's she does not seem to reflect in much depth about what his behaviour might mean, what thoughts and feelings might be involved.

RA: Euhm (2s) DANIEL had /eh/ a BIT of an ISSUE in SHOWING us LOVE (2s), He'd be/ eh' EMBARRASSED (1s) for you to CUDDLE HIM or (1s)/ ANYTHING.

PE: Yeah (2s)

RA: Whereas he comes and does IT to ME now (2s)

PE: Right/ so he's MORE LOVING (2s)

RA: Yeah and / like/ he SAYs to ME (2s) / I don't know HOW it STOPPED. I DIDN'T even THINK of IT (2s)/ every time / excuse me/ every TIME he GOT OUT the BATH I give him a KISS an' say 'RIGHT YOU go DOWNSTAIRS now (1s)

PE: Yeah

RA: And I DON'T KNOW WHY it STOPPED but it (1s)/ probably he were PADDYING or SOMETHING

PE: Yeah

> *RA: (1s)/ and in / last COUPLE of DAYS/ THIS WEEK (1s) he*
> *were/ like/ ' why aren't you givin me a KISS NO MORE' and I*
> *were/. Like/ I DIDN'T THINK/ you know what I MEAN*
>
> <div align="right">*LN 10, p8*</div>

Meeting Daniel's needs LN's 2, 4, 5, 16

In the following accounts Rachel considers how her commitment to cleaning and her lack of time might be experienced by Daniel. She suggests that his needs are generally not prioritised. As she spoke about her cleaning Rachel rushed, and I wondered if she found it painful to say.

> *RA: Yeah (2s). I could see why he MIGHT be doing stuff (1s) /*
> *you KNOW (2s)/ like / say / when WE'RE/ like/ I have a thing*
> *obviously with CLEANING (2s) and STUFF LIKE THAT [said*
> *very fast] and I LOOK (2s) and THINK (2s) ' NO WONDER*
> *he's getting STRESSED (2s) cos ahm/ you know I'm….*
>
> *PE: ye-ah*
>
> *RA: 'In a MINUTE/ in a MINUTE/ in a MINUTE*
>
> <div align="right">*LN 2, p2-3*</div>

Through the programme theories of attachment are discussed in relation to the history of each child and family. The following suggests that this may have caused Rachel to consider how the way she and her partner had been with Daniel, in situations of considerable stress, in which his need for attention and love might not have been met.

232

RA: Yeah /well/ the ONLY THING WE put it DOWN to was ME with CLEANING and stuff/ that (2s) you KNOW/ THAT might be c-CAUSING it (2s) but we HADN'T had OWT' like THAT, TRAUMA –wise (1s) in 'us (2s)/ ah but we DONE A LOT of MOVING (2s)

PE: Mmm

RA: …. when we HAD DANIEL (2s) we MOVED FIVE TIMES [1s laugh] (2s)

PE: DID you?

RA: Since we've HAD 'im

PE: Oh RIGHT (1s) oh/ my GOODNESS.

RA: So/. Obviously we've MOVED (2s) and OBVIOUSLY (2s) that LEAVES him LEFT OUT of IT because (1s) of (1s) you're TOO BUSY (2s)

PE: Yeah

RA: He just KIND of SAT and WATCHED really

<div align="center">

LN 4, p4

</div>

Rachel provides her most reflective account of Daniel's unmet need within a co-constructed narrative about his experience in school. She identifies the complex detail, the likely effects of Daniel's difficulties with language. This causes me to consider whether Rachel is able to think about Daniel's needs more easily when she is not closely involved.

RA: That's what I think it IS. I think he's getting FRUSTRATED
(1s)/ kind of EMBARRASSED to ASK maybe

PE: Mmm

RA: and he DOESN'T UNDERSTAND what they're SAYING and
with the other CHILDREN he's getting a bit / like/

PE: yeah

RA: (2s) He FEELS/ I think he just FEELS (2s) STUPID

PE: Mmm

RA: and he FEELS (1s) an he's a BIT (1s) and obviously he
doesn't KNOW how to (3s) SAY ' I don't FEEL TOO GOOD
about THIS'

LN 16, p15

The way I am affects him LN's 2, 7, 8

As in her first interview Rachel describes her struggle with time, and the pressure of work. Within the following extract she also describes herself as 'VERY ANXIOUS SOMETIMES' and hints at how her stress might be difficult for Daniel to deal with.

RA: It might be MY FAULT (1s)/you know……..
 …….Cos I'M QUITE a STRESSY (2s)/ 'COME ON/ COME ON

234

[PE laughs 1s]

RA: I'm like THAT/ you SEE

PE: Yeah

RA: And OBVIOUSLY if he's / like (3s) [RA makes a fed up face]

<div align="right">*LN 2, p3*</div>

RA: yeah/ I'm VERY ANXIOUS SOMETIMES/ yeah (2s) and it's
/ LIKE/ I'm CONSTANTLY on me HIGH HORSE/ you know
what I mean/ It's BECAUSE (2s) I'm ON me HIGH HORSE
because I'm RUSHING and I ah'nt GOT TIME to do
EVERYTHING I NEED to DO.

<div align="right">*LN 8, p7*</div>

The 'ideology' of relating we promoted presented psychological need as distributed across systems. In this way it is possible to see relationships across time and space as interdependent. In her first interview Rachel described her relationship with her Mother as 'good'. In this interview she relates that her Mother went to live abroad shortly after Daniel was born, and that this was difficult for her to deal with. Rachel considers the impact this may have indirectly had upon Daniel.

RA: So I / MAYBE/ MAYBE/ it RUBBED OFF

PE: YEAH

RA: with ME being a bit UPSET and 'what-HAVE-you'

<div align="center">*LN 7, p7*</div>

*6.21.2 Over-arching narrative theme : **Still trying to make sense of Daniel***

Daniel has had all his needs met LN's 6, 9, 17

Daniel's development of speech and language was significantly delayed when he started school in his Reception year. Rachel describes feeling confused as to how this came about, comparing the experiences of her two children and Henry's faster development. She suggests that Daniel had more opportunities than Henry.

RA: But/ like/ you SAYING THAT / I USED to READ MORE to DANIEL than I DO Henry. (2s)

<div align="center">*LN 6, p6*</div>

In interview one, caring for people by cooking and cleaning for them emerged as central to Rachel's narrative of 'the good life'. This narrative reappears I feel in the following extract and may be connected to the sense of confusion Rachel expresses at times in relation to Daniel's difficulties.

RA: YOU KNOW/ he gets FOOD on the TABLE every NIGHT/
FULL MEAL every NIGHT (1s)/ an' (2s)

PE: yeah

RA: He gets EVERYTHING (2s)/ he/ he's SPOILED/ he gets ALL
the TOYS in the WORLD/ you know/ it's/ (1s) HE GETS
EVERYTHING (2s) but NOW we DO PICK us' TIMES/ to/
WHEN to GIVE 'em to 'im (1s) an' we NOT just GIVING 'em for
the/ eh (1s) FUN of it

PE: Right

RA: We're GIVIN it 'im for (1s) BEING GOOD.

<div align="center">LN 9, p8</div>

Toys here may represent some of the material comforts which Rachel strives for. However behaviourist theory, although not quite as we intended it to be understood, is also evident. Daniel's 'need' for 'rewards', rewards applied in a technical way, with an educative and moral purpose, is also being met, she suggests. Rachel presents this account as a defence, I feel, perhaps against her previous self-accusation that she has let Daniel down through not spending enough time relating to him. It occurs to me that this defence might be considered plausible within some accounts of parenting, or child-care, or educational discourse, available in culture (Scheer, 2011).

