



School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

**MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH THE 'OTHER':
AN EXPLORATION OF MUTUALITY BETWEEN PARENTS
AND TEACHERS**

Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology

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Declaration

This thesis is being submitted for the award of Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. I declare that it is my own work and does not include material that is the work of others without acknowledgement, that I have consulted all materials cited, and have not submitted this assignment for any other academic award.

Joanne Buntin

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Overarching Abstract

This thesis problematises home-school 'partnership' and comprises three chapters: a systematic literature review, a bridging document and a piece of empirical research. In the systematic review I examine the role of social class in parent-school relationships and provide a synthesis from documented experiences of parents and teachers of both working and middle class backgrounds. The findings suggest that parental social class can impact on interactions with teachers in differing ways. Power was found to be embedded in school cultures and in the boundaries and receptivity between working and middle class parents and teachers. Reciprocal relationships were possible when local knowledge and community practices were rooted in school culture. The bridging document discusses my theoretical underpinnings, epistemological decisions and ethical considerations of the research and brings together the literature review and the research project. The empirical research explored whether mutuality was possible in parent-teacher relationships and if so its nature and role. Through conceptualising mutuality through a relational and dialogic lens I was interested to find out if there was potential to create conversations between parents and teachers which were jointly owned, non-goal directed and on-going and would go some way to creating more equitable participation. A participatory action research (PAR) framework was adopted with five mothers and five members of staff in a local primary school in the North East of England. Joint and separate sessions of parents and teachers took place over a seven month period. Relational approaches, based on narrative therapy and Video Interaction Guidance (VIG), were used and multiple forms of data were co-created. Parents and teachers identified what had been important about the way they were working together. Three processes that may have enabled mutuality to develop are discussed; i) making connections through the 'other', ii) outsider's perspective, and iii) creative tension in dialogue. This paper concludes that despite literature suggesting parent-school relationships almost always develop in the interests of the staff and school rather than parents from areas of socio-economic disadvantage, this research proposes that mutuality created the potential to move beyond existing power imbalances and towards more equitable practices.

Chapter 1. What is known about the role of social-class in parent-teacher relationships? A meta-ethnography

1.0 Abstract

Working in partnership with parents is central to education policies in the UK and elsewhere. Partnership suggests reciprocal and equal participation in decision making processes. However, researchers suggest that parent participation has been conceptualised from an institutional perspective and from the point of view of schools and education policy. Parents are often positioned as a homogenised group seldom taking into account social class, cultural differences and gender. In light of this, an approach was taken in this review that recognised the heterogeneity of parents and examined parent-school partnership more critically from the perspective of parents and teachers. A meta-ethnographic approach was applied to qualitative studies to examine the role of social class in parent-school relationships from documented experiences of parents and teachers of both working- and middle-class backgrounds. Seven studies were selected and a seven step systematic approach was applied which generated an interpretative synthesis and line of argument. The line of argument presents *power* as a core concept across studies. Different forms of implicit and explicit power were present in the relationships between middle- and working-class parents and teachers: traditional power in terms of hierarchy, status and authority; and discursive power related to knowledge production and the ability to act. *Power* is presented as a dynamic influence in relation to three interrelated concepts: *school culture*, *boundaries* and *receptivity* in terms of how middle- and working- class parents and teachers experienced the other. These concepts are discussed in relation to the findings in the studies and supported by relevant theory and research. In light of this review methodological limitations are presented and possibilities for future research are discussed.

1.1 Parental involvement in schools

Since the 1970's in the UK parental involvement in schools has been encouraged (Plowden, 1967). Around the same time in many other countries arguments were made for increased parental participation (Dimmock, O'Donoghue, & Robb, 1996). For example in the US federal initiatives such as Head Start provided resources for disadvantaged communities that were conditional on the involvement of parents. The benefits of involving parents in children's formal education has been widely reported (e.g., Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Peters, Seeds, Goldstein, & Coleman, 2008). Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) suggest in their large scale review that parental involvement has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment even with other variables accounted for. Legislative frameworks and education policies in England have outlined ways in which schools can involve parents by providing them with a voice and encouraging parental partnerships in schools (Department for Education, 2013; Department for Education and Employment, 1997, 1998; Department for Education and Skills, 2001, 2003).

However, whilst policies have outlined broader strategies, the extent and nature of involvement in schools by parents is often varied. A wide range of practices exist that often include 'top down' interventions aimed at 'a perceived insufficiency of parental involvement' (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003 p.84). Furthermore, within the broader parent-partnership literature, parents have reported feeling disempowered in their relationships with professionals where professional discourse is often valued above others and where school staff can inhibit the accessibility of schools to certain groups of parents (Crozier, 2000; Crozier & Reay, 2005; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Todd & Higgins, 1998; Vincent, 2012).

1.2 Child development and parent-school relations

In the UK as in many societies, children are embedded in specific social and cultural contexts where they participate in divergent social practices across home and school that influence development (Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978). Yet development is often thought of as a 'natural' process evolving in a linear fashion over time and influenced by environmental factors (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Such development is measured against a universal set of milestones and expectations that assume child rearing practices are the same across institutions and communities. This can lead to an

assumption that children participate in similar activities across home and school when often practices can be very different (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010; Hedegaard & Fleer, 2008). Fleer and Hedegaard (2010) found that within the context of schooling, when teachers and other professionals' conceptualised development as natural and evolving, expectations about a child's behaviour and academic attainment were framed within a set of predetermined age related norms. In doing so no account was taken of the child's different home practices and activities resulting in teachers and professionals knowledge about development being put forward as the 'right and only way' (Fleer & Hedegaard, 2010 p.167).

One implication of this view of development for parent-school relations is that demands and expectations are placed on families to adhere to normative practices and ways of interacting based on a one-size fits all model of parenting that presumes white middle class values and beliefs (Vincent, 1996). This view is echoed in the literature on parent-school partnerships with Bastiani and Wolfendale (1996) stating that such a narrow conceptualisation fails to consider the situated and constructed nature of the relationship between teachers and parents in specific contexts. Todd (2008) makes the point that many of the current ways of working with parents fail to engage parents on their own terms as a diverse group. This suggests consideration that goes beyond viewing parents as a homogenous group is required to allow for some examination of the complexities that belie the interactions between parents and school staff. It therefore seemed appropriate given my interest in understanding parent-school relations from the perspective of those involved i.e. parents and school staff, that I applied a method that was based in the interpretive paradigm. With this in mind I undertook a meta-ethnography as proposed by Noblit and Hare (1988).

1.3 Method - Meta-ethnography

Meta ethnography is a way of comparing and synthesising qualitative studies into a 'holistic interpretation' (p.10 Noblit & Hare, 1988). This method considers how ideas, meanings and social phenomena might connect and interact. Noblit and Hare (1988) propose a seven stage process for synthesising qualitative research:-

1. Getting started
2. Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest
3. Reading the studies

4. Determining how the studies are related
5. Translating the studies into one another
6. Synthesising translations
7. Expressing the synthesis

The remainder of this systematic review will follow the process outlined above as a way of generating interpretive explanations of how social class affects parent-school relations. It is based on systematic comparison and synthesis of seven qualitative studies in this area. Although I followed this seven step process, it has been acknowledged previously that the approach adopted in qualitative synthesis 'cannot be reducible to mechanistic tasks' (Atkins et al., 2008 p.7). It should be noted that meta ethnographic approaches as outlined by other researchers were also used to guide this process (Atkins et al., 2008; Britten et al., 2002).

1.3.1 Getting started (Rationale)

Working in education for the past 20 years, I have become interested in how schools in different and similar sociocultural contexts engage with parents in meaningful dialogue and inclusive practices. The idea of schools working in partnership with parents is a growing feature of educational policies and practices. Partnership suggests reciprocal and equal participation in decision making processes. Yet defining the nature and purpose of partnership and the role parents ought or want to take within their children's schools is problematic.

1.3.1a Problematising home-school partnership

Researchers have argued that parental participation is too often conceptualised from an institutional perspective, from the point of view of schools and education policy (Crozier, 2000). Other researcher suggest that education and social policies have repositioned parents so they are increasingly called upon to be actively involved in their children's education and treated as a homogenous group seldom taking social class, cultural differences or gender into account (Hartas, 2014; Todd, 2008; Vincent, 2012). This can position parents who find it difficult to become involved, for a variety of reasons, as lacking or deficient in some way implying they do not care about education and lack aspirations for their children's future. Additionally, the emphasis on developing parental participation in schools perhaps overlooks the skills required by school staff to engage with parents and may fail to consider teacher's beliefs about the purposes of such partnerships (Dyson, Beresford, & Splawnyk, 2007).

Dyson et al. (2007) argue that many teachers and support staff have had no formal training in this area and are therefore lacking efficacy and confidence when it comes to facilitating participatory practices with parents.

1.3.1b Poverty, socio-economic status and disadvantage

It has been argued that the social class of parents including family income, parental education and occupational status is important because it gives a picture of the socio-economic life a child experiences on a daily basis (Predelli, France, & Dearden, 2008). Analyses from the Millennium Cohort Study found that socio-economic inequality has a significant effect on development during the early years most notably on language, literacy and social behaviour (Hartas, 2011, 2014). Furthermore, in the same study socio-economic status including parental income and education explained a bigger proportion of the variance than other factors such as parental involvement or aspirations in terms of children's language, literacy and social development during the primary years of education (Hartas, 2011). This would suggest that education policies which focus on improving parent participation and aspirations as a means to narrowing the achievement gap may overlook intrinsic disparities and inequalities in our society.

In recent years a number of researchers have examined the role of social class and parent-school relations by taking a critical approach to the middle-class model (e.g., Crozier, 1997; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Vincent, 2001). Lareau (1987) applies Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital to examine the interactions between parents and school personnel in white working and middle class communities. Sociological perspectives that consider the social and cultural positioning of parents and teachers in heterogenic contexts provide an important lens through which to consider beliefs, ideas, practices and constructions of self. It is beyond the scope of this review to provide a rich analysis of different theoretical sociological perspectives. However, by selecting studies that apply socio-cultural conceptual frameworks to the question of parent-school relations, it may be possible to generate further understandings and explanations within this field of study.

Furthermore, it has been argued elsewhere that understanding the psychology of social class within education is an area in need of some attention (Ostrove & Cole, 2003). Ostrove and Cole (2003) argue that whilst it is important to understand the

implications of poverty and material inequality there is also a need for psychology to critically examine how social class effects factors such as 'identity, attitudes, experiences of discrimination and various areas of functioning such as self-esteem and well-being' (p.680). Therefore this systematic review set out to analyse and synthesis existing literature to explore the ways in which social class may affect the interactions between parents and teachers. This was with a view to identifying how perceptions and beliefs about home-school relationships are influenced by the social and cultural positioning of parents and teachers.

In this review I aim to synthesise previous qualitative literature to explore how social class affects interactions between parents and teachers¹ and how parents and teachers view the relationship they have. Thus provide further explanations about the nature of home-school partnership and what this actually means for parents and schools, particularly for those who experience social inequalities and who live and work in marginalised communities struggling with poverty and disadvantage.

1.3.2 Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest

Noblit and Hare (1988) assert that in order to avoid making crude generalisations across a range of studies, the scope of a meta-ethnography will be more restricted than traditional meta-analyses. Rather than carry out an exhaustive search, they suggest it is appropriate to carry out a detailed focused search in order to select relevant studies as well as discussions with scholars in the chosen area. This method of selecting relevant papers has been used by others scholars to synthesise qualitative research (Britten et al., 2002). However, given the purpose of this review and pragmatic university requirements, I initially undertook a more traditional exhaustive approach to the search as adopted by Atkins et al. (2008). A traditional electronic database search (Scopus, Web of knowledge, ERIC, British Education Index) was undertaken between September and December 2012 using a combination of key search terms (described in Table 1). Additionally, a key informant in this area with knowledge of the literature suggested selected texts that provided further scope.

¹ The term teacher is used throughout this thesis but there is recognition that parents interact with other school staff. So 'teacher' may also include other members of school personnel unless defined otherwise.

1.3.2a Inclusion Decisions

The search generated fifteen papers that required further reading as the titles and abstracts alone made it difficult to make inclusion decisions (Atkins et al., 2008). This process ensured that the final papers included the perspectives of parents and teachers and also observational data examining the interactions between school staff and parents. In the end seven papers were selected for the purposes of the meta-ethnography: Reay (1999); O'Connor (2001); Lewis and Forman (2002); Crozier and Davies (2007); Katyal and Evers (2007); Blackmore and Hutchison (2010); F. Doucet (2011).

Table 1. Key search terms

How does social-class impact on the interactions between parents and teachers and how do they <i>view</i> the relationship they have?	
Parent-teacher relationships	Parent-teacher interactions; OR parent AND teacher; parent-teacher relation* ² parent-partnership parent involvement home-school AND partnership
Social class	Socio-economic Social depriv* social class working-class OR middle-class

1.3.3 Reading the studies

In order to become as familiar as possible with each paper's content, the next part of the meta-ethnography involved the reading and re-reading of the papers. A table was used to highlight demographic data including participant information, methods of data collection and research setting (see Table 2). All seven studies had a theoretical or conceptual framework that problematised the issue of parent participation. It has been suggested that theoretical or conceptual frameworks situate us within certain outcomes and implications for practice in relation to the problem (Anfara Jr & Mertz, 2006; Graue, 1999). The conceptual framework brings together

² Asterisk added to the term to search for variations of the word.

theories and experiences the researcher is utilising when conceptualising the study (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Therefore I felt this warranted some attention and so included theoretical frameworks in Table 2. Five of the seven studies utilised the concept of cultural capital to examine the impact of cultural and social reproduction in home-school relationships.

1.3.3a Cultural Capital

In order to examine social class through a more meaningful understanding of the behaviour and beliefs of parents and teachers, Bourdieu's concepts of cultural capital and habitus have been deployed by educational researchers in the UK and in the US (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Reay, 2001, 2004; Reay & Ball, 1997; Vincent, 2001). The critical approach to parent partnerships adopted by Lareau have focused on the role of social class, school culture and local contexts in shaping home-school relations (Lareau, 1987). Cultural capital has been defined in terms of 'institutionalized, i.e., widely shared, high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, formal knowledge, behaviours, goods and credentials) used for social and cultural exclusion' (Lareau & Weininger, 2003 p.587). The important aspect here is how culture is used as a resource enabling access to other resources highlighting the relational nature of status, power and authority. Within a Bourdieuan framework school is conceptualised as a system of classification which serves to exclude and include forming the basis for social order (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). It is through the various and interconnected forms of capital; economic, social, cultural and symbolic that power is recognised and produces advantage and disadvantage.

1.3.4 Determining how the studies are related

Interpretations and explanations in the original studies were treated as data and translated across the studies to produce a synthesis (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Summaries of key findings in each study were mapped using a grid format which helped identify metaphors and concepts. This process enabled some consideration of similarities and differences between papers. Many related concepts became apparent quite quickly through the reading process e.g., 'making contact', 'status', 'power', 'roles', 'being listened to', 'parenting ability'. Through looking at the overlaps and relationship between the key concepts, first and second order interpretations became identifiable. It is suggested that in a qualitative synthesis, studies can relate to one another based on one of three assumptions: i) assumption of similarity –

studies may be directly comparable as reciprocal translations; ii) assumption of difference - studies may stand in opposition to one another as refutational translations; iii) assumption of inference that goes beyond the parts and says something about the whole organisation or culture - taken together studies may represent a line of argument (Noblit & Hare, 1988). At this stage, I made assumptions that a synthesis of the studies could be taken together to represent a line of argument. Two steps were involved in the process: translating the studies into one another to form a synthesis; and then translating the studies into an interpretive order so that a theoretical line of argument was generated. The next sections will outline these steps followed by a discussion based on the line of argument.

