



“Holding the Family and the Child in Front of Everything
Else”

An Exploration of Educational Psychologists’ Perspectives
on Family-Centred Practice in Early Years Education: An
Appreciative Inquiry

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Declaration

This thesis is submitted as part of the award for Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. This work is my own and does not include the work of material of others without acknowledgement. This work has not previously been submitted for any other purpose.

Emma Hutcheson-Galbraith (July 2023)

Overarching Abstract

This thesis explores Educational Psychologists' (EPs) perspectives on their role in relation to a family-centred model of partnership within the context of early years education (EYE). It comprises of four chapters which include: a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), a critical consideration of the methodological and ethical assumptions of the project, an empirical research study and a reflective account of the research process.

The SLR (Chapter 1) explores families' perspectives on what contributes towards effective family-centred practice (FCP) within an Early Years context. A meta-ethnographic approach was adopted to synthesise the findings from six papers, which were identified as being relevant to this review and the research question. Findings were conceptualised into three key themes: Relational Behaviours (quality interactions and relatedness and an ethics of care), Dialogic Behaviours (valuing local knowledge, enabling and scaffolding dialogue and validating and legitimising families' voices) and Participatory Behaviours (democratic partnerships and co-construction). A theoretical model of FCP, from the perspectives of the families whom it was designed to serve, was generated from these findings. By prioritising the views of families over other professional groups who may traditionally hold more power, this framework may contribute towards redressing power imbalances within the context of partnership working.

Chapter 2 provides a rationale and argument for the empirical research question as derived from the SLR. A critical reflection of the philosophical assumptions are discussed with a focus on how relational constructionism can provide a suitable lens to view the empirical research, providing justification for the methodology adopted. Ethical considerations of this project are also explored throughout this chapter.

As derived from the SLR, the empirical report (Chapter 3) follows the five-step process of an Appreciative Inquiry, whereby a group of six EPs from one local authority explore their past and current successes in implementing FCP. Conceptual ideas around what may be possible within a preferred future were also explored. The data was analysed using an inductive thematic analysis approach. The findings highlighted several factors that could contribute towards EPs re-orientating their professional practice to a more family-centred model of practice within the context of an Educational Psychology Service (EPS). This included the identification of current practice which supports the joint experience of FCP,

alongside suggestions which could open up new opportunities for co-action and promote broader organisational and systemic change. The use of this theoretical model of practice may support a new understanding of how FCP can be understood and implemented within the context of an EPS.

The final chapter (Chapter 4) provides a reflective account of the research journey. This includes the exploration of how my engagement in this process has influenced me on a personal and professional level, impacting upon my future practice. Finally, several potential next steps are outlined in relation to future research and wider practice.

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Chapter 1: Systematic Literature Review

How do families construct what constitutes effective family-centred practice (FCP) within the context of Early Years?

1.1 Abstract

Working in partnership with families in mainstream services is recognised as a key priority for practitioners. In Early Years (EY), the development of collaborative family-practitioner relationships has been suggested to support a range of developmental outcomes. Whilst the importance of this is acknowledged, practices which best support partnership working remain vague and these relationships may not always support collaboration.

This chapter offers a qualitative synthesis of the literature in the form of a meta-ethnographic study. The systematic literature review (SLR) asks the question: *How do families construct what constitutes effective family-centred practice (FCP) within the context of Early Years?* Six qualitative papers were reviewed and synthesised to create a model of families' perspectives of effective FCP in EY. As aligned with FCP, the meta-ethnography suggests that families valued both the relational and participatory practices of the framework. However, extending upon this, the theme of dialogic practices suggests the centrality of language and dialogue in the effective enactment of FCP. These findings may provide an explanation of the underlying processes of this model which can be grounded within psychological theory and research.

The findings of this SLR may extend upon the wider body of literature on FCP, by offering a synthesis of this framework in practice, which is rooted in the perspectives and voices of families. It is hoped that these findings may have implications for educational practitioners working in collaboration with families. This may illuminate considerations for facilitating more collaborative partnerships in the context of EY provisions.

1.2 Introduction

It has long been acknowledged that the developmental and learning outcomes for young children are positively impacted by successful family-practitioner relationships (Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Rouse, 2012). This may be supported by a shared understanding of children's needs, joint goals and mutual decision making (Rouse, 2012). The family is

recognised as highly important in early development, with parents acting as their child's most influential first teacher (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). It is acknowledged that the term 'family' is a broad and subjective concept. The use of this term will reflect any adult who has a familial influence upon a child's life.

At the point where a child enters an institutional education provision it has been considered good practice for families to be involved in their education (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Early years education (EYE) may be considered any provision which provides care and supports the learning and development of children from birth to five (Department for Education, 2021). Despite the acknowledged importance of family involvement in EYE, recent research has suggested that practices supporting the development of partnerships remains unclear. Kambouri et al. (2022, p. 4) argued that "the reality of partnerships between practitioners and parents is still far from ensuring an ideal and collaborative ethos".

However, family-centred practice (FCP), described as a model of partnership, has been considered the cornerstone of educating young children within the context of the early years (EY) (Dunst et al., 1994; Dunst et al., 2007; Haines et al., 2015). The focus of this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is to explore families' experience of FCP within the EY. I will begin by exploring the research and theory underpinning partnerships in the EY, before exploring how FCP may act as a framework to support this endeavour.

1.2.1 Partnership Working

Family partnerships may be described as a multi-faceted construct (Sime & Sheridan, 2014), also referred to in the literature as parental 'involvement', 'engagement' or 'participation' (please see Epstein, 1991; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Sime & Sheridan, 2014). Whilst these terms are generally used interchangeably within the research, they are often thought to have different meanings (Hummel et al., 2022; Kambouri et al., 2022). For example, 'parental involvement' may more aptly describe families' behaviour with regard to supporting their child's learning (Minkle et al., 2014). Instead, it is the term 'partnership' which is suggested to encapsulate "the bidirectional character and the quality of the interactions between parents and professionals" (Hummel et al., 2022, p. 2), reflecting the reciprocal nature of this type of relationship (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). Underpinned by feelings of trust, respect, reciprocity and mutually shared goals and decision making (Alasuutari, 2010; Dunst & Dempsey, 2007;

Keen, 2007), this terminology may more adequately reflect the collaborative ethos of this construct.

Effective partnership working may involve the facilitation of what has been referred to as a 'messy web of interactions' (Crozier, 1999, 2001; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Several barriers are considered to hinder the development of effective partnership working. Research suggests that the balance of power (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Todd, 2019), upheld by professional discourses, may determine the expectations, rules and roles of these relationships (Fairclough, 2001). This may emphasise expert constructions of practice which disregard the importance of family knowledge (Ballard, 1999; Lawlor & Solomon, 2017).

Models of 'partnership' may then focus on the 'upskilling' of families', implying that they are lacking in understanding or knowledge which, when offered, will enable them to be more 'effective' (McQueen & Hobbs, 2014; Todd, 2019). Legislation and subsequent policy positions family-practitioner partnerships as essential within the United Kingdom (UK) education system (Department for Education, 2014). Despite this, policy requirements do not always meet the ideal standard of participatory practices (Kambouri et al., 2022).

1.2.2 Family-Practitioner Partnerships in the Early Years

The influence of the family in EY is well documented (Belsky et al., 2007; Rouse, 2012), acknowledging the critical role played by families in child development (Evangelou, 2009; Melhuish et al., 2008; Sylva et al., 2004). This seems to reflect a wider shift in educational practice and an understanding of child development. By relocating the focus away from within-child deficit discourses, a wider spectrum of influences i.e., familial influence, can be understood (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Hobbs et al., 2000).

Effective and meaningful collaboration in EYE is considered to be essential to family-practitioner partnerships (Baum & McMurray-Schwarz, 2004). Investment in early relationships is suggested to support intervention outcomes, which may promote learning opportunities within the home environment across a range of developmental areas (Elicker et al., 2013; Evangelou, 2009; Melhuish et al., 2008). Early positive experiences of family-practitioner relationships may also provide a foundational basis for future partnership working (Kuhn et al., 2017). Despite this, fully ascertaining the relationship between family partnerships and educational attainment may be considered elusive in

nature (Gorard & See, 2013; Wilder, 2014). Whilst recent research has made progress in developing an understanding of what best supports partnerships in the EYE (please see Kambouri et al., 2022), further exploration may be warranted.

1.2.3 Conceptualising Family-Centred Practice

FCP is considered a partnership model in the context of the care and education of young children (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007; Haines et al., 2015; Rouse, 2012). This model emphasises a philosophy of practice in which families are considered pivotal in the lives of children. This supports the idea that families should be empowered as active partners in their child's education and care (Allen & Petr, 1998; Dunst & Trivette, 1996; Rouse, 2012). FCP is also reflective of current UK policy. Within England, the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2014, p. 85) cites the importance of support within EYE being "family-centred and should consider the individual family's needs and the best ways to support them".

FCP is influenced by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Dunst et al., 1988; Espe-Sherwindt, 2008). This acknowledges the holistic nature of child development, whereby children exist within an interconnected ecological system made up of the family, the community and society (Wright et al., 2010). The child, their family and the environment are therefore considered to be inextricably linked (Holland & Kilpatrick, 2003). FCP therefore acknowledges the importance of recognising the systemic nature of the early care and education of young children (Rouse, 2012).

A 2010 review of the literature sought to find consensus on the definition of FCP across the research. The key features of this framework remained consistent (see Table 1). However, the review indicated a shift in the most salient aspects of FCP, whereby at the core of this framework is the family-practitioner relationship and family choice (Epley et al., 2010). This aligns with Rouse's (2012) conceptualisation that it is the "interactional relationships that are formed with families and also in the way families are enabled to participate in this partnership and decision making process" that defines FCP (Rouse, 2012, p. 12). The inclusion and distinction of relational and participatory practices is therefore considered essential to FCP (Dunst, 2002; Dunst & Dempsey, 2007; Espe-Sherwindt, 2008).

Table 1. Common Features of FCP.

Principle	Description
Family-practitioner relationship	This refers to the partnership between families and practitioners. It is the reciprocal nature of FCP, which invites the active participation of families, which is seen as essential in the facilitation of this model of practice.
Family choice and decision making	Families are recognised as co-contributors in decision making procedures. Their unique understanding of their child is drawn upon to support the development of outcomes and goals.
A whole family approach	This principle recognises that children exist in the wider context of the 'family unit'. In this ecological system, the child, the family, and the environment are inseparable. The family are viewed as a unique operating system.
A strengths-oriented approach	The systemic nature of a family is acknowledged and within this, all family systems are recognised as possessing unique strengths.
Individualised services	Support is individualised to each family's needs, flexible, co-ordinated, and responsive.

Relational practices may be best understood by interpersonal qualities that support the development of respectful, reciprocal and responsive relationships between families and practitioners (Barrera & Corso, 2002). Participatory practices are considered to support the active involvement of families within the decision making process, supporting a joint understanding of a child's needs (Espe-Sherwindt, 2008; Rouse, 2012). Both relational and participatory elements must be present within practices. However, it is the participatory practices which are regarded as essential in the effective enactment of FCP (Espe-Sherwindt, 2008).

FCP has been considered effective within context of Early Intervention (EI) settings (Dunst & Espe-Sherwindt, 2016). However, Rouse (2012) has suggested that FCP can also be successfully utilised within EYE and non-interventionist settings. A visual representation of a FCP model, detailing the interconnections between the principles and core characteristics of the model is set out below (Figure 1). This details a conceptual understanding of how FCP may support partnerships within the context of EYE settings (op cit).

A model of Family Centred Practice

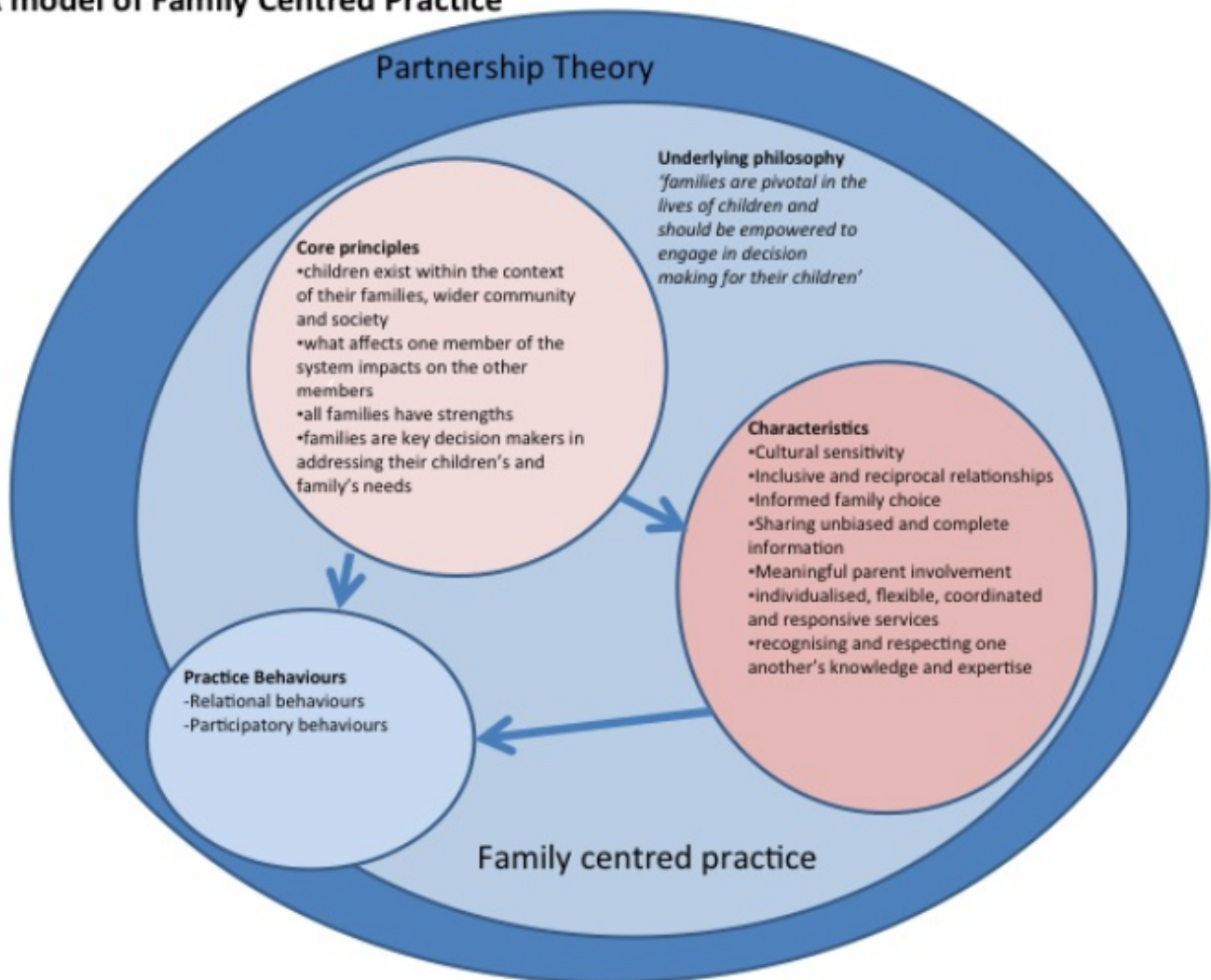


Figure 1. A Conceptual Model of Family-Centred Practice.

However, this framework is not without criticism. The language associated with FCP has described practitioners as 'help-givers' and families as 'help-seekers' (Nachshen, 2005; Rouse, 2012). This seems to reduce families' feelings of empowerment, positioning practitioners as 'experts' and families in need of 'expert' support (Dunst et al., 1988). This may illustrate a disconnect between the terminology used to describe FCP and the core ethos of the framework.

Despite the problematic nature of this terminology, these conceptualisations seem to be rooted within the cultural and historical specificity of this framework (Burr & Dick, 2017).

Recent FCP literature may more aptly reflect the shifting culture of partnership working and this terminology has since been acknowledged as problematic (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). FCP may therefore no longer be grounded within this type of discourse and could now be recognised as more culturally specific, reflecting the shifting nature of knowledge as relative, rather than absolute and true (Burr, 1998). Therefore, despite this critique, impetus to explore this framework as a model of partnership may still be justified.

1.2.4 Hearing Families' Voices

Whilst a collaborative ethos is proposed, it would appear that families' voices are less represented within the context of policy development on FCP (Lee, 2015). This is reflective of the literature more broadly, whereby families' voices may often be subject to normative policies (Cottle & Alexander, 2014). FCP may then be devised and developed on the belief systems of more powerful groups and dominant discourses (Skrtic, 1991b; Skrtic, 1991a). Processes that are suggested to support family partnerships may therefore not necessarily involve families or reflect their voices and needs (Lee, 2015).

Core to the current exploration is the centrality of families' voices on what makes FCP effective. Via this SLR, the power must lie with families. Their voices are prioritised over all others who may traditionally hold more power (Skrtic, 1991b; Skrtic, 1991a). This meta-ethnography will be explored via a social constructionist lens, suggesting that social reality is a subjective concept, constructed through language (Burr, 1995). This meta-ethnography and my interpretation of the findings therefore make no claims to discover truth (Noblit & Hare, 1988). However, by giving a voice to the diversity of families' perspectives, it is hoped that this will help to construct a unique understanding of their experiences, to better understand FCP as a model of partnership in EY.

1.3 Method

The research question for this review was: *How do families construct what constitutes effective family-centred practice within the context of Early Years?* Qualitative research is considered to support the exploration of how people understand and construct their social worlds (Atkins et al., 2008). As this review is primarily concerned with understanding families' experiences, the decision to focus on qualitative studies was crucial to this exploration.

To engage with the SLR, a suitable method of qualitative synthesis was chosen. A meta-ethnography approach to qualitative synthesis is regarded as a well-established method. This is suggested to support the development of research findings which can increase explanatory power (Britten et al., 2002; France et al., 2019). Noblit and Hare (1988) described meta-ethnography as an interpretivist tool which can provide a method to analyse and synthesise qualitative studies, to develop a new understanding of an area of research. They suggest seven stages for engaging in a meta-ethnography (Figure 2). This framework was adopted for the purpose of this review.