Too complicated LN's 11, 13, 17, 18

Although in some of her narratives Rachel attributes complex inner experience to Daniel, and expresses understanding of his motivation, at other times she describes herself as being unable to understand, and suggests that his behaviour is senseless, or without meaning, that it is beyond understanding. In the following Rachel expresses her struggle to understand. In her account strategies likely to influence the 'rational-choosing' child and the 'behaviourist child' shaped up by rewards and sanctions are presented as not effective. As previously, explanations relating to a more complex inner world of emotion and desire are omitted. As a result we are left with a child who cannot be understood.

RA: But he KNOWS (2s)/ he KNOWS (2s) how (2s) MUCH we get UPSET (2s) not ANGRY/ UPSET/ cos I TELL him it makes me SAD

PE: Mm hmm

RA: When he's NAUGHTY

PE: Mmm

RA: But then when he IS GOOD (2s) I give him SO MUCH ATTENTION/ 'and how GOOD and BRILLIANT YOU'VE BEEN'

PE: I think he /kind of / WANTS to be GOOD/ DO you not THINK?

*RA: He DOES/ that's what I MEAN. He just THINKS/ that's why
as soon as he comes OUT/' I've been GOOD'*

PE: [laughs 2s] He wants to PLEASE YOU.

*RA: Yeah/ he wants to please me but I think he just can't HELP
(2s) DOING what he is DOING. I REALLY/ I REALLY DON'T
think he's got any CONTROL of it/ as such.*

*PE: I DON'T think he HAS.(3s)/ I KNOW/ I THINK he
sometimes has / or just / LOOKS as if he's GOT CONTROL (2s)/
cos he's/ ONE minute he seems OK and the NEXT MINUTE
he's/ LIKE*

*RA: Yeah/ that's what I'm TRYING / how it goes from THAT to
THAT. It just DOESN'T make SENSE....*

LN 17, p15

Pathological child, or child struggling with anxiety and unmet need? LN's 4, 5, 7, 8, 14, 16

   As discussed previously, in the interview Rachel explores possible explanations for her son

Daniel's difficulties derived, I think, from developmental discourses, available in culture but

also the focus of dialogue within the intervention. In these accounts Daniel is considered in

relation to unmet relational needs in the past and present which influence his relationships,

particularly in school. Rachel also drew on systemic theory, representing herself as stressed

by the demands of multiple systems in a culture in which cultural narratives of the 'good life'

seem to connect powerfully with her own sense of value. However towards the end of the

interview Rachel introduces the idea that there is something wrong with Daniel, an idea that

she had discussed with us from time to time from the very beginning of the programme. She wondered if Daniel had Autism.

RA: ..... / I STILL think there's MORE TO IT. (1s) He CAN'T HANDLE STUFF. He really gets (3s)/ like/ we were on HOLIDAY and he really COULD NOT HANDLE having a CHOICE (3s) between the trampoline thing and the balls that go on the water (2s) and he got his 'sen into SUCH a STATE over it (2s)

PE: He couldn't make that DECISION.

RA: No

PE: Right

RA: He REALLY/ he were / OOOh/ he just / it were WEIRD to WATCH (1s)/ it was so/ it was SO...

PE: Yeah

RA: (2s) am thinking ' what are you? (1s)/ WHY?

LN 14, p11

I offered an interpretation which explored what might have been Daniel's thoughts and feelings in the situation described, an explanation which I thought might have made sense of his behaviour. Rachel seems to accept this but goes on to describe the situation in more detail. In her account anxieties about money feature as well as the stress and anguish of struggling with a child's angry protest and distress. Her sense of despair is powerfully

240

represented. I wondered if Rachel was disappointed with my response, in not engaging with her disability discourse. The narrative resolves with the contradictory explanation that the problem was simply ordinary, a tired child out of their routine. As with the interview more generally Rachel shifts between contradictory perspectives, from understanding a child's complex motivation to a position where things cannot be understood except from the perspective of disorder or disability. Miltenburg and Singer associate such contradictions with a lack of insight into thought and feelings associated with experience (Miltenburg and Singer, 2000). Rachel may have not been able to make sense of her own experience with Daniel. However Winslade and Monk (1999: 3) suggest that narratives compete within culture for dominance. It may be that Rachel was comfortable with the narrative of disorder/disability, it seemed the best explanation, but felt obligated to reflect my interpretation, within the context of our conversation.

PE: Was he thinking 'I CAN'T CHOOSE because if I have one I can't have the OTHER?'

RA: Probably (1s)/ he just made a right (1s)/ HENRY went on the BALLS. Henry chose to go on the balls/ then Henry went on the BALLS (1s)/ and he kept SAYING ' I want to go on it'/ Henry didn't like it so he got OFF and the MAN were gonna give DANIEL Henry's TURN cos it were FIVE EURO

PE: Mm (2s)

RA: And (2) Daniel /then/ WOULDN'T GO ON / but then/ so we had to WASTE that MONEY/ and then he WANTED to GO ON/ but then I said 'NO WAY

PE: Mmm

RA: ..... are we letting you ON when you've just TURNED DOWN that/ you know what I MEAN/ we're not putting another FIVER in for you to do the SAME cos it were FIVE EURO (2s)/ and (2s) DANIEL the WOULDN'T go ON/ but then / we had/ we WASTE the MONEY / then he asked to GO ON and I said ' NO WAY'

PE: Mmm

RA: ...are we letting you ON when you've just TURNED that/ you know what I MEAN

PE: Yeah (1s) yeah

RA: we're NOT putting another FIVER IN when it/ for you to do the SAME (4s). So (2s) euhm/ (2s) then he got WORKED UP and then he were KICKING OFF and screaming ALL the way BACK to the HOTEL/ and THAT DAY he were just being an ABSOLUTE/ I don't know if it were just THAT DAY (3s)/ he were an ABSOLUTE NIGHTMARE (2s)

PE: was that UNUSUAL for HIM (2s) to BE like THAT with YOU? (2s)

RA: Euh (2s) / for as LONG as it WENT ON. (2s) NORMALLY he would SHUT UP

PE: Right

RA: He WERE TIRED (2s). We were on HOLIDAY and OBVIOUSLY (1s)/ YOU KNOW (4s).

LN 14, p11

Chapter Seven   Discussion

The focus of this research is expressed within the following title:

Knowing bad and making good: Exploring consciousness of value with parents in a parenting programme.

Within this focus I have identified the following research questions:

How do parents come to 'know' what is good?'
What helps them to put into practice what they know to be 'good?'

7.1   Introduction to discussion

In the previous chapter I aimed to represent the narratives of parents in relation to relevant theory and guided by my research questions. It is usually acknowledged within contemporary narrative research that there are several reductive and creative steps between the subjects experience and the final research narrative. The reader's engagement with the text might be considered another layer of construction, and meaning making (Riessman, 1993: 6-24). In chapter 6, I tried to represent the parents' narratives in enough detail so as to allow the reader to construct their own understandings in relation to the research questions, and critique mine. Within the following chapter I aim to explore how the parents' narratives might inform our theory and practice within educational and child psychology. I acknowledge that this meta-

narrative is one of many possible alternatives. Previously I explored 'truth' as it is conceived in narrative research, and within critical realist ontology. My purpose is not to claim to have discovered or revealed the definitive 'truth' about processes or mechanisms, but rather to contribute to an on-going reflexive dialogue in which theory and practice shape one another. Rose expresses something of the aspirations of such research.