1.3.5 Translating the studies into one another

In order to be transparent about my interpretation of the relationships between the studies a coding grid was created (see Table 3). This process of mapping concepts with findings helped identify relationships across studies. The papers revealed nine concepts that embodied ways in which social class affected parent-teacher relationships. I was able to see where findings and concepts overlapped revealing the most influential concepts across all of the studies. This led to the development of second and third order interpretations.

Table 2. Demographic data and theoretical frameworks utilised in each study

Study	Sample	Data Collection	Setting	Theoretical framework
Reay (1999)	33 Mothers of Year 5 children (1/3 sample lone mothers Mixed ethnicity and class) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o 14 Middle Class o 12 Working Class o 7 ambivalent about class positioning <p>Primary school teachers from working – and middle- class backgrounds</p>	Demographic data Self-identify in social class terms Observational recordings of formal and informal contact between parents and teachers. Over 18 month period – In-depth interviews with mothers	UK 2 Primary schools: School A – Multi-ethnic working class school inner city School B – White middle class suburb	Bourdieu's (1977) linguistic and cultural capital. Attempts to recognise complexities of social class positioning.
Lewis and Forman (2002)	Parents Middle- and Working- Class School staff	Ethnographic approach Detailed observations of everyday interactions between parents and school staff.	USA 2 Contrasting elementary schools: School A – Middle Class suburb, reputation for having a very active and involved parents School B – Economically disadvantaged area, reputation for extensive parent participation	Bourdieu's (1977) cultural capital and habitus. Focus on the role of social class and school culture and local contexts in shaping home-school relations. Relational nature of status, power and authority
Crozier and Davies (2007)	157 Households 591 Parents and Children 20 Case study Families 69 Teachers and Youth workers	Focus groups In-depth interviews Observational data	UK 2 areas in north east of England Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities 8 primary schools 5 secondary schools	Critical approach to parent partnership – recognition of how professional discourses can shape relationships between professionals, children and parents. Examination of cultural, organisational, institutional and political influences.
Katyal and Evers (2007)	<i>International school:</i> 6 Parents 5 Teachers (all Caucasian) <i>Chinese girl school:</i> 5 Parents 5 Teachers (4 Chinese, 1 Caucasian) <i>Government aided school:</i> 1 Parent (Philippine) 5 Teachers (all Chinese)	Interviews	Hong Kong 3 Secondary Schools: <i>International school</i> – emphasis on pastoral care program <i>Chinese girl school</i> – reputation for its body of caring teachers <i>Government aided school</i> – keen to view itself as a learning organisation	Epstein's (1987) parent involvement model contrasted with Lareau's critical perspective on parental involvement which utilises Bourdieu's cultural capital theory. Epstein's model is a framework for a strategy of action based on the assumption that many parents are not involved and should be.

Study	Sample	Data Collection	Setting	Theoretical framework
O'Connor (2001)	17 Staff (15F, 2 M) including: The principal, teachers, Special Educational Needs teachers, librarian, counsellor 15 Parents (majority white, working class – high school educated or less)	Demographic data Interviews	USA Inner city elementary school Poor working class area	Lareau's theory about the separation of working class and middle class parents in education.
Blackmore and Hutchison (2010)	8 Teachers (from primary and secondary sectors of the school) 1 Principal 7 Parents (all mothers)	Interviews	Australia Case study 1 School: Kindergarten -Year 12 Culturally diverse inner city suburb Majority low-income families Large proportion of single-parent families Diverse student population – 32 language backgrounds School offers alternative programmes based on Steiner and Montessori approaches	Feminist critical policy analysis focusing on the discursive constructions of parental involvement through policy. Bourdieuian framework utilised – recognising the power of the various and interconnected forms of capital – economic, social, cultural and symbolic – that produce advantage and disadvantage. Conceptualisation of school as a system of classification which serves to exclude and include forming the basis for social order.
Doucet (2011)	54 Parents (1.5/2 nd generation Haitian) Students (US born – 2 nd generation) of Haitian descent School personnel Community members and leaders	Data from two previous studies by the same researcher Structured interviews Ethnographic observations Formal and informal conversations – field notes	USA 4 Public schools	Turner's (1975) concept of 'root paradigms' of socio-cultural rituals to point out three underlying metaphors in the ritual system of parental involvement. Critical Theory used to problematize and engage the narrow construction of parental involvement

Table 3. Overlapping concepts/themes interpreted from the studies

Concepts	Reay (1999)	O’Conner, (2001)	Lewis and Forman (2002)	Katyal & Evers (2007)	Crozier & Davies (2007)	Blackmore & Hutchison (2010)	Doucet (2011)
<i>Discrepancies in the status and authority between parents and teachers</i>	Social class afforded different positions of authority. In contrast to most of the MC ³ mothers, WC ⁴ mothers rarely had a sense of entitlement to be heard or of certainty that what they said was right.	SES and deficit of social power of families reinforced inequality in relationships between parents and teachers. Parent’s implicit trust in schools expertise.	Social class was not an easy predictor of parent participation Status differences fundamentally influenced the nature of home-school interactions.	Content of parent-teacher communication lay in the hands of school administration. Hierarchy of school system fostered a culture of authority and power.	Balance of power in the hands of school at best only ‘allowed’ parents to support them in ways based on schools decisions. Parents aware of power differences in terms of knowledge and expertise of teachers vs parents	Power not entrenched in the hands of school personnel and interactions were often social than official.	Top-down process – with school people as the experts.
<i>Positioning of parents by school</i>	Process of infantilism. Treating WC mothers as children. Feeling reprimanded and told off like a “naughty school girl”.	Parents positioned as incompetent, powerless and unequal in the parent-teacher relationship.	MC parents positioned by staff as clients and consumers and often resented by staff. WC parents viewed as mutual partners and collaborators – expert status applied to parents with regard their children. Parents did not occupy traditional roles.	Parents positioned as providers of resources and aspirations.	Deficit model of parenting emphasised by school – belief that Bangladeshi parents were not interested in their children’s education. Mothers described by some male head teachers as: ‘drudges’, ‘deficient’ ‘damaging in their parenting skills’.	Tension between recognising the diversity of parent groups and succumbing to society’s prejudicial views of diverse communities.	Deficit based views by school personnel of culturally diverse communities.

³ MC = Middle Class

⁴ WC = Working Class

Concepts	Reay (1999)	O'Conner, (2001)	Lewis and Forman (2002)	Katyal & Evers (2007)	Crozier & Davies (2007)	Blackmore & Hutchison (2010)	Doucet (2011)
<i>Use of knowledge</i>	Educational capital enabled MC mothers to initiate more contact and communicated more criticism to teachers than WC mothers (who were apologetic or accusatory). MC mothers more likely to write/ phone or request to have a meeting with the teacher " <i>I have to talk to you urgently</i> ".	Teachers questioned ability of parents to help in the education of their children. Parents " <i>don't feel comfortable</i> " when put on the spot to read and write.	<u>White MC school:</u> Struggles between parents and staff over what counts as legitimate school knowledge. <u>Contrasted with diverse WC school:</u> Teachers communicated regularly that they valued parents' knowledge and input.	Where teachers and parents had similar educational qualifications obvious cultural differences including class were not an issue between parents and teachers.	Information was passed between families lessening the need to speak directly to school.	Local knowledge played a pivotal role in the success of parent-teacher interactions by sustaining community participation in education. Linguistic and social capital of multi-ethnic community not easy to transform into useable educational capital within the school.	Linguistically, Culturally, and Socioeconomically Diverse (LCSD) parents lacking information about the 'rules' of schooling. Not part of formal and informal networks.
<i>Being heard and listened to</i>	MC mothers refused to accede to teacher's judgments when there were disagreements. Entitlement to be heard. WC mothers rarely had a sense of entitlement to be heard or of certainty that what they said was right. " <i>like talking to a brick wall</i> " (parent)	Parents felt that a request for public dialogue was " <i>just for show</i> " because ultimately " <i>they're just going to do what they're going to do</i> ". Teachers: felt they had closer relationships " <i>breaking down the barriers with active parents</i> ".	<u>White MC school:</u> Teachers felt scrutinised by parents. Parents asserted their right to participate in school. <u>Contrasted with diverse WC school:</u> Discussion and disagreement a necessary part of a 'no closed doors' philosophy in relation to parent participation.		Parents treated as passive in the face of school demands. No consultation about what parents need/want to support their involvement.	MC parents possessed the economic, social, cultural capital necessary for confident participation in school activities	Haitian parent's voices fell on 'deaf ears'. Parents aspirations for their children were dismissed as unrealistic and naïve.

Concepts	Reay (1999)	O'Conner, (2001)	Lewis and Forman (2002)	Katyal & Evers (2007)	Crozier & Davies (2007)	Blackmore & Hutchison (2010)	Doucet (2011)
<i>Parent/teacher role expectations</i>	<p>MC mothers retained a sense of being experts about their children.</p> <p>WC mothers expressed internal contradiction reflecting their ambivalent role in school context against the 'expert' teacher.</p>	<p>Mixed messages about the role of parents in school which maintain the separation of roles between parents and teachers.</p> <p>Teacher's perceived having to take on 'additional burdens' because "<i>parents aren't doing their job</i>" in meeting the basic needs of their children.</p>	<p>Role of parents viewed differently in contrasting schools. Traditional parent roles presented new challenges vs. inventing new roles for all community members.</p>	<p>Delineation of roles between parents and school staff likened to that of professional and client</p> <p>Teachers did not see themselves as partners with parents in terms of academic progress and development</p> <p>ONLY in so much as having shared responsibility for socialisation of children.</p>	<p>Parents viewed their role: to provide a supportive home and family background and develop family values.</p> <p>Schools view of home-school relations based on ensuring compliance and either 'expert or transplant model'.</p>	<p>Negotiation between teachers and parents about the role MC and WC parents wished to have in school.</p> <p>Visible (MC mothers) and invisible (WC mothers) parental involvement.</p>	<p>Direct parental advocacy was not part of the cultural expectations of Haitian families. However, when mistreatment/discrimination of child particularly SEN – parental advocacy paramount.</p> <p>Expectation by school that parents would not know how to advocate for their children.</p>
<i>Use of material resources</i>	<p>MC mothers able to convince teachers and external educational personnel of their entitlement to extra resources for child with SEN.</p> <p>WC mothers struggled unsuccessfully to gain more teaching support for their children despite numerous attempts.</p>	<p>School conceptualised as one single site for the use of the community as the educational and service provider for neighbourhood families.</p>	<p><u>White MC school</u> Teachers struggled over resources and needing to control parental participation.</p> <p><u>Contrasted with diverse WC school</u> Material resources enabled WC parents to act as effective advocates for their children whether in concert with or in opposition to the school.</p>	<p>Little use was made of communication via home pcs/internet even though this is a widely used by young people in their education.</p>		<p>Social spaces were made available within school for parents to meet.</p>	

Concepts	Reay (1999)	O'Conner, (2001)	Lewis and Forman (2002)	Katyal & Evers (2007)	Crozier & Davies (2007)	Blackmore & Hutchison (2010)	Doucet (2011)
<i>Gendered parental involvement in education</i>	Fathers talked to teachers at formal events: Masculinity seen as a linguistic resource in dealing with teachers. MC masculinity impressed teachers more than WC masculinity "stupid man".				Fathers had prime responsibility for ensuring that their children were upstanding members of their community. This parental role was not recognised or understood by the school.	Competing demands on women's time. MC mothers in school had more autonomy over working hours than WC mothers	Distinct roles of mothers and fathers that reflect patriarchal culture - Haitian fathers represented violations to the 'cult of domesticity' paradigm within the US norm of 'good' parenting practices.
<i>Communication between parents and teachers</i>	Class differences in how teachers responded to mothers requests. Responding more quickly and directly to MC mothers requests.	Collaboration was either arrived at on school's terms or independent of schools. Teachers and parents seldom conferred with each other in meeting the children's needs.	No consultation /collaboration between MC parents and staff about how to their resources might best be used. Social class impacted the quantity of time WC parents could spend in at school not quality of relationships with staff.	No system in place to support regular/ sustained information on a frequent basis. The idea of teachers and parents working together towards greater cooperation and communication was not evident.	Parents and teachers did not make joint decisions – 'transplant' model in action (parent classes etc.).	Social connections were developed through cultural activities (led by parents) and the use of space within school.	
<i>Cultural norms and school ethos</i>		Parents and teachers had difficulty seeing beyond existing structures and practicalities for developing ideas about schools.	<u>Diverse WC school</u> Culture within school fostered the idea of authentic reciprocal relationships between teachers and WC parents as a joint undertaking.	Belief by teachers and parents that regular interaction was impeded by the cultural norms of Hong Kong.	School's overriding concern was a discourse of compliance and culture of performativity.	Leadership of school philosophically and ideologically committed to inclusion of all children and their families.	Legitimacy of school authority - boundaries between school and home clearly delineated. Supported idea of parental involvement but in exclusionary practices evident.

Concepts	Reay (1999)	O'Conner, (2001)	Lewis and Forman (2002)	Katyal & Evers (2007)	Crozier & Davies (2007)	Blackmore & Hutchison (2010)	Doucet (2011)
Affective factors	<p>Making contact with teachers constituted an enormous psychological effort on the part of WC mothers full of apprehension and anxieties. "making myself go and see the teacher"; "plucking up the courage".</p> <p>MC mothers talked about "doing what comes naturally" feeling confident</p>	<p>Parents felt intimidated and educationally inferior in the presence of their former teachers.</p> <p>Parents and teachers felt a "helplessness to change things"</p>	<p><u>White MC school</u> Teachers talked about MC parents making them feel unwelcome and resentful. disempowered, disrespected, lacking efficacy, threatened, frustrated "I just felt mad".</p> <p>MC parents left feeling bewildered why teachers did not want the help they were offering.</p>		<p>Complacency by teachers about the need to reach out to parents. Sense of helplessness in trying to engage with parents. "we're out of our depth trying to involve the Bangladeshi parents".</p>	<p>Some parents felt a sense of belonging through the cultural activities in school: "there's a place for me at this school".</p>	<p>Parents received negatively by the school. Parents felt a sense of injustice by the way their children and them were treated by school staff. "if it was a white child, maybe she would not have these problems"</p>
Division, distancing and isolation	<p>Teachers from WC backgrounds viewed their own class-histories as reducing the social distance between themselves and the WC mothers.</p> <p>WC mothers did not share this perspective they positioned teachers as middle-class regardless of their WC background "posh", "well-off" and "privileged".</p>	<p>Teacher's viewed their own personal history and culture as very different and "superior" to the culture of the school/community population.</p> <p>Teachers viewed by local community as "strangers in the community"</p>	<p>General distrust of parents by teachers because of competing agendas and controlling parental participation.</p>	<p>Class differences between teachers and parents led to assumptions being made about parents and children's aspirations.</p>	<p>Parents cast in the role of "hard to reach" by school. Teachers viewed relationships with Bangladeshi parents as nonreciprocal. Lack of parental involvement had not featured as a whole school concern. "dragging them in off the street" Parents did not see the need to visit the school or attend parents meetings.</p>	<p>Inherent tension in parental participation in communities where parents may have negative recollections of their own education.</p> <p>Ambivalence by teachers and parents about the value of contributions offered by home environments to education.</p>	<p>LCSD families cast as the uninvolved uninterested "others" this created insider-outsider boundaries. Parental voice often silenced.</p>

1.3.6 Synthesising the translation

As has been suggested previously, synthesis involves some degree of ‘conceptual innovation’ or insight that goes beyond the sum of the parts i.e. beyond the interpretation of each study (Strike & Posner, 1983 p. 346). Synthesising the most influential concepts across the studies required further analysis in order to go beyond the first order interpretations (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The nine concepts were grouped into four areas (denoted by colours) with second order interpretations (see Table 4). A synthesis of first and second order interpretations allowed for a line of argument to emerge.