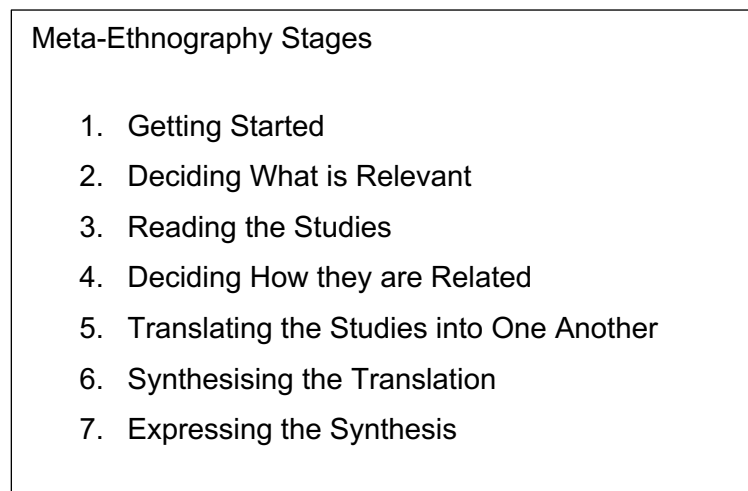


Figure 2. Seven Stages of Meta-Ethnography.

1.3.1 Getting Started and Deciding What is Relevant

A comprehensive search of the literature was conducted from July to December 2021. Five databases were accessed to conduct a thorough exploration of research relevant to the topic of exploration. These included: ERIC, SCOPUS, Web of Science (WoS), Child and Adolescent Studies (CAS) and PsychINFO. The final search terms are included in Table 2.

Table 2. Final Search Terms.

Intervention “family cent*” or “family-cent*” or “family intervention”
Setting “early year*” or “early childhood*” or ECE* or “early education” or “foundation year*” or nursery or “children* centre*” or “pre-school” or kindergarten
Outcome Parent* or famil* or care* or mother* or father* or partnership* or collaboration or participation or involve* or engage* or “working in partnership”

To support the screening process, the programme Covidence was implemented. This web-based software tool helped to streamline the SLR process. The screening process can be seen in the PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 3).

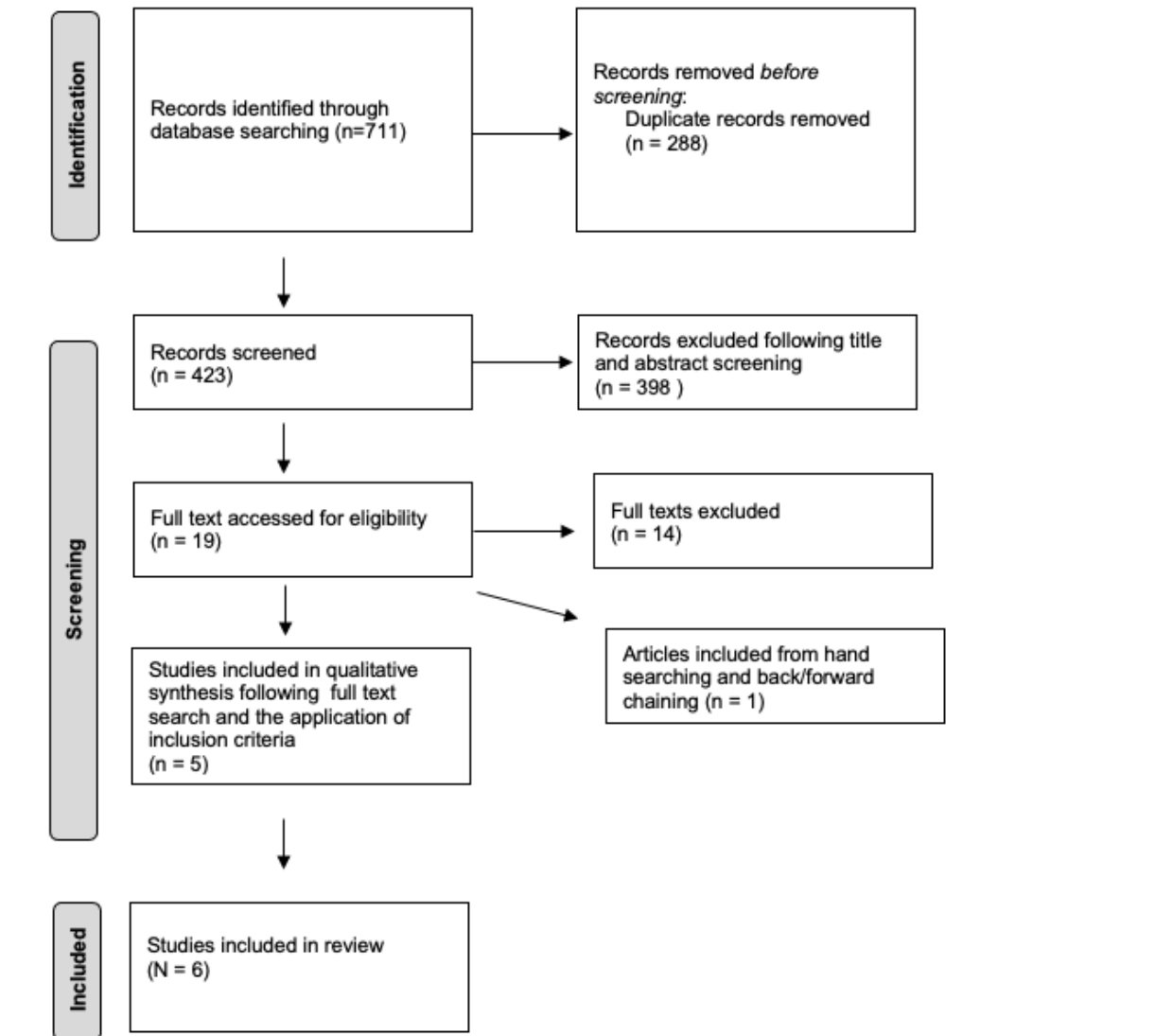


Figure 3. PRISMA Flow Diagram.

The initial searches yielded a total of 423 studies after duplicates were removed. A title and abstract screening was conducted to ascertain which studies were of relevance. 19 papers were read in full. At this stage, inclusion criteria were applied to these papers to understand their relevance in relation to the topic of exploration (Table 3). With the inclusion criteria applied to all 19 papers, 5 were deemed suitable for the synthesis and 1 additional paper was found via hand searching.

Table 3. Inclusion Criteria.

Category	Inclusion Criteria	Justification
Population	Families of children in Early Years, aged 0-6 years old, as aligned with the Early Years statutory frameworks for included countries. Diverse parental roles, including studies with extended family members and foster parents caring for a child.	Aligned with the research question and to ensure the inclusion of diverse parent voices and family inclusion.
Setting	Any Early Years setting, including Early Intervention (EI) settings, adopting a FCP model.	Aligned with the research question.
Outcome	Exploration of the features of FCP which support families constitutes towards the effective enactment of this model of practice.	Aligned with the research question.
Type	Empirical design and qualitative methodology to understand how families view their social world and to explore experiences.	Suitable for a meta-ethnography.
Geographic location	Australia, United States of America, Canada and Ireland.	These countries mirror much of the Western culture found in the UK. Reflective of countries that adopt a FCP model in EY practice.
Journal type	Published (peer reviewed) research since 2010, as aligned with Epley et al. (2010) literature review of a common definition of FCP.	For quality assurance purposes.

1.3.2 Reading the Studies and Deciding How They are Related

All six papers were read in detail. Information was extracted from the papers and placed in a table (Table 4). Three of the six papers included the experiences of service providers and EY practitioners, alongside participating families. As aligned with the research question, a decision was made to only draw data from families' experiences.

All participating families within each of the studies had engaged in an EI programme, which was underpinned by FCP. No studies based within a UK education setting could be located via my searches.

Only one of the six studies (Lee, 2015) followed an approach that was informed by statutory guidance on FCP. This EI programme followed the requirements of the 'Individualised Family Service Plan' (IFSP), which is suggested to promote family-centred EI services to children and families (op cit). All other studies were guided by the principles of FCP which were derived from an original theorisation of this model of partnership (Dunst et al., 1988). This appears to differ from a UK context. Despite UK policy documentation making reference to the importance of support within EYE being family-centred (Department for Education, 2014) how this may be enacted in practice remains vague.

The papers were read again and first order constructs were drawn from the participating families in each paper. First order constructs are original extracts from the participants. However, the researcher's interpretation of the data has also been considered to constitute data. These are second order constructs (Schutz, 2012). This means that the first order constructs will be interpreted twice, by both the original researcher and as a result of this meta-ethnography (Atkins et al., 2008).

In this stage, engagement in the initial mapping process was conducted, supporting the exploration of commonalities across the six papers. This facilitated the identification of interrelated themes. Common concepts which appeared were aggregated and the six papers were translated into one another (Noblit & Hare, 1988).

Table 4. Data Extraction Table.

Title	Author	Participants	Context	Method Type	Measure or Theme
<p>Holding the Cards: Empowering Families Through an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Family Goal Setting Tool.</p> <p>This qualitative study describes mothers' and practitioners' perceptions of the utility of the Family Goal Setting Tool: Autism Spectrum Disorder Version (FGST: ASD Version) in an Australian context.</p>	<p>Jones, Rodger, Walpole & Bolbir (2019)</p>	<p>9 mothers of children with Autism in EY (8 biological and 1 foster mother) and 11 EY practitioners (5 teachers, 3 speech language pathologists (SLPs), 2 occupational therapists (OTs), and 1 family support worker (FSW) in Australia</p>	<p>Australia (Queensland).</p> <p>The research was facilitated in the context of the Early Intervention (EI) service 'Autism Queensland' guided by the principles of FCP. This is a state-wide ASD non-profit organization based in Queensland, Australia providing centre-based and outreach EI services for children aged 3-6 years old.</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews and focus groups.</p>	<p>Analysis revealed four interrelated themes, including that the FCP tool facilitated a comprehensive approach, collaboration, goal prioritisation, and relieved the stress of goal setting. In addition, practitioners described an overarching theme that the tool empowered families and enabled FCP.</p>
<p>A Qualitative Study of Parental Experiences of Participation and Participation in an Early Intervention Service.</p> <p>Using a qualitative inquiry, in-depth interviews were</p>	<p>James & Chard (2011)</p>	<p>4 mothers and 3 fathers of children with primary physical disabilities within a pre-school setting for children aged 0-6 years old.</p>	<p>Ireland.</p> <p>The research was facilitated in the context of an EI service of a regional children's centre in Ireland. This EI services adopted a FCP model of</p>	<p>Semi-structured interviews. 4 interviews were conducted with mothers only and 3 interviews were conducted with both mothers and fathers.</p>	<p>Analysis generated three themes. These included: new experiences: early stages of involvement associated with stress. Parents were not always ready to participate in active decision making associated with FCP. Empowerment: over time parents felt more empowered to 'speak up'. Collaboration middle ground: the</p>

carried out with parents of 7 children with primary physical disabilities who attended a pre-school programme in Ireland.			practice and supported families and children aged 0-6 years old with special needs.		importance of relationships with professionals. Relationships were balanced and equal partnership was gained.
The paradox of early intervention: families' participation driven by professionals throughout service process. Using a qualitative case study approach, this study looks at both participation and perception of families in the EI service process in the metropolitan area of the US.	Lee (2015)	3 families of children aged 0-3 years old who had recently entered the EI systems, engaging with a multi-agency team of practitioners.	America (New York). Participants recruited for this study were currently engaged with a variety of EI services supporting families and children aged 0-3 years old with disabilities. All EI services followed statutory guidance on family-centred EI services and the requirements of the 'Individualised Family Service Plan' (IFSP).	Observation data, file reviews i.e., the Individualised Family Service Plan (IFSP), in-depth interviews and the researcher's reflective notes.	Findings indicated that families' participation in this family-centred model of practice varied. This was dependent upon the variable availability of practitioners, their competency levels and approaches to practice from individual service providers. Families' participation within the FCP process was often hindered by procedural requirements and professional bureaucracy.
Parents' and Service Providers' Perceptions of Family Goal Setting Tool: A Pilot Study. This qualitative study described parents' and service providers' experiences in using a Family Goal Setting	Rodger, O'Keefe, Cook & Jones (2012)	8 mothers and/or primary caregivers and 10 members of the family and early childhood service team including 2 OTs, 2 SLPs, 2 social workers, 2	Australia (Queensland). This research was facilitated in the context of a 'Family and Early Childhood Service' provided by a local disability services. This is an	Semi-structured interviews and focus groups.	Findings concluded that the use of this tool enabled collaborative goal setting and facilitated the family-centred nature of this activity. This tool also supported a strengths-based focus to practice and support family empowerment.

Tool in an Australian context.		programme officers, 1 physiotherapist and 1 psychologist.	EI service providing support for families and children with disabilities aged 0-6. Practices were guided by the principles of FCP.		
In It for the Long Haul: Parent-Teacher Partnerships for Addressing Preschool Children's Challenging Behaviours. This qualitative study aimed to explore parents' and service providers' perspectives on the process and social validity of a family-centred intervention, 'Getting Ready', in an American context.	Kuhn, Marvin & Knoche (2017)	4 parents, 3 preschool teachers and 2 EI coaches of children engaged in the 'Getting Ready' programme.	American (Midwest). Participants recruited for the purposes of this study were engaged in the EI programme 'Getting Ready' in rural and urban areas of Midwestern American. This EI was designed to support families and pre-school children aged 0-5 years old with 'behavioural difficulties'. The programme was designed around the principles of FCP.	File reviews, audio recordings from parent/teacher conferences and interviews with parents and service providers.	The study's findings contributed themes including parent-professional partnerships, positive parent-child interactions and better engagement in collaborative problem solving and planning.
Learning from parents' stories about what works in early intervention. Using a multiple case study approach, this ethnography	Pighini, Goelman, Buchanan, Schonert-Reichl & Brynelsen (2013)	6 families (two-parent families; one single parent family) of children who had received infant development	Canada (British Colombia). This research was facilitated within the context of a Canadian Infant Development	Retrospective experiences. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups and file reviews.	Families described the ways in which FCP supported collaborative practices, whereby joint decision making was supported. The family-centred model of practice also supported family empowerment. Families expressed the importance

<p>examined the experiences of children aged 0-3 years old deemed at risk for developmental delays or disabilities who had received EI services in a Canadian context.</p>		<p>programme services.</p>	<p>Program (IDP). This is an EI service for families and children aged from 0-3 years old who have, or are at risk of, developmental delays. This programme was guided by the principles of FCP.</p>		<p>of close relationships with the service providers.</p>
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1.4 Findings

1.4.1 Translating the Studies Into Each Other and Synthesising the Translation

In conducting a meta-ethnography, the researcher must determine how the studies are related to one another (France et al., 2019). This includes an understanding of the relationship between each of the studies (Noblit & Hare, 1988). For example, are they reciprocal (directly compatible and comparable), refutational (contradictory) or do they represent a coherent line of argument (holistic inference) (France et al., 2019)?

In this stage, a mapping process was adopted to support the construction of interrelated themes. This mapping process supported the identification of the key constructs from each of the six papers. This enabled the development of broader themes in which the key constructs could be categorised. Through engagement in this mapping process, it is conceivable that the papers were comparable in more ways than they were not. Table 5 sets out the contributions of each SLR paper to the 3rd order constructs. This process of synthesis is essentially a reciprocal translation of the data (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The six papers were translated into one another, resulting in seven themes, as presented in Figure 4.

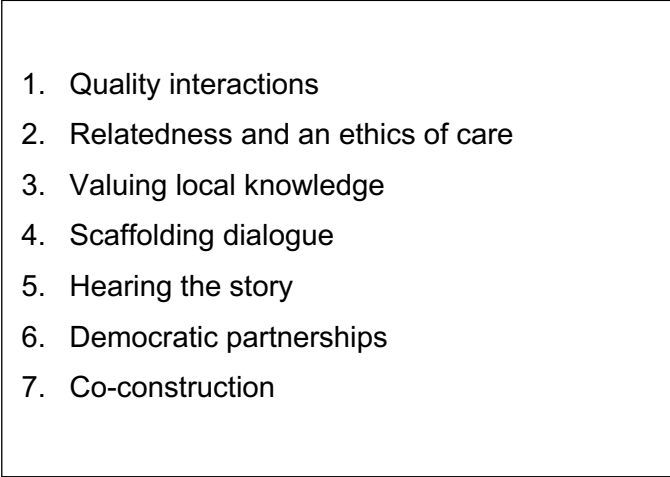
- 
1. Quality interactions
 2. Relatedness and an ethics of care
 3. Valuing local knowledge
 4. Scaffolding dialogue
 5. Hearing the story
 6. Democratic partnerships
 7. Co-construction

Figure 4. Constructed Themes.

Table 5. Contributions of Each SLR Paper to 3rd Order Constructs.