> …the work as a whole will suggest new truths, especially the extent to which all living is a creative act of greater or lesser authenticity, hindered or helped by the fictions to which we submit ourselves.
>
> Rose, 1983, in Clandinin and Connelly 1989, p18

 In narrative theory stories invite other stories, and this may be a way to think of research reports (Clandinin and Connelly,1989).

7.2   Parent's accounts: Unique perspectives on value.

7.2.1   *Narratives examined for perspective on value.*

   Parents responded to my initial question,'how do you think we know what is good in family life, and what are you trying to achieve in your own family?', by telling stories about their own history as well as their own purposes in the past and present. As Bruner suggests emotion and value interweave in narratives (1986, 2004). It was often clear what experiences were valued and which weren't, and why. Parents' efforts to seek value were also described.

Examining accounts from the perspective of value has allowed me to notice and analyse certain aspects of the narratives, content and structure, and from this I have developed some hypotheses regarding my participants' perspectives on value, as well as the changes in their experience that took place in the period of the intervention. These are examined in the following discussion.

7.2.2 *Each person's emotional experience appears very bound up with what they value. Relationships with their children are embedded in this matrix.*

Each parent's perspective was unique, their accounts of their relationships with their children embedded within a matrix of connected, but also competing, valued purposes. For example, Sally described her pre-occupation with the online game, World of Warcraft, as causing her to neglect her son. Elly identified her own need for cohesion and harmony in the home and her ongoing sense of loss for her previous home, as causing her significant stress. Rachel identified her strong need to clean and the high levels of stress she felt about money as affecting her relationship with her son. Within the narratives these ideas about what was 'good' and 'bad' often connected to past experiences, in particular parents' own experiences as children. Dilemmas and compromises were also evident, and more consciously explored within the follow-up interviews, perhaps as a consequence of the intervention experience.

7.2.3 *Parent's valued different experiences but these could be linked to existential themes.*

Although each parent's account was unique I have theorized in the previous analysis that through their seeking to fulfil purposes that might seem counter-productive, or contrary to what they know to be 'good' in 'parenting', parents might be understood as seeking existential value within a phenomenological philosophical perspective. Sally described vividly how reaching into a virtual world allowed her to achieve autonomy, a sense of purpose and belonging. Elly, through her seeking of harmony, perhaps, sought to recreate her memory of the longed for lost place of her childhood. Within an existential framework she might be understood as trying and to manage existential fears around loss, destruction, being and non-being (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2011: 24-25). Rachel was preoccupied with the physical conditions necessary for survival and perhaps found it difficult to rest and to focus on relationships. My impression from immersing myself in these parents' stories was that the search for value at this existential level may be difficult to resist, despite the conflict with what might also have been potentially 'known' to be 'good', for example, being with their children. Being more able to 'resist' more successfully may have been an outcome of the intervention. The following discussion explores this possibility.

7.2.4   *Consciousness raising supported agency/choice-making.*

In existential psychotherapy gaining insight into motivation and a conscious search for value might be expected to support a person's efforts to change, allowing them to become more 'agentic' (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2011: 39-42). In particular in the second interviews towards the end of the intervention, parents represent themselves as valuing their relationship experience with their children more highly. All represented themselves as having

a new 'perspective' on their pre-occupations and, to some extent, 'agentic' in their efforts to shift their focus to their relationship with their children. Within the therapeutic perspectives I explored in chapter 3 (Han –Pile 2011, Van Deurzen and Adams 2011, Miltenburg and Singer 2000, Winslade and Monk 1999, Morgan 2002), consciousness raising is thought to lead to greater agency, and the making of more deliberate choices regarding the seeking of value. The opportunities to narrate, to tell, and re-tell their stories and to hear others stories, are likely to have contributed to this. (see later for fuller discussion of this aspect of the experience).

7.2.5 *Where experience is contradictory and confusing, and perhaps overwhelms with emotion, narratives are dissociated and contradictory.*

Where experience is contradictory and confusing, and perhaps when emotion is overwhelming, it is theorized that a person's narratives can become less ordered and less coherent (Dimaggio and Semerari 2004, Miltenburg and Singer 2000). Miltenburg and Singer suggest they can become dissociated, existing alongside one another, their contradictions apparently unnoticed by the narrator (2000: 508-510). Contradictory representations of identity in Sally's first interview, in particular in relation to her choice-making where she emerges as strong and yet passive, seem less evident in her second interview where the narratives seem generally more coherent and agentic. In the second interview Sally describes herself as finding more positive and less aggressive ways of being powerful: she no longer reminds herself of her own Mother from whom she is estranged. It may be that Sally found an alternative way to 'be' with her children, within the intervention, a way that was less distressing for her and helped her resolve some of her dilemmas

regarding achieving the 'good'. However, Rachel represents herself as unable to make sense of her son Daniel's behaviour. She explores a number of different explanations and interpretations, shifting between different perspectives sometimes in the same short narrative (see section below for fuller discussion). Miltenburg and Singer suggest that such contradictions suggest a lack of insight (2000: 508-510), that Rachel may not have achieved a satisfactory understanding of her son's situation through the intervention. Alternatively, her understanding may not have been the same as mine and she perhaps felt she could not be transparent about this. Rachel seemed to value ideas of children and behaviour which oriented towards behaviourist ideas of reward and punishment. She also wondered if her child had Autism. At this time she was experiencing extremely high levels of stress with pressure from school and financial worries. I think it is possible that she felt confused and overwhelmed at this point in the intervention and was perhaps oriented towards a narrative which did not require her to alter current circumstances, revise her personal history, or make systemic changes or changes in her own ways of being. This might have been reflected in her style of narrating.

The power of certain narratives to account for children's problems adapting to the world, in individualistic terms, will be discussed in the following section.

7.3 Parents' experience of conflicting ideologies and narratives of parenting.

Paulo Freire in his book, *Pedagogy of hope: Reliving pedagogy of the oppressed* (1997: 18-26), describes being given the task of disseminating 'knowledge' of 'good' child-care practice, informed by pedagogy and 'empirical study', to the poorest and most deprived populations in the industrialized areas of Brazil. In his lectures he confidently advised against practices such as harsh punishments, but found himself confronted by angry and sceptical parents who expressed an ideology of parenting rooted in harsh experience, in which the need for financial and physical survival was uppermost. Punishment was viewed as 'good' because it was believed to be educative, to contribute to their children's survival. Freire concluded from his experience that in order to address the inter-generational political and social oppression experienced by this population it was necessary to engage in a dialogue, with persons, their experience and with ideology.

I feel that Freire's experience might resonate with many whose work is to influence practice in schools and families. In our intervention we have the privilege and opportunity to engage in such dialogue. In the parents' accounts it is clear that we successfully communicated our particular ideology, our narrative of parenting. All three parents described gaining a different perspective, 'it opened my eyes (Sally)'. This was particularly evident in their narratives about the 'process of change' In particular the perspective of the child was more visible in the second interviews, perhaps because a key element of our narrative was the importance of empathic interpretation of a child's communication. Echoing Vansiegelhem (2010), Smith's (2010, 2011) and Suissa's (2006, 2013) observation that a plethora of advice for parents exists in culture and has the effect of disempowering parents, deepening their uncertainty, Elly describes her sense of relief in being able to commit to a particular set of

ideas. She identifies a perplexing schism within culture between 'behaviour management' and 'nurture', a schism many Educational Psychologists encounter I believe in discourse around children.