1.3.7 Expressing the synthesis

In order to effectively communicate the synthesis (to the reader and possibly other educational professionals in the future), the line of argument was presented in visual form to facilitate understanding of the concepts and their relationship (Noblit & Hare, 1988) (see Figure 1). The synthesis provides some understanding about the role of social class in the relationships and interactions between parents, teachers and schools. A central concept of power was found to be in a dynamic relationship affecting school culture, boundaries and receptivity. The next section will discuss the line of argument and the concepts of power, school culture, boundaries and receptivity in more detail.

Figure 1. Line of argument represented visually

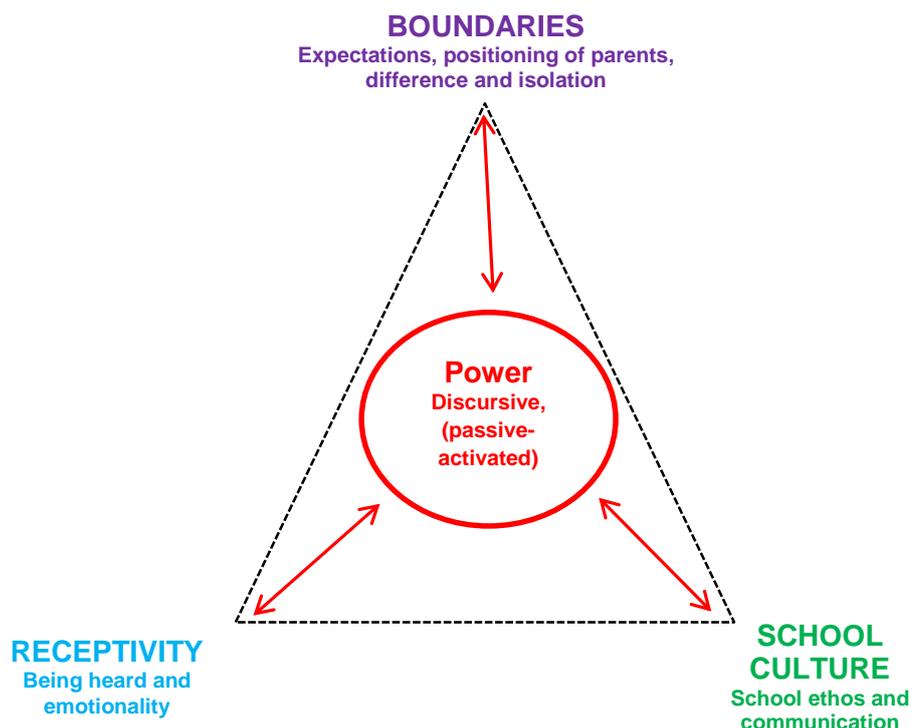


Table 4. Synthesis, including concepts and second- and third-order interpretation

CONCEPTS	SECOND ORDER INTERPRETATIONS	THIRD ORDER INTERPRETATIONS
Status and authority	A. Differences in class and status of parents reinforced positions of authority, inequality and power	D. Power: Differences in class and status between teachers and parents can create hierarchical relations that legitimise school authority. When certain forms of cultural and linguistic resources are seen as more appropriate than others Power is present in the discursive modes, language, knowledges that are used by parents and teachers.
Language and knowledge	B. Certain types of cultural resources (linguistic, educational, knowledge) can be activated through production of language and discourses/ knowledges	
Use of material resources	C. The use of material resources within schools and local communities can be used in opposition to the school/parents' wishes or can develop collaborative partnerships.	
School ethos	E. School ethos creates expectations for parental involvement based on a 'one-size fits all' model of parenting. Working class parents struggle for a sense of control, authority and autonomy in their interactions with teachers. Accessibility inhibited or liberated for certain groups of parents by the ethos and culture schools generate. Leadership plays a central role in defining what this will be.	G. Culture of schools: can permit /normalise power imbalances or can move towards more equitable and collaborative participation. Recognition of the social positioning of WC parents and the role of the 'insider-outsider' boundaries would be required for any shift to occur.
Communication	F. Inequitable practices created when parent-teacher relationships are defined by a culture of compliance embedded in localised power relations.	
Positioning of parents	H. Parents often cast by teachers in a deficit role leading to isolation and separation between teachers and parents.	K. Boundaried relationships between parents and teachers – perceptions of working class families can lead to a process of alienation and division within and from others. However, potential for crossing boundaries and creating new forms of knowledge and power.
Role expectations	I. Parents are positioned in relation to their social class and educational histories.	
Difference and isolation	J. Certain knowledge and language privileged that can alienate working class parents from schools. In contrast, middle class parents' acquisition of cultural capital generated a certainty and self-assurance when interacting with teachers.	
Being 'heard' and 'listened to'	L. Social class can influence the extent to which parents communicate with a sense of certainty, belonging and right to be heard.	N. Receptivity: The way teachers receive parent's initiatives and concerns influenced by the social positioning of parents. Parents' self-efficacy plays a role in this - linked to power and knowledge, cultural capital and the hierarchical and official relationships within schools.
Emotionality	M. Parents and teachers feelings of competency influenced by social class and affect the interactions between them.	

1.4 Discussion

1.4.1 Power

Power represents the central concept in the line of argument. The concept of power seemed to have the most dynamic influence across all seven studies. Power as discussed here is a complex idea that has been highlighted previously as a critical factor within the parent partnership literature (for example Crozier, 1998, 2000; Todd, 2008; Todd & Higgins, 1998). However, different forms of implicit and explicit power were present in the relationships between working – and middle-class parents and teachers. Power was embedded within hierarchical relationships and afforded positions of authority to teachers often reinforcing a deficit in social power for working class parents (e.g., Crozier & Davies, 2007; O'Connor, 2001; Reay, 1998). Interactions in some instances were based on top-down processes with school people positioned as the more knowledgeable experts (e.g., F. Doucet, 2011). In these examples power can be explained within a traditional model where it is understood to be hierarchical, explicit and embodied in rules, laws and institutional models in terms of the state (Foucault, 1982). However, this perspective only offers a limited explanation of power in the home-school context.

Other ways of conceptualising power offer a more helpful explanation for understanding the complexities that underpin parent-teacher relationships. A Foucauldian perspective asserts that power and knowledge are inseparable from the production of discourse (Faubion, 1994; Foucault, 1982). This view supports the findings that language was intimately bound up with the politics of knowledge present in the discourses within the schools in all of the studies. Power in this respect was inherent in the ways parents and teachers talked about themselves and described their actions in the institutions which they were situated. Power from this perspective does not reside in an institution or authority but in the ability to act. Many of the working class mothers in the studies were not passive and often challenged how they were positioned in relation to schools (e.g., Lewis & Forman, 2002; O'Connor, 2001; Reay, 1998). Discursive practices and behaviour seemed to disseminate power across home and school generating dominant discourses and truths regarding home-school relationships. Foucault asserts: 'What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no it also traverses and produces discourse' (cited in Faubion,

1994 p.120). This idea is interesting when considering how working class parents passed information about school between each other creating their own social network without the need to speak to school personnel (e.g., Crozier & Davies, 2007). Informal parental social networks of the kind found in the studies (e.g., Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Reay, 1999) could be described as a 'form of resistance and attempt to dissociate these relations' in the way the state, through education, has shifted its focus on to them (Foucault, 1982 p.780). However, the creation of social networks on school territory can go unnoticed by school staff and remain hidden as was found across the studies. Dominant narratives produced about working class parents can often fail to consider these 'hidden' actions and behaviours. Subsequently, working class parents can be positioned by schools as uninterested in their children's education.

In considering how meaning was created across studies, this perspective offers a richness that recognises how parents are socially and culturally positioned by dominant discourses that permeate ideals of what being a 'good' parent means and what home-school relations should look like. Kainz and Aikens (2007) problematise power in home-school relationships by developing Foucault's notion of genealogy and tracing historical documents. They suggest that the dissemination of dominant ideas about parental involvement in schools has come from three areas: developmental science; family intervention; and education policy. Additionally they argue that this 'motivating impetus' comes from a shift in education from a 'social and moral order to an emphasis on achievement and productivity' (p. 303). This view is echoed in other social science literature which recognises the increased focus on childhood and parent-child relationships (Hartas, 2014), and neuroscience research that makes tentative links about early home environments and infant brain development to offer normative explanations regarding parental influences (for critique Lee, Bristow, Faircloth, & Macvarish, 2014; Tallis, 2011).

Despite these dominant ideas, localised power was transformed when physical spaces were re-organised for social purposes reflecting a shift away from parental involvement being seen as a service to school (e.g., Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Lewis & Forman, 2002). When schools created social spaces for parents and teachers to engage in activities based on local knowledge and collaborative practices (such as community gardens, art and cooking classes) reciprocal

relationships developed. In both of these examples the leadership of the school opened up spaces within the school where time and space was dedicated to developing more collaborative relationships between parents and teachers. This suggests that when difference is recognised within the school culture as an asset, as capital, engaging with working class and culturally diverse groups of parents on their own terms can occur. In the two studies where this occurred (e.g., Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Lewis & Forman, 2002), there was potential to generate social capital which readily transformed into an educational resource that supported the development of collaborative, rather than official and hierarchical relationships. Therefore possibilities were created for developing genuine dialogue between parents and teachers when local knowledge and culture were activated, despite embedded power relations. Power, linked to knowledge, plays a dynamic central role in the other three interrelated concepts; school culture, boundaries and receptivity.

1.4.2 School Culture

Across the studies it was found that power was embedded within a localised context in the school's culture which is recognised here as being social, historical and specific. Power was related to the ways in which schools implicitly and explicitly created a culture that included or excluded certain parents through social customs, routines and rituals. Implicit practices and knowledges within a school community created a normative way of being by teachers/staff and parents and contributed to exclusionary and inclusionary practices. Interactions between parents and school were most often defined by schools, on their terms and in line with the current culture of performativity. This led to working class parents struggling for a sense of control, authority and autonomy in their interactions with teachers. There were often no joint decision making processes and when parents did become involved on their terms this was often perceived by teachers as interference. Educational psychology research investigating the views of 'hard to reach' parents about school engagement found that the 'terms of engagement' (p.52) were related to a number of factors including the organisational culture of a school, communication and support, and development and training of staff (Day, 2013). The two studies where relationships between working class parents and teachers were found to be reciprocal and collaborative (i.e., Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Lewis & Forman, 2002), the school leadership in both schools seem to have played an important role in enabling such

developments to occur. Each school had head teachers who were committed to the idea of inclusion and community participation for all families and were developing practices and allocating resources to try and embed such a philosophy in practical ways throughout the whole school. In the reorganising of physical spaces and the creation of time and space for parents and teachers to engage in collaborative activities, it could be argued that power and knowledge were being shifted and harnessed to create future possibilities. This would suggest that the role of the school leadership is integral to developing an inclusive philosophy with regards to the involvement of parents and creating a vision for all staff to work towards. The head teacher's perspective and practices may contribute significantly to perpetuating existing power relations through practices that exclude working class parents from participating on their own terms.

1.4.3 Boundaries

The third idea I put forward is that parent-teacher relationships are bounded by the discursive power that creates formal and informal practices, biases, prejudices. Not only is the relationship between home and school bounded with respect to roles and responsibilities but when legitimate boundaries are violated barriers can be constructed (A. Miller, 1996). Different types of boundaries can affect the way parents and teachers interact. Physical and explicit boundaries can act as a barrier to the inclusion of working class parents in schools. For example the use of a chalkboard positioned at the entrance to the school gates (another boundary) with a 'running total of lateness and the target for punctuality for the week' arguably served as a barrier of recrimination targeted at those parents who may struggle to get their children to school on time (Crozier & Davies, 2007 p.305). This type of physical barrier may have developed into an internal barrier of resentment and hostility on the part of parents who felt blamed and 'got at'. Whilst teachers and school staff, who were subject to continuous inspection and accountability, created a barrier of compliance where they felt parents had to be 'cajoled', 'scolded', 'told off', and 'dragged in off the streets' (Crozier & Davies, 2007).

Across five of the studies, narratives about parents and teachers in each particular context where they were subjected to 'dividing practices' acted as a boundary (Foucault, 1982 p.777). According to Bruner (1990) narrative is one of the most powerful discourse forms in human communication and lies at the heart of human

thought. He argues that narratives provide a frame through which experiences are represented and this framing enables humans to interpret their experiences and one another. The subsequent role parents were cast in permeated the way teachers talked to and about them. For example in O'Conner's (2001) case study of poor white working class parents, interactions with school staff highlighted how parents were positioned as incompetent, disinterested, powerless and unequal. In doing so barriers were created affecting how parents and teachers each perceived the other. Assumptions were made by school staff about the parenting ability of this group of parents and consequently translated into a belief that parents from this community had a poverty of aspiration for themselves and their children.

However, such beliefs are not created in isolation. Within current education policy in England for example, an underlying assumption is that aspirations are too low amongst children from disadvantaged backgrounds (St Clair & Benjamin, 2011). Across all of the studies with the exception of Blackmore and Hutchison (2010) these kinds of assumptions and beliefs were evident and created barriers that excluded working class parents from engaging with teachers. These findings reflect recent research which argues that parents have been repositioned politically in social and education policy to the extent where they are viewed as being the cause and solution to many social problems (Lee et al., 2014).

In contrast, when middle class parents went beyond school expectations of involvement, they were viewed as being 'too' involved (e.g., Lewis & Forman, 2002). Teachers perceived their professionalism to be under scrutiny and felt threatened with middle-class parents cast in the role of interfering outsider. Furthermore, middle class parents believed they had the requisite resources, skills and competencies to deal with teachers on a more equal footing (e.g., Reay, 1999). This finding is supported by previous research which has found that the resources, knowledge and skills working class parents have, mothers in particular, often go unseen by schools and are perhaps deemed of lesser value in economic terms when compared to middle class parents (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Reay, 1998). The parent-teacher relationship is further weakened when there is ambivalence about the value of the child's home environment compared to their educational environment and experiences within school (e.g., O'Connor, 2001). The language used to talk to

and about working class parents can therefore create distrust between teachers and parents.

Previous literature suggests that the legitimate boundary that exists between home and school can develop into an impenetrable barrier for working class parents alienating them further from education (A. Miller, 1996). Parents reluctance to engage with school particularly when it is about children's behaviour, has been found to relate primarily to their own difficult childhood educational experiences and an overwhelming feeling of 'dread' when having to reencounter school again (A. Miller, 1996 p.158). Such physical and emotional barriers arguably act as a powerful reminder of some parent's negative experiences of schooling. These barriers emphasise unequal power relations that may foster a culture of 'us' and 'them'. Previous research concerned with boundary crossing and learning offers some insights about how people participate in activities across diverse socio-cultural sites or institutions (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). Boundaries contain 'sociocultural differences leading to discontinuities in action and interaction' (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011 p. 152). In this regard barriers, as discussed in this section, could be conceptualised as boundaries. Furthermore, boundaries are not fixed and research suggests they are dynamic, temporary, ambiguous constructs that hold the possibility of transformation across diverse communities of practice in terms of learning and participation (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011; Wenger, 1998).