Research paper								
3 rd Order Construct	Jones, Rodger, Walpole & Bolbir (2019)	James & Chard (2011)	Pighini, Goelman, Buchanan, Schonert-Reichl & Brynelsen (2013)	Lee (2015)	Kuhn, Marvin & Knoche (2017)	Rodger, O'Keefe, Cook & Jones (2012)	No. of papers contributing to this construct	Construct synthesis
Mutual respect		✓	✓	✓	✓		4	Quality interactions
Feelings of trust			✓	✓	✓		3	
Interpersonal skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5	
A sense of connection and care	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		5	Relatedness and an ethics of care
Feelings of 'friendship'	✓	✓	✓				3	
Family expertise acknowledged			✓	✓	✓		3	Valuing local knowledge
Understanding family perspectives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	
Creating a shared space for dialogue	✓		✓	✓		✓	4	Scaffolding dialogue
Facilitating family voice	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	

Visual tools scaffolding family voice	✓					✓	2	
Acknowledging, validating and holding emotions	✓	✓	✓	✓			4	Hearing the story
Concerns acknowledged and validated			✓	✓	✓		3	
Democratic collaboration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	Democratic partnerships
Shifting the balance of power	✓		✓	✓	✓		4	
Active involvement	✓				✓	✓	3	
Joint decision making	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6	Co-construction
Developing a shared understanding	✓	✓	✓		✓		4	
Identifying family priorities	✓					✓	2	
No. of contributions to each paper	14	10	15	13	13	8		

This reciprocal translation of the studies and the interpretation of the first and second order constructs are detailed within Table 6. The themes ‘valuing local knowledge’ and ‘scaffolding dialogue’ as well as ‘democratic partnerships’ and ‘co-construction’ have been collapsed together for the purposes of analysis and discussion. The synthesis of the data and comprehension of the studies as a whole works to support an understanding of the research question: *How do families construct what constitutes effective family-centred practice within the context of Early Years?*

Table 6. *Meta-ethnography Themes, Interpretation and Synthesis.*

Theme	Interpretation	Synthesis
Quality interactions	Families appeared to describe the importance of the nature of their interactions with practitioners. The 'quality' of those interactions were perceived to build feelings of "trust" and "respect", supporting the development of reciprocity between family members and practitioners.	Relational practices
Relatedness and an ethics of care	Many families expressed their appreciation of partnerships which were relationally grounded. Their experience of these relationships was an outcome of their 'relatedness' and 'care' to the said practitioner. This often involved feeling a sense of "connection" to practitioners that appeared to transcend the typical boundaries of family-practitioner relationships.	
Valuing local knowledge	Families seemed to value practices that prioritised their voices and positioned them as important, recognising and appreciating their expertise on their child. These practices appeared to appreciate each families' unique strengths. This seemed to challenge the traditional hierarchy of power and expertise inherent within family-practitioner partnerships.	Dialogic practices
Scaffolding dialogue	It seemed that professional practices that facilitated a shared space for dialogue were valued by participating families. These practices appeared to prioritise and scaffold the importance of family voice within consultations and interactions,	

	creating a democratic model of engagement. The process of facilitating discussion around visual artefacts also resulted in the development of information that was then cumulatively co-constructed and owned by each participating consultee.	
Hearing the story	Some families expressed the importance of their story of the 'problem narrative' being offered legitimacy by being heard and acknowledged. Families sought practices which noticed and acknowledged their presentation of their families' difficulties and offered emotional containment.	
Democratic partnerships	It appeared that families sought partnerships where power and control were equally distributed. Family-practitioner partnerships that were more democratic and equitable were viewed positively by families. This involved families' negotiation of their role and level of participation within the partnership, underpinned by embracing parental agency within these relationships.	Participatory practices
Co-construction	Families' believed in the importance of parents and practitioners co-constructing an understanding of their child. This involved new and shared understandings of their child and family's needs, including the identification of strengths. Where meaning was jointly and collaboratively co-constructed, 'action' was negotiated in collaboration. This involved future goals and outcomes shaped by both family and practitioner expertise, which was often holistic in nature.	

1.4.2 Expressing the synthesis

Where Table 6 represents the synthesis, Figure 5 was created to provide a visual representation of the line of argument.



Figure 5. A Model of Families' Construction of FCP within EY.

Central to families' construction of FCP is the presence of both relational and participatory practices. However, current findings may expand on the original conceptualisation of FCP. For instance, the processes underpinning these practices, which appear to be relational in nature (Gergen, 2015), may be better understood. The theme of dialogic practices suggests the centrality of dialogue in the co-construction of

knowledge (Mercer, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978) supporting effective FCP. However, it is the fluid interrelation of each aspect of the model in which “meaning takes shape within a continuous process of coordinated action – one that both precedes and follows the actions themselves” (Gergen, 2015, p. 7). This seems to bond the model together resulting in a sense of symbolic interdependence (Mead, 1934). This visual representation may reflect the reciprocal nature of partnership working, highlighting the interconnectedness between the relational, dialogic and participatory practices which appear to shape FCP. This may also highlight the experiential and relational aspects of partnership working and FCP (Bell, 2002; Sinclair, 2004).

The following analysis and discussion aims to elucidate upon this understanding further, by grounding this synthesis within psychological theory and research.

1.5 Discussion

1.5.1 Relational Practices: Quality Interactions

All families appeared to report the fundamental significance of the relational aspects of FCP and their working partnerships (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007; Dunst et al., 2010; Espe-Sherwindt, 2008). Central to my line of argument are practices which enhance family-practitioner relationships. These relational behaviours provided a foundational basis for partnership working, which continued to influence and enable meaningful participation and co-production.

Central to these relational practices is the importance of ‘quality’ interactions. Roffey (2013) defines quality interactions as micro-moments between families and practitioners which enhance relational quality and build mutual trust and reciprocity. Participating families seemed to value interactions which developed a sense of ‘trust’, ‘respect’ and supported feelings of ‘empowerment’. One mother (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 86) shared feelings of “mutual respect” between her family and the practitioner. These findings highlight the importance of developing a feeling of mutuality and reciprocity in relationships (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017).

All participating families indicated that the perceived quality of these interactions was a key factor in influencing the nature of these relationships. One mother (Jones et al., 2019, p. 124) stated, “You have eye contact, so the person’s more engaged in the conversation”. This also seemed to extend to other family members, with one mother

(Pighini et al., 2014, p. 267) stating, “My daughter was delighted to spend time with [consultant]. I am sure because of the unflinching respect shown to this little person”. However, when aspects of these interactions were not present, this seemed to detrimentally impact upon the relational quality between families and practitioners (Lee, 2015).

Quality interactions seemed to be constructed and reconstructed through the language and ‘symbols’ i.e., non-verbal cues (Blumer, 1969) facilitated via practitioners FCP, deriving from interpersonal communication skills. Interpersonal communication has been regarded as a significant indicator of how families assess the ‘quality’ of their relationships with practitioners (Hedges & Lee, 2010; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). These skills may be understood as a reciprocal process of communication, whereby shared meaning is created via interaction (Friend & Cook, 1992). It is through the interpersonal qualities of interactions that trust seemed to be developed.

Mutual trust is suggested to act as a critical aspect of family-practitioner relationships (Clarke et al., 2010; Hummel et al., 2022; Rautamies et al., 2021). Trust is regarded as a complex and dynamic phenomenon (Tschannen-Moran, 2014a), conceptualised as “a psychological state based on expectations and on perceived motives and intentions of others” (Costa, 2003, p. 608). Trust may be developed through social interactions (Hummel et al., 2022; Keen, 2007), which are underpinned by open and reciprocal communication (Kambouri et al., 2022; Rautamies et al., 2021). The current findings reinforce trust as an interactive concept, whereby trust was constructed between families and practitioners via communicative processes (Konecki, 2019).

The interpersonal nature of these quality interactions supported the development of respect, trust, mutuality and reciprocity, which are all considered critical to FCP (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). Via these relational processes, a shared meaning of the relationship was negotiated and co-created between the two parties (Blumer, 1969). This reflects the core ethos of the relationships within partnership working, which may be considered bi-directional in nature (Kambouri et al., 2022). Findings suggest the importance of fostering these types of interactions between families and practitioners when working in family-centred ways.

1.5.2 Relational Practices: Relatedness and an Ethics of Care

Families valued partnerships which were relationally grounded. The nature of these relationships appeared to foster a sense of relatedness. These relationships seemed to transcend the typical power dynamics and bureaucratic boundaries of family-practitioner partnerships. Parents in two qualitative studies described their relationships with practitioners as 'friendships' (James & Chard, 2010; Pighini et al., 2014), with one mother, in James and Chard (2010, p. 281), stating that the partnership "goes beyond (my child)". Similarly, one parent in Pighini et al. (2014, p. 266) described the practitioner as "our saviour, like our protector, checking on all of us".

These relationships seemed to be characterised by a sense of 'care', which supported a feeling of relatedness to the practitioner. This further enhanced feelings of reciprocity (Burbules & Densmore, 1991; Morrow & Malin, 2004; Sykes, 1991) and fostered the development of positive relationships (Douglass & Gittell, 2012). In contrast, families in Lee (2015) characterised their relationships with practitioners as 'bureaucratic', negatively impacting upon relational quality and their engagement within the process. These practices seemed to reinforce the power differentials between practitioners and families within this study.

Noddings (1984) relational ethical stance on 'care' may support an understanding of current findings. Ethics of care is an approach which "emphasises the interrelatedness of human beings and highlights the importance of attentiveness, empathy, responsiveness, and responsibility for others" (Gabriel, 2015, p. 317). Caring is viewed as a reciprocal process in which both parties within the caring relationship contribute equally (Delaune, 2017; Noddings, 2013). Previous research exploring refugee families' experiences of EYE highlighted that a sense of feeling cared for was crucial to supporting family-practitioner relationships (Keary et al., 2022).

Despite the acknowledged importance of a sense of care, practitioners can often feel torn between neo-liberal policies which govern educational systems and relationally grounded approaches (Chatelier & Rudolph, 2018). The standardisation and formalisation of EYE contexts may reinforce bureaucratic systems and processes, creating barriers to family-centred and relational practices (Douglass & Gittell, 2012). Bureaucratic organisational systems may then conceptualise caring as 'unprofessional'

(op cit). These findings appear to align with the UK education system, where an increase in neo-liberal education policies have negative consequences on family partnerships (Lyon, 2018).

Recent findings emphasise the importance of an ethics of care, which is central to relational practices and families' experiences of FCP. This relational ethic of care may support shared power and mutual respect, as aligned with Noddings' (2002) theoretical framework (Douglass & Gittell, 2012). This seemed to support a feeling of relatedness, whereby families developed a sense of connection to the practitioner, enhancing mutuality. Current findings therefore support the importance of prioritising caring when working in family-centred ways, in order to enhance the relational quality of family-practitioner partnerships.

1.5.3 Dialogic Practices: Valuing Local Knowledge and Scaffolding Dialogue

Central to FCP is the recognition of the unique expertise that each family has on their child (Rouse, 2012). Practitioners valuing families' local knowledge of their child is a key aspect of current findings. Across all six studies, the centrality of dialogue in the co-construction of knowledge was recognised (Mercer, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978). The theme of dialogic practices contributes a novel addition to the original theorisation of a FCP model. This highlights the importance of dialogue acting as a mechanism which can support the relational and participatory aspects of the model. Via these dialogic practices, FCP could encourage the creation of shared space for dialogue and interactions (M. Bakhtin, 1981). Through the scaffolding of dialogue, families were able to share their unique expertise with greater ease.

Families seemed to value practices that prioritised their voices and positioned them as important, recognising and appreciating their expertise on their child. One mother, in Pighini et al. (2014, p. 267), stated, "The consultant listened and understood my concern". Families participating within this study were reported to value the use of collaborative consultation, which utilised active listening strategies and validated their concerns, whilst inviting information sharing. Practices which scaffolded the importance of family voice within consultation and interactions seemed to create a democratic model of engagement (Brinn, 2016).

Findings from Kuhn et al. (2017) suggested practitioners' ability to notice and affirm families' skills and strengths and the asking of open-ended questions supported parents' engagement in dialogue. In contrast, families participating in Lee (2015) described the need to 'fight for' required services for their children, which limited what one mother believed she could share. Families in this study seemed to be positioned as simple followers of instructions, removing any sense of moral agency or voice (Ramaekers & Suissa, 2011).

Two of the six studies (Jones et al., 2019; Rodger et al., 2012) valued professional practices, which facilitated a shared space for dialogue via visual tools. The process of facilitating discussion around a visual artefact supported the development of information that was co-constructed and owned by each participating consultee. Visual tools were suggested to support, engage and 'ease' families into discussion, to share their views and express their intervention priorities (Jones et al., 2019). One parent (Rodger et al., 2012, p. 367) expressed, "It was me choosing those things as opposed to relying on a staff member".

The issue of family voice in the context of the partnership literature is considered complex (Couldry, 2010; Lyon, 2018). However, understanding families' perspectives is deemed a priority in EYE (Parsons et al., 2023). Additionally, research has identified families' role in the representation of their children's voices, particularly when children are considered pre-verbal (Teachman & Gibson, 2018), which may often include EY children (O'Leary & Moloney, 2020). This can be understood through an ecological lens, in which an understanding of the child is co-constructed between the social actors within the social contexts of a child's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Lawlor and Solomon (2017) argued that, expertise which is grounded in the lived experience of families, is often dismissed in the context of professional discourse. Families believe that they have to go into 'battle' to have their voices heard (Parsons et al., 2023). The ethical implications of this are critical, as expressed by Couldry (2010, p. 1), who argued that, "treating people as if they lack that capacity is to treat them as if they were not human". Practices, which extend beyond tokenistic dialogue and display an authentic commitment to making space for family perspectives, are central to families' experiences of FCP, aligning with previous research (Brinn, 2016).

These behaviours recognise and discriminate between the 'subtle yet crucial' differences of practices which simply scaffold families into a professional standpoint and those which

act to hear their voices (Brinn, 2016; Siraj-Blatchford & Wong, 1999). Scaffolding techniques supported the creation of a democratic space which promoted participation and collaborative dialogue (Barrow & Todd, 2011). At times, scaffolding involved the use of visual tools to provide a joint focal point, that was viewed as less intimidating than direct questioning (Van der Riet, 2008), facilitating family voice. Current findings extend upon a simple recognition of the importance of the family voice within FCP, deepening an understanding of the processes which not only value families' perspectives but facilitate and enable them.

1.5.4 Dialogic Practices: Hearing the Story

In four of the six studies (James & Chard, 2010; Kuhn et al., 2017; Lee, 2015; Pighini et al., 2014) families valued practices which sought to hear their story or the 'problem narrative'. This acknowledged their family's difficulties and offered emotional containment which appeared therapeutic in nature. Families participating in Pighini et al. (2014, p. 266) described the importance of their emotions being validated. One father explained, "I have discovered that my consultant does not get uncomfortable with me when I'm scared, mad, sad, worried". In addition, another mother described how she felt "validated on her concerns" (Pighini et al., 2014, p. 267).

In contrast, for families participating in Lee (2015), their experiences were hindered by practice which lacked in 'emotional care'. Families requested more 'understanding' from professionals. One mother expressed a desire that professionals working with families would "have some training experience where they hear first-hand accounts of what it's like to realise that your child is anything other than normal" (Lee, 2015, p. 12).

Recent findings suggest that dialogic practices which were therapeutic in nature were valued by families. Couldry (2010) has suggested the importance of narrative within the context of 'voice'. Although it is important for one's story to be told, 'to give account', this story also needs to be heard and received. This perhaps relates back to an ethics of care. Noddings conceptualises the importance of dialogue which emphasises that in listening, the "commitment is not to gather information per se, but is to the living other who addresses us" (Caine et al., 2020, p. 267). Therefore, through dialogue a caring relationship can be developed and sustained (Noddings, 1992).

Recent findings may be likened to narrative therapy practices, which have acknowledged utility within the context of family partnership working (McQueen & Hobbs, 2014) and

family therapy practices (Freedman & Combs, 1996; Phipps & Vorster, 2015). This psychological framework may provide a therapeutic tool to enable families to construct the meaning they give to certain events or the stories of their lives, via interactions with others (White et al., 1990), whilst supporting collaboration in practice (Dunsmuir et al., 2014; McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). Despite this, families' discussions with practitioners may often be based around 'information gathering', with the practitioners offering some 'solution' to their families' problems (Annan et al., 2013; McQueen & Hobbs, 2014; Todd, 2007).

The dialogic practice of families' stories being 'heard' is an important aspect of their experiences of FCP. The resulting sense of emotional containment is central to families' engagement within the process. This highlights the inclusion of dialogic practices which have a therapeutic element to them as part of FCP, which could be facilitated by narrative psychological framework. Families' perspectives therefore highlight the critical interplay between interpersonal skills and the application of psychological theory to support dialogic interactions.

1.5.5 Participatory Practices: Democratic Partnerships and Co-construction

Participatory practices were considered an important aspect of families' experiences of FCP. The concept of democratic partnerships and co-construction was central to participatory practices across all six papers.

Democratic partnerships in which power and control were equally distributed were valued by families. Families participating in James and Chard (2010, p. 281) considered that "their relationships with professionals were balanced, with both sides giving input to an equal partnership". One grandmother, in Pighini et al. (2014, p. 267), commented on the ways in which her consultant "gave her room to make inquiries on her own terms: *"I knew I could ask"*. However, families participating in Lee (2015) described potential barriers to participatory practices. Requirements of bureaucratic processes seemed to disempower families, limiting their participation. One mother described practitioners as 'insiders' who were "bounded by their superiority in the system", whilst she considered herself as an 'outsider' (Lee, 2015, p. 12).

Participating families in all six papers highlighted that co-construction was underpinned by the democratic quality of their partnerships. Where meaning was jointly and collaboratively co-constructed, 'action' appeared to be negotiated in collaboration.

Families' comments seemed to highlight the ways in which the expertise of all participants was regarded as valid, supporting the negotiation of new meaning (Jordan, 2004). In Jones et al. (2019, p. 124), one mother stated, "We came up with the goals ourselves, we all sort of worked together. It did work well working collaboratively and having the different perspectives." Another mother, in Kuhn et al. (2017, p. 87), shared, "We have the goals (for the child) and talk about that. Everyone pitches in ideas."

John Dewey (Dewey, 1903) defined democratic partnerships as relationships in which each party shares responsibility via alliances that are considered mutually beneficial (Beneke & Cheatham, 2016; Dzur, 2004; Sullivan, 2005). It is via the reciprocal nature of these partnerships that a sense of interdependence is fostered. Knowledge and expertise can then be shared and advanced (Skrtic, 2013) and the power is equally distributed (Schuman, 2005). Within the context of the partnership literature, these concepts appear fundamental to participatory practices, supporting collaboration and promoting positive outcomes for children and their families' (Beneke & Cheatham, 2016; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; O'Connor, 2008).

Recent findings acknowledge the importance of power sharing within the context of participatory practices. This is also regarded important in the partnership literature in EYE (Beneke & Cheatham, 2016). By developing practices which explicitly challenge expert discourses and power structures, more inclusive and democratic approaches to partnership working can be developed (op cit). Therefore, the barriers created by limiting the possibilities of power sharing may be overcome (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008).