Perhaps indicating the extent of their engagement with the parenting narrative/ideology of the programme both Elly and Sally's represent themselves as coming to know something 'good' in parenting through the experience. In the second interviews they both express clear views about 'bad' parenting they observe in the community, parenting that expresses negativity, with parent role largely disciplinary. They identify themselves as having changed their beliefs and their practice. Within Rachel's account a number of conflicting ideas, discourses and ideologies are evident. She is less certain that things have changed. Riessman (1993: 43-53) suggests that ideas can constellate within narratives sustained by poetic tension, and express something deep about a person's engagement with the world. Although I have not analysed Rachel's account in this way I think a significant tension existed between 'making life good', 'the stress of the situation with Daniel' and the narrative, which we encouraged Rachel to adopt. They could not be reconciled.

It is also worth considering the powerful effects of disability discourses in our culture (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2012) as well as the popularity of discourses of morality and rationality embedded in the 'behaviour management' discourse popular in schools (Scheer, 2011). Perhaps because of circumstances in school, in particular the deployment of a Behaviour Support worker from a different Local Authority team, to support Daniel in school, I think it is likely that we enjoyed less ideological hegemony than usual in the systems around Daniel. It may be that our intervention relies upon this hegemony and that Smith's observation is valid: parents within our culture are encouraged and are inclined to

look outside themselves for technical advice and guidance rather than reflecting upon their experience with their child in an empathic way (Smith, 2010, 1011).

7.4 Did the parents acquire knowledge which was emancipatory?

7.4.1 *Introduction to this discussion*

I would argue that implicit and explicit in our programme, and our purposes as child-care professionals, is an assumption that psychological 'knowledge' about children, childcare and relationships, can be helpful, empowering and improve lives. I would therefore like to consider to what extent parents experience in the programme might have been emancipatory and to try to offer an account of this hypothesis in terms of what psychology is and what psychology does (Parker, 2005: 5-6).

7.4.2 *The oppressive potential of psychology.*

It is clear that different readings of children's experience may bring particular outcomes (Goodley and Runswick-Cole, 2012). It may also be the case that certain readings promoting 'instrumentality', or pathology, are empowering to some. Parents/educators and children may not be empowered by the same narratives. The critique of Smith (2010, 2011), Suissa (2006, 2013) and Vansiegelhem (2010) regarding the instrumentality and alienating effects of much 'professionalised' parenting advice might be viewed as a critique of psychology and its propensity to marginalise the humanistic and philosophical dimension of experience. As I

outlined in chapter 2 the programme is informed by a number of psychological discourses. It has been argued that most of these discourses are recognisable within culture, forming a psy-complex (Rose 1989, Parker 2005), a dynamic and contradictory account of what it means to be human, encouraging and facilitating the anxious, evaluative self-monitoring likely to support governance within the modern state (Vansiegelheim 2010, Smith 2010). Within this Foucauldian oriented thesis our roles as professionals within the programme might be viewed as further facilitation of introspective self-governance, a gentle expression of state power and a subtle enforcement of the state agenda. Parker describes the psy-complex as operating in the following way,

> The analysis of the psy-complex…..takes up Foucault's (1977, 1999) historical work on the production of individuality in western culture, and emphasizes that the psy-complex works through both discipline and confession. That is, our 'subjects' are already ready to speak about themselves to us psychologists, and they expect that we want to hear about private thoughts and feelings, as if those things dredged up from under the surface will help us to explain why people do things.

> Parker, 2005, p7

Parker's description presents psychological meanings as hidden within persons and then exposed through dialogue. Some form of correction or replacement from the professional is implied (hence confession then discipline). This critique highlights the risks parents might be taking in engaging with a psychological intervention, psychological understandings being both illusory and individualistic.

Parker's critique exposes the workings of power in determining meaning. It therefore seems important to consider how power is experienced in the intervention, in particular in relationships, between ourselves and the parents and the parents and their children.

7.4.3 *Learning to be powerful in non-aggressive ways in relationships with children.*

Sally, Elly and Rachel identified 'power' as central to their role as parents. They valued power. Perhaps reflecting cultural discourse (for example, school discipline) they cited being able to 'control' their children's behaviour, and their children showing compliance to instructions, as evidence of their power. Powerless- ness was experienced and represented as lack of control and lack of influence. Through the programme Elly and Sally described themselves as coming to feel more powerful and confident but as experiencing this power differently to previously. They described themselves as now tending to be less coercive and stressed, but as more influential, expressing their power in less direct ways, for example, through the maintenance of the rituals of relating, and means of communication, practised through the programme. This lessening of aggression is represented by Sally as freeing her from an oppressive sense that she was 'being' like her Mother, an identification which had troubled her. Elly connects her increasing confidence in her relationship with her daughter with a greater sense of agency in her life generally: she describes herself as more able to tackle the everyday ordering and sorting involved in managing life (Van Deurzen and Adams, 2011: 76-89). These parents' narratives suggest that aggressive and coercive relating with their children within the particular context of their lives, social cultural, historical, creates cycles of conflict which is disempowering for them, their children, and those who connect with them in systems. Conversely being able to guide and influence children in co-

operative and enjoyable relating, and being able to maintain a non-aggressive approach (ritualised within scripts and strategies) even under emotional pressure, empowers them.

7.4.4 *Becoming reflexive parents*

For Parker, and others it is 'psychological' understandings, often internalised through therapy, and therapy discourse, which deny authenticity and de-limit a person's capacity to develop their own voice and purposes (Parker 2005, Eccleston 2012). Through psychologisation aspects of experience become abstracted and distorted, de-normalised. Related to this is an idea proposed by Smith in his article 'Total Parenting' (2010). Drawing upon Arendt's idea of 'natality' (1958: 247) Smith suggests that discourse around parenting can become a barrier to a parent opening themselves to genuinely 'being' with their children. Smith reminds us that children are not 'objects' to be manipulated or managed, rather, in being human they are…..

> ..unpredictable and unconditioned….the child presents itself as *other*, an autonomous source of meaning, a person capable of initiation, of individuating him or herself and so avoiding mere iteration.

> Smith 2010, p12

These ideas cause me to consider to what extent parents might have developed their reflexive ability through the programme, as opposed to a psychologised discourse of relationships, and whether this was central to any change process which took place. The hypothesis I am reaching for here is as follows: working together in the intervention, did we manage to re-

instate the phenomenology of parenting, an openness and sensitivity to experience, or did our parents, while in our temporary community, simply adopt an alternative ideology, a set of ideas and strategies, and apply them?

In my reading of the parents' accounts, in particular the narratives relating to 'the process of change' I notice that although parents do sometimes refer to 'strategies', suggesting a continued 'instrumentality' in their approach there are also accounts of their 'being' with their children which are suggestive of the 'receptivity' which Smith associates with 'natality' (Smith 2010: 112). There is an emphasis upon sense-making in their narratives, the making sense of personal experience, in relation to ideas about relating we promoted, as well as personal history, culture etc. This is especially so in Sally and Elly's accounts.