1.4.4 Receptivity

The cultural and educational capital of middle class parents can generate a sense of entitlement to be heard and a certainty that what they are saying is right. Middle class parents possibly have more useable resources that schools value in relation to parental involvement (Lareau, 1987). This can mean that teachers' behaviour may change in relation to the power dynamics underpinning interactions with diverse groups of parents. The review found that teachers were more receptive and responded more quickly to middle class parent's requests by creating time and space to listen to them (e.g., Reay, 1999). In contrast, working class parents, when objectified as deficient and uninterested, were silenced or received in ways that ultimately excluded them. This finding could be explained through a sociological perspective which proposes that the social positioning of working class parents

means that they feel less entitled to be heard (Bourdieu, 1993). Consequently, barriers are created through exclusionary practices that are inextricably linked to power.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that interactions were emotive encounters that evoked antagonistic feelings on the part of parents and teachers. Feelings of anxiety, resentment, distrust, anger and frustration describe how teachers felt when interacting with middle class parents (e.g.,Katyal & Evers, 2007; Lewis & Forman, 2002). When interacting with working class parents, feelings of complacency and helplessness were most prominently featured in teacher's accounts (e.g.,Crozier & Davies, 2007; F. Doucet, 2011; O'Connor, 2001). Whereas working class parents reported feeling intimidated, unwelcome, anxious and apprehensive in encounters with school staff (e.g.,Reay, 1999).

It appears that emotionality contained within parent-teacher interactions is embedded within school culture operating through societal discourses and knowledges about what parental involvement in schools ought to look like. This is consistent with previous research which has examined parent-teacher interactions as emotional practices related to personal and cultural beliefs shaped by the teaching profession and society (Lasky, 2000). Lasky (2000) makes an important distinction between the interactions and relationships parents and teachers experience. She suggests that working conditions for teachers can prevent any emotional understanding and developing any kind of relationship can be very difficult 'as sustained contact, depth of relationship and trust are critical to such a quest' (p.857). Receptivity may therefore be made possible if time and space are created for developing reciprocal relationships between parents and teachers.

1.5 Conclusion

The process of meta-ethnography involved interpretation of interpretative studies and in that sense the task was subjective (Noblit & Hare, 1988). However, I have made every effort to be transparent in the decisions I have taken with regard to translating the studies into the other and developing a line of argument. I was guided by previous researchers who argue that meta-ethnography is less to do with making grand claims about knowledge and more about understanding the issues and contributing ideas about the socio-cultural systems to a particular field of study

(Britten et al., 2002; Noblit & Hare, 1988; Robson, 2011). This meta-ethnography has explored research that has examined the role of social class and parent-teacher relationships. This was with a view to exploring how social class affects the relationship between parents and teachers. I have referred to relevant theory and research to support the findings and line of argument. This review has made me consider the social and cultural positioning of parents and teachers and the complex nature of the relationships that can develop between them. However, I am aware that some of the concepts identified in the initial reading stage went beyond the scope of this review yet remain important issues with regard to parent participation, for example the gendered role of parenting. This perhaps is a limitation of the methodology in that the most common themes/concepts had to be identified across studies.

It is perhaps unsurprising that power was the central concept interpreted as influencing all others given that all seven studies explored parent-teacher relations through a critical lens. Five of the seven studies utilised Bourdieu's conceptualisation of cultural capital, which highlight both the cultural and individual aspects of these relations (Bourdieu, 1977; Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999). This relational conceptualisation examines social, cultural and institutional forces that are embedded within parent-teacher relationships as part of a broader theory of social reproduction. In this way the cultural capital framework provides an explanation of social class inequalities as reflected through the discrepancies in parent participation and the ways working class parents can be marginalised from schools. Graue (1999) suggests that researchers utilising a cultural capital framework provide an important relational analysis in the field of parent-teacher relations. However, she also points out that it is somewhat limited in that it can fail to recognise parents as active social agents. Therefore, future research into parent-teacher relationships may consider how discursive power is embedded in school culture and affects boundaries and receptivity through a different conceptual framework. Since despite social and economic inequalities in working class and culturally diverse communities, there appear to be possibilities for learning and participation when boundaries are crossed and the 'other' is confronted in reciprocal collaborative practices.

Chapter 2. My stance as a researcher: A bridging document

2.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out to link the findings as discussed in chapter one with the development of a participatory action research project with a group of parents⁵ and teachers in a primary school in the north east of England. The systematic review and the empirical research rest on certain assumptions about how the world is; the nature of human interaction and development; claims to knowledge; and what research is. The methodological choices I made are based on these assumptions as was my role within the research and my interpretations of the data. So in making my stance explicit, I hope to provide the reader with an understanding of me as a researcher-practitioner and a perspective on the claims I make.

2.1 Developing a research focus

As stated in chapter one (p.6) by problematising home-school relations, there is recognition on my part that the dynamics between parents and teachers are complex influenced by many psychosocial factors at a micro and macro level. My interest in parent-teacher relationships arises from concerns about the national agenda with regard to educational and social inclusion and from working with parents and teachers in a professional capacity over a number of years. I have observed schools responding in different ways to diversity in terms of social class, ethnicity, culture, religion and gender. For example as a Parent Support Advisor covering two schools in the same community where there was significant social and economic deprivation, the head teacher's in each school had a different stance with regard to the parents and local community. It is my view that their stance affected the extent to which parents felt they could engage with school.

Additionally, as an Educational Psychologist (EP) in training, my work involves consultations with parents, teachers and other professionals to discuss the educational needs of children. The barriers that exist between parents, teachers and other professionals that are created and reinforced by the social and economic inequalities within our society are often 'played out' in the interactions between

⁵ The parents in this research were a group of five mothers. For ease of communication I refer to them as parents throughout the thesis. However I recognise the gendered nature of their role.

people in meetings. The participation of parents and children in the decisions that affect their lives is an important principle to apply in practice. However this can often present many challenges for the EP when consulting with parents and teachers as previous literature has found (Barrow & Todd, 2011; Todd, 2008; Todd & Higgins, 1998). Parent participation is about social justice, inclusive education and developing more equitable and ethical participatory practices in schools and the wider community (Vincent, 1996, 2012). Ideas about how we understand people psychologically within their social relations in differing contexts is an important part of my thinking and practice and was one of the reasons I was interested in examining the role of social class in parent-teacher relationships as discussed in the review in chapter one.

The meta-ethnography set out to review literature which examined parent-teacher relationships in differing socio-economic contexts. By asking those directly affected about their experiences, parents and teachers were able to provide missing 'voices' to this area of research. The review examined studies from different countries (UK, US, Australia and Hong Kong) and any claims made about the role of social class across contrasting cultural-historical contexts are cautionary. Overall, it was suggested that because parents and teachers experienced 'partnership' from differing social, cultural and emotional positions within the institution of school, authentic reciprocal relationships were seldom developed. However, exceptions did occur when social relations were reconfigured and boundaries were crossed. In those instances the knowledge and perspectives of parents' from working class and diverse communities were recognised as different and important (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Lewis & Forman, 2002). The four themes to emerge emphasised the role of *power, school culture, boundaries and receptivity* in the way social class can affect parent-teacher relationships. With these themes in mind, further research was needed to understand how reciprocal relationships between parents (from areas of socio-economic disadvantage) and teachers could be created given the social, cultural and emotional positioning of them within schools and communities. Mutuality as a concept offered the potential to examine what it means to have reciprocal relationships between a group of parents and teachers. It therefore required further exploration. As a researcher the question I initially had in my mind was: what is there

to be known about mutuality in parent-teacher relationships? In light of this, a direction for the empirical research began to develop.

Furthermore, the four related themes (power, school culture, boundaries and receptivity) that developed from synthesising the seven case studies provided a way forward for thinking about the empirical research project. The themes informed my thinking about how to conceptualise a piece of research examining the role of mutuality with a group of parents and teachers. In particular the central concept of power in parent-teacher relationships as discussed in chapter one (p. 21-23) informed the overall approach I took to the design of the research project and my underlying epistemology which is discussed in more detail in this chapter and in chapter three (e.g., p. 50). The school context of the research and on-going conversations I had with members of staff and with the head and deputy head teachers were predicated on the finding that school culture and the role of the leadership seem to play a central role in the development of reciprocal and equitable practices between parents and teachers. The overall dialogic relational approach and the specific therapeutic approaches I used to facilitate each session with parents and teachers i.e., Narrative Therapy and Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) were chosen in order to address in some way either directly or indirectly the themes of receptivity, boundaries and power between parents and teachers. I discuss this in more detail in chapter three (p.46-48) in terms of what this meant in practice in relation to the research sessions with parents and teachers and with regard to the outcomes (p.55-65).

2.2 Assumptions underlying the research

As a researcher-practitioner the philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality which underpinned this research were part of a process beginning many years ago with an interest in social justice and community participation. I have provided some account of my overall ontological and epistemological perspectives in relation to the decisions I took with regard to methodology and interpretation of data as well as the implicit assumptions made during the research.

2.2.1 Ontology and epistemology

My philosophical stance is post-structuralist in orientation and is critical of scientific discourses that imply analytic objectivity and a rational approach to the world through

a dualistic separation of the reasoning mind and emotions of the body (Francis, 1999; Marková, 2003b). This overall stance rejects the idea of there being a world separate from people that can be researched and so an interpretivist approach developed in the research (Willig, 2008). My interests within this research lay in the interactions and the social meanings that parents and teachers co-created. Furthermore, as an applied psychologist and researcher I take a critical perspective within the field of psychology and reject the monologic paradigm of self that occupies much of today's Western psychological theory and practice (Sampson, 2000). I support the view that self is a relational concept rather than an individualistic self-contained ideal.

A relational perspective recognises that the self is situated in culture with the other constructing and co-constructing the social world. Sampson (1993) suggests the traditional monologic view of self has a historical and cultural base that has continued to privilege the perspective of dominant societal groups, most notably white, Western males. The voice of otherness and difference is often suppressed and silenced by this monologic paradigm where standardised categories are accepted as the 'norm' and through essentialist notions of identity such as gender, ethnicity, and sexuality for example. Sampson (1993) argues that the suppression of differences and otherness has become a 'politics of domination by one group over others, carried out in the name of finding a single unifying perspective from which all human experience can be evaluated' (p. 84). I support this view that our experiences of identities (man/woman/ parent/teacher) are defined by what they are compared with and co-constructed in relation to rather than an everlasting essence. In considering the relationship between parents and teachers, it was important to deconstruct the dominant discourses about how parents and parenting is currently defined; according to what comparisons and whose dominant monologue.

The extant literature about home-school relationships spans many overlapping disciplines and this arguably warranted some attention. Parents and parenting has been firmly placed on the national social and education policy agenda for some time now, notably since New Labour came into government in 1997 (Lee et al., 2014). In problematising the idea of partnership and questioning policy assumptions I considered societal discourses about parenting and the implications this has for how we conceptualise childhood (Faircloth, 2014). In order to examine more fully the

layers of complexity that belie parent-teacher relationships I drew upon research from a range of academic disciplines, as well as psychology. This was helpful in both the systematic review and the research project in that I brought together research from: sociology, education and psychology. This allowed me to view the macrosystem in which the research took place in more detail (Bronfenbrenner & Condry, 1970). The systematic review primarily drew on research from sociological and educational fields of study. As a trainee EP, psychological theory underpins what I do on a day-to day basis and so is fundamental to my developing practice. However, educational and sociological theories and research influence my stance and world view in a slightly different but no less significant way. The process of wider reading helped me consider and explore further my values as a researcher and my philosophical position in relation to various academic theories and frameworks. This was particularly the case when thinking about relationality and what it means to engage with the 'other'.

2.2.2 The social construction of reality

Given the purpose of this research and its overriding concern with developing meaningful social interactions between parents and teachers, the approach I took was within a social constructionist framework, in which self is understood as a matter of social and linguistic negotiation. From this perspective the actions of individuals are best understood by examining the social context in which the actions take place. Social reality is therefore constructed in socially organised communities and meaning is co-created in relation to others in social, cultural activities. I support the view that meaning making is social, relational and dialogical with language playing an important role in the multiplicity of meaning (Salgado & Hermans, 2009; Willig, 2008). Social constructionism considers the relationship between power and discourse (Burr, 2003). Wertsch (1998) argues that certain knowledge's become privileged within dominant discourses and the words we use are afforded by the community of practice we live in. Foucault and post structuralist thinkers have challenged the assumption that knowledge is free of and distinct from politics (Foucault, 1972, 1977). These ideas about power, knowledge and meaning made me consider the conventional ways parents and teachers meet and interact. How do these daily activities enable participation and activate local knowledge and meaning?

What kinds of activities are needed that would engage both parents and teachers as equals? These questions helped me to think about the first sessions together.

2.2.3 A dialogical approach to socially shared knowledge

It became apparent through further reading that understanding socially shared knowledge from a dialogical perspective offered a way of thinking that was potentially transformative for my research and practice. It offered a way of thinking about actions and meanings across the individual-social divide. Whilst similar to a social constructionist position in terms of a relational ontology it is slightly different (Salgado & Hermans, 2009). Markova and colleagues offer a useful way of thinking about dialogism:

‘The limits of the self are not within the I, but *within the relationship with the other, I and thou*’. Every individual makes his/her world in terms of others by dialogically constructing and re-constructing the social world as a set of multifaceted and multivoiced realities situated in culture... These are not engaged in a peaceful contemplation but are in tension, they clash, judge and evaluate one another.’

(Marková, Linell, Grossen, & Salazar Orvig, 2007 p.8,)

Markova’s ideas helped me to understand how socially shared knowledge, interactions and dialogue situated in communities, cultures and histories are communicated through the many different ways that we speak and in the way we address others. Dialogic psychology helped how I conceptualised participation with the idea that the space *between* parents and teachers was important for creating socially shared knowledge where difference could be heard and genuine dialogue possible. Dialogue (thinking and talking) from this perspective allowed for meanings to be negotiated and re-negotiated. It enabled individuals to examine the world from the perspective of someone other than themselves and allowed the voice of ‘otherness’ to be heard. Arnett and Arneson (1999) argue that in order to ‘keep a conversation going’ there needs to be genuine reception of the other that goes beyond the individual (p.288).

2.2.4 Use of the term 'other'

I would like to briefly clarify differing meanings in the term 'other' and 'otherness' that I use within this thesis and consider whether an emerging conception can bridge these differences. A sociological understanding of 'otherness' is central to any analysis of how majority and minority identities are socially constructed. 'Otherness' is said to be that which defines the self in a binary relation to that which is alien to, strange and different in some identifying way from the norm (Mead, 2009). According to sociological and cultural theories the process of othering is fundamental to the formation of social identities, belonging and social status (Bauman, 2013; Hallam & Street, 2013). Foucault (1982) argued that this process was essential to the way knowledge and power are embedded within societal structures and advances dominant political agendas.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, a dialogical perspective recognises the way that societal discourses can come to dehumanise and essentialise the 'other' particularly in matters of race, gender and class where for example women can be colonised and constructed as the 'other' to man and subjected to patriarchal laws, rules and dominance (Sampson, 1993; Van Pelt, 2000). In this regard fundamental questions are raised with regard to the nature of social knowledge (Hallam & Street, 2013; Marková, 2003a). From this perspective otherness is not an essence of self nor an objective entity that exists in the world separate from people. The 'other' is socially, culturally, and politically constructed through history; through people. As was evident in chapter one, when working class parents were conceptualised as different as 'other' to the experiences and knowledge of teachers they were perceived as something to fear. This subsequently led to practices which alienated and excluded parents from their children's education. When parents are conceptualised within societal discourses as 'hard to reach', it may be possible that an identity of 'otherness' is constructed about their ability and desire to engage. These perceptions can create distrust in the parent-teacher relationship which can be difficult to repair unless there is a willingness and time and space created to hear the 'other'. Previous research has found that parents whose trust in their children's school is low and were labelled 'hard to reach' indicated a greater desire for reciprocal communication with teachers (Dunsmuir, Frederickson, & Lang, 2004). The themes from the literature review suggest that parents, especially those from working class and

socially and economically disadvantaged communities, are often conceptualised as the 'other', as different.