From a Foucauldian perspective, knowledge and power gives legitimacy to established institutions, such as educational contexts (Burchell et al., 1991). However, effective partnerships may be underpinned by empowering families as equal partners (Hughes & Greenhough, 2006; Wheeler & Connor, 2009; Wheeler et al., 2006). Recent findings emphasise the importance of refuting the notion of the professional 'expert' (Lai & Vadeboncoeur, 2013), and transforming the role of the 'expert' from 'professional' to 'facilitator' (Beneke & Cheatham, 2016; Dzur, 2004; Skrtic, 2013). This may challenge tokenistic approaches to participation as a means of appeasing associated policy (Cooke & Kothari, 2001) and instead promote the democratic agency of families (Lyon, 2018).

Co-construction is also regarded as important in the context of partnership working (Harris & Goodall, 2008). This is dependent on the degree to which power is shared (Jordan, 2004), and mutual trust is established (Genat, 2009; Rubin & Rubin, 2011),

empowering both families and professionals to develop an understanding of the child and the situation (Brinn, 2016). Without the generation of dialogue which integrates both family and professional perspectives, scaffolding may be deemed as 'authoritative' (M. M. Bakhtin, 1981), inhibiting the development of participatory practices. Therefore "to move beyond a tokenistic dialogue, a genuine commitment to integrating differing perspectives remains crucial but also complex" (Brinn, 2016, p. 198). Recent findings emulate this conceptualisation, linking to both relational and dialogic practices. This allowed effective engagement in co-construction to identify strengths, goals, and challenges and facilitated a democratic agenda (Beneke & Cheatham, 2016). Meaning was therefore viewed as continually emerging through an interactional process, as opposed to awaiting discovery by an expert observer (Macready, 1997).

Previous research reflects the current findings. Families value practices which build trust (relational practices) and sought to scaffold their views (dialogic practices), which ultimately supports a move towards democracy and co-construction (participatory practices). These elements were central to families' experiences of FCP, supporting the development of future goals and outcomes, which were shaped by both family and practitioner expertise and were often holistic in nature (Brinn, 2016; Siraj-Blatchford & Wong, 1999).

1.6 Conclusion and Implications

This qualitative research synthesis sought to explore what supports the effective application of FCP within the EY from the perspectives of families. Lee (2015) challenged FCP, suggesting that the policy and requirements associated with this framework may not adequately reflect the voices and needs of the families (Skrtic, 1991b; Skrtic, 1991a). In response to this, this small-scale SLR has suggested a model of FCP that synthesises and reflects the experiences and voices of families.

These findings have implications for research and practice. They contribute to a wider body of research examining the effectiveness of FCP. However, to my knowledge, this is the first synthesis of families' construction of this framework in practice. This may contribute a new understanding on the topic, rooted in the experiences of families. This may have important implications for practitioners working within EY, who are hoping to develop an understanding of FCP and how it may be facilitated within practice.

This research may influence Educational Psychology practice. Educational Psychologists (EPs) assume a unique position in working directly with families in EYE, alongside promoting positive partnerships between families and practitioners more broadly. This highlights a gap within the literature, and therefore, exploring how FCP can be implemented within the context of Educational Psychology Service (EPS) may be warranted. Further exploration of this topic may support the development of how EPs can work effectively with families in EYE, aligned with a new understanding of FCP. It is hoped that these insights will contribute to the existing literature and have implications for the ways in which EPs implement FCP as part of their EYE practice, within the context of service delivery and provision.

Chapter 2: Bridging Document

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will justify and bridge the findings from the systematic literature review (SLR) with the empirical research. Professional and personal values are suggested to 'come into play' when engaging in qualitative research (Gilgun, 2006). Throughout this process, my decisions have been guided by my personal values and philosophical position as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) and a researcher. Chapter 2 will provide a critical and reflective exploration of these decisions, delivering a justification for the methodological approach adopted for this research.

2.2 Personal Experience and Motivation

My interest in the topic of family-centred practice (FCP) is underpinned by my experience working in a family support role in a highly deprived area of Glasgow. Providing holistic services to families at home, in Early Years Education (EYE) and the community, was an essential aspect of this role. Child and family wellbeing was conceptualised through an ecological lens, influenced by parental, family, communal and social wellness (Prilleltensky & Nelson, 2000). An important aspect of this role was working closely with the child and their family, to establish good relationships and positive partnerships. Promoting family participation in the care and support of children's development and education was also a crucial aspect of my role.

In 2019, I joined an Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in the North East of England. Since then, I have been working towards achieving my Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. Influenced by my previous family support role, facilitating the inclusion of families has been an integral aspect of my professional practice. I continue to be interested in Educational Psychologists' (EPs) work with families. My understanding of how FCP can be implemented within this professional context has provided some interesting reflections. I have noticed that, when time has allowed for this, families have expressed their appreciation for an EP working in a family-centred way. When support has provided a bridge between education, home and the community context, I have observed families feeling more empowered to participate in the care and support of their children.

It has been widely acknowledged that, for practitioner psychologists, working with families and parents is central to good practice (Dunsmuir et al., 2014). However, in the

current context of the profession, practice often appears to be primarily focused on school needs and Local Authority (LA) procedures. Therefore, the role of the EP appears to be school-focused rather than child and family-focused (McGuiggan, 2021). I wondered how EPs may currently be working towards bridging this gap. I was curious about how I could explore how EPs are engaging with FCP, exploring both past successes and possibilities for future practice.

2.3 Bridging Literature and Empirical Research

The rationale for the empirical project was influenced by the SLR. Integral to the SLR was the prioritisation of families' voices. Partnership working is often a process associated with a balance of power sharing opportunities (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Todd, 2019). However, power may often be too readily afforded to educational professionals (Shumway & Foucault, 1989; Trainor, 2010). The theoretical framework of 'the special education paradox' (Skrtic, 1991b; Skrtic, 1991a) provided a critical lens to consider the SLR. Skrtic (1991b) suggested that the policies, practices and grounding assumptions that underpin professional frameworks, such as FCP, may only reinforce and sustain a professional bureaucracy.

Drawing from Skrtic's position, Lee (2015) suggested that FCP can be understood as a set of assumptions and beliefs which has been constructed by more dominant groups. These dominant groups may then set the standards for practices that families are expected to conform to. Therefore, FCP may not be an adequate reflection of the voices and needs of the families it is designed to serve. The SLR sought to explore families' perspectives, as opposed to those of professional groups who may traditionally hold more power and implicitly promote the values of a more dominant group. By synthesising the individual and socially shared constructions of FCP via a family lens, the SLR has created a new understanding of this framework which may more adequately reflect families' voices. My hopes for engaging in a more democratic way of prioritising families' voices has facilitated a new understanding of FCP within the context of an Educational Psychology Service (EPS).

Recent research has criticised the role of the EP for prioritising the needs of schools and bureaucratic educational functions, rather than meeting the outcomes for children and families (McGuiggan, 2021). However, this is likely to reflect the changing socio-political context of traded services, which may reposition schools as customers who commission the services of EPs (Lee & Woods, 2017). This may create the illusion that the schools

who commission these services are the main beneficiaries of EP time (Stringer et al., 2006). Additionally, the marked increase of Statutory Assessment requests from the LA in recent years has increased the workload demands for EPs, impacting upon wellbeing (Jayanetti, 2021) and influencing the ways in which they can work with families. Given the current nature of the EP role, underpinned by high workloads and increased pressure to deliver on statutory requirements, I was keen to consider a way of exploring their FCP from a strength-oriented perspective.

This drew me to Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is a form of action research and an approach to supporting organisational and social change via the exploration of appreciative and collective narratives of past success (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008). AI also seems to align well with the theoretical assumptions of FCP, which is described as a strength-oriented approach (Rouse, 2012). Therefore, it appears compatible with the topic of exploration. However, prior to exploring the justification of this methodological approach, it is prudent to consider the context of my own philosophical position, which is integral to this thesis.

2.4 Philosophical Perspective

Initially I approached this thesis from a social constructionist (SC) perspective, whereby social reality is viewed as a subjective concept, created through language (Burr, 1995; Moore, 2005). From the SC perspective, discourse is used as a tool for making sense of our social world, underpinned by ideas that are culturally sensitive (Burr & Dick, 2017). This perspective is critical of the positivist notion of objective truth and instead suggests that reality can be understood independently of our knowledge of it (Grix, 2018).

Power relations are also key to the SC perspective. This refers to how individuals are positioned in society, in which some groups are afforded more power and authority than others. Those who are afforded more power can set the standards and norms that others are expected to follow and obey (Burr & Dick, 2017). This aligns well with Lee's (2015) critical position on FCP, and is therefore reflective of my interpretivist approach to the SLR and empirical study.

As this project has progressed, so has my understanding and my SC stance via a relational lens. Relational constructionism (RC) has provided a framework to extend my philosophical view, through which to position the empirical project. RC provides a theoretical understanding of the process of SC. Hosking and Bouwen (2000, p. 129)

suggested that “all social realities are viewed as interdependent or co-dependent constructions existing and known only in relation”. RC centres relational processes as a fluid and ongoing means by which relational realities are constantly in flux. This includes the construction of realities relative to a relational self, which is multi-dimensional and which is constructed and reconstructed in relation to others (Hosking, 2011). Thus, a monological view is rejected, and instead, a dialogical view is suggested as a means of how we relate to the other (Sampson, 2019).

The concept of family-practitioner partnerships may be described as a multi-faceted construct and the terminology around definitions has been subject to a variety of interpretations (see Kambouri et al., 2022). Despite the subjective nature of this construct, relational processes seem to provide a theoretical underpinning to a variety of these interpretations, which often refer to the reciprocal relationship of respect between practitioners and families (Hummel et al., 2022; Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). This supports the facilitation of collaboration and shared expertise, promoting positive outcomes for children and their families (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; O'Connor, 2008).

Partnership working, from a theoretical perspective, may then assume that social reality can be understood in relation to the other, via relational processes. This creates a participatory world view and “assumes the primacy of relations as the medium in which all social constructions are continuously created and changed” (Hosking & Bouwen, 2000, p. 130). RC centres dialogical practices as a means of relating to others, supporting a mutual or reciprocal creation and co-construction of ongoing relational processes (Sampson, 2019). A relational perspective offers an epistemological position that recognises the importance of language and interaction in the construction or (re)construction of relational realities (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Giving voice to the numerous and simultaneously existing social realities can facilitate ‘power to’ different but equal relations within the context of partnership working (Hosking, 2011).

This epistemological position has influenced the methodological decisions made for the empirical project. The method for inquiry may be considered as a participatory vehicle to support new ways of being in relation to others, as well as creating a space whereby multiple realities may co-exist whilst being appreciated as equal (Hosking, 2011). The following section will present AI via a RC lens and provide justification for this methodology in the empirical project.

2.5 Methodological Decisions

As an approach and a research methodology, AI focuses on appreciating the existing strengths and values of an organisation, and exploring these assets as a means of constructing new possibilities which may support real and positive change (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 2013; Ghaye et al., 2008). AI is suggested to be more positive in nature and reinforces collaboration and participation (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004, p. 1018).

AI emphasises the view that the world is socially constructed. This positions change processes as embedded within an ability to appreciate multiple realities. By valuing the 'best of what is', a new and more hopeful reality can be co-constructed (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2018). I suggest that AI gives primacy to a relational ontology, acknowledging the relational nature of the world (Bushe, 2012; Sim, 2019; Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004; Watkins et al., 2011). Hosking and Bouwen (2000) consider this within the context of interaction, understood as the co-constructive acts that create social realities.

However, what is 'positive' is also considered a variable local construction (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004), and as such, the idea of 'knowing' is rejected (Hosking, 2011). However, the collaborative, democratic and participatory nature of AI facilitates a space for dialogue and 'inter-acts' via the appreciation of the multiplicity of different voices, giving power to multiple local realities. This challenges traditional forms of research methodologies, which reinforce the reconstruction of local realities via a particular knowing and structuring external agent i.e., the researcher (Hosking, 2011). AI therefore aligns well within the RC perspective.

It is also important to acknowledge how AI supports the theoretical assumptions of FCP. For example, FCP is suggested to emphasise a democratic, collaborative and participative approach to partnership working, which is strength-oriented in nature (Rouse, 2012). This suggests compatibility and congruence with the topic of exploration. AI, therefore, offers a collaborative and qualitative approach to facilitating the empirical project, supporting the inter-dependent construction of an in-depth exploration of FCP. In this vein, the knowledge generated from this inquiry is not separately existing. Instead, it is co-constructed, and what can be 'known' is only in relation to other members of the group (Hosking & Bouwen, 2000), as aligned with the relational nature of partnership working.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

2.6.1 Participatory and Appreciative Action and Reflection (PAAR) Research

Moghaddam et al. (2008) extended the definition of AI as a form of action research by suggesting that a 'participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR)' framework may more aptly describe this type of methodology. PAAR is defined as the "use of our appreciative intelligence to focus on the best of what is currently experienced, seek out the root causes of this, then design and implement actions that amplify and sustain this success" (Moghaddam et al., 2008, p. 362). Figure 6 identifies the key characteristics of PAAR, as aligned within AI methodology.

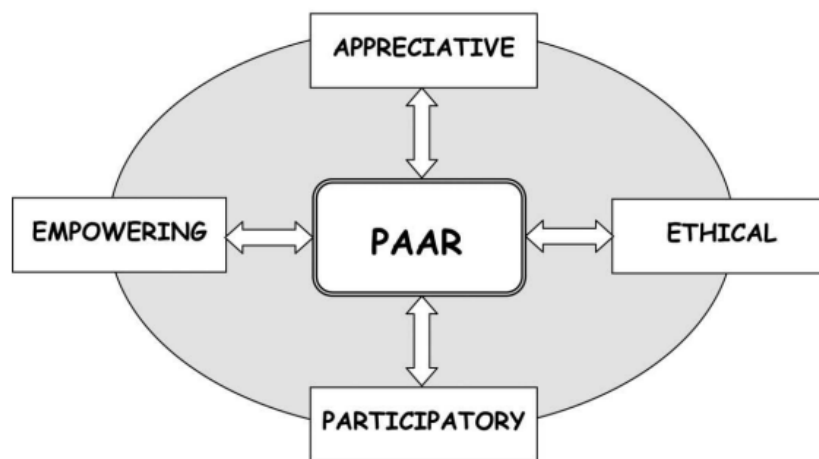


Figure 6. A Participatory and Appreciative Action and Reflection (PAAR) Framework for Action Research.

The ethical considerations of this framework are key. PAAR approaches to research are underpinned by the concept of empowered participation (Fung, 2009). Through the process of deliberative democratic practice, all those involved within the process participate directly (Ghaye et al., 2008). This may create a genuine sense of ownership of knowledge, as opposed to more tokenistic forms of inquiry which may not authentically promote participation (Cook, 2009). Therefore, the ethical basis of AI can be justified via a PAAR framework, aligning with the participatory nature of FCP.

2.6.2 Issues of Influence, Positioning and Data Analysis

Ethical considerations of this project may also reflect on my positioning within AI. As I derived the topic of inquiry and focus, it would be naïve to deny my influence within this process. In many ways, I assumed an insider role, as a qualitative researcher who is also an insider to the population of study (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), sharing language, identity and an experiential basis with participants (Asselin, 2003). An insider position has been criticised as influencing the data generated. This involves the shaping and guiding of the data gathered by the core aspects of the researcher's experience and not the participant's (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). To counter my influence, and 'step back' from the data collection process, I attempted to reinforce my position as facilitator. In doing so, I allowed the 5 stages of AI to guide the process and provided prompt sheets where possible which would facilitate the collaborative dialogue between the group members.

My positioning within the research process is also suggested to impact the data analysis stage (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Reflecting on this position, I was struck by the idea that in research, "there is no neutrality, there is only greater or less awareness of one's biases" (Rose, 1985, p. 77). Underpinned by this type of thinking, I considered how I could acknowledge and approach my insider status through the data analysis stage. Reflexive thematic analysis (TA) provided an approach to the data analysis stage of the project, which acknowledged my influence as the researcher. Reflexive TA acknowledges the interaction of the researcher's theoretical orientation, and what they may bring to the interpretation, whilst being answerable to the dataset (Clarke et al., 2015).

By reflexively engaging with my own assumptions, I may not limit or constrain the self I bring as an insider to the research process. Instead, I acknowledged what I bring to the interpretation (Terry et al., 2017). This allowed me to reflexively engage with my own insider perceptions, which may be clouded and influenced by my personal experience as a member of this group (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

2.7 Quality and Validity Frameworks

My decision to reject any form of quality assessment may be regarded as a limitation of the SLR. This is based on the assumption that if research is to be deemed 'valuable' within applied contexts, then quality must be derived from more than just an abstract criterion (Gough, 2007). However, the application of quality appraisal tools is connotated

with quantitative ideals, associated with objective truth and scientific rigour. This is underpinned by a positivist notion of 'evidence' as an objective truth (Biesta, 2010).

Appraisal tools provide a set of criteria (Barbour, 2001) which rank research based on perceived 'validity' or 'reliability' (Clegg, 2005; Cohen et al., 2017). There may be a dichotomy between the assumptions of appraisal tools and the highly subjective nature of these frameworks, which incur the value judgements of researchers (Andrews, 2005). My beliefs, that social reality is a subjective concept, felt incongruent with the behaviour of engaging with a quality appraisal tool, based on positivist assumptions, creating a sense of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Thus, it was decided that applying a quality appraisal tool would have been antithetical to my espoused philosophical position, which recognises multiple forms of local realities (Burr, 1995).

Quality appraisal tools focus primarily on the 'quality' of the written report (Atkins et al., 2008), with criteria that is prescriptive in nature (Barbour, 2001). Positioning families' perspectives in this hierarchical nature may act to silence their voices. This challenges the core nature of the SLR, in which all families' voices were prioritised. In engaging with a quality framework, I would be applying a set of notions, assumptions and beliefs which have been constructed by more dominant groups. Allowing the standards of quality set by other more powerful groups to define and reflect families' voices would contradict Skrtic's framework (1991b; 1991a) drawn upon for the purpose of this research. I therefore decided to omit the use of a quality appraisal tool for the papers included in the SLR.

2.8 Summary

This bridging document has provided me the opportunity to reflect on my personal motivations for conducting this research. It has also offered me the space to explore the choices I have made whilst engaging in this process, which align with my world views and values. I have explored the evolution of my philosophical position and the development of a relational ontology, providing justification for my stance on data collection and research methodology.