Suissa (2006, 2013) suggests that there is too much emphasis upon 'doing' in parenting and not on enough on 'being'. It occurs to me that 'being' with their children, with the reflexive capacity that comes with this, may emerge through the programme as both parent and child become free of the oppressiveness of aggressive power, the 'technical' knowledge associated with advice regarding 'discipline', and in this way acquire knowledge of alternative ways to co-ordinate their relating to their children. This may be what psychology can offer in relation to parenting and child-care: consciousness-raising and emotional support so as to allow exploration of alternative ways of 'being' with children. This in itself may have emancipatory effects, beyond any particular set of ideas about the 'good' in parenting.

7.5   Therapeutic change: a shift in ideology and a re-working of beliefs

In the previous discussion the possibility that some ideas around children and parenting can be experienced as oppressive or emancipatory was considered, and that this may vary depending upon the context. Some ideas may be oppressive for children but hold value for their parents. However, it is generally held that therapeutic intervention should involve some change in beliefs. Martin proposes that the therapeutic process is one of narrative deconstruction and reconstruction. Through an increased consciousness in relation to their experience people make 'revisions to their personal theories' and this change is '…the primary goal of psychotherapy' (Martin, 1994: 91). As previously described, Elly and Sally, and to some extent Rachel, represented themselves as adopting a different perspective: they thought differently about their children, they had new understandings. In accordance with Miltenburg and Singer's (2000) neo-Vygotskian model this re-working of beliefs incorporated other goals beyond those bringing the client to therapy: life-style and cultural meanings, present and past etc. Sally and Elly became more conscious of cultural parenting practices. Both made sense of and evaluated relationships with partners in the light of new understandings, and both re-organised aspects of their lives. All three participants became more aware of themselves and how their children experienced them. For Miltenburg and Singer (2000) this reflection and awareness is fundamentally concerned with moral value, the identifying and seeking of the 'good'. It is the knowledge of the 'good' which determines the direction of change, a knowledge which integrates cultural meanings, and personal experience, past and present, as well as a hoped-for future.

7.6 An 'heuristic' theory of change: doing things differently, as well as thinking differently.

7.6.1   *A summary of the theoretical perspectives explored in this study, informing the following hypotheses about change.*

In chapter three I outlined the structure of the intervention and described the activities involved. In the previous chapter I had examined the psychological theory embedded within the discursive content of the programme. I had felt a significant aspect of the phenomenology, evident in our practice, was the embodied relationship between persons and contexts, something which was not captured within the psychology commonly associated with parenting programmes. In order to theorize this relationship I explored eco-systemic thinking, specifically I made links between our practices and those of Milan Family Therapy. I also considered the role of narrative in constructing meaning within the life-world (Bruner, 1986, 2004), as well as Martin's (1994), and Martin and Gillespie's (2010) theory that an experience of agentic self-hood constituted within narrative in an embodied relationship with context, was central to any explanation of therapeutic change. I will now return to this theory in the light of my analysis of the parents' accounts.

7.6.2 *In order to experience the 'good' parents needed to do things differently.*

Milan cybernetics proposes that disruptions to habitual ways of being destabilises the systems and sub-systems within which individuals exist. (Becvar and Becvar, 2003). In chapter 3, I described the supportive contexts in which new rituals of relating were practiced,

the aim being to allow parents to experience an alternative and possibly more valued way of being in their relationships with their children.

Sally and Elly provided powerful descriptions of the dissonance and turbulence they experienced as they attempted to enact the strategies/rituals introduced to them. Sally represented herself as 'having the power stripped away' as she attempted to alter her usual approach. Elly described herself as overwhelmed at times by uncertainty, a sense of 'not knowing' perhaps induced by the effect of altering familiar circular patterns of relating (Becvar and Becvar, 2003). Although changes may have provoked some re-organisation within systems (Becvar and Becvar 2003, Jones 1993: 55-76), they may also have exposed some dilemmas: consider for example Sally's reflections on the role of her partner in the family, Elly's struggle to tolerate her daughter's expressions of strong emotions, and Rachel's struggle to manage time and finances.

The parents' accounts foregrounded the need for safe practice in psychology. Hearing their accounts I was concerned that the disequilibrium created by doing things differently was too great a risk to the well-being of parents and to the functioning of their systems. Although Sally's and Elly's accounts suggest that disequilibrium is a necessary catalyst to change (Becvar and Bevar 2003, Jones 1993:55-76), Elly's account perhaps reminds us as practitioners to consider the risks of destabilisation when negotiating interventions, or giving advice. Sally and Elly referred to their sense of commitment to the intervention and the regular contact with professionals and the group as sustaining them which supports the assertion that making changes requires a supportive containing context (Hayward, 2003).

Perhaps related to this is the need to consider the meaning of lack of change, or lack of engagement. Although Rachel described some changes made in her patterns of relating to her son she did not represent herself as experiencing turbulence as a consequence. In cybernetic theory this might suggest a disengagement with the intervention (Becvar and Becvar 2003, Jones 1993:55-76). As previously discussed the particular 'good' Rachel was oriented to may have been to maintain survival, or 'functionality' in her systems. Involvement in the programme may have exposed dilemmas which Rachel perhaps felt could not be resolved in the systems as they were. It is also important to acknowledge that the changes we proposed through our narrative of parenting may not have seemed achievable, or desirable, they may have represented a culturally specific form of relating which was not meaningful or motivating to Rachel (Burman, 1994: 77-93).

7.6.3 *Embodiment and narrative: Knowledge written into systems.*

Eco-systemic theory is often used to provide a rationale for assessment and intervention (BPS 1999, Kelly et al 2008). In this study, in evaluating this programme, I am exploring to what extent an existential-phenomenological ontology can underpin systemic thinking and contain a theory of change. I would like to propose that to do so might allow us as psychologists to acknowledge, respect, and work with the value-seeking purposes of those who engage with us.

As previously described we often need to engage with Cartesian models of personhood expressed by others, in particular those where action is assumed to be the outcome of rational

cognition. Phenomenology makes no clear distinction between person, (body and mind), and context.

> We find the life world meaningful primarily with respect to the
> ways in which we act within it and which act upon us.
>
> Kuper, 2005, p116

Phenomenology also offers a perspective on the role of the professional who intervenes. Kuper describes the relationship between an embodied knowing and developing forms of practice. Specifically, doing things differently opens a space in which other forms of practice can be considered. I believe this may be a way of conceiving of our activity working alongside parents and in schools

> As living bodies of knowing these respond to meaningful questions,
> problems or claims posed to someone through embodied or
> situational conditions and contexts.
>
> Kuper, 2005, p116.

For Bruner language becomes the vehicle through which the body makes sense of and orientates to the life-world (1986: 3-10). Kuper, drawing upon the work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, links narrative and embodiment to the phenomenological concept of intentionality. She suggests that the experience of the body in context and the narrative expression, the constitution of knowing, is coloured by the 'perspective of intentionality' (Kuper, 2006: 116). This perspective encourages me to speculate that as practitioners, with the aim of exploring possibilities for change, we may, in community contexts, be more able

to perceive and communicate our own embodied intentionality and so more easily rework our narratives, with others.

However, previously in this discussion I have considered to what extent our ideology/narrative of parenting is adopted by parents. A phenomenological perspective might allow me to propose another, more fundamental, hypotheses in relation to parents' experience of such narratives, and their engagement with agencies such as ourselves. Where a person's relationship with the world has become problematic, it may be necessary to consider how the context of experience might be arranged so as to draw them out into a more valued relationship with the world. Much of the language of intervention around children and parents is concerned with 'behaviour change' (Evans et al, 2004). Problems are often identified within persons. Rather than focus on individual deficits or problems an eco-systemic and phenomenological/ narrative perspective might prompt us to ask: What experiences and narratives of value might encourage persons to engage with systems? How might a dialogical process support a person to explore their own value-seeking within their life-world? This will be considered in the following section of this discussion.