Developing this point from a dialogic perspective, 'otherness' is not considered an essential feature of self and so the dissonance and tension that comes when confronted with difference is arguably something to at least confront and engage with (Sampson, 1993). In this respect the 'other' that was brought to each session contained social, emotional and psychological perspectives that were vital to the genuine-ness of the dialogue created between parents and teachers and to the mutuality that was possible. It was important therefore to create the conditions whereby parents and teachers could explore mutuality through their 'otherness'.

The third use of the term 'other' is in relation to the concept of intersubjectivity advanced by (Trevarthen, 1979, 1980, 2011), and the centrality of this to the method of Video Interaction Guidance (VIG). Intersubjectivity is the innate ability to recognise the other and respond in an attuned way reflecting a fusion of minds (Trevarthen, 1980). The 'other' from this theoretical perspective holds that humans are self-organised in such a way that from the moment of birth we are 'seeking to enter into regulated engagement with subjective processes in other human beings' (Aitken & Trevarthen, 1997, p. 654).

In considering the concept of a 'dialogic space' for parents and teachers to engage in meaningful reciprocal dialogue, all of these meanings of 'other' offered something theoretically useful. In each session it was important to create time and space for each other to be heard, so that aspects of emotional and expressive behaviour could be received and attuned interaction developed. The use of relational approaches such as Video Interaction Guidance supported this process in that the self/other interactions were literally viewed through a different lens, a section of video recording of parents and teachers interacting. Parents and teachers were able to reflect on their interactions in a way that that did not rely on memory and where they were actively engaged in change (Cross & Kennedy, 2011) (see chapter three p.56-61). Additionally, from a dialogic perspective it was important to hear multiple voices of 'otherness' from parents and teachers working collaboratively without trying to reach a consensus view and ultimately closing down the dialogue (Barrow & Todd,

2011). This offered a potential way of developing insights and learning between participants.

In summary, the meaning of 'other' in this research combines different theoretical perspectives to that which was different in terms of the social identities and subjectivities of participants (working class parents and teachers), and the different knowledges and ideas brought to and developed in each session. Whilst acknowledging how social identities can be formed through othering, I tried to draw on other theoretical interpretations in relation to the social nature of being and knowledge construction. Throughout each session the 'other' (identities, roles, knowledge, emotions, perspectives) was received and taken seriously, and in doing so offered the potential to shift power and cross boundaries to new learning (Barrow & Todd, 2011). Through the questions I asked as the outsider in each session the 'other' was facilitated in a safe space where parents and teachers were engaging in a dialogue with each other. Difference was able to be heard more readily, in particular the voices of parents, thus leading to new insights and connections between them and teachers.

2.3 Methodological Considerations

Participatory Action Research (PAR) offered an approach which was consistent with my world view and the importance I place on people as knowledgeable in their own right. PAR has transformative potential embedded in its core principles in the following ways:

- Participants are actively involved in the research process;
- Co-ownership of the research process and outcome;
- Investigation of any phenomenon builds on what people know, accessing their local knowledge.

(van der Riet, 2008)

These three principles at the heart of PAR appealed to me as a researcher and practitioner because they link my worldview and practice. The idea that participants are conceptualised as equals created the possibility of change from its inception. Importantly this approach moves away from traditional research relationships to participative, dialogic, collaborative relationships between the researcher and participants (van der Riet, 2008). The emphasis throughout this research was on

possibility and recognising working class mothers as powerful agents of change who can participate collaboratively in practices alongside teachers as equals.

2.3.1 'Focus groups' or a relational beginning

In preparing for the first sessions with parents and teachers I found it helpful to draw on the ideas of Marková et al. (2007) about different ways to conceptualise dialogue in focus groups. These are: i) as a communicative act; ii) as different voices (between and within individuals); iii) as a circulation of ideas; iv) as a socio-cultural situated activity. Although Markova and colleagues discuss these ideas in terms of analytical tools when studying focus groups I found their ideas useful for conceptualising all of the sessions with parents and teachers.

Although I referred to the first and last sessions as 'focus groups' as they served a slightly different purpose to the other sessions, the parents and teachers did not have this delineation. For them each session built on the previous one and they referred to the time together as being 'therapeutic' and this for them began from the first time we met i.e. the focus groups. Initially I was surprised that participants referred to the sessions and time together as being therapeutic. When we discussed what they meant by therapeutic it was interesting what they said. One parent described it as a space for talking and listening: *"I know that I can come in here and you will actually listen to me, not judge me"*. A teacher described the time together as being an opportunity to hear other voices: *"I think it was a chance to listen to other people as well. To internalise what they were saying and think actually that's changing my view and what my initial rushed thought was"*. The value of creating time and space was another important element highlighted by the deputy head: *"Time, I keep saying it, but you don't get time and it's not just us, mums don't get time to sit and think and articulate what's going through their heads.....How beneficial it can be to just tackle one thing at a time and do it properly and not be worried about what I'm going to be doing for tea. That's the therapy, creating a space to just be"*. The meaning of 'therapy' in this context for these people highlighted the importance and strength of the PAR framework. I suggest it was the dialogic relationality underpinning the process that created the 'therapeutic-ness' experienced by participants.

2.3.2 Local knowledge and co-construction

From the outset I viewed this research process as meta-practice (Kemmis, 2009). In my work I try and resist medical models or deficit notions of people and problems that presume an expert is needed to fix a problem. However, reflecting on the first session highlighted my taken-for-granted assumptions and made me understand better what PAR meant in practice. In the first session with parents I had in mind to do a visual timeline using visual method of 'Fortune Lines' (Clark, Laing, Tiplady, & Woolner, 2013). I liked the idea of using this tool because it did not rely on linguistic/verbal skills and offered a way of starting the discussion about home-school relationships based on participant's experiences. I thought that having something to look at would provide a more comfortable way of generating ideas initially rather than looking at each other. Furthermore, I did not want to go in with a set of predetermined questions, I had one question which was '*what are your experiences of parent-teacher relationships?*' I wanted their ideas and narratives to direct the conversation and was from the outset responding to what was being created in dialogue.

A set of questions can become static and less fluid with a sense of predetermination about what is 'out there' to be found through asking the 'right' question. However, this came with assumptions on my part about these mothers and their willingness to engage and my concern that they may be apprehensive. This was unfounded and it was clear when one of them spoke that they did not have any inhibition about speaking with me or to each other. The parents felt that it was unnecessary to begin with the Fortune Lines tool. Within five minutes of the first session, I was being challenged as a researcher in terms of what this participatory action project meant in this context to these people. In that first session this group of five mothers demonstrated they had more agency than perhaps I had initially given them credit for. This for me was an important insight into the rest of the process. I understood in that moment that it was not just my research it was theirs too and they were clearly taking ownership of it.

2.3.3 Ethicality – respectful and sustainable

Some researchers suggest that ethics is a critical integral part of the accountability and epistemological and philosophical positioning of the researcher (A. Doucet & Mauthner, 2002). In discussion with my supervisor, scrutinising my approaches,

stance and knowledge claims I tried to maintain reflexivity about my research practice. We considered whether my espoused views about power, change and knowledge construction aligned with the research design and analysis. On reflection the principles and practice of PAR required much thinking on my part in terms of my role as a trainee EP working in the school and as a researcher. I considered my positioning as both an insider and an outsider as discussed by van der Riet (2008). I recognised the dual role I had within the school context. Whilst I advocate that EPs are change agents (Gillham, 1978), there were times in the process when there was a tension in the relationship between me as the researcher and the rest of the school community. I reflected on this considerably throughout the process and realise that perhaps this was a necessary part of the process.

Furthermore, this research involved all women (parents and teachers) and I was aware that my own working class background and position as a single mother (for a long time) are part of my subjectivity and being in the world. My history informed the way I interacted with the participants and co-created meaning with them. It was present in the discomfort and to some extent the familiarity I felt when hearing stories about their childhoods. My motivations resided in a transformative agenda and I was approaching this research critical to some extent of the practices within the school. However, I had to develop relationships with parents and teachers as part of the collaborative process. I am aware that my relationships with participants developed over time. There was a development of trust between us that allowed me to bring an otherness to the dialogue. The amount of data generated in the research was considerable and the analytic process presented some difficulties for me. I wanted to remain faithful to the participants and their constructions of knowledge and at the same time I recognise my own influence on the interpretations reported.

2.3.3a Supervision

I want to finish with a short explanation about the role of supervision in my research journey because for me it mirrored the dialogic relationality created in the research project. Supervision was a space and time where reflexivity was encouraged by my supervisor and enhanced by the conversations we had. It was an integral part of the process and a collaborative dialogic encounter each time where the otherness of what I was bringing was held in tension with my supervisor's perspective (Marková,

2003a). Each session was audio recorded and then transcribed as I wanted to be present in the conversation rather than having to make notes. The session itself and then the process of transcribing provided a level of reflexivity about what was influencing my decisions and thinking about the research. The questions my supervisor asked helped me consider my influence in the research process and how the research influenced and changed me. Supervision has served to help me better understand myself as a researcher and how this piece of research has contributed to my developing practice.

Chapter 3. Parents and teachers crossing boundaries together:

What does mutuality have to offer?

3.0 Abstract

Within education and social policy in the UK, a focus on and support for parenting has been viewed as a means to overcoming social and economic disadvantage. In education it has been widely recognised that it is beneficial to involve parents in children's education as part of a strategy of narrowing the achievement gap. However, despite policies and legislation advocating parental engagement in schools, practices are varied according to factors such as socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and the presence of special educational needs. A recent meta-ethnography examined how social class can affect parent-teacher relationships. Power was found to be embedded in school cultures and was related to the boundaries and receptivity between parents and teachers. In light of these findings, this research set out to explore whether mutuality is possible between parents and teachers and if so its nature and role. Mutuality was conceptualised through a relational and dialogic lens. A participatory action research (PAR) framework was adopted with five mothers and five members of staff in a local primary school in the North East of England. Joint and separate sessions of parents and teachers took place over a seven month period. Relational approaches, drawing on narrative therapy and Video Interaction Guidance (VIG)⁶, were used within the PAR and multiple forms of data were co-created. This involved the sharing, between parents and teachers, of stories and perspectives of parenting. Video was used to support this process. It was possible to identify the development of mutuality as a result of this process. Three aspects that may have enabled mutuality to develop are discussed; i) making connections through the other, ii) outsider's perspective, and iii) creative tension in dialogue. Despite literature suggesting parent-school relationships almost always develop in the interests of the staff and school rather than parents from areas of socio-economic disadvantage, this research suggests that mutuality created the potential to move beyond existing power imbalances and towards more equitable practices.

⁶ As part of this chapter there are two very short video clips to watch that go with the text and correspond to 3 photos.

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Parents and education

Within family and social policy in the UK parenting has been viewed increasingly as a means to overcoming social and economic disadvantage (Hartas, 2014). The benefits of involving parents in children's education in order to narrow the achievement gap has been widely recognised (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Dyson et al., 2007). In England, education policies have placed greater emphasis on schools and other professionals to work in 'partnership' with parents (for example, Department for Education, 2013; Department for Education and Employment, 1997, 1998, 2001; Department for Education and Skills, 2001, 2003, 2004). The latest Ofsted framework for school inspections, for example, requires leaders and managers to provide evidence that they are working to 'engage parents in supporting pupils' achievement, behaviour and safety and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development' (p.20 Ofsted, 2014). However, there seems to be a significant gap between the rhetoric surrounding the notion of parent partnership and what this means in practice. Developments treat parents as a homogenised group that act in the same way with similar socio-economic opportunities (Bridges, 2010; Crozier, 2000; Hartas, 2008). Parents and teachers experiences of partnership is often varied according to factors such as socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and the presence of special educational needs (as discussed in Chapter One).

3.1.2 Unpicking relationships in home-school partnership

Research has found that there is great variation in how and why schools engage with parents (for example Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Reay, 2001; Todd & Higgins, 1998; Vincent, Rollock, Ball, & Gillborn, 2012). Studies in the area of home-school partnership and parent-teacher relationships have arguably fallen into two broad areas (Crozier, 2012). One has problematised the partnership discourse taking a more critical stance through examining the impact of class, gender and ethnicity on home-school relations in terms of what is possible or permitted for the role of the parent (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Reay, 1998, 2001; Vincent et al., 2012). The other has tended to focus on typologies of parental involvement and has aimed to identify characteristics of 'effective' interventions, or approaches, for engaging parents (Epstein, 1987; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Goodall, 2012; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Vincent, 2001). The

approach I have taken in this research is a development of the first of these two areas. It problematises the partnership discourse and explores how authentic partnership can be made possible through developing mutuality between a group of parents and teachers.

3.1.3 Mutuality and parent-school 'partnership'

Research exploring the meaning of partnership between families, schools and communities has identified important elements of effective partnership (Macgregor, 2005 citing Cuttance and Stoke, 2000). It has been suggested that: 'a degree of mutuality, which begins with the process of listening to each other and incorporates a responsive dialogue' needs to be central to any meaningful participation and home-school partnership (p. 4). Here, mutuality is conceptualised as a means of engagement in the participation process related to listening and meaningful dialogue. However, there is no explanation as to what mutuality may mean in terms of its role or function, or the impact of mutuality on education (i.e. on attainment). Although policy documents in England emphasise teachers and parents working together in partnership, it is unclear whether mutuality is seen as part of the process or as a desirable outcome to work towards. Given how power functions in relation to class, gender and race and in the hierarchical and official relationships between school and home, some suggest that mutuality between parents and teachers may only ever be superficial (Todd & Higgins, 1998). Research has found that parents from disadvantaged socio-economic communities are seldom recognised as agents of change in their own right (Lascelles, 2012). Within the free market of education where social and political ideology positions parents as competing consumers, it is difficult to see how mutuality in parent-teacher relationships based on equitable and flexible collaboration can be developed (Bridges, 2010; Fielding, 2013; Reay, 2001; Vincent, 2012).

Nevertheless, there are schools that approach parental partnership in interesting and unique ways despite embedded power differentials, particularly in economically and culturally diverse communities (for example Lewis & Forman, 2002). Further research exploring whether mutuality is possible between parents and teachers is warranted. The aim of this research was to explore the possibilities of mutuality with a group of parents and teachers from a small primary school in the North East of

England in a participatory action research project. Three research questions were held in mind:

- Is mutuality possible between parents and teachers?
- If so, what components of mutuality are important for these parents and teachers?
- If it is possible, what factors can enable mutuality to develop between parents and teachers?