My decision to adopt a PAAR approach, as aligned with my philosophical position, was presented, and justified and the ethical implications of this were discussed. The issue of my insider status was explored, and how this influenced the data collection and analysis stages were considered in the context of how the research has been conducted. Lastly, I

have provided a justification of my decision not to utilise any quality assessment framework, as aligned with my philosophical position, as well as Skrtic's framework (1991b; 1991a), which was drawn upon for the purpose of the SLR.

Chapter 3: Empirical

How can Educational Psychologists keep families at the centre of their practice within the context of Early Years Education? An Appreciative Inquiry.

3.1 Abstract

Current political discourse and education policy emphasises the importance of working in collaboration with families, within the context of Early Years Education (EYE). Despite the proposed benefits of family-centred practice (FCP), there appears to be a dearth of research that explores this framework within the context of Educational Psychology practice. In response to this literature gap, this chapter explores: *How can Educational Psychologists keep families at the centre of their practice within the context of Early Years Education? An Appreciative Inquiry.*

A qualitative research approach was adopted, implementing a participatory research methodology through the use of Appreciative Inquiry (AI). A five stage AI was facilitated with a group of six Educational Psychologists (EPs) in one local authority Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in the North East of England. The AI was recorded and transcribed and the data was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Findings from the AI may be understood by two separate but overlapping set of sub-themes. This includes factors which were found to be important in supporting EPs' FCP in EYE now and within a preferred future.

This included relational, participatory and dialogic practices which support EPs' current FCP. Participants hopes for future practice looked to enhance this joint experience alongside families, by building upon established FCP. The development of 'new meaning' was also co-constructed through a preferred future, which included the development of FCP from an organisational perspective. These findings may have implications for both individual practice and systems level development. Implications for educational professionals and policy makers are offered.

3.2 Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings of an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) research project, exploring family-centred practice (FCP) as a partnership framework within Early Years Education (EYE). This project focused on the perspectives of Educational Psychologists

(EPs), working in one Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in a Local Authority (LA) based in the North East of England.

3.2.1 Policy and Context

FCP has the underlying philosophy that families are pivotal in the lives of children and that they should be empowered as active partners in decision making in EYE (Allen & Petr, 1998; Dunst & Trivette, 1996; Rouse, 2012). The importance of families' participating in their child's education has long been acknowledged, dating as far back as the Plowden Report (1967). In the United Kingdom (UK), The Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2014) advocates families as equal partners within their child's education. This is underpinned by empirical evidence which highlights family partnerships as a key indicator of improved educational success (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Sime & Sheridan, 2014).

EI has been suggested to alleviate difficulties across a range of developmental areas and it is a key area of focus for the distribution of public resources (Douglas-Osborn, 2017). The Conservative government's initiative to introduce several 'family hubs' across the country also seems to highlight the importance of EYE, with an emphasis on EI and holistic care for families (HM Government, 2022). Therefore, working in collaboration with families continues to be a key issue for policy makers and practitioners (Kernan, 2012; McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). In relation to this, EPs are acknowledged to have an important role in the development of EYE and EI services (Douglas-Osborn, 2017).

3.2.2 A Role for Educational Psychology

The significance of child development within EYE is widely recognised, with family involvement cited as a key contributing factor towards promoting positive outcomes for young children (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Sime & Sheridan, 2014). With an in-depth understanding of child development, EPs may be well placed to support EYE. They are considered to possess the knowledge and skills which can positively contribute towards the development of these settings (Dennis, 2004; Douglas-Osborn, 2017; Shannon & Posada, 2007). However, there is a relative paucity of literature on the role of the EP within these contexts. Disparities on the perspective of what EPs can contribute to EYE are also common. Research has identified a need to understand what EPs can provide to EYE settings, to better meet the needs of the families and communities they serve (Douglas-Osborn, 2017).

Currently, the profession may not be delivering psychological services which are family-focused in nature (McGuiggan, 2021). This poses the question as to whether applied psychology may continue to serve bureaucratic educational functions, rather than meeting key outcomes for children and their families (MacKay, 2006). However, if EPs are to engage effectively with families, they require a clear rationale for developing systems that support collaborative working (Dunsmuir et al., 2009).

FCP has been suggested to support the development of systems for partnership working (Allen & Petr, 1998; Dunst & Trivette, 1996; Rouse, 2012). This may provide impetus for exploring this framework for practice within the context of an EPS.

3.2.3 Rationale and Aims of the Project

A literature review identified that research which seeks to understand how education staff and EPs engage with FCP in EYE is limited. In response to this identified gap, this empirical research explores the question '*How do Educational Psychologists currently engage in a model of FCP in the context of EYE and what are their hopes for their future practice?*' This research may be able to provide a tentative framework of FCP for EYE, within the context of an EPS. It is hoped that this will enable the development of more family-focused support within psychological practice in EYE.

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Appreciative Inquiry

To explore participants' views on FCP, I adopted a research method that facilitates participation and collaboration, appreciates multiple and diverse views, promotes the importance of relationships and offers a strengths-oriented approach. This methodology may be considered congruent with the topic of exploration (see Rouse, 2012).

AI is founded on the idea that the world is socially constructed and subjective (Burr & Dick, 2017). Therefore, appreciating multiple views and possibilities can support change (Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008). AI involves two key aspects including appreciation and inquiry. To 'appreciate' recognises the value of exploring the best of an organisation, by identifying current strengths, successes and opportunities which currently give that organisation 'life'. To 'inquire' involves posing questions which supports the exploration

and the 'discovery' of new possibilities in practice (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 2013; Cooperrider et al., 2008; Zandee & Cooperrider, 2008).

AI is regarded as a form of action research. However, it differs from traditional models of practice, because the process is guided and moulded by the experiences and history of the group (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 2013). AI may then align better with a participatory and appreciative action and reflection (PAAR) research model (see page 37). Given the participatory nature of FCP, with an emphasis on the democratic equality and collaborative engagement of all participants (Rouse, 2012), AI appears compatible with the topic under exploration. In light of this, the five dimension cycle of AI was utilised. This is comprised of five stages, including defining, discovering, dreaming, designing and destiny (see Table 7).

Table 7. Five-Dimension Appreciative Inquiry Process.

Appreciative Inquiry Process
Introduction
A brief presentation reviewing family-centred practice and introducing Appreciative Inquiry.
Stage 1. Define – defining the focus of the inquiry
Stage 2. Discovery – appreciating the best of what is
Stage 3. Dream – imagining what could be
Stage 4. Design – determining what should be
Stage 5. Destiny – creating what will be
Question Time
An opportunity to ask any questions arising

The focus of the AI was to explore how EPs currently engage with FCP in EYE and their hopes for future practice. AI has the dual focus of appreciating the best of 'what is', and

reflexively extending into an exploration of ‘what might be’. The research questions are included in Table 8.

Table 8. Research Questions.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When are we at our most family-centred? What in our current practice do we want to embed within the EPS? 2. What else could be possible within a preferred future?
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3.3.2 Recruitment and Participants

Six participants took part in the research process. Participants were recruited directly. A message was sent to the whole EP team via the digital platform ‘Microsoft Teams’. Participants were invited to express their interest in taking part in the study by emailing me directly to request more information on the purpose of the study and the requirements of their participation. At this point they were sent an information form (Appendix C) and advised to complete the consent form (Appendix D) and email this back to me if they did choose to participate in this study.

All participants were qualified EPs. Five out of the six participants trained at Doctorate level and one participant was trained at Masters level. Participants had been practicing, post qualification, for a range of years and engaged in a variety of specialisms as detailed in Table 9.

Table 9. Demographic Information of Participants.

Participant	Role and qualifications	Years practicing	Specialisms	Areas of interest
Respondent 1	Main grade EP. Doctorate trained.	5	None.	Social and emotional mental health (SEMH) and EY.
Respondent 2	Specialist EP. Masters trained.	23	Communication and interaction.	Early child development and Autism.
Respondent 3	Specialist EP. Doctorate trained.	6	SEMH and trainee Educational Psychology support.	Emotionally based school avoidance.

Respondent 4	Specialist EP. Doctorate trained.	3	Communication and interaction.	Autism, language development, selective mutism and inclusion.
Respondent 5	Main grade EP. Doctorate trained.	1	None.	SEMH, relational practice, social communication and consultation.
Respondent 6	Main grade EP. Doctorate trained.	1	None	Emotionally based school avoidance and solution-oriented practice.

3.3.3 The Research Process

The AI was facilitated over a single three-hour session in September 2022. Discussion took place in a large meeting room within the EPS building. Participants were seated around a round table to promote discussion and collaboration. The session began with a brief PowerPoint presentation which outlined and explained each of the five stages of the AI. During the 'discover' phase, participants were split into pairs for discussion. A prompt sheet was provided to support this phase (Appendix A). This included each participant identifying three wishes for their future work alongside families which were written on post-it notes and attached to a piece of flipchart paper. Following this, participants were invited back together to discuss and share their reflections. All other phases were facilitated as a whole group.

During each stage of the AI participants were guided back to the PowerPoint presentation which aimed to support their understanding of the process and scaffold their participation via guiding questions. This was particularly relevant for stages 4 and 5 of the AI which involved participants defining their collective hopes for their future practice. To support this phase of the AI participants were provided with flipchart paper and pens. These resources were suggested to support the co-construction of an action plan and collectively define 'next steps' to build upon their FCP in EYE. However, how the group used these resources was guided by each of the members. Participants were encouraged to draw from the themes they developed in the 'discover' and 'dream' stages of the AI. As part of this process, participants revisited the wishes they had identified during the 'discover' phase to support a collective understanding of their future hopes.

Although AI acknowledges the reciprocal reshaping of knowledge between participants, with the hopes of minimising my own researcher bias, prompt sheets were provided to

guide participants through the process of the AI (Appendix A&B). The session was audio recorded using a dictaphone device. A fellow Trainee Educational Psychologist acted as a scribe and wrote down key points throughout the session. This was to support and prompt participants discussion and was not used for data analysis.

3.3.4 Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this research was granted by Newcastle University Ethics Committee in January 2022. As suggested by the British Psychological Society’s Ethical Standards, an information sheet was provided (Appendix C). This informed participants that the audio recording of the session would be stored securely and then destroyed following completion of the research project. Written consent was obtained from all participants (Appendix D). Participant identities have been anonymised throughout the research process. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time prior to the recording of the AI.

3.4 Data Analysis

Inductive reflexive thematic analysis (TA) was adopted as it offers a flexible method for analysing qualitative data and is consistent with the constructionist epistemology adopted (Clarke et al., 2015).

As a large amount of data was generated by the AI, TA supported an overview of the data, whilst providing a thematic understanding of the socially shared knowledge discussed and constructed (Marková et al., 2007). The six-phase guide of TA was adopted to facilitate the analysis of the data (Table 10). Themes were generated, refined and presented using a thematic map. The themes, sub-themes and codes derived from this thematic map are presented in Appendix E.

Table 10. Six Phases of Thematic Analysis.

Phase	Process
Familiarisation with the data	This stage involves the researcher immersing themselves with the data. This involves reading and re-reading and making provisional notes on meaningful content.
Generating initial codes	In this phase, the researcher begins to work with the data in a more systematic way. This involves developing codes which are reflective of the data and which are of interest to the researcher. A list of initial codes will be developed.

Initial theme generation	This involves making sense of the generated codes and collating the codes into specific themes.
Developing and reviewing themes	This phase involves the refining of the themes constructed during phase 3. This may involve collapsing themes to create overarching themes and sub-themes.
Defining and naming themes	This phase involves defining the themes and providing names and definitions for each of the themes. At this stage, each theme must appear distinct and should contribute towards an understanding of the data. This phase ensures there is a good representation of each theme from the data excerpts. The thematic map should be clearly refined by the end of this stage, representing the overarching themes and sub-themes.
Producing the report	Excerpts from the data are selected to evidence the analysis. These excerpts are to be discussed within the context of the literature. This provides an account of the data, alongside a coherent argument to answer the proposed research question.

3.5 Findings

Findings may be considered in light of two distinct, yet inter-related aspects. This includes what EPs currently believe is working well in supporting their FCP in EYE (stages 1 & 2 of the AI) and their hopes for their future FCP (stages 3, 4 & 5 of the AI). The analysis detailed above facilitates the grouping of sub-themes into the following overarching themes: a family-centred philosophy, relational practices, participatory practices, dialogic practices, enhancing the joint experience and a family-centred organisation. To guide the reader through the analysis, thematic maps for each of these themes are set out in Figures 8-14.

Findings are presented first, alongside direct quotes from participants. As the AI generated a large amount of data with themes that appeared to be interlinked, an overall discussion section for the AI is provided in order to explore what's working (phase 1) and hopes for the future (phase 2). It is hoped that this will provide an understanding of the data. The findings have been discussed and contextualised within the wider literature to answer the research questions outlined above. The findings have also been synthesised into a visual model (see Figure 7).



Figure 7. Visual Representation of EP' Perspectives on their FCP in EYE from the AI.

3.6 What is Working Well

Figure 8 shows the grouping of themes and sub-themes of participants' perspectives of phase 1 of the AI. This phase explored what is working well to support FCP in EYE and what should be embedded in current practice and the EPS. Current findings relate to the SLR exploration and the central themes may be understood and categorised by EPs' relational, participatory, and dialogic practices. These practice behaviours seemed to be underpinned by the overarching theme of a family-centred philosophy for practice (see Figure 7).

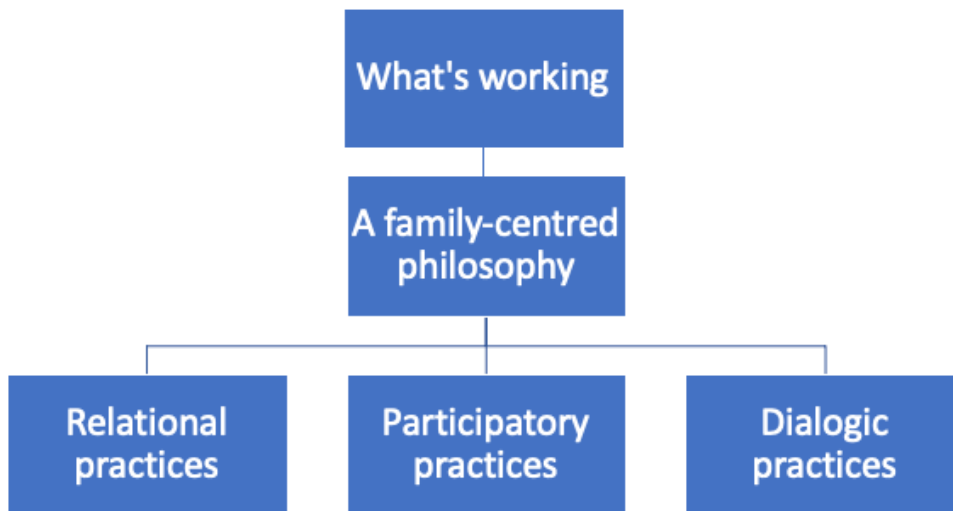


Figure 8. Thematic Map for Phase 1 of the AI.

It is important to note that the ways in which EPs enact these FCP behaviours appear to be grounded in their professional practice and the context of an EPS. Participants also seemed to identify and acknowledge the eco-systemic nature of their FCP, which was demonstrated via their relational and participatory practice behaviours. This indicates that how EPs engage in FCP, within the context of an EPS, may differ to other professional contexts.

The following sections will provide an overview of these findings and the development of the associated sub-themes.

3.6.1 An Overarching Family-Centred Philosophy

The overarching theme of a ‘family-centred philosophy’ recognised the family as pivotal in the lives of children. EPs appeared to both accept and acknowledge this as part of their FCP, consistently holding families at the centre of all decision-making processes. This underlying philosophy was present throughout all themes discussed. This was explicitly stated by Respondent 3:-

The decisions you're making are coming from the family... It is about holding the family and the child in front of everything else (R3).

3.6.2 Relational Practices

Sub-themes that were grouped as ‘relational practices’ were developed from codes that demonstrated that the nature of EPs relationships with families, which was central to their FCP. From the process of analysis, four sub-themes were developed, as displayed in Figure 9.

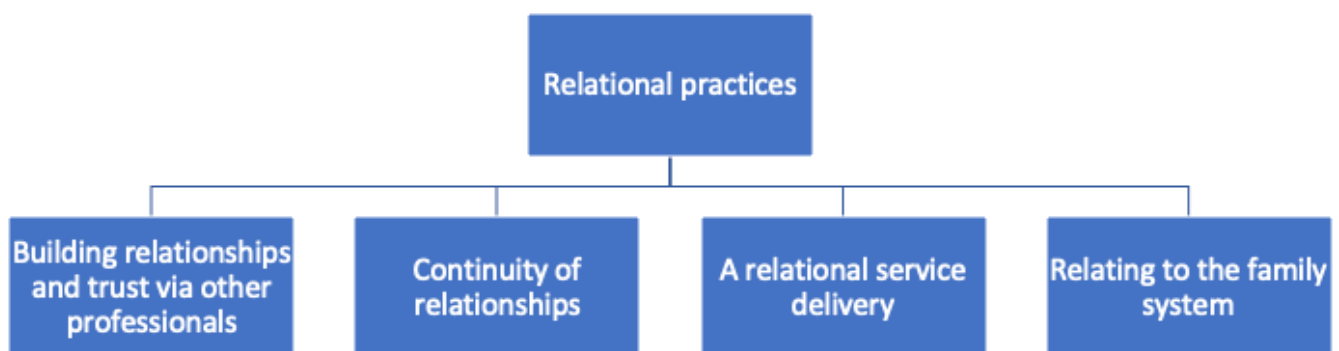


Figure 9. Thematic Map for Relational Practices.