7.7   The relationship context of change.

7.7.1   *Introduction*

In this discussion so far I have considered the relevance of existential theories of embodiment in the context of collaborative work, and attempts to share the life-world of clients, in my hypothesising around a theory of change in this particular intervention. Studies

which identify a positive relationship experience between client and therapist as the most influential factor in securing good outcomes, are often quoted. I will now consider relationships, and specifically whether parents' experience of relationships within the group was helpful and supported their purposes.

7.7.2 *The experience of meaningful conversations (the narratives of others) provides hope that change can take place*

Gergen (1999), Suissa (2006, 2013) and Smith (2010, 2011) suggest that it is in the contexts of relationships that alternative values to those imposed by culture can emerge. I interpret their position in the following way: relationships may be a liminal space from which it is possible to reflect upon, (perhaps to re-experience, within the body) experiences and the habitual assumptions, thoughts and feelings which constitute them (Felder and Robbins, 2011). I have also been interested in how our ideology, our narrative of parenting, has figured in the process we have been engaged with. Part of my concern has been rooted in ethics: I wonder, and perhaps worry about, the possibility of us, as professionals, imposing our views, thus adding to the oppressive load experienced by parents, and undermining our relationship.

The parent group was the context in which this ideology was shared and explicitly presented as our preferred way of thinking about parenting. Although it is clear that this narrative cannot be isolated from the social, and power infused, context in which it was spoken, our aim was to keep alive the possibility of critique, this being integral to our ideas about respect in relationships. Gergen recognises the depth of meaning ideology contains but

suggests that within a social constructionist paradigm, it is not necessary or possible to hold that our 'truths' are true, to others.

> On this view the value of ideological critique remains paramount: to engage in critique is to defend a mode of life, a tradition, a network of human relationships. At the same time the critic is not left in the arrogant and indefensible position of claiming the 'truly true'.

> Gergen, 1999, p155

Elly and Sally identified the group context as supportive of their efforts to make changes in their lives; in particular they found hearing the other parents' stories as helping them to stay hopeful, to feel less alone, as well as to make sense of their experiences generally. Their statements suggest that changing one's relationship with the world is supported by a sense of belonging, of being socially included. However I would like to suggest that relationships within the group allowed for a dialogue and that this was integral to a change process.

Gergen theorizes that a carefully orchestrated dialogical process can be transformative, even between those in conflict (1999: 42-164). Although our parents were not particularly inclined to be adversarial, with ourselves or others, we sought to hear different perspectives, and to engage with them. In this sense I feel that Gergen's theory is informative and relevant to our group process. Gergen identifies the hearing of personal stories early in the process as important, and this resonates with my experience of working with the parent group. Within these stories purposes, values, dilemmas and uncertainties tend to be represented.

> Answers to the first two questions typically yielded a variety of
> personal experiences, often stories of great pain, loss and suffering.
> Participants also revealed many doubts, and found themselves
> surprised to learn that people on the other side had any uncertainties
> at all.

<div align="center">Gergen,1999, p155</div>

Gergen also identifies the embodied responses of those hearing stories as allowing them to feel to some extent as though they were the speaker. Elly, in her account, describes herself as being able to feel hope, listening to other parents who described their struggle to do things differently, and finally their success. The 'abstract' nature of our narrative, of 'attachment', and 'child-development' etc, may have been made more meaningful, and possibly, believable, through the story-telling of parents.

> There are at least three reasons that story-telling expressions are
> desirable for transformative dialogue. First they are easily
> comprehensible: from our earliest years we are exposed to the story
> or narrative form, and we are more fully prepared to understand than
> in the case of abstract arguments. Further stories can invite fuller
> audience engagement than abstract ideas. In hearing stories we
> generate images, thrive on the drama, suffer and celebrate with the
> speaker. Finally the personal story tends to generate acceptance as
> opposed to resistance. If it is 'your story, your experience' then I can
> scarcely say, 'you are wrong'.

<div align="center">Gergen, 1999, p158-159</div>

The broader context of the intervention and the shared activities which were also part of the programme may also contribute to transformative dialogue in settings which might be more

obviously 'therapeutic' in purpose and method. Gergen speculates that, in order to be transformative, dialogue needs to take place within the context of ritualised and co-ordinated social experience.

> .....transformative dialogue may thrive on just such efforts toward mutual co-ordination. Thus if we are to generate meaning together we must develop smooth and re-iterative patterns of interchange- a dance in which we move harmoniously together.

> Gergen,1999, p160

This way of understanding the conditions necessary for transformational dialogue has implications for the contexts in which psychology is practised, but also for social justice more generally: in order to trust those with whom we engage we need to feel on safe ground, that we are to be treated with respect, as equals. Sally's perception that while in the programme she was 'not own her own' encourages me to think that we were to some extent successful in our aim in creating a temporary community in which parents felt safe and valued. This may have been a necessary pre-condition for any process of change.

7.8   Implications for educational and child psychologists

7.8.1   *Introduction to discussion*

As educational and child psychologists we are usually called upon to identify children's needs, give advice, or provide an intervention which is informed by an evidence base, or

coherently linked to psychological theory. The intervention which is the focus of this inquiry is representative of these professional purposes.

However, my starting point in this research was my growing discomfort with the psychological theory generally used to account for change within the parenting intervention I work within, and within parenting programmes more generally. I felt that the theory did not account for my experience, and did not provide a therapeutic model of change. Parker suggests that critical psychology should seek to break open theories, to consider them as ideologies (2005: 88-89), that the purpose of research perhaps is to examine what this process might reveal. In examining parents' experience of a psychological intervention from the perspective of value I adopted a philosophical perspective, and critiqued psychology from this position. In the following discussion I will consider what the implications for practice this critique might offer educational psychology.

7.8.2   *Working with parents: Engaging with unique narratives of value.*

As discussed in the introduction to this work the focus of much of the literature and cultural discourse around parenting is upon identifying 'effective techniques' and 'parenting style' as well as the environmental stressors which might undermine a person's capacity to look after their child (DfE 2011, Moran et al 2004). In this study I have taken a different approach, inquiring into parents' value-seeking, their efforts to live the 'good life'. In doing so I have elicited unique accounts of three parents' efforts to achieve states of being which have existential value to them. I suggest that eliciting these narratives helped, both myself, and the parents, to make sense of their present circumstances with their children.

In a therapeutic approach informed by narrative theory, it is assumed that humans orientate towards valued purposes, and that explicit acknowledgement of this creates a respectful alliance between client and therapist (Epston and White 1992, Morgan 2005, Winslade and Monk, 1999). Such respectful inquiry may help EP's address the potential for increased marginalisation of those whose struggles have identified them as being in need of 'assessment' or 'intervention'. Although this research is located within a particular practice context I think it is likely that such dialogue, wide-ranging and oriented towards value-seeking, and therefore respectful of the dilemmas such a perspective raises, can contribute to a shared empathic understanding which then becomes the basis of the joint-problem solving activities central to the EP role.