3.1.4 Relational Approaches to Mutuality

Within the fields of psychology and counselling, mutuality features significantly in therapeutic relational approaches such as person-centre therapy, relational psychoanalysis and relational-cultural therapy, (see Aron, 1996; Jordan, 1995; Rogers, 1951). It has been recognised that although the relationship between client and therapist is not an equal one the therapeutic relationship is based on a type of mutuality that is reciprocal and has within it unity (Aron, 1996). Rogers' person-centred approach also asserts the possibility to transcend unequal relationships by creating mutuality through dialogue (Rogers, 1951). However, mutuality from this perspective has a focus on the individual and is somewhat limited. It reflects more individualistic notions of self that have come to dominate Western models of psychology (Sampson, 1993). Socio-cultural and feminist theorists challenge this monologic view of self with mutuality being embedded within an interdependent model of human relationships (Daniels, 2005; John-Steiner, 1999). Mutuality is thus located in a social paradigm where the self is constructed through dynamic interrelated collaborative activities with others. Approaches to mutuality from this perspective view the person in a dialectical process as agent and recipient (John-Steiner, 2000). This suggests that approaches which recognise people as both agents and recipients could create opportunities for developing mutuality between parents and teachers.

3.1.5 Creating a 'dialogical space'

Consequently, considering mutuality from a dialogic perspective where self and other are interdependent, opens up the possibility for parents and teachers to share different perspectives and negotiate meaning in a dialogic space (Marková, 2003a).

The idea of a dialogic space is a space created on a physical, psychological and social level (Marková et al., 2007; Rule, 2004). It is on-going and in a dynamic process of transformative potential. Therefore, from this perspective, what is contained within individual parents and teachers is less important than what transpires *between* them (Barrow & Todd, 2011). A shift would be required privileging reciprocal discourse and reconfiguring social relations in order to negotiate meaning. Narrative therapy (e.g., White & Epston, 1990) and Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) (e.g., Kennedy, 2011) were two approaches that seemed to offer a way of doing this. Narrative therapy is based on a post-structuralist notion of truth and knowledge, and aims to deconstruct assumptions that might be ascribed the status of truth (White, 2007). A narrative approach offers the potential for positioning teachers and parents both as central i.e. as worthy of consideration and as a way of challenging normalising ideas about each (e.g., “*unfortunately, which I think is just typical of perhaps the area we are in, you have parents who just don’t care*” - Teacher, session 1a). VIG is an intervention where participants review (very short) video clips of better than usual interaction in order to enable them to be more aware of their strengths in relationships (Kennedy, 2011). Therefore, as a relational approach, VIG offers the potential to develop attunement between teachers and parents by focusing on very small aspects of verbal and non-verbal interaction. Additionally, using video in this way may support parents and teachers to co-create new meanings, as well as solutions and change (Kennedy, 2011).

Conceptualising mutuality through a relational and dialogic lens opens up the potential to create conversations between parents and teachers which are jointly owned, non-goal directed and on-going; conversations that could go some way to creating more equitable democratic participation. Adopting a dialogic perspective that utilised relational approaches was consistent with the way I was conceptualising mutuality. As a practitioner-researcher I wanted to explore possibilities with parents and teachers. This was with a view that their relationships are ‘underpinned by power relations and the struggle, most often implicit rather than explicit, for control and ascendancy’ (Crozier, 2000 p.117). Not only do such power relations exist between parents and teachers but also in the way that other professionals, including EPs, are often viewed as the expert within schools (Todd, 2008; Todd & Higgins, 1998). Furthermore, it has also been recognised that systems and individuals within

those systems are in a transactional relationship and have influence upon one another (Edwards, 2011). Therefore, it seemed appropriate to use an approach to research that viewed parents and teachers as active collaborators to negotiate their subjective realities and co-construct meaning together.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Participatory Action Research (PAR)

In many accounts of action research there is a view that the research itself goes beyond describing, exploring and explaining and moves towards action or creating a change in some way (Robson, 2011). PAR is a research paradigm that is democratic and reflective at its core and can lead to direct action as an outcome of the research itself or indirectly through influencing policies (Baum, MacDougall, & Smith, 2006; Brown & Strega, 2005). PAR involves participants and researchers in a process that aims to change practices, understandings and conditions which are bound together and in relationship with the other (Kemmis, 2009). I support the view that PAR be considered as 'meta-practice' (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) and social practice (Arruda, 2003). I viewed my role in the research process as inseparable from my position as an educational psychologist in training and as such theory and practice went hand in hand.

Greenwood, Whyte, and Harkavy (1993) suggest that participation in action research can develop in many different ways and with variable levels of participation.

Therefore process of participation is always emergent and local conditions control to a larger or lesser extent the degree to which participation can be developed placing it on a continuum. This was an important consideration as I was mindful that the idea of doing research could act as a potential barrier to participation. The parents and teachers I would be working with were not a group and had rarely talked together as equals, yet alone made decisions together. It was therefore important to find ways to enable all to participate with relative ease. Furthermore, power is a fundamental concept that underpins PAR (Baum et al., 2006). Foucault's notion of power offers a way of understanding how power dynamics are realised through the interactions between parents and teachers (Foucault, 1972, 1977). Different forms of power function in institutional practices and discourses privileging certain knowledge. The PAR approach offers the potential to shift power relations so that working-class

mothers may be recognised as powerful agents of change who can participate in practices alongside teachers and other professionals collaboratively as equals.

3.2.2 Social Context

This research took place in a small primary school in the North East of England. The wider community is made up of ex-mining villages and suffers from socio-economic disadvantage with levels of deprivation within the top ten percent in England (McLennan et al., 2011). The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average, as is the number of pupils with special educational needs. I have worked as a trainee educational psychologist in many schools in the area but was struck by the way parents and teachers interacted in this particular school. As far as I could see, and this was my own perception, on the surface parent-teacher relationships seemed friendly and the school seemed welcoming of many parents. However, it appeared at times, particularly when discussing children who were displaying behaviours or learning approaches that the school found challenging, the language used to talk about some parents often reflected a more cynical view. This made me wonder about the nature of partnership between parents and teachers within this school and in whose interests did such a partnership reside. I was keen to understand further the nature of the parent-teacher relationships and to explore the role of mutuality through the development of a participatory action research project.

3.2.3 Parent and Teachers

Parents: The criterion used for recruiting parents was those who had children in Key Stage One (Reception to Year 2) so that any plans following the research could inform and build relationships in the longer term. I approached parents in the school playground and all were unknown to me. Many parents were unable to participate due to caring responsibilities (there was no crèche facility), work commitments or they did not want to. Flyers were displayed around school and letters were also sent out to parents asking for volunteer participants (Appendix 1 & 2). Initially eight parents volunteered but three dropped out due to other commitments. Five parents agreed to participate in this research.

Teachers: School staff were informed about the project at a staff meeting where the nature of the research project was explained to them and volunteer participants were sought. The invitation was open to all teaching and support staff. Initially five

members of staff⁷ (three teachers and two learning support assistants) participated but one teacher was ill and could only participate in the initial focus group session. Once participants were recruited and informed consent obtained (Appendix 3 & 4), dates and times of sessions were negotiated that were convenient for all. It should be noted that consent was also obtained throughout the research project at the start of each session so in that sense consent was on-going and understood within an ethical practice framework of research (T. Miller & Bell, 2002). Consent was obtained from every participant for the use of the video data and visual images used in this thesis.

All participants identified themselves as white British females aged between 26 and 41 years old (Appendix 5). Each parent had between one and five children who were currently attending the school. Four mothers identified themselves as working class and one as middle class. Four out of the five mothers had lived in the local community for most of their lives (26 years or more). One mother had lived in the local area for 6 years. Three mothers worked part-time and two identified themselves as housewife.

The three teachers identified themselves as lower middle class or professional class and the two learning support assistants identified themselves as working class. Three members of staff had lived in the local community for their entire lives and two members of staff lived elsewhere.

3.2.4 Research Design

The PAR cycle included nine sessions in total (illustrated in Figure 2) and each session lasted approximately 1 – 1.5 hours and were facilitated by me (described in Table 5). Participants were conceptualised as co-researchers in keeping with PAR and a constructionist perspective. Although times and dates were allocated for each session and a rough outline of the process is presented here, in practice the process required much more flexibility and returning to ideas from previous sessions. Each session took place in school, either the staff room or a small meeting room. Initially I tried to secure a meeting room that was in the children's centre near to the school. I felt that would have been a more 'neutral' space to meet with participants and may

⁷ I shall hereon in refer to the participants who were members of staff as 'teachers' unless otherwise stipulated.

have gone some way towards shifting established power imbalances. However, this room was unavailable. Each session was audiotaped and some sessions were videotaped. As discussed embedded within the PAR process was the notion of a dialogic space and this included time for us all to reflect on how we were working together. The facilitation of the sessions was an important part of the process and as stated previously my role in the research was not neutral. I have provided three ideas that helped guide the facilitation and examples of how this was done in practice.

3.2.4a Creating the conditions for meaningful dialogue

Separate group sessions: In the initial stages of the PAR process parents and teachers had the opportunity to meet separately. This was with the intention that they could experience themselves as knowledgeable individuals in their own right and in relation to one another. With encouragement, both groups (parents and teachers) seemed able to share their stories and experiences of parent-teacher interactions and home-school relationships. This was, it seemed to me, important especially for the parents because unlike the teachers who were used to meeting as a group regularly they did not. Some of the parents knew each other simply because their children were in the same class, others had barely ever said hello to each other previously. The parents and teachers were not a group at the beginning of the process and so being part of this research process was something new to all of them. Therefore, from the outset participants were encouraged to contribute to discussions in an environment that was dialogic, safe and meaningful. It was not known how this group of parents and teachers would interact separately and together. One member of staff was surprised that some of the parents had agreed to take part as she felt that they were not the 'type' to get involved in anything in school. It was therefore important to create a space where parents and teachers could listen to each other's narratives and feel able to contribute to discussions in a meaningful way. This part of the process was also about establishing relationships with participants in the context that was being researched i.e. the school.

Figure 2. The Participatory Action Research Cycle

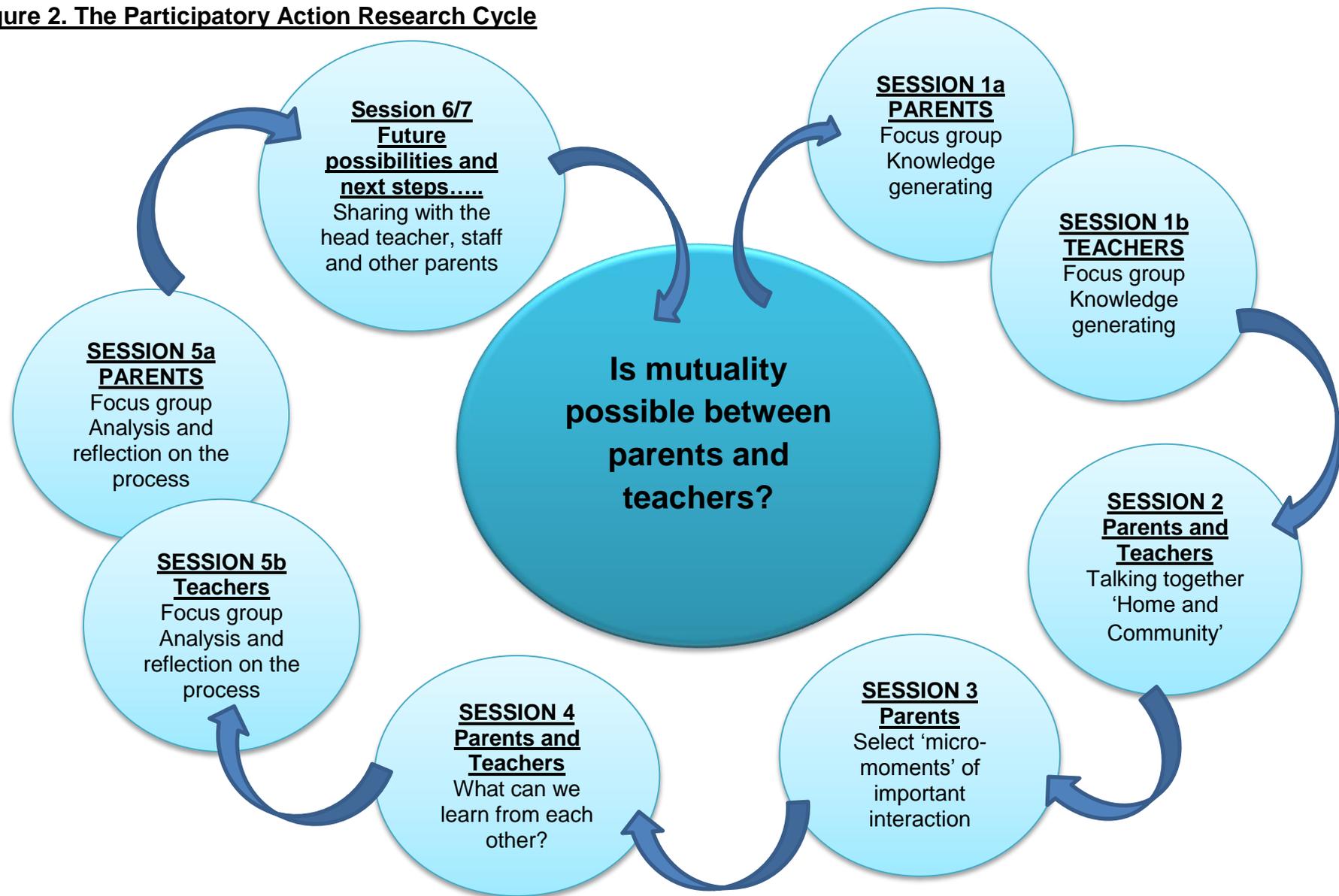


Table 5. A brief outline of the content, purpose and method of each session

Content	Purpose and method
<p>Sessions 1a and 1b – Focus Groups Parents and teachers in separate groups (1a and 1b) discussed their experiences of parent-teacher relationships in school.</p>	<p>Establishing relationships with the participants in situ.</p> <p>Discussions audiotaped and then transcribed and analysed with a view to planning the next session.</p>
<p>Session 2 - A joint collaborative discussion-based session with both parents and teachers Used phrase from a parent from session 1a as starting point: <i>‘Raising kids that are going to be the next bunch of adults’</i> Talking points included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children in the community • Commonalities and differences they have in terms of parenting and views about education 	<p>Knowledge (data) generating</p> <p>This session was video-taped</p> <p>To develop a dialogic space with parents and teachers that ‘walks through the mud of everyday life’ (Arnett & Arneson, 1999 p.32) .</p>
<p>Session 3 – Parents selecting video clips Parents selected video clips to show back to teachers. The clips were from session 2.</p>	<p>Parents analysed video clips of interactions</p> <p>Discussion based around understanding what this means for them and what is it important to them?</p> <p>This session was video-taped</p>
<p>Session 4 – Parents and teachers watching video clips The selected video clips were shared with teachers. Discussion about why these were selected and what was noticed.</p>	<p>Analysis of process and developing thoughts and new understandings</p> <p>This session was video-taped</p>
<p>Session 5a and 5b – Parents and teachers in separate focus groups Through the dialogue created with and between parents and teachers in the reflective videoed workshop sessions, participants reflected on the process and identified what mutuality meant for them and principles they would like to see shared and adopted by the school as a whole.</p>	<p>Shared reflection and consolidation of the learning that has taken place</p>
<p>Session 6 – Meeting with Head teacher and Deputy Head Discussed next step</p>	<p>Reflect on the research process and what has been learned</p> <p>Making change plans</p>
<p>Session 7 – Meeting with staff Presented to staff some of the process and insights Discussed next steps</p>	<p>Making change plans</p>

3.2.4b Departing from structured starting points

As a collaborative process it was important that parents and teachers felt able to depart from the design structure that I was bringing as the researcher. A basic

principle of PAR is that it is a process that engages all participants in education, research and action and as such they contribute to the process (Brydon-Miller, 1997). The interactional situation was in a relational process between the participants and me. In that way the questions and strategies employed through the research design contributed to the co-creation of knowledge (Akulenko, 2013). It was important especially in the initial phase of the process to respond to the knowledge that was being constructed in the room rather than insisting on a predetermined procedure. This allowed the research to be created in the moment and required flexibility as a researcher to the people I was in the room with. I was learning about what was important for this group through creating the process together.