3.6.2.1 Building Relationships and Trust via Other Professionals

EPs spoke about the nature of their working relationships with families, which are often less consistent than that of other professional bodies. This requires EPs to build meaningful connections in a limited amount of time. The concept of building relationships via other multi-agency partners was considered important. This included transferring trust from other practitioners who worked more consistently with the family. Respondent

4 explained how good relationships with other practitioners can give EPs a 'green pass' with families, creating a relational foundation for their FCP:-

And it builds that trust. And you get a little bit of a green pass. If you're familiar with the other professionals who work closely with the family, I think it automatically builds confidence and trust and helps the family to relax. (R4)

3.6.2.2 Continuity of Relationships

However, where possible, participants valued the importance of building relationships and a sense of connection with families over time. This was an important aspect of relational practices. These relational practices seemed to enable a way of 'being with', and working alongside families throughout a partnership journey, that indicated a sense of collaboration and reciprocity over a sustained period. Respondent 5 elaborated on this concept:-

The importance of being able to be involved over time, from pre-school, from a very young age, to be able to work alongside and establish that rapport with the family and be alongside them throughout that journey towards early years provision' (R5).

3.6.2.3 A Relational Service Delivery Model

Many participants indicated that relational practices were core to EPS service delivery model. This was a highly valued aspect of their practice and was integral to EPs FCP. However, it appeared to extend beyond the application of a practice framework and instead acted as a core value for all EPs as Respondent 6 explained:-

I think the relational aspect of the service is something that we all really value. That, as a service, is key for everyone. I think at the heart of it are relationships, whoever it's with' (R6).

3.6.2.4 Relating to the Unique Family System

Relational practices also recognised the importance of relating to the sociocultural context of children in EYE. This included the ways in which EPs understood and related to the wider family system, which was recognised as unique to each child. It also

encompassed an appreciation the diversity of different family units, as well as the acknowledgement of the influence of wider family relationships on the child. Respondent 1 discussed how they related to and supported the inclusion of a diverse range of family members within their practice:-

Acknowledging who the caregivers are, are grandparents involved and can they come along, things like that (R1).

3.6.3 Participatory Practices

Sub-themes formed from 'participatory practices' were derived from codes which referred to how EPs currently encourage family participation in their FCP.

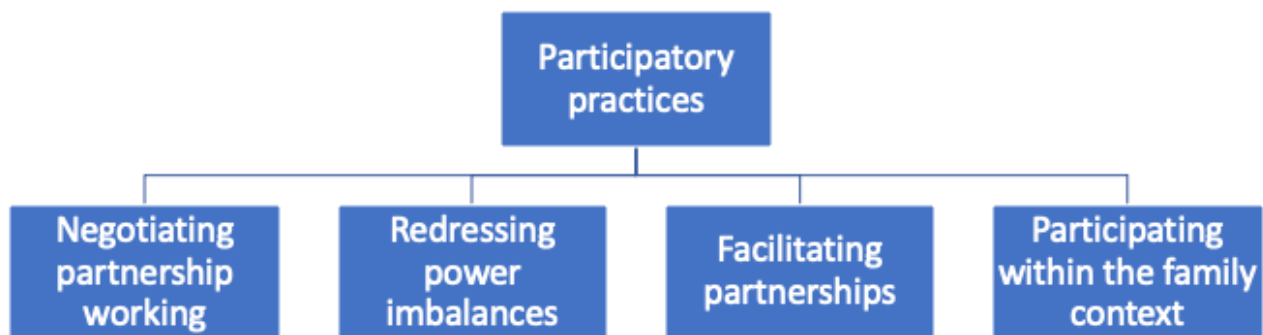


Figure 10. Thematic Map for Participatory Practices.

3.6.3.1 Negotiating Partnership Working

Participants advocated for families' choice in terms of partnership working. For instance, this included providing opportunities for families to negotiate the ways in which they would like to work with an EP. Opportunities for dialogue around establishing best practice for individual families were discussed. This involved meeting the family on their terms as much as possible, whilst balancing this alongside their participation to encourage feelings of empowerment. Respondent 2 discussed the facilitation of conversations around effective partnerships working alongside individual families:-

Holding their wishes of how they would like to work with you as important and having those conversations to figure that out at the beginning, for that to be one of the first things you do together' (R2).

3.6.3.2 Redressing Power Imbalances

Participants discussed how they attended to the balance of power between themselves and families, in order to support their participatory practices. The principle of a transparency was central to these practices. This enabled them to explain their role, perhaps increasing the sense of accessibility to the EP. This is elaborated upon by Respondent 3:-

Something around being accessible, for families to understand what family-centred practice is. For families to be able to understand who we are and what an EP does is important. (R3)

Facilitating consultation in spaces which may better engage families in EP practice was also considered important. Respondent 4 discussed how engaging with families at home could support feelings of empowerment and their participation:-

I think, for me, there's something about, for the parents, having a conversation about their child in their home might feel quite different to them having a conversation about their child in school. So it might put it back on their territory and redresses the power imbalance (R4).

3.6.3.3 Facilitating Partnerships

Some EPs viewed their role within the process of FCP as a facilitator of partnerships. This included the use of EP directed collaboration as a tool for promoting working partnerships between families and other external practitioners i.e., nursery staff. Respondent 1 stated:-

That non-judgmental approach, particularly when there's tension between nursery and the family. When there's a lot of tension, we need to focus on trust building between both parties. (R1)

3.6.3.4 Participating within the Family Context

Participants spoke about developing an understanding of the child as they participate within the wider context of their family. This included participating and engaging with the family at home, to develop more holistic understanding of the child. This is linked to EPs' eco-systemic view of child development. Since children are viewed as inseparable from their family, participating within this context seem integral to EPs' FCP. Respondent 6 illustrates the importance of this:-

Being able to see them and work with them in that family context is really important. It is where they are living with siblings, with their families. Being able to do some joint work with them at home, with what's available to them at home is really important. (R6)

The importance of developing good relational links with multi-agency partners was acknowledged as part of these practices. Participants often looked towards other practitioners, who work more consistently with the family to support this eco-systemic view. Respondent 1 discussed the facilitation of joint home visits with Portage workers.

You are usually able to see them at their best as well during a Portage visit. Because the Portage workers are really good at working with the family and getting the best out of the children. (R1)

3.6.4 Dialogic Practices

Sub-themes drawn from 'dialogic practices' appeared to be grounded in the context of consultation, which is considered a key function of the EP's role (Farrell et al., 2006). These practices also included how families' stories may translate via verbal and written feedback.



Figure 11. Thematic Map for Dialogic Practices.

3.6.4.1 Discursive Strategies and Consultation Skills

Participants acknowledged and validated families' concerns, as well as centring their voices as important. EPs appeared to use a number of consultation skills and 'discursive strategies' (Nolan & Moreland, 2014) to gain an understanding of the families' unique expertise on their children. Respondent 6 illustrates how EPs may currently engage in deep listening skills:-

I think it's important that we go in and really listen to what the families are saying and that we're not just going off schools' information. We need to understand their story. (R6)

Respondent 3 seemed to acknowledge the importance of validating families' voices, offering legitimacy to the problem narrative being heard and acknowledged. This was an important component of EPs' consultation skills, within the context of their FCP.

Respondent 3 explained:-

It's tough. You need to sit with them in that 'problem' at the beginning and hear their story. You are saying, 'I'm here to hear what your experience is', and allowing them that space (R3).

3.6.4.2 A Strengths-Oriented Approach

Participants spoke about facilitating a strengths-oriented approach to consultation practice. This included recognising and acknowledging the family and child's strengths.

Whilst Respondent 1 recognised the importance of validating a family's difficulties, balancing this alongside the child's strengths was considered important:-

We discussed the importance of not dismissing difficulties, but we felt that highlighting those strengths is key. Sometimes this can bring families on board (R1).

3.6.4.3 The Story Has Been 'Heard'

Dialogic practices incorporated how the family voice may translate into verbal and written feedback. This included "pulling together the threads" of families' expertise and stories to ensure that that "their story had been heard, understood and accepted" (Nolan & Moreland, 2014, p. 70). Respondent 3's comment seems to exemplify the way in which dialogic practices can extend beyond verbal interactions:-

One thing I've been pleased with in the past is when a parent has said, once you've sent your report out or even after you've had a feedback meeting, they go, 'you've really got my child' (R3).

3.7 Hopes for Future Practice

Figure 12 sets out the grouping of themes and sub-themes of participants' perspectives for Phase 2 of the AI. This included an exploration of participants' future hopes for their FCP in EYE. It both built upon and extended beyond their construction of their established FCP, following on from their discussion during Phase 1 in relation to what is working well. This supported a new understanding of FCP from a wider organisational perspective.

The AI therefore stimulated new thinking around change from a broader systems' perspective. It may be suggested that the tacit knowledge generated during Phase 1 of the AI has both built upon established practices and supported a new meaning of FCP, which was co-constructed through a preferred future (see Figure 7). Figure 12 describes the grouping of themes and sub-themes of participants' perspectives of Phase 2 of the AI. The following sections will provide an overview of these findings, and the development of their associated sub-themes.

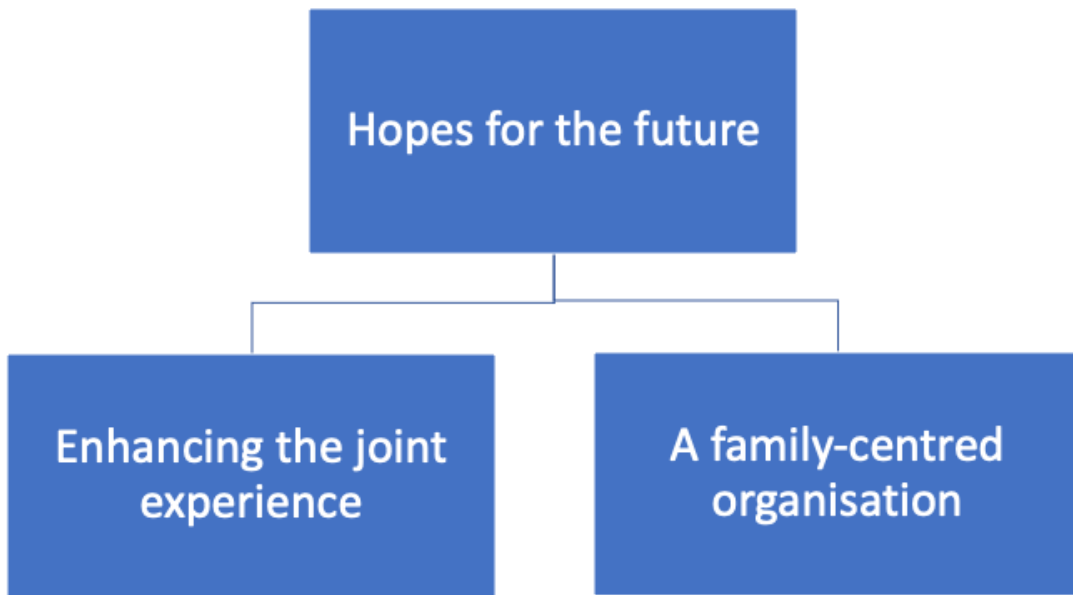


Figure 12. Thematic Map for Phase 2 of the AI.

3.7.1 Enhancing the Joint Experience

Subthemes organised under the theme of ‘enhancing the joint experience’ (Figure 13) extend upon already established relational, participatory and dialogic practices discussed in Phase 1 of the AI.



Figure 13. Thematic Map for Enhancing the Joint Experience.

3.7.1.1 Prioritising the Relational Processes

Participants spoke about their hopes to focus less on the bureaucratic functions of their role i.e., statutory work. They discussed that they would like to more consistently consider their relationships with families from an experiential perspective.

EPs acknowledged current context tensions i.e., a high demand of statutory work as a challenge to this hope. Despite this, holding families' experience of 'being with' the EP was still considered a key priority moving forward, as reflected in Respondent 4's comment:-

To hold the family's experience of us with them as being the most important thing and trying to prioritise that. Yes, getting that information is a priority and it is important, but so is the family's experience of us, so for that to be most meaningful (R4).

3.7.1.2 Inviting Participation

Participants considered how they could ensure families' feelings of autonomy, as part of a partnership journey. EPs acknowledged that this can often be undermined by a professional bureaucracy. This is linked to considerations around how EPs may better invite families' participation into their FCP. It included discussion around more practical strategies and resources i.e., introductory letters and early phone calls, that could support EPs and families to establish early contact, build rapport and begin to negotiate their working partnerships. Respondent 6 elaborated on this:-

...or perhaps a letter. You've kind put out that olive branch. It's an invitation. It's an invitation they still might not feel comfortable to accept, but it's better than not having it at all (R6).

3.7.1.3 Family-Centred Formulations

Participants discussed how they might create more opportunities to share and co-construct family-centred formulations, alongside families, as part of their future practice. This included more consistently embedding family voice into written communication with greater consistency. Family-centred formulations were discussed in terms of creating more space for feedback via dialogue as a way of 'sense checking' and co-constructing a way forward alongside the family. Respondent 3 stated:-

Always have that conversation just before the report goes off. 'Okay, this is what the headlines are. These are the outcomes that I've picked up on. Is there anything that's not covered there that's really important for you?' You can reflect that back to them (R3).

3.7.2 A Family-Centred Organisation

The final grouping of sub-themes, as detailed in Figure 14, explores how FCP may be integrated into EPs' practice from an organisational perspective i.e., EPS service delivery.



Figure 14. Thematic Map for A Family-Centred Organisation.

3.7.3.1 Family-Centred Processes

Participants discussed their hopes of embedding family-centred processes into the systems of the EPS. This included promoting a flow of information between EPs, families and other multi-agency partners, promoting transparency within practice and supporting families in accessing an EP. Respondent 6 stated:-

The dream is that systems are more conducive to family-centred practice in that by the time we're involved, families already have a fair understanding of who we are and what we might do (R6).

3.7.3.2 Holistic Services to Families

Participants spoke about their hopes of engaging more systemically with families, across a range of contexts. This related to a desire to extend their current FCP service offering from individual casework to providing more holistic services to families within a community context. Respondent 4 discussed how this could be facilitated via traded time, within the context of current practice:-

We could use that traded time for more systemic work, like family groups (R4).

3.7.3.3 Promoting FCP to School Commissioners

Within the context of this paradigm shift, EPs discussed how they may promote FCP to partnering professionals. This included being able to communicate the value of FCP to school commissioners via planning meetings. Respondent 5 outlined the importance of asserting the value of FCP to EYE practitioners, who commission EP time:-

...because nursery are the holders of that time, they would have to understand the value of family-centred practice in the way that we do, in order for them to see the value in using the time for that, so that would be a dream (R5).

3.8 Discussion

In this section, the findings presented above will be discussed and contextualised within the wider literature to answer the research questions identified for this empirical project.

3.8.1 A Family-Centred Philosophy

Core to participants' current practice was an underlying philosophy of FCP. This included an understanding that "families are pivotal in the lives of children and should be empowered to engage in decision-making for them" (Rouse, 2012, p. 19). It is suggested that FCP cannot be effectively enacted if this underlying philosophy is neither accepted nor acknowledged. It is this core philosophy that shapes associated practice behaviours (relational and participatory), reflecting the reciprocal nature of partnership working (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017; Rouse, 2012).

This philosophy of practice was acknowledged as important by all participants, influencing how EPs viewed and interacted with families, guiding any subsequent

practice behaviours. Practice behaviours seem to support participants to constantly and mutually create meaning and value via a process of co-action. This may involve the joint co-ordination of actions between themselves, families and partnering professionals (Gergen, 2009, 2015). This underpinning philosophy seemed to construct an understanding of working partnerships which were democratic and equitable in nature. This has been considered important in the context of FCP (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017) and the wider literature on partnership working (Beneke & Cheatham, 2016; Dzur, 2004; Skrtic, 2013).

This philosophy of practice seems to explicitly acknowledge the influence of the family within the context of child development, underpinned by an eco-systemic perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The term 'ecological', from a psychological perspective, relates to the wider environment and the interrelated relationships which reciprocally shape and influence their child (McGuiggan, 2021). From this perspective, EP work may focus at a microsystemic (features of the individual family or school context) and mesosystemic (two microsystems in interaction with one another) level (Anderson, 1983). This interactionist perspective is reflected in participants FCP, in which they seem to engage in the dynamic process of working within and across the systems of a child's life. This has been regarded as integral for EPs EYE practice (Wood, 2015).

The following sections will aim to elucidate upon this understanding further, whereby practices behaviours discussed by participants reflect this core philosophy of FCP.

3.8.2 Relational Practices

Relational aspects of FCP appeared to be integral to EPs' current and future EYE practice. These behaviours were a foundational aspect in supporting the interactional nature of the relationships formed with families (Dunst et al., 1994; Rouse, 2012). Relational behaviours related to a sense of connection, which was considered a core value of service delivery. These relationships seemed to have a therapeutic element, underpinned by a "way of thinking with, experiencing with, relating with, acting with and responding with" the families they work alongside (Anderson, 2007, p. 43). This informed professional practice and shaped the personal and collective values of the EPs and the service. Relational values are considered key to partnership working in EYE (Douglass & Gittell, 2012), which was demonstrated through EPs current FCP.

Participants recognised that positive past experiences and repeated interactions with practitioners can facilitate the development of trusting relationships (Bidmead, 2013;

Ridgway et al., 2021). Current findings align with literature on the interactive nature of trust (Hummel et al., 2022; Keen, 2007; Konecki, 2019). However, relational practices extended beyond direct EPs' interactions with families and building relationships and trust with families via other practitioners was considered important.

The value of working collaboratively alongside other practitioners has long been established as good practice, supporting better outcomes for children and their families (Ainslie et al., 2010; Atkinson et al., 2007; Chuard, 2021). The idea of collaborative working was acknowledged to support participants' FCP as partnering practitioners supported EPs to transition into good working relationships with families. This may relate to the concept of 'collaborative advantage', whereby the outcomes achieved within this context could not be reached by any of the EPs acting alone (Huxham & Vangen, 2013). Current findings may have implications for the broader influence of effective inter-professional relationships, to support EPs to develop trusting relationships with families.

The interactional nature of child development was also acknowledged as an important aspect of participants relational practices (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). Children were thought to participate within a unique cultural context i.e., the family unit. EPs acknowledged that child development is embedded in these systems of relationships (Frosch et al., 2021). This aligns with a relational family systems' perspective of wellbeing, which supports an understanding of the interconnectedness of family-child relationships (Sameroff, 2009) and the interactional influence of the family unit (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). EPs acknowledged the importance of relating to the wider family system. This may emphasise the EP role in supporting the dyadic connections between families, the child and the family system as a whole (Frosch et al., 2021), as part of their FCP.