In the programme we explicitly communicated our particular narrative of parenting. This might be understood as being our psychological 'advice', or psychological 'knowledge'. Analysis of the parents' accounts suggests that our advice/knowledge provoked dis-equilibrium within systems. Parents described finding change de-stabilising, and difficult to achieve. However, they also represented themselves as being sustained by the interpersonal support of the temporary 'intervention' community and as achieving new and important insights through the experience of thinking differently and doing things differently. There are several problem-solving models commonly used within EP practice, for example (Monsen and Frederickson, 2008). These models include cyclical review: it is generally thought to be good practice for educational psychologists to monitor the process of change and the effects of the 'knowledge' they introduce into the systems. Such networks often arise naturally, for example within a school community. However it may be important to build into problem solving a network of support, of on-going dialogue in which the experience of those involved

can be contained. In any problem solving process it may also be helpful to consider the circularity within and across systems, specifically the unfolding meanings within the life-world provoked by some change. Such dialogue with its emphasis upon 'being' may help to counter 'instrumentality' implicit within the 'doing' involved with following a plan or implementing a strategy, or where psychology is 'applied'. It may lead to the 'reflexivity' which informs and sustains 'relational being' (Gergen 1999, Smith 2010, 1011, Suissa 2006, 2013). It may lead to a critical approach to psychology as it is applied (Parker, 2005). What I feel this work may have delineated is that 'psychological advice/knowledge' has questionable validity, in an epistemological and ethical sense, beyond an embodied dialogical, collaborative community context in which the meaning-making is never fore-closed. This may be of particular ethical concern at a time where local authorities and national government are once again re-configuring service delivery and the educational psychology role. For example, less direct contact between psychologist and client may be the result.

7.8.3 *Particular contexts encourage commitment, as well as particular circumstances. What are we asking parents to commit to?*

Miltenburg and Singer (2000) suggest that commitment to a group, belief system or ideology sustains a person's determination to make changes in line with what they 'know' to be good. One of the parents, in this study, stated that she needed to have 'faith' that the programme would help her. She also suggested that her situation was desperate: adversity may have motivated her to make a commitment.

I feel that several points for practice emerge from this analysis. Firstly our intervention was a community with its own ideology. Commitment therefore offered relationships and a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging, to a team, a knowledge community or a school may be important for change. Secondly, commitment was the outcome of narrative exchange: we told our story, parents told us theirs, meetings were arranged and the pattern of our relating established. How support is offered may be crucial. We may need to attend, as practitioners, to how we communicate our values and intentions and prepare the social context so as to create the trust necessary for relationships and 'transformative dialogue'. Such attention may have structural and interpersonal dimensions, as raised in the previous section of this discussion. In situations where trust and co-operation break down it may be crucial that we advocate for the less powerful, highlight rights and responsibilities within the immediate and wider community. In this way we may help to ameliorate the sense of exclusion experienced.

7.8.4 *Towards a model of therapeutic change.*

Martin (1994) makes a case for the development of a theory of change which can capture the complexity of real world contexts and the effects of psychological intervention in everyday practice. He proposes that, to develop such a theory, explorative work would be necessary in order to generate hypotheses which could then be explored through further work. This is what I have tried to achieve in this research. Through asking, how parents know what is 'good' in their lives and in parenting, and through examining their responses through the lens of existential-phenomenological and systems theory I have developed some hypotheses and perhaps some tentative theory as to how this psychological intervention may have supported change.

I have formulated 'change' as an alteration in a person's relationship with the world. This has involved some re-working of beliefs, enough turbulence so as to promote the reflexivity that might be required for this, the embodied experience of 'doing' things differently, in the context of a community in which an ideology of 'how to **be** a parent' was dialogically shared and tested through experience. I have also hypothesised that it was important that parents experienced a sense of 'belonging' to a group, and trust in professionals as fundamental to their engagement with a dialogical process which may have been transformative. Within the parents' narratives it was clear that their world extended in time and place, and that their relationships and purposes were meaningfully embedded in this wider experience. The outcome of 'change' and 'no change' has therefore to be understood in relation to the micro and macro systems and how these are experienced by persons.

7.8.5 *Educational psychology and ideologies of parenting and child-care circulating in culture.*

Perhaps central to this intervention and research is the dialogue around relationships with children. In their accounts parents refer to alternative narratives available in culture and all express in various ways some confusion they have about the multiple perspectives available. Within this intervention the Cartesian rational-choosing child and the pathological child were powerful explanatory narratives which we might be viewed as attempting to displace with our preferred narrative, which might be described as the 'embodied-relational child'. This dialogical process, extending across systems is visible in the parents' accounts I believe. I think it is likely that educational psychologists engage with these competing narratives

270

frequently in their practice contexts, and in doing so, articulate a professional narrative around child/adult relating similar to ours. So, as psychologists, in meetings, we engage with powerful voices in culture, perhaps amplified through the media where education and entertainment purposes are entwined. In line with our systemic and dialogical models of practice we might reasonably expect that as a profession our purposes in meetings might be supported through a more public expression of commitment to our valued theories of relating. As I outlined in the introduction to this thesis this may require us to be confident about our evidence base, to articulate clearly the value we are trying to achieve through the application of psychology, and to be clear about the kinds of psychology we are applying. This may depend upon us being clear about such questions as, what is a child, what is a relationship and how do we imagine the ways humans and environments interact?

7.8.6   *Ontological positions: When we talk about persons what do we mean?*

For Martin (1994), how we talk about a person derives from ontological assumptions about personhood. As practitioners we are often in situations where children's needs are not being met, where there is a question about 'care' and 'learning'. We often engage in consultations with narrow ideas of 'behaviour management' and 'achievement', endeavouring to turn conversations towards a consideration of the barriers to inclusion, learning and well-being. In doing so we are perhaps trying to articulate a level of experience in which a person's relationship with the world is made visible. This raises the question of value. Specifically we might be exploring how the young person might be enabled to achieve a more valued (by them) relationship with their world. In such dialogue assumptions about what a person is may remain unexplored.

Within educational psychology there are voices calling for a debate around ontology. Psychologists may be overly attached to a limited range of theory with which they are familiar (Fox, 2011). There is also concern around eclectic engagement with theory not well grounded in a coherent ontology and epistemology (Todd, 2009). This eclecticism is evident in this programme and is partly what has motivated me to explore a more philosophically oriented phenomenological and relational perspective. In doing so, I have gained a deeper and more confident understanding of my own position in relation to these issues. However, the problem of how to engage with others' views of personhood remains: a problem which has ethical and personal dimensions. Perhaps Gergen (1999), with his theory of transformative dialogue, offers educational psychology a way forward, one which allows us to confidently develop a knowledge base in theory and practice, but also to hold onto to our practices of problem-solving dialogue, that is, to engage respectfully and productively with the multiple perspectives of others whilst expressing our own. If as psychologists we can offer knowledge, this allows us to take a strong position in relation to the good, for example what kind of experiences might be valuable to a young person. Through transformative dialogue we may promote reflexivity in others, and ways of being with others which are in line with this good. This is an aspect of our practice which may require more theorizing.

7.9   Limitations of this research

In this work I have generated a number of hypotheses regarding parents' experience of value and how they can be supported to achieve value in their relationships with their children. From this I have developed a tentative theory of change. The research took place

within a very specific context and involved a very small sample and this needs to be taken into consideration when evaluating its limitations.

A narrative method was used which allows for multiple readings. My own particular reading relates to the theory described in chapters 1-4 of this work. I have included extensive quotes from interview transcripts within the analysis section (chapter 5) so as to allow alternative readings. The full transcripts are available in the appendices.