3.2.4c Taking a Narrative Approach to facilitating conversations

As a researcher I was not separate from the process and generating data but very much part of creating it. Therefore my role was both empathetic; the insider role where I am with you, and the outsider role where I am separate from you which creates a more distanced perspective (van der Riet, 2008). I facilitated sessions and provided a framework through which the following session's content was co-constructed with the participants. In that sense I was a practitioner working collaboratively with a group of parents and teachers. It is important to recognise that in every session there were elements that I was bringing that facilitated the process. For example Session 2 began with a phrase used by a parent from the previous session '*Raising kids that are going to be the next bunch of adults*' (see Appendix 6 for summary of key discussion points). I decided that this would be an important stimulus for discussion because it re-produced in a different form something a parent had said. In doing so it gave new meaning and value to her as a parent within this context.

Understanding parent-teacher relationships through the narratives constructed within a particular school context is not the basis of the individual alone but the individual's participation in and through culture and everyday transactions (van der Riet, 2008). Many of these interactions are rooted in language, shared understandings and discourses which are immersed in beliefs, desires and values (White & Epston, 1990). One way the 'outsider' role was enabled to be present within the dialogue was through my facilitation using approaches based on Narrative Therapy. An underlying mode of inquiry when facilitating conversations in a narrative way is through taking a

stance of critical curiosity (see Table 6 for narrative questions). In applying this approach in the sessions, the meanings given through dominant societal and cultural discourses of 'good' parenting and parent-teacher relationships could be explored in more depth and deconstructed.

Table 6. Examples of Narrative questions asked in the research process

- *What would you have hoped for during that time when all of that happened?*
 - *How would you have liked school to approach you with the concerns they had?*
 - *Why is it important to you?*
 - *Can you say something that has struck you about the discussion today?*
 - *Something that will stay with you....*
 - *So in that moment when you heard Mrs X say that, what did you notice?*
 - *What do you think has enabled that conversation to happen?*
 - *When have you noticed that before?*
-

3.3 The Analytical Process

Throughout the process, parents and teachers were invited to reflect on what was important to them and what they were noticing anew in terms of how they were interacting. The embedded nature of participation within this piece of research meant that we moved beyond data collection within the process itself. Parents and teachers throughout were collaboratively reflecting, analysing and negotiating together on what mutuality meant for them. Participants in this research were viewed as co-researchers so it seemed appropriate to use their reflections about what mutuality meant for them as the starting point. In that way I have made transparent their constructions about the nature of mutuality within this piece of research. These ideas were generated at the end of session 4 where participants were asked to reflect on what they thought had contributed to successful interactions and mutuality between them. Participants wrote on post-it notes things that had been important to them in the process. This generated a great deal of discussion between participants reflecting on aspects of the process as well as new insights for example '*Seeing parents as people*' (column 1, Table 7). Participants were then asked to arrange the comments into themes suggested by me, for example '*Witness-connecting with others*' (column 2, Table 7). I have presented the main comments and themes arrived at by participants in tabular form (Table 7).

Table 7. Identified elements of what mutuality meant for participants and thematic components in relation to review themes (power, school culture, boundaries and receptivity)

Elements identified by parents (P) and teachers (T) about what was important in the interactions between them	Components of mutuality	Linking review themes with components of mutuality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We know that we all want the best for our kids (P&T)</i> • <i>We are all on the same page (P&T)</i> • <i>Seeing them (teachers) as human (P)</i> • <i>Seeing parents as people (T)</i> • <i>Talking about our families and backgrounds helped make connections with each other. (P&T)</i> • <i>We're all human and I seeing there's tragedy in everyone's background (P)</i> • <i>Everyone is different as individuals but we share the same values (P)</i> • <i>Getting to know the other mams more than just a 'hello'(P)</i> • <i>Links to other Mams! Sometimes I don't get the chance to just be a Mam! (T)</i> 	With-ness – connecting with others	BOUNDARIES POWER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Everyone felt at ease with each other (P&T)</i> • <i>Communication is the key to change and make people feel valued (P&T)</i> • <i>Respect of teachers/parents (P&T)</i> • <i>Trust and being approachable – not having high barriers (T)</i> 	Having positive regard for one another	RECEPTIVITY BOUNDARIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Respectful when listening (P&T)</i> • <i>Being listened to (P)</i> • <i>Listening is the key to developing change (T)</i> • <i>Everyone listened to what the person had to say (P)</i> • <i>Pondering on what a teacher or parent has said (P&T)</i> 	Active/purposeful listening	RECEPTIVITY POWER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Just having a conversation about what had made us happy that week broke things up (P)</i> • <i>Sharing stories about our education, our parents, our children (P&T)</i> 	Shared narratives - past, present and future	RECEPTIVITY BOUNDARIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Teachers interacting as people rather than just their role as a teacher (T)</i> • <i>Recognising similarities and differences in each other (P&T)</i> 	Bringing multiple selves to the situation	SCHOOL CULTURE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hearing how another person thinks was thought provoking (P&T)</i> • <i>Positive (not dwelling on the negatives) (P&T)</i> • <i>Informative (T)</i> • <i>Parents know children best (T)</i> 	Open to possibilities	SCHOOL CULTURE RECEPTIVITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Everyone could have their say and not be put down (P)</i> • <i>Parents feel empowered to be part of the school (T)</i> • <i>Peoples/parents thoughts on staff and school environments (T&P)</i> • <i>Everyone has joined in and listened to others opinions (P&T)</i> 	Democratic	POWER BOUNDARIES RECEPTIVITY SCHOOL CULTURE

As shown in Table 7, I have made explicit where the components of mutuality linked to the concepts of power, school culture, boundaries and receptivity between parents and teachers. Although these four concepts are interrelated and link to all of the listed themes, it was apparent where they featured most prominently.

In the next section three key points will be discussed that I, both participant and researcher, perceived as central to the development of mutuality between parents and teachers. I have drawn on my own observations and reflections as the researcher, as well as two sources of data: the video data from the video analysis with parents (session 3) and transcriptions of the final focus groups with parents and teachers (session 5a/b). I will also consider towards the end of this chapter other contextual factors that may have contributed to the progress made in the research sessions and towards the eventual outcomes. Coming from a dialogical epistemology it is important that the findings are viewed as provisional rather than a final authoritative account (Arruda, 2003).

3.3.1 Key points in the development of mutuality

When I set out to explore with parents and teachers whether mutuality was possible, it was unknown whether there would be a way for this to happen or whether it was possible at all, particularly given reported failures of parent teacher interactions as discussed in chapter one. However, as the themes in Table 7 suggest, some kind of mutuality was created between parents and teachers and could be described. There seemed to be a number of underlying processes that enabled this to happen. Three of these will be discussed: i) making connections through the other, ii) outsider's perspective, and iii) creative tension in dialogue. The next section is accompanied by two very short video clips that go with the text and correspond to the photos. Video clips were included so that the quality of interactions (verbal and non-verbal) was not lost in translation (Plowman & Stephen, 2008). Being able to see the participants in context, tells a richer story than I could capture with words. It provides a window through which the people and ideas I have been writing about can be seen more clearly.

3.3.1a Making connections through the other

Parents and I worked collaboratively reviewing micro-moments of interactions between teachers and themselves guided by the principles of Video Interaction

Guidance (VIG) (Kennedy, 2011). Although based on VIG principles of attuned interaction and guidance, it was not intended to follow a typical cycle as when working with a parent and child for example. Following the VIG process, prior to the session with parents video footage was edited from the previous session and a few clips of successful interactions between parents and teachers were selected. At the beginning of the next session parents were shown an abridged version of the VIG principles and were asked to consider these principles when watching the short video clips of interactions (see Table 8). As the facilitator or ‘guider’ in VIG terms, it was important for parents to have the time to watch and reflect on what they were seeing to develop new thoughts, feelings and narratives (see Appendix 7 showing the guider’s role).

Table 8. Abridged version of VIG principles of attuned interaction and guidance (adapted from Kennedy, 2011)

Being attentive	Looking interested with friendly posture Giving time and space for each other Wondering about what the other is doing, thinking or feeling Enjoying watching the other
Encouraging initiatives	Waiting Listening actively Showing emotional warmth through intonation
Receiving initiatives	Showing you have heard, noticed the other’s initiative Receiving with body language Returning eye contact, smiling nodding in response Receiving what the other is saying or doing with words
Developing attuned interactions	Checking the other is understanding you Waiting attentively for your turn Having fun Contributing to interaction/activity equally
Guiding	Extending and building on the other’s response Giving information when needed Providing help when needed
Deepening discussion	Supporting goal-setting Sharing viewpoints Collaborative discussion and problem-solving Naming difference of opinion Reaching new shared understandings

Parents were able, by watching short video clips, to select and reflect on successful interactions between them and teachers that may otherwise have gone unnoticed (illustrated in Figure 3). For example, one of the moments they selected was fleeting and to some may seem inconsequential (illustrated in Figures 4 and 5). However, it was apparent that this moment was not at all inconsequential due to their observed reaction when they saw it. Therefore it seemed for these parents that this moment was important. The moment was when a parent noticed a Deputy Head Teacher pondering on something a mother had said (watch Video Clip 1). Using this visual relational method, parents had the opportunity to reflect on successful moments of attuned interaction between themselves and teachers and this seemed to play a key part in the mutuality that was created. Watching a short video clip over again acted to slow time down and created a gap whereby new understandings were made.

Parent A: *Did you see Mrs X there? She (Parent B) obviously said something..... You said something and it was like..."oh".....*

PARENTS WATCHED VIDEO CLIP AGAIN

Parent B: *Mrs X's reaction? Hmmm.....that's interesting*

Parent C: *It's good*

Researcher: *Why is that important for the Deputy, Mrs X in that position, to be able to ponder on something that you have said?*

Parent B: *Because it gives her an insight into how someone else, how we are thinking as parents*

Parent C: *Because we are all different. She's obviously thinking "oh wow I'd have never of thought of that", and that's nice to see.*

By seeing the Deputy Head respond in that way, it was confirmation for these parents that she was entering their social world (watch Video Clip 2). She was entering into it as a whole person, rather than as a teacher talking about their children in an official capacity.

Figure 3. Parents selecting and analysing moments of successful interaction



In this moment power had shifted and change had occurred in how a parent was received and heard. For this group of parents, that moment held the possibility of change and a preferred richer description in narrative terms in which they were seen as having something important to say and where they were valued as equitable participants in school (White, 2007). Furthermore, given that interaction is the central principle in VIG, the parents were able to see their own strengths in the interactive encounter with teachers, 'it is not what a person does that is important but what that person does in response to another, and that both partners are equally affected by disruptions in communication' (Cross & Kennedy, 2011, p. 71).

Figure 4. A moment showing parents and teachers talking about "*Raising kids that are going to be the next bunch of adults*"



Figure 5. A moment showing Deputy Head Teacher pondering about something said by a parent



Through the video analysis and subsequent shared feedback with teachers (session 4), a new understanding appeared to be created that went beyond the 'known and familiar' to 'what it is possible to know' in terms of being a supportive school, have parent-teacher relationships, and be in partnership (White, 2007 p. 263).

I think it's essential because nobody knows the children better than their own parents so parents have got to feel that they are listened to. It's made me think that we need to set aside time to do groups like this every now and again just to stop. Because we get on a treadmill, we get here at eight o'clock and just run run run. And sometimes you have to stop and think about what you're doing. I'm not sure we get enough time to do that with parents, to just stop and listen rather than react all the time to something that's happened. To just take a few minutes to stop and listen to what people have got to say. I've learnt so much just by listening to people's ideas and things I'd never have thought of. (Teacher)

Due to the constraints of time, teachers did not have the opportunity to follow the same process of selecting and reflecting on successful moments of interaction with parents. This is a limitation of the current research as doing so could have provided further opportunities for learning conversations in terms of bringing teachers closer to their espoused theory about engaging meaningfully with parents (Cross & Kennedy, 2011). This could have contributed to furthering discussions in the joint session about what it means to have meaningful relationships with parents.

The only time we get to talk to parents is at parents evening, a ten minute slot and that's usually filled with all the negative things and you don't always want it to be negative. If you can develop good relationships with people particularly if you have a tricky situation with a particular child I think it's important to get parents on side to help you deal with anything, its partnership and you're all doing it for the best interest of the child. (Teacher)

3.3.1b Outsider's perspective

Given that the approach adopted was dialogic in origin, the use of video as a means of creating new insights and learning can be explained in terms of a 'boundary object' between parents and teachers (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011). In this way, video clips functioned as the bridge to connecting the sites of school and home, and the often contradictory practices and perspectives between parents and teachers. The boundary object, in this case video clips of successful interactions, not only 'articulated meaning' (Akkerman & Bakker, 2011 p.140) but through the shared review process, transformed meaning for these participants (Cross & Kennedy, 2011). Traditional parent-teacher boundaries, as highlighted in chapter one, were bridged and new insights about the other were created.

Teacher - *You realise how much you give away through non-verbal cues. The new insight that parents commented on wouldn't have come across if the session had just been taped on audio, you wouldn't have seen that.*

Parent - *It broke barriers down. You see the ones (teachers) who were in here in a different sort of light. They are human and I feel better to talk to them. I think it's different on the yard. It's more interactive. Its better, well actually not even better just more relaxed, more welcome.*

Furthermore, it has been argued that visual techniques offer an important distanced perspective that might support transformative dialogue and practices in PAR (van der Riet, 2008). I suggest that the use of video was a means of distanciation and enabled greater understanding of the social situation because the outsider's perspective 'provides for a view that is not possible within the bounds of the context in which the action occurs' (p.549 van der Riet, 2008). The video was a shared reference point and allowed participants and me to see parents and teachers interacting in a way that offered something contradictory to an 'insider' account (van

der Riet, 2008). The video was explicit and tangible and through the facilitation that I offered as an 'outsider', a means to critical reflection. Parents and teachers were able to talk about what they were seeing and what this meant to them based on their own understandings about their school and community.

We're women. Women with a common interest in the children that we work with, it's their children. It's nice for them to see us like that because you get a different relationship going, you're free-er to say the things you want to say. You don't think of yourself as coming across as an authoritarian figure do you? But I suppose you do because when we walk down to the yard and we're all together and we're all in our school coats and we're chatting teacher talk, I suppose to some parents on the yard it might look like a very kind of 'us and them'. I don't think we realise how powerful it is. (Deputy Head)

I was able to bring my perspective in terms of what I was seeing and what it meant to me as an educational psychologist researcher. We were collaboratively engaging in the process of meaning making that went beyond what these participants and I already knew.

3.3.1c Creative tension through non-goal directed conversations

It was clear that from the start of this process the talk between the participants reflected differing perspectives, not only between parents and teachers but amongst parents. As has been discussed previously, certain groups of parents can be alienated or silenced from the practices of schools despite partnership rhetoric as discussed in chapter one. Within this PAR, steps were taken to reduce the power differentials not only between teachers and parents but also between myself as the researcher and all the participants. Through the collaborative process, underpinned by the values and principles of narrative therapy and VIG, it was possible to create together 'non-goal directed conversations' about what being a parent and raising children meant to these people (Barrow & Todd, 2011). In doing so, parents and teachers were able to hear multiple perspectives within and between themselves. In each session, they were co-constructing a social reality that sat alongside and in contradiction to their own individual constructions, and I believe this is where the 'sparks of tension' and potential for change resided (Barrow & Todd, 2011 p.283).