Participants hopes of a commitment to caring and reciprocal relationships with families were at the core of their future FCP (Douglass & Gittell, 2012). EPs hoped to give primacy to the process of relating (Aspelin, 2011; Gergen, 2009), over the current bureaucratic functions of their role which is suggested to create barriers to family-centred and relational practices (Douglass & Gittell, 2012). Therefore, individual action would continue to move towards co-action, by creating a sense of interdependence between themselves and families (Gergen, 2009). Research has suggested that by prioritising relational ethics practitioners can support and enhance effective partnerships with families (Caine et al., 2020; Douglass & Gittell, 2012; Henderson, 2019).

3.8.3 Participatory Practices

Participants current and future FCP included the recognition of participatory practices. EPs seemed to balance families' participation alongside meeting them on 'their terms'. This may reinforce families' moral agency and voice via FCP (Ramaekers & Suissa, 2011). This aligns with a critical perspective, highlighting the potentially paradoxical nature of postmodern participatory practices. Power relations and practices, guided by professional norms, may undermine truly participatory practice, reinforcing tokenism and reducing the democratisation of participation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Mouffe, 2005; Pellizzoni, 2001). EPs participatory practices may better empower and facilitate family participation in the negotiation of partnership working (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; Sime & Sheridan, 2014), reinforcing parents as equal partners (Rouse, 2012).

Participants' attendance to the balance of power appeared to refute an expert model of practice. This challenged some of the problematic language associated with FCP, whereby practitioners have been conceptualised as 'experts' (Dunst et al., 1994; Rouse, 2012). Supporting feelings of empowerment is considered central to FCP (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007; Rouse, 2012) and family-practitioner partnerships (Kambouri et al., 2022). Families are suggested to be most comfortable engaging with external practitioners they trust in their home (Hughes-Belding et al., 2019; Korfmacher et al., 2008). Participants considered how physical spaces could enhance families' feelings of empowerment and participation within their FCP (Jeyasingham, 2014; Lefebvre, 1991).

Transforming their role from expert to facilitator and supporting more equitable partnerships (Dzur, 2004; Fischer, 2004; Skrtic, 2013) was important to EPs' FCP. Participants often viewed their 'facilitator' role as developing broader family-practitioner partnerships, ensuring the power is shared, supporting the facilitation of collaboration and shared expertise (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). The importance of EP directed collaboration is considered a key skill that EPs may bring to interactions between families and education staff (Nolan & Moreland, 2014). Through the application of psychological theory EPs can act as a bridge between the school, family and community links (Cameron, 2006; Farrell et al., 2006) supporting their FCP.

Participating alongside children and families within the home context was also regarded as important. Where possible, participants would find ways to engage and participate with families at home. The home learning environment has been recognised as an important aspect of supporting early child development (Lehrl et al., 2020; Nicholson et

al., 2016), underpinned by an eco-systemic perspective on child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This involves a shift away from an individual to an interactional view of child development as a means of promoting change (McGuiggan, 2021). These practices seemed to support a multi-layered understanding of the child (Cameron, 2006), as they participated in the wider context of their family. Participating other professionals in practice also supported this understanding. This may further emphasise the importance of multi-agency partnerships to enhance EPs FCP (Darra et al., 2020).

EPs seemed to continue to grapple with the potentially paradoxical nature of participation (Cooke & Kothari, 2001) as part of their future practice. Parental choice within the context of a neo-liberal education system is regarded as complex, regulated by narratives of the 'good parent' (Lyon, 2018), determining the nature of family participation via professional norms. Participants hoped to better embrace family agency via participatory practices and practical strategies and resources including introductory letters.

This may better enhance how practitioners and families negotiate, as well as plan support for their child (Koskela, 2021). EPs hoped to appear more accessible to families, as advocated by past research on enhancing family partnerships within EYE (Kambouri et al., 2022). Future hopes seemed to relate to EPs desire to enhance the joint experience with families via participatory practices, opening up new opportunities for co-action (Aspelin, 2011).

3.8.4 Dialogic Practices

EPs' perspectives on dialogic practices seemed to both align with and extend upon the findings from the SLR. This included dialogic practices which recognised and appreciated families' unique expertise of their child. Participants focused these dialogic skills within the context of the EP profession, recognising the interactional and dialogic nature of consultation practice (Wagner, 2008). Findings may re-emphasise the centrality of dialogue within the process of FCP, whilst facilitating the co-construction of knowledge (Burr & Dick, 2017; Mercer, 2000).

Participants utilised a wide range of interpersonal skills, alongside the application of psychological theory via consultation to facilitate families' voices. This involved the use of discursive strategies to scaffold and facilitate family voice within the process of FCP, including demonstrating empathy and deep listening (Nolan & Moreland, 2014), to validate and legitimise families' voices. These types of dialogic practices enabled EPs to

understand families' unique expertise on their child (Espe-Sherwindt, 2008). Dialogic and discursive elements of consultation are considered a key function of the EP (Farrell & Woods, 2015; Kennedy et al., 2009; Wagner, 2008). The very act of listening may facilitate the co-construction of knowledge, combining families' unique expertise with that of professional input (Sherwood & Nind, 2014). This was acknowledged as an important aspect of participants FCP.

Participants acknowledged the importance of listening to families' stories in consultation, further reflecting narrative principles within FCP. Researchers have suggested that "in the face of prevalent discourses and dominant knowledges, simply listening to the story someone tells us constitutes as a revolutionary act" (Freedman & Combs, 1996, p. 44). EPs may then engage in narrative principles, as part of their FCP, to identify with the lived experiences of families and ensure that their story is heard (Morgan, 2000; White, 2007). This emphasises the therapeutic nature of EPs interactions with families as part of everyday or consultative practice, providing a space in which families' stories of difficulty can be heard (McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). These dialogic skills were balanced alongside the acknowledgment of child and family strengths. This suggests the importance of balancing the acknowledgment of difficulty, whilst shifting from deficits and the pathologizing of children and families, to a strengths-oriented approach via FCP. This may support capacity-building and more inclusive approaches to practice (Fenton et al., 2015; Johansson et al., 2008).

The EPs also seemed to reflect on how families' stories may be translated via written and verbal feedback, ensuring that their stories "had been heard, understood and accepted" (Nolan & Moreland, 2014, p. 70). Participants hopes for their future practice included ways in which families' voices could be better incorporated into psychological formulations. This involved an additional layer of co-constructing families' stories via written work, embedding their voice within this process of formulation and outcome planning.

By embedding family voice within all aspects of their FCP, EPs may be able to do more than understand families' experiences by simply hearing their stories. This may involve the more active engagement with these narratives (Sherwood & Nind, 2014) via their psychological formulations. In doing so, EPs may be able to better engage in co-construction practices valued as part of FCP and partnership working (Beneke & Cheatham, 2016; Brinn, 2016), whilst enhancing co-action (Gergen, 2009).

3.8.5 A Family-Centred Organisation

New meaning of FCP, generated from the AI, included the consideration of a paradigm shift in the organisational structure of the EPS and service delivery. Previous research identified that the culture of the organisation is a key factor in determining the successful implementation of FCP (Douglass & Gittell, 2012; Hemmelgarn et al., 2001). This was acknowledged as important to participants.

Participants considered how FCP could be implemented throughout EPS processes and systems, increasing transparency and accessibility. The field of Educational Psychology has often been criticised for a lack of role clarity (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Gibb, 1998) and EPS stakeholders, including families, may have a less developed understanding of the EP role (Fallon et al., 2010). Feelings of uncertainty around the outcomes of EP work may reduce role clarity and families' confidence in the EPs unique contribution (Farrell et al., 2006). Current findings seemed to explore ways to increase role clarity and an understanding of FCP through processes and tangible resources. Participants identified with ways of fulfilling Kambouri's (2022) assertion that practitioners have a responsibility to make themselves accessible to families, through their organisational structure and EPS processes.

Hopes to extend current FCP from individual casework to more systemic ways of engaging with families (MacKay, 2006) were discussed. Participants considered ways of moving beyond servicing of narrow Special Educational Needs (SEN) procedures i.e., statutory processes (McGuiggan, 2021) in EYE. This included engaging in practices which maximised the interconnections between the family, community and school/nursery resources (Ho, 1997).

As an organisation, EPs hoped to engage more systemically with the microsystem of the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) through their service delivery offer. This may create a better foundation for children and their families further engagement in learning (McGuiggan, 2021). By developing an organisational shift in how the EP role is understood via FCP, EPs may "claim their natural heartland" by providing holistic services to all families across a range of contexts (MacKay, 2006, p. 14). This involved the identification of more effective cross-system working processes with EYE provisions and families, as facilitated by the EP within a community context.

These hopes were considered within the context of traded services, whereby EP services are 'sold' to education providers who 'buy in' their services (Farrell et al., 2006).

This often creates the illusion that the schools, who commission these services, are the main beneficiaries of EP's time (Stringer et al., 2006). Participants seemed to grapple with the tension arising out of this context and they hoped to challenge this by promoting the value of FCP and systemic working to commissioning services.

This may be considered through an evidence-based practice (EBP) perspective. EBP is suggested to act as a cornerstone in ensuring impact and change in terms of educational psychology input (Boyle & Kelly, 2016). Establishing an evidence-base for FCP may support participants to communicate its effectiveness to school commissioners and partnering practitioners. This may provide a basis upon which judgments can be made regarding the effectiveness of FCP (Friedman, 2005), aligning with this hope for future practice and supporting the development of FCP from an individual to a more systemic perspective.

However, EBP has the potential to negate the importance of practice based on the professional judgement and experiences of education staff (Evers & Kneyber, 2015; Nelson & Campbell, 2017). It may then be prudent for EPs to involve and draw information from families and school staff who have a unique understanding of the context of their schools and the community (Boyle & Kelly, 2016; Burden, 2015), in developing an evidence-base. This may support more inclusive and effective practices which have been co-constructed at a local level (Allan, 2003; Florian, 2014).

3.9 Limitations

My influence as a researcher must be acknowledged as a possible limitation of the current study. As AI acknowledges the reciprocal reshaping of knowledge between participants (Cooperrider et al., 2008), knowledge is not contained within the individual but instead is socially shared (Marková et al., 2007). Despite efforts made to minimise any researcher bias, the topic of exploration was guided by me. It was intended that the research methodology should be participatory in nature and, as such, my influence upon this process must be acknowledged in what took place and what was said (Ghaye et al., 2008). As a result of this limitation, my own researcher influence may require further investigation at a later date.

The purpose of the current study was to explore FCP in the context of one small group of EPs, working within an EPS in the North East of England. However, Cooperrider et al. (2008) suggested that AI may be better facilitated when all members of an organisation participate. Current findings may therefore be siloed in nature and limited by the views of

one professional standpoint, as opposed to reflecting the perspectives of the wider organisation. This is reflective of the nature of this small-scale study and the associated time constraints.

Data was derived from a small population of EPs working in one LA in the North East of England. All participating EPs appeared to share common values and professional norms. For example, all participants practice appeared to be guided by the current EPS consultation model of service delivery which is likely to have influenced the current findings. This may not adequately reflect the wider variation of EP practice nationally. Although generalisability is not the aim of the current study, findings may be limited by this. Despite this, there appears to be some congruence between current findings and the original theorisation of a FCP model and findings from the SLR model, indicating that they offer some suggestion of what is important in FCP in the context of EP and EYE practice.

3.10 Future Research

The aim of the current study was to explore EPs' perspectives of FCP in EYE. Whilst the current study has provided new insights into how FCP may be facilitated within the context of an EPS, it does not explore families' views on this topic. Considering the emphasis on the reciprocal nature of the relationships between families and practitioners advocated by FCP, future research may seek to focus on facilitating the exploration of this topic via sessions which encourage families and EPs to work in partnership. This may extend an understanding of FCP within EYE, and better reflect the voices and unique needs of the families that it aims to serve within the wider local community (Lee, 2015; Skrtic, 1991b; Skrtic, 1991a).

Future research may also explore FCP with a broader range of professional organisations. A key implication of the current study was the importance of good working partnerships with multi-agency practitioners and other professional bodies. This has been cited in the literature as supporting positive outcomes for children in EYE (Darra et al., 2020). Future research may focus on how FCP could be facilitated more broadly within a multi-agency context.

3.11 Conclusions and Implications

Current findings contribute towards a growing body of research which considers how to support the development of family-practitioner partnerships within the context of EYE. According to a recent literature review (see Kambouri et al., 2022) the understanding of practices which best facilitate partnership working are limited (Wilson & Waddell, 2020). Current findings may extend this body of research, considering how FCP can be best facilitated within the professional context of an EPS and beyond.

The findings have a dual focus at both an individual practice level and from a broader organisational perspective. With expertise in the facilitation of consultation, which can support collaboration between families and school partners (Wagner, 2008), findings may have important implications on the how FCP can influence and support current consultative practice. With the hopes of developing FCP from an organisational perspective, EPs may wish to extend the use of an AI approach with the wider EPS and families, to support broader reflection on this topic. This may facilitate the development of a more collective understanding of the socially shared knowledge on FCP, to develop a policy framework which reflects the voices of families and practitioners.

Current findings may also go some way to challenge the 'othering' nature and discourse around 'hard to reach' parents and 'troubled families', which serves a deficit discourse against those who are poorly represented and supported by the system (Goodall, 2019). By embedding partnership working within participatory, dialogic and relational practices, via a psychological lens (Gergen, 2009), this new understanding of FCP may actively disrupt the power dynamics that traditionally exist within educational contexts. Findings may instead seek to empower families and practitioners alike, to support equality and effective engagement in partnerships in EYE (Kambouri et al., 2022). This may be particularly important for families from lower social economic backgrounds, who are typically categorised through othering discourses (Goodall, 2019).

Implications may also include the development of FCP with partnering EYE practitioners. One of the proposed core functions of the EP is supporting the development of continuous professional development (CPD), alongside educational practitioners (SEED, 2002). Underpinned by a psychological understanding of adult learning models (Knowles, 1984) and organisational development frameworks (Cooperrider et al., 2008), EPs may contribute a unique understanding of what constitutes effective CPD. Current findings may therefore have important implications on how EPs support partnering professionals who wish to develop their systems for partnership working and FCP in EYE.

Chapter 4: Reflections

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a reflective summary of my research journey and the ways in which this experience has impacted me as a practitioner, a researcher and on a personal level. This will include implications for my own professional development, Educational Psychology practice and wider implications for Early Years Education (EYE).

4.2 Contribution to Knowledge

I would suggest that the findings from the current study make several contributions to knowledge. The SLR findings appear to represent the first synthesis of families' construction of a FCP model in practice. In the context of the family partnership literature, families' voices may often be subject to normative policies (Cottle & Alexander, 2014). Opportunities for practitioners and policy-makers to hear families' voices are limited and often confined to questionnaire and 'tick box' type exercises (Sherwood & Nind, 2014).

The current findings have endeavoured to illuminate the voices of those that are so often marginalised by bureaucratic systems (Lee, 2015; Lyon, 2018). The model that has been produced from these findings may provide a starting point for EPs and EYE practitioners alike to engage more effectively with FCP, as current procedures and strategies to develop partnerships remain vague (Kambouri et al., 2022).

Despite calls for research to further explore EPs perceptions of working alongside families (McGuiggan, 2021), the current understanding of this is reflective of the paucity of research in this area. To my knowledge, this is the first study to explore FCP within the context of EP practice. The current findings may make some contribution towards bridging the gap within the literature, alongside other recent valuable contributions towards developing an understanding of family-focused psychological practice (op cit).

Despite this, McGuiggan's (2021) research may be perceived as tentatively critical of current EP practice. As a way of countering this, the current research aimed to explore

the positives of EPs FCP as reflective of an AI approach (Van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Adopting a more affirmative approach to facilitating this research may have positive implications for better understanding current strengths and successes (op cit) and constructing new possibilities which may support real and positive change in the context of the EPS and organisations more broadly (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 2013; Ghaye et al., 2008). This may be particularly important in the current context of UK educational practice which can be a highly stressful role, in which professional demands on educational staff remain high (Kinman et al., 2011; Worth et al., 2015).

4.3 Hopes for Research

My background, prior to embarking upon the doctorate training to become an Educational Psychologist (EP), was the driving force behind this research project. Working in the third sector as a family support worker across Glasgow, I had the privilege of getting to know several families. I was often welcomed into their homes and invited into the family unit. I celebrated moments of hope and joy with them, and I listened to their stories of pain, which were often underpinned by the trauma of their past experiences. The bond we developed often transcended beyond the subscribed and bureaucratic boundaries of family-practitioner relationships. We developed a sense of connection that, in many ways, felt like friendship. I was often struck by the ways in which these relational bonds seemed to support change.

A relative novice to psychology at this point, I questioned what was the simplicity of my support, through a psychological lens. I was not engaging families in any tailored interventions or attempting to 'upskill' them via parenting programmes which were widely offered by other services. Reflecting on this time, I can now see the power in the simplicity of those collaborative bonds that we developed, rooted within relational psychology and practice. This supported a sense of hope and change, drawing from the core principles of FCP. I have since had a myriad of opportunities to develop my psychological practice. However, it is this relational understanding that continues to ground me in my practice. Thus, working in partnership with families is core to my Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) role.

Moving into the context of Educational Psychology practice, I began to feel a sense of disconnection from families. Opportunities to engage and work in family-centred ways did not always seem to be prioritised. I was struck by McGuiggan's (2021) research, which suggested that the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) may be more school-

focused rather than child and family-focused. Although existing literature asserted the importance of EYE practitioners working in partnership with families (Kambouri et al., 2022), I found that how EPs enacted this in practice remained vague. I hoped that a rich exploration of how EPs are currently working in family-centred ways could bridge this gap identified by McGuiggan (2021).

My thesis aims to contribute towards an understanding of how to support the development of family-focused psychological practice. The current findings may highlight what can support a 'collaborative ethos' of EP practice, which may often be absent from partnership working in the context of EYE (Kambouri et al., 2022). This may support the development of practice at individual and policy level within Educational Psychology Services (EPS), facilitating processes which could enhance EPs' ability to hold families at the centre of their practice.