7.10   Recommendations for future research

In this research I have explored the experience of value and change in a particular practice context. It may be possible to apply this perspective to other contexts in which educational psychologists practise. The search for value may be relevant to teachers applying curriculum, interventions to support peer-group relationships, young people's engagement with social media, group work to address self-harming behaviour, to give some examples. Continuing research using a psychological ontology, such as Martin's (1994, 2003) model of therapeutic change, would emphasise embodied relational being and perhaps help to counter individualistic psychological understandings which threaten to oppress and marginalise the vulnerable (Parker 2005, Goodley 2012, Eccleston 2012).

The hypotheses I have generated are tentative and further research might usefully explore their usefulness in similar and different contexts.

7.11 Conclusion

In this research I have explored three parents' experience of a group parenting intervention in which I was professionally involved. I was particularly interested in the possibility that a search for value in their experience was an aspect of any change which took place. Within parents' narrative accounts unique perspectives on value emerged. Parents had valued purposes to which they oriented. Sometimes this value concerned survival, physical and psychological, at others a search for meaning. Parents' intense preoccupation with some valued purposes distracted them from their relationships with their children. Through the intervention the parents seemed to reflect upon their value seeking and become more able to resolve dilemmas where particular valued purposes conflicted. Two of the parents described themselves as experiencing a greater value in their relationships with their children as a consequence of their experience in the intervention.

The parents represented themselves as very sensitive to cultural narratives of parenting. The intervention can be considered an intense exposure to a relational narrative of parenting in a temporary community in which practical engagement with these ideas is supported. Parents experienced a change of perspective in response to the narrative we shared, although it was also evident that alternative narratives, for example, those which pathologise children's behaviour, or construct them as rational-choosing beings, were also present, and possibly undermining of our 'therapeutic' purpose.

This work might also be considered an exploration of the 'value' of psychology, as well as my own valued purposes as a practising psychologist. I have critiqued and explored a range of psychological perspectives and explored the boundary between philosophy and

psychology. My ambivalence regarding behaviourism has been strengthened as it seemed, at times, to undermine the embodied-relational understanding we were trying to promote: the sense of 'instrumentality' expressed in behaviourist strategies may have worked against a deeper or wider reflection upon experience. Through exploration of theory and examination of theory in relation to parents' experience I was able to connect my relational perspective, and my curiosity about change, to phenomenological psychology. A phenomenological ontology seemed to allow for psychological change and development, the influence of ideology (and power speaking through ideology), the interactivity of systems, and the embodied relationship between persons and their world. In this way I was able to generate a 'heuristic' theory of change which may help to make sense of other practice situations, and which might be usefully explored in further research (Martin, 1994: 14-15).

Since I began working in this parenting intervention I have sensed that it provided possibilities for the 'application' of psychology beyond the 'disciplinary' (Scheer 2011, Foucault, 1977). An exploration of parents' experience of value has given me an opportunity to explore this possibility. Facilitating parents' voice has allowed a complex picture to emerge, one which invites respect for parents' efforts to seek value, to manage their lives in difficult circumstances, but also informs as to how we might provide alternative experiences for those struggling with parenting, so as to alter ways of thinking and feeling, and ways of being.

To conclude, I would like to comment on Parker's proposal regarding emancipatory psychological research as I believe this may also have relevance for practice.

> So the task of the qualitative researcher is to produce this kind of
> knowledge in a way which is different from this popular view, to

275

enable accounts and modes of activity usually hidden from psychology to come to light.

<div align="right">Parker, 2005, p7</div>

Previous research into parenting and parenting programmes might be said to have provided some insight into patterns of relating associated with 'good' and 'bad' outcomes for children (Kochanska et al 2008, Moran et al 2004). However, such 'findings' are usually presented as dislocated from context and experience, and as a consequence, provide limited opportunities for the practitioner who is engaged in hypothesising around possibilities for change. However, a focus upon experience (in research and practice) exposes the dilemmas, opportunities and barriers experienced by those who seek value and meaning in their lives, those who may be engaging with (or avoiding) the 'absurdity' which adversity threatens to reveal. An examination of the practices of parenting, an experience of intense value to many, may therefore provide insights for psychologists more generally.

<u>Epilogue</u>

In the opening chapter of this thesis I described the curiosity, uncertainty, and dilemmas which I have brought to this research. Perhaps my greatest uncertainty has been in relation to knowledge, the knowledge often applied to parenting, and the validity of the knowledge claimed by psychology. As a psychological practitioner I am expected to 'know' how to parent well, and to apply this knowledge in a way which is helpful. It is easy, I feel, for a straightforward and understandable expectation such as this to become reduced, in practice, to a model of 'expertise'. In this way my uncertainty about 'knowledge' becomes connected to my uncertainty about 'role'. Yet the complexity involved in 'intervening', hopefully conveyed within this thesis, would suggest that 'expertise', if such a thing is relevant to a practitioner, cannot in itself be reduced to certain understandings as to what a parent should 'do', or even how they should 'be'. Dialogue and reflexivity seemed central to any change which took place: the process of meaning-making an incessant accompaniment to our social activity. As psychological practitioners we worked alongside our 'clients' and witnessed our ideas connecting to complex circumstances. The consequences of this were not usually a simple, linear unfolding of cause and effect. I am reminded of Aristotle's concept of 'practical wisdom' (Aristotle, 350 B.C., 1996). There is a need for reflexivity and circumspection in the application of 'knowledge' which is evident in collaborative work such as this.

Concerns about psychological knowledge and how it is applied underpin Parker's view that psychology can be oppressive (2005). I have been interested, in this work, in exploring the idea that psychology can liberate and strengthen people who are in precarious circumstances. In order to do this I began to explore psychological theory which is rooted firmly within, or

compatible with, a phenomenological ontology. Some of this theory is well established in educational psychology, for example, Vygotsky, Bruner, and Bronfenbrenner. Existential theory is less so. Yet existential theory, psychology and philosophy, allow us to conceive of bodies and minds as existing in a symbiotic relationship with the world, a world which includes words, ideas, institutions and other manifestations and abstractions of power. For me, a psychology such as this is intrinsically political and compels me to question whether my practice is oppressive. Those who ask for our involvement can perhaps be conceived as asking for help in their relationship with their world. Although this formulation of 'role' may seem naively simple, it helps me, and may help educational psychology as a profession, to counter pressures to collude in the prioritising of processes of categorisation and de-normalization which often come from those who commission our services, and sometimes from parents themselves.

Reflecting now upon the process of this research it occurs to me that I began with the intuition that a focus on 'value' might be an important aspect of this reflexivity, but I was unsure about how a consciousness of value, knowing the 'good' and the 'bad', might function within a process of change. Emerging now from the long, three year, reflection, a period in which my understanding has developed through reading and thinking, I have a sense that this intuition is justifiable, perhaps vital. For the parents the practice of parenting existed alongside other important purposes. It was clear in their accounts that what was valued, even imperatively so, was shaped by experience, and part of this experience was culture. What was valued, and how value could be achieved, ideas formed through experience, were then expressed in their relationship with us as purpose, motivation, engagement and lack of engagement. I am strengthened in my view that value is neither static, nor intrinsic to persons. Rather, as an intervention, we had the opportunity to speak to,

(or speak of), value. I am inclined to think that where we were successful in working

collaboratively and respectfully with parents, it was achieved this way.

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