Teacher - *I think it's allowed us to see them as more than just a parent figure. As individual people in their own right who have things in common with you. Whereas it's usually a very quick let's get sorted what I need to get sorted about your child and there's not the time to get to know them as people and what they really think.*

Parent - *It's nice to see parenting on different levels because we've all got different parenting skills and deep down we all want the same thing ultimately for our children.... but there's certain things that each of us would do differently.*

By talking together in this way they were constructing a new way of interacting with each other. Through creating the space and time to have reflective conversations where exceptions were noticed and where space was given to receive the voice of otherness, long held beliefs, normalising truths and negative perceptions were being challenged. For example, the deputy head's descriptions of certain parents in the group were challenged through participating in equitable and collaborative practices that allowed for different types of conversations with those parents.

....there's certain people in the group that I had misconceptions about if I'm being quite honest. There were certain ideas about people.... and they've really surprised me..... Just how sensitive some people are and how thoughtful they are. It has made me think that, it's going to make me sound like a right snob I don't mean it like that, I mean that if you take the time to get to know people they have got things to say that are of value.... to you and to the whole school. You just have to take the time to get to know what they are all about. (Deputy Head)

This statement suggests counter narratives were formed that moved away from thin descriptions of parents that developed a level of critical consciousness which allowed the deputy head to reflect on her own learning (Freire, 2000). Parents were also able to identify a shift in their perceptions of teachers, seeing beyond the authority figure through the development of more social relationships.

I think it's not to judge people too quickly for me because you do have this thing about what the teachers are going be like and you expect to go in all

guns blazing. I had some of these teachers as my teachers and that's hard.
(Parent)

Transformative dialogue requires that the two-way conversation is never closed, always on-going and that confrontation and struggle with the other is what creates new insight and tension (Barrow & Todd, 2011). Through having different kinds of conversations that were not goal-directed and were open to multiple-voices and different perspectives, parents and teachers developed a consciousness about their hidden negative perceptions. This view is supported by others who suggest that more dialogic relationships between parents and teachers may in some way re-address the power imbalances that exist (Vincent, 2012). The participants in this research project were learning about each other and what it means to have genuine dialogue. This created the possibility for a cultural shift to occur between parents and teachers in that context. For a period of time, parents and teachers received each other with positive regard, where boundaries of learning and understanding were crossed and there was some parity in the discursive power between them. In the process parent-teacher relationships were being reconstructed.

3.4 Conclusion

In this piece of research I was concerned with parent-teacher relationships and have problematised from the outset the notion of parent partnership. Participatory research methods were combined with relational and psychological approaches to explore the role and function of mutuality with a group of parents and teachers. Three components were highlighted as playing a critical role in the mutuality that developed between participants that led to the success and eventual outcomes i.e., changed relationships. Furthermore, the research project took place in a specific social context that created certain favourable conditions for working in this way with this group of participants. The impact of such contextual factors cannot be overlooked in any discussion of this project as they are likely to have contributed to each session and the progress and outcomes created during the course of the research.

3.4.1 Contributing factors

It is important to recognise that the progress made during this research project and the development of mutuality occurred through a PAR design which had embedded

within its conception democratic processes (Greenwood et al., 1993). As discussed in this chapter, within the research design two specific relational approaches were used to facilitate discussions between parents and teachers, narrative therapy and VIG. These approaches have been written about extensively and are widely used in Educational Psychology practice as well as other fields (e.g., Chasle, 2011; Gibson, 2013; Hannen & Woods, 2012; Hayes, Richardson, Hindle, & Grayson, 2011; McCarten & Todd, 2011). Additionally, within the specific school context there was a school leadership that was supportive of the research from the outset. The Head Teacher provided cover for the teachers to come out of lessons for each research session and the staff room was vacated and given over to me and the participants every week for the period of the research. These are demonstrable examples of a head teacher, in her attitude and application of resources, being committed to changing the status quo.

It was also apparent that teachers, support staff and parents were committed and invested in the wider community in which the school was located and that members of staff had a history and affinity with the local area with many of them residing there either currently or previously. These contextual factors are important when examining the possibilities of participatory action research aiming to develop parent-teacher relationships. As I have previously discussed school culture and leadership are integral to the development of reciprocally meaningful relationships between parents and school staff. It therefore seems that future collaborative projects between parents and teachers are made more possible when the full extent of the leadership of the school is supportive, both in attitude and in allocating resources. Previous research would support this finding and the crucial role school leadership has in developing more equitable and reciprocal parent-teacher relationships (Blackmore & Hutchison, 2010; Dunsmuir et al., 2004).

Whilst acknowledging the importance of contextual factors in the success of this project, the participatory action research design is also likely to have contributed to the outcomes. It is therefore difficult to unpick mutuality from other aspects of the process that enabled parents and teachers to participate equitably. However, it is my view that mutuality may have played a critical role in developing a different way of communicating and collaborating between these parents and teachers. It seemed to

allow for differences to be held in tension with enough positive regard that people did not walk away from the process.

3.4.2 Mutuality - a necessary component of democratic participation?

It has been argued elsewhere that dialogue which opens up the possibility for insight, change and transformation requires going beyond mutuality (Barrow & Todd, 2011; Marková, 2003a). In a discussion about democratic practices, Barrow and Todd (2011) suggest new insights can only emerge from 'a confrontation between self and otherness and in dialogue' and this 'should lead to an ongoing and dynamic tension as opposed to fusion and stability' (p.283). Whilst supporting this statement, mutuality in this context, as created and developed with these parents and teachers, seemed to be integral to the way insight and transformation occurred within a democratic relational process. Mutuality in this research was not about reaching a consensus, as the themes in Table 7 demonstrate. Participants valued talking with each other, hearing different perspectives and through this process new understandings about the 'us' seemed to be created.

The process of developing mutuality within a dialogic space and employing narrative and VIG approaches enabled possibilities for understanding the self and others. I believe this was a necessary part of democratisation in which a group of parents and teachers gained new insights and commonality of purpose so that transformative dialogue was able to occur. The development of mutuality between these parents and teachers helped the process to remain intact rather than fall apart because of conflict and disagreement (Arnett & Arneson, 1999).

3.4.3 Implications for Educational Psychologists

This research was conceptualised as meta-practice and is at the heart of what I believe EP practice is about (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008). In the wider context of policy and legislation, the changes were small and perhaps insignificant. However, at a school level a number of changes have happened since the research came to an end in terms of my official involvement. For example: children's reports are now written with a 'rich' description of the child at the beginning followed by attainment levels; parents evenings are being re-conceptualised by some teachers as non-goal directed conversations; and some parents and staff meet as a group regularly to discuss school and community issues. The Deputy Head Teacher has taken the lead

on developing more equitable practices and finding ways to engage all parents in decisions about the school. As a result, parents are participating more in democratic decision making processes with staff and are directly effecting change in the school. Their knowledges are potentially redefining power relations and richer narratives are being ascribed 'truth' status about what parents can contribute to the organisational culture of the school. I am aware that my role in facilitating relationality between parents and teachers was not insignificant. I continue to support the school in my role as a trainee EP and attend the parent teacher meetings as well as consulting with the Deputy Head Teacher regularly supporting her initiatives and talking through different problem-solving approaches e.g., using solution-oriented psychology. In doing so she has felt more able to use psychology to understand how to support other members of staff to develop their relationships with parents especially the ones deemed 'hard to reach'.

EPs are well placed to carry out research as part of our developing evidence-based practice (Topping & Lauchlan, 2013). Research examining parent-teacher relationships in schools seems to me to be an important area of EP practice at a wider local authority and national policy level. A useful starting point for understanding the complex dynamics of parent-teacher relationships with school leadership teams would be an exploration of the four themes of power, school culture, boundaries and receptivity as discussed in Chapter One. This could be developed further in terms of specific approaches for developing mutuality in relation to any contextual factors that may be impacting on parent-teacher relationships in specific contexts. As suggested in previous research, EPs are well placed to use relational approaches such as VIG and narrative therapy to support schools develop their relationships with parents in the interests of all children (Barrow & Todd, 2011; Day, 2013; Dunsmuir et al., 2004). EPs have the potential to facilitate psychosocial processes through creating 'dialogic spaces' with parents and teachers to support the development of mutuality in schools. In doing so new insights may be possible that go some way towards creating more equitable participatory communities of practice.

"The children we work with every day, there's other ways to narrow the gap for them and there's other ways to make sure they're happy in school and it's got to come from parents and we need to have more time to discuss with

them their children. Isn't there a quote that you can't keep doing the same thing and expect different results? That's important within the community that we want parents to go away feeling valued and that their opinions matter. You can't just go round saying we're a really open school.....how do we become inclusive for all parents not just the ones who want to be active in school."

(Deputy Head Teacher)

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Appendices

- Appendix 1 Information 'flyer' given out to parents and displayed around school
- Appendix 2 Letter sent out to all parents in Key Stage One
- Appendix 3 Participant Information Sheet (the same one was given out to members of staff with relevant changes)
- Appendix 4 Participant Consent Form
- Appendix 5 Participant Demographic Sheet
- Appendix 6 Participants summative points from discussion in Session 2
- Appendix 7 The seven steps to developing attuned interaction and guidance during a shared review (Kennedy, 2011)



**RESEARCH PROJECT
at
'X' Primary School**

An Exploration of Parent-Teacher Relationships

A collaborative piece of research between parents and teachers

- 6-8 parents needed to participate in this research project
- 5 group sessions – lasting 1 hour each (approximately)
- Joint session with parents and teachers exploring your experiences of parent-teacher/school relationships
- Times and dates of sessions will be negotiated to suit participants
- Please speak to your child's teacher or let the Head Teacher know if you are interested.
- More details will be provided when you sign up

If you require any further information about this project then please
contact me on 07984501341
or email j.buntin@newcastle.ac.uk



Research Project – Exploring parent-teacher relationships

Dear Parent/Carer,

My name is Joanne Buntin and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist based in Durham, currently working in local schools in the area including ('X') Primary School. I am in the second year of an Applied Doctorate in Educational Psychology course at Newcastle University. I am about to begin my research exploring parent-teacher relationships.

I would like to invite 6-8 parents to be part of this research project alongside 4 members of staff. The research will explore in joint sessions the views of parents and teachers about being a parent, parental involvement and your experiences of parent-teacher relationships.

The research will involve five sessions taking place at (school's name) – each session will last approximately 1 hour each. The first session will be on Thursday 11th July and the rest will be after the summer holidays in September/October.

If you are interested participating in the research then please can you let your child's class teacher or the Head Teacher know.

Thank You!

Joanne Buntin

Tel: 07984501341

Email: j.buntin@newcastle.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet (the same one was given out to members of staff with relevant changes)



Making Connections: Building mutuality between parents and teachers

Participant Information Sheet

Dear Parent/Carer,

My name is Joanne Buntin and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist based in Durham, currently working in local schools in the area and in the second year of an Applied Doctorate in Educational Psychology course at Newcastle University. I am about to begin my research exploring parent-school relationships. This research is being supervised by Professor Liz Todd. This project has been approved by the University's Research Ethics Committee

INVITATION

You are being asked to take part in a piece of research that will mean exploring ideas with teachers about parental involvement in your child's school and your experiences of parent-teacher relationships.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

You will be asked to take part in five sessions taking place in the school and this will involve;

- Session 1** Focus group
- Session 2** Discussions and activities between parents and teachers based on issues/themes arising from the focus groups. The workshop will be videoed.
- Session 3** This session will involve parents selecting clips from video footage taken in the previous session.
- Session 4** Parents to sharing selected video clips with teachers followed by a discussion about these. This session will also be videoed for the purposes of data collection.
- Session 5** Focus group

All times and dates will be negotiated with all participants (and the head teacher regarding use of the school building).

TIME COMMITMENT

The sessions will last approximately 1 hour each. Total time approximately 5 hours.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS

You may decide to stop being a part of the research project at any time without explanation. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn/ destroyed. You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you. You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered. If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask me before the research project begins.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

It is unknown at this time if this research will have any benefits. It is my hope that the research process will provide new insights and understandings between the parents and teachers involved in this project will develop as part of the project and that benefit the school as a whole.

It is unlikely that this research project will present any known risks to participants. However, there may be some mild discomfort when discussing sensitive issues focus groups or workshop sessions. I am confident that any emerging issues will be dealt with sensitively and supportively. There may also be some mild discomfort with being videoed and/or with seeing yourself on the screen. This is a very normal response to filming and any self-conscious moments will be accepted and acknowledged and those taking part in filming will be reassured.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

The information collected will remain confidential and decisions will be taken within each group about what to share and not share. Participants will be identifiable in video clips; however no individual names/school name will be attached to the video data when stored. Data generated during the course of the research project will be kept securely in paper or electronic format as appropriate and retained for a minimum of 12 months following data collection or the minimum time required by law. Typically this may be six, ten, twelve years or longer. Data will be stored safely and will remain confidential.

Data may be used for the purposes of presentation at conferences or publication. All data, with the exception of video clips, will be anonymous. Any video clips used in presentations will not identify participants by name or school.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

If you have any questions about this research project at any time then please contact me by telephone 07880044751 or email j.buntin@ncl.ac.uk

Joanne Buntin
 Trainee Educational Psychologist
 c/o Lorna Wilson
 School of ECLS
 King George VI Building
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 Newcastle upon Tyne
 NE1 7RU
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CONSENT FORM

Making Connections: Building mutuality between parents and teachers

Please Initial Box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above research and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I agree to take part in the above research.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I agree to the interview / focus group / workshop being audio recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I agree to the interview / focus group /workshop being video recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, articles or presentations by the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I understand that my name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentations.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant..... Date..... Signature.....

Name of Researcher..... Date..... Signature.....

Participant Demographic Sheet

1. Male/Female (please delete):
2. Age:
3. Age of child/children:
4. Ethnicity:
5. How would you describe your current employment status? (please tick)
 - Employed full time
 - Employed part time
 - Unemployed / Looking for work
 - Student
 - Full-time mum
 - Retired
6. Occupation:
7. What is the highest level of education you completed? (please tick)
 - Primary school only
 - Some secondary school, but did not finish
 - Completed secondary school
 - Some college, but did not finish
 - Two-year college course
 - Three/Four-year university degree
 - Some graduate work
 - Completed Masters or professional degree
 - Advanced Graduate work or Ph.D.
8. Social class:
9. Do you live in the local community?
10. If so, for how long?

‘Raising kids that are going to be the next bunch of adults’	
Resources available in the community:	School, afterschool clubs, parks, social places such as the pond/nature – looking after the world, library ‘free’ learning/books/computers, faith, church, Sure start, gym, clubs and classes.
Skills our children will need:	To be reflective/soulful, clear communication and good social language, endurance and motivation, focus, confidence but not arrogance, ICT, having hope, be world wise, friendships - the good, bad and ugly.
Strengths our children already have:	Their personalities, they know right from wrong – their morals, confidence, independence.
Difficulties/barriers in the community/wider community that may hinder your children:	Lack of understanding and tolerance, jealousy, fear of difference, peer pressure.
Values that we want our children to hold on to:	Good friendships, knowing right from wrong, respect, trust, to cope with whatever life holds.
Aspirations/hopes for our children:	Understand themselves, good health, know how to build themselves up when things get difficult, to be happy (everything else will fit around that).

Appendix 7: The seven steps to developing attuned interaction and guidance during a shared review (Kennedy, 2011, p. 30)