4.4 Learning Implications for my TEP Practice

Through an in-depth exploration of the literature on FCP and the analysis afforded to me via the meta-ethnography and the empirical project, I have had the opportunity to ground this framework within psychological theory and research. This provides a theoretical basis for the process of engaging with the relational, dialogic and participatory practice behaviours espoused by the model. I believe that these findings may have important implications which can provide an understanding of how psychological theory can support the effective enactment of an FCP.

Reflecting on this research process, I noticed the ways in which I was continuously drawn towards relational ways of thinking. Gergen's (2015) work seemed to provide a foundational basis for my thinking, perhaps suggesting the centrality of these relational concepts within the context of partnership working in EYE and more broadly. By giving primacy to the process of relating, opens up the opportunity for co-action (Vasilic, 2022), in which every interaction or act of coordination may hold the possibility of transformation (Gergen, 2009). This understanding has given me insight into how relational processes may be prioritised, even within the fleeting interactions that EPs often have with families, which may be contained to only one meeting or consultation.

Relational thinking has had an important influence on my own consultation practice, and the quality of interactions contained within these micro-moments between myself and families. These interactions have the power to enhance relational quality and build

mutual trust and reciprocity. The concept of focusing on 'a way of being with' families in consultation has supported this shift in my practice. Derived from Anderson's (2007) thinking on collaborative therapy, I have noticed how a sense of 'being with' consultees has opened up a dialogic space in which we are reciprocally engaged with one another, within this joint social activity (Nolan & Moreland, 2014). In doing so, I have noticed that a shared space for dialogue and interactions has been created (M. Bakhtin, 1981), supporting the development of partnership working, even within these fleeting interactions.

As a TEP, I have often felt a sense of pressure that I needed to prove that I was 'doing' psychology, by bringing some type of framework or strategy to my consultations and interactions with families and school staff. However, via this research project, I have re-grounded myself in the idea that it is the psychology that the EP brings to a dialogic process that impacts change (Wagner, 2008), as opposed to the facilitation of some rigid process. This has anchored me to my early experiences of working in a family support role, which I can now ground within the psychological theory of my current practice and a relational and dialogical theoretical perspective.

Narrative psychology principles have also influenced my thinking about FCP, aligning with family therapy research (Freedman & Combs, 1996). This understanding may support the reorientation of a narrative approach to EP practice, particularly in the context of establishing partnerships with the families (Dunsmuir et al., 2014; McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). This exploration has re-aligned me with my own narrative journey and encouraged a deeper consideration of how these principles may continue to support my FCP.

In direct work with families, I have strived to engage in conversations in which I 'hear their story'. Freedman and Combs (1996) positioning of a simple act of listening to another's story as being revolutionary, particularly in the face of dominant discourses, has supported me to create more of a context in which families feel, not only listened to, but heard (Rouse & O'Brien, 2017). This has allowed me to connect more deeply to families' alternative stories, acknowledging their lived experiences (McQueen & Hobbs, 2014).

Finally, in a broader sense, this research project has allowed me to illuminate the potential for adopting FCP as part of EP EYE practice and wider service delivery. In the future, it is my hope to involve other key stakeholders in this type of dialogue to support a

wider range of EYE practitioners to consider how they may align their practice with these findings.

4.5 Learning Implications for Research Practice

There have been many implications for my research practice through engaging in this research process. Engaging with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) brought several challenges. A meta-ethnography approach to the synthesis of qualitative data has a number of suggested benefits and was a natural choice for the current study. This includes the generation of a greater depth of analysis of qualitative data, the production of new research questions and the ability to provide novel contributions to the area of exploration (Atkins et al., 2008). However, as a novice researcher I had a sense of trepidation in engaging in this process, perhaps reflecting my inexperience in using it and the feelings of conscious incompetence that this elicited (Chapman, 2007).

In an effort to overcome this challenge, I was guided by Noblit and Hare's (1988) seven stage framework for engaging in a meta-ethnography (Figure 2). The stage 'deciding what is relevant', in which I was required to locate potentially relevant studies, was a particularly challenging phase for me. To support with this phase, I sought support from my research supervisor and the library staff to develop appropriate search terms. This included refining the search terms and narrowing my focus to limit the studies to a manageable number.

My engagement with the seven stages of the meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988) was an iterative process, which often involved moving between the stages with a level of flexibility. This was particularly relevant for stages 4 and 5 of the meta-ethnography. Willig's (2013) suggestion that we consider research as a form of 'adventure' provided a helpful conceptualisation to this SLR exploration. This involves a creative, rather than mechanical, mode of working which inevitably brings surprises, changes of direction and some uncertainty to the research process (op cit). Being able to sit with this discomfort of the feeling of uncertainty that came with this process supported me to flexibly move between each of the stages and allowed better engagement with the qualitative analyses and the human experience of these participating families (Frosh, 2007).

My engagement with, and the facilitation of, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) that has had a transformative impact on my development as a research practitioner. With the hope of illuminating and appreciating the existing strengths and values of FCP held by EPs, AI

was a natural choice. This opportunity allowed me, as a novel researcher, to engage in this process. Despite my trepidations around my novice status, I am grateful for this experience which has allowed me to understand the power of AI as an approach to action research.

I have always been drawn to action research models and the collaborative nature of these approaches. My professional values aligned with the idea that action research is “inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organisation or community, but never to or on them” (Herr & Anderson, 2014, p. 3). By engaging with ‘real world’ research in this way, change within the practice of the co-researchers has been promoted (Simm & Ingram, 2008). I was struck by how the dialogic interaction between the EPs and their engagement with AI had the power to create new knowledge about the situation (Marková, 2003). This has highlighted the importance of engaging in research in this way as “knowledge constructed without the active participation of practitioners can only be partial knowledge” (Somekh, 2002, p. 90). By generating a genuine sense of ownership of the knowledge created, EPs noticed a shift in how they conceptualise their work with families in the context of EYE.

I have been particularly influenced by how AI may create a sense of hope within practice and organisations more broadly. I have been reflecting on the sense of hopefulness that occurred between practitioners on that day. EPs currently find themselves working within difficult circumstances, in which they may be pushed towards the more bureaucratic functions of practice, which do not always align with their personal and professional values. I have been inspired by how AI seemed to ‘fan the flames of hope’ that day through the application of psychological theory (Cox, 2020). At the heart of this hopeful action were the families that EPs work alongside.

I am left pondering the role of AI in research practice. It would seem that this tool has the potential to wade through and embrace the ‘mess’ of real world research as a means of developing new constructions of knowledge (Cook, 2009). This seems to create a space that supports feelings of hope, where change feels more possible in the face of the complexity of practice and the challenges of working within the current socio-political context of education. I think that this relates to the need to recognise the power of embracing hope within the process of research, as a means of supporting change in practice.

4.6 Wider Implications

The empirical project has important implications for the EPS and service delivery within the context of EYE work. It is my plan to share these findings with the EPS, with the hope that this may support change at a local policy level. However, prior to this, if service delivery is to truly reflect a FCP philosophy, then the voices of families within the local area must be sought. Without an adequate exploration of local families' perspectives, current findings may only serve the injustice which they seek to counteract (Friend & Cook, 1992).

Current findings may reflect recent political interest and policy development i.e., the 'Supporting Families 2021-22 and Beyond' policy. Across England, the development of 'family hubs' is a key priority, and central to this initiative is the concept of partnership working. Interestingly policy documentation on the provisional roll out of family hubs states that "the extent to which this [family hubs] is co-designed directly with families and communities varies across local areas" (HM Government, 2021, p. 1). With the hopes of developing practice which adopts a 'whole family approach', I remain tentatively critical of this initiative and the approach to 'partnership' which has been adopted. Reflective of the SLR findings, I wonder if this research could provide some input to influence or support policy and practice within the context of family hub working.

I am curious as to how FCP could influence genuine partnerships with families in practice, as opposed to tokenistic approaches to participation, as a means of appeasing associated policy (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). An understanding of FCP, derived from the SLR, may promote a framework for working which supports the democratic agency and voices of families (Lyon, 2018) within the context of family hub working. There are also important implications for the LA in which I facilitated my research, as the EPS has been tasked to support the development of family hubs within the local area. This may further emphasise the importance of developing FCP at a local level, as well as nationally.

4.7 Summary

Within this chapter, I have endeavoured to discuss the impetus for exploring this topic and my hopes for this research. I have reflected upon and outlined the ways in which this has influenced my professional practice as a TEP and my understanding of 'real world' research in practice. On a personal level, I have been grounded in the importance of relational being and relationality as a "process of coordination that precedes the very

concept of the self" (Gergen, 2015, p. 15). This has had a significant impact on how I view the world and the ways in which I engage with those within it. Relational thinking has anchored me to my early practice experiences which continue to have an important influence on me.

My next steps include seeking to publish Chapter 1 and 3 in an appropriate journal associated with Educational Psychology practice. I also hope to continue to disseminate these findings within the EPS in which this research was conducted. There may also be scope to integrate the current findings as part of an initiative to develop family hub work within the LA. However, in any such developments, the centrality of families' voices must be maintained in order to effectively reflect the true collaborative nature and ethos of FCP.

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Appendix A: Discovery Prompt Sheet

Stage 1. Discovery – ‘The best of what is’

A high point: I would like you to think back on your time working with families in the Early Years Education, as part of your Educational Psychology practice. There will have likely been ups and downs. For the moment I would like you to think about a high point – a time when you really felt like you were engaging in family-centred practice.

Discuss examples of this. Guiding questions may include:

- What was the situation?
- Who else was involved?
- What parts of what you did made the most difference?
- What was special about it?
- What does family-centred practice look like when it is happening and working well?

Values: What are the things that you value about yourself, your work and the organisation/team/group you work with? Give an example of that from your work this year.

Values: What are the core factors, values, or strengths that give life to your organisation/team/group without which it would cease to exist in its present format? What would you want to preserve moving forward?

Your work: When you are feeling good about your work, what do you value about it?

Three wishes: If you had three wishes for the work you do alongside families, what would they be? **Please each write your 3 wishes on the post-it notes and stick to the flipchart paper provided.**

Appendix B: Appreciative Inquiry Agenda

Stage	Time
<p align="center">Introduction</p> <p>A brief presentation reviewing family-centred practice and introducing Appreciative Inquiry will be presented</p>	9.15am-9.45am
<p>Stage 1. Define – defining the focus of the inquiry</p>	9.45am-10.15am
<p>Stage 2. Discovery – appreciating the best of what is</p>	10.15am-10.45am
<p>Break</p>	10.45am-11am
<p>Stage 3. Dream – imagining what could be</p>	11am-11.30am
<p>Stage 4. Design – determining what should be</p>	11.30am-12pm
<p>Stage 5. Destiny – creating what will be</p>	12pm-12.30pm
<p align="center">Final questions</p> <p>An opportunity to ask any final questions will be provided</p>	An additional 10 minutes for questions if required

Appendix C: Information Sheet



Newcastle University
School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences

Information

My name is Emma Hutcheson-Galbraith, and I am a trainee Educational Psychologist with Newcastle University, working in X Educational Psychology Service (EPS). As part of my training, I am required to conduct a research project. The topic I hope to explore is **How can Educational Psychologists keep families at the centre of their practice within the context of Early Years Education? An Appreciative Inquiry**. This will involve the exploration of the ways in which Educational Psychologists at this EPS might adopt the principles of family-centred practice (FCP) as part of their service delivery offer.

The basic principles of FCP (Epley et al., 2010) are detailed below:

Principle	Description
Family-practitioner relationship	This refers to the partnership between families and practitioners. It is the reciprocal nature of FCP, which invites the active participation of families, which is seen as essential in the facilitation of this model of practice.
Family choice and decision making	Families are recognised as co-contributors in decision making procedures. Their unique understanding of their child is drawn upon to support the development of outcomes and goals.
A whole family approach	This principle recognises that children exist in the wider context of the 'family unit'. In this ecological system, the child, the family, and the environment are inseparable. The family are viewed as a unique operating system.
A strengths-oriented approach	The systemic nature of a family is acknowledged and within this, all family systems are recognised as possessing unique strengths.
Individualised services	Support is individualised to each family's needs, flexible, co-ordinated, and responsive.

Please read the following information and consider whether you would feel able to take part in this project.

Project aims and rationale

In this project I endeavour to work with a group of Educational Psychologists (EPs) to explore practices which may align with the principles of FCP. I hope to explore and identify aspects of current and past experience which exemplify the effective FCP within the context of Early Years Education. The aim of this project is to inform the future development of approaches which support the participation of families within EP practice.

What the research involves

I am hoping that this research project can be a joint endeavour where we work together. The information below provides details regarding the project, including what the commitment may look like for you, the process of the research and what will happen to the information gathered.

The project will involve participants partaking in a collaborative inquiry, called an Appreciative Inquiry. It is hoped that the Appreciative Inquiry will offer the opportunity for reflective discussion between EPs involved in facilitating family partnerships within Early Years Education. The discussions will provide an opportunity to begin to develop a shared understanding of FCP and how practice may be developed based on 'the best that there has been' and 'the best that there could be.' The inquiry process will take place on Wednesday 7th of September at the X between 9.15am-12.30pm.

The process and theoretical underpinnings of Appreciative Inquiry will be outlined at the beginning of the session. Participants will then be guided through the 5 stages of the process. There is no requirement for participants to have had prior experience of collaborative inquiries, though an interest in supporting the participation of families in EP practice would be beneficial.

At a later date (date to be negotiated with participants and the EPS), I will provide feedback to staff regarding the findings of the research project.

Possible outcomes

It is hoped that the process of an Appreciative Inquiry into the facilitation of FCP may generate a shared understanding and insights into your practice, whilst also informing the future development and sustainability of FCP in the context of the EPS.

Information gathered

As this research project is being undertaken as part of my doctoral training a research report will be required. During the Appreciative Inquiry, conversations will be audio recorded and transcribed to allow for data analysis. The transcriptions will be stored in line with Data Protection legislation and will be kept only until the research project is completed. Participants in the research will remain anonymous in the transcripts, in the project write up and, in any feedback, given to the local authority and participants.

Personal information (i.e., from consent forms or information from the discussions) will be kept securely and either locked away or password protected. Transcripts and recordings will be shared only with my supervisors, and those employed to transcribe the data, who will give reassurance about GDPR compliance. The recordings will be destroyed immediately after transcription.

Additionally, in the future, the information gathered may be shared or used in other research articles or presentations to inform an understanding of FCP and family partnerships within EP practice and as part of EPS service delivery.

Taking part

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without reason if you change your mind. If you decide to withdraw, please contact me

(contact details below). It should be noted that once the Appreciative Inquiry has been carried out, I will be unable to remove contributions to discussions from the research.

If you have any queries or questions regarding the project, please do not hesitate to contact me. My email address is X. Alternatively, you can also direct questions to my research supervisor at Newcastle University, Mr David Lumsdon (Educational Psychologist & Senior University Tutor). He can be contacted via email at X.

If you are interested in being involved with this research project, please complete the attached consent form, and return it to me.

Many thanks,

Emma Hutcheson-Galbraith
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix D: Declaration of Informed Consent



Newcastle University
School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences

Declaration of Informed Consent

- I agree to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to explore the ways in which Educational Psychologists facilitate family partnerships, within the context of Early Years Education. This will include the

exploration of the core principles of family-centred practice and the consideration of how this framework may align with current and previous experiences, whilst exploring hopes for the future.

- I declare that I have understood the nature and purpose of the research.
- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the information provided.
- I have been informed that I may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without penalty of any kind.
- I have been informed that all of my responses will be kept confidential and secure, and that I will not be identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.
- I have been informed that the researcher will answer any questions regarding the study and its procedures. The researcher's email is X and they can be contacted at any time. The research supervisor can be contacted at X.
- I will be provided with a copy of this form for my records.

Any concerns about this study should be addressed to the School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences Ethics Committee, Newcastle University via email to X.

Date	Participant Name (please print)	Participant
Signature		

I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant and secured their consent.

Date _____

Appendix E: Themes, Sub-themes and Codes

Theme	Sub-themes	Codes
Phase one: what is working well		
A family-centred philosophy	Overarching theme	Families as pivotal in children's lives Families as active decision makers Holding the family at the centre of practice
Relational practices	Building relationships and trust via other professionals	Transferring trust between practitioners Developing connections via other practitioners
	Continuity of relationships	Building and maintaining connections Continuity of care
	A relational service delivery model	A relationally grounded experience EP involvement as a relational experience Relational processes at the heart of partnership working
	Relating to the family system	Appreciating family dynamics Wider family inclusion Acknowledging the influence of family relationships
Participatory practices	Negotiating partnership working	Family led participation: choice for involvement Creating opportunities to discuss ways of working together Family choice first
	Redressing power imbalances	Empowering spaces Transparency and accessibility of information

	Facilitating partnerships	EP acting as a bridge between the home and nursery environment. EP as a neutral facilitator. EP directed collaboration.
	Participating within the context of the family	Building a picture via other practitioners Building a picture of the child via their family Viewing the child in the home/family context
Dialogic practices	Discursive strategies and consultation skills	Curiosity empathy and deep listening. Appreciating and acknowledging parents expertise on their child Scaffolding dialogue: preparing for consultation
	The story has been 'heard'	Acknowledging and legitimising family concerns Pulling together the 'threads'
	A strengths-oriented approach	Understanding family strengths Strengths-oriented consultation
Phase two: hopes and dreams for the future		
Enhancing the joint experience	Prioritising the relational experience	Practice sustaining and enriching relational processes Moving away from 'outcomes' based consultation
	Inviting participation	Tangible resources which invite participation Establishing rapport: early contact and connection Families options for meeting spaces Families autonomy over how they interact with the EP
	Family-centred formulations	Co-constructing next steps via feedback

		Families' stories reflected in written formulations Sense checking and co-constructing hypotheses
A family-centred organisation	Family-centred processes	Accessible information/resources to share with families Accessibility of information between EPs and families and other professionals Families awareness of the EP role Families views on service delivery
	Holistic services to families	Family-centred systemic work Working with families across different contexts Establishing community connections
	Promoting FCP to school commissioners	Supporting an understanding of FCP to nursery settings Managing expectations and tensions of traded work