

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences



Building Bridges to Realise Potential: an ecological and social capital exploration of young people missing from education to support their re-entry to education or training.

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Abstract

Young people who go missing from school through non-attendance is not a new phenomenon and continues to challenge government policy makers and researchers. The research literature in the area has tended to look at deficits either of the young person, parent, school, society or various combinations therein-much of it developed from looking in on their lives as opposed to eliciting the unique views of those who are living those lives. This research project aims to redress this by eliciting the unique perspectives of the young people and their parents on the factors involved, in the young person going missing from school and the issues which this raises for them. It aims to analyse these factors and issues from an ecological and social capital perspective, exploring whether adopting such an analysis can inform an intervention approach to support their route back into education or training. A significant barrier identified was their lack of social capital in relation to knowledge of possible educational options available to them, and a lack of support to help navigate their route back into some form of education or training. Based on this, the researcher adopted a curative approach (Kinder & Kendall, 2005) using the social capital concept of linking social capital as a practical intervention. This involved an intervention with the researcher acting as a linking social tie to bridge the young people back into education or training.

The research project adopted a social constructionist perspective and took the form of a qualitative exploratory study, which employed structured discussions and a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2003). The contributors to the research project were a group of young people (n-10), in Year 3 or Year 4 of a Scottish secondary school, who were aged 13 to 15 years. They comprised 6 males and 4 females. Their attendance had diminished to such an extent that school staff felt that they would be unlikely to return to a secondary school. The young people's parents (n-10) also contributed to the research process.

Following the intervention, seven of the ten young people returned to an education or a vocational placement. Implications for schools and professional practice are discussed, as are opportunities for further research.

Dedication

To Mark and Debbie,

with love.

Declaration of Ownership

I confirm that I Patricia Marian Murray, am the sole author of this research report.

The content of which has been undertaken by me and has not been presented previously, in part or in whole, for any other higher degree

Signature: *Patricia Marian Murray*

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Glossary of Terms

Children's Hearing System: From 1971, children's hearings took most of the responsibility for dealing with children and young people under 16 over from the courts and, in some cases, under 18 year olds, who commit offences or who are in need of care and protection.

Children's Panel: Every local authority has a children's panel, and panel members sit on hearings. A children's hearing has three panel members, of which there must be a mix of men and women. The hearing must decide whether compulsory measures of supervision are needed for the child and, if so, what they should be.

MCMC (More Choices, More Chances): More Choices, More Chances (MCMC) is the Scottish Government Strategy which sets out to reduce the proportion of young people who are not in Education, Employment or Training.

Secondary School Stages: First year (or S1) 11–13yrs; Second Year (or S2) 12–14yrs; Third Year (or S3) 13–15yrs; Fourth Year (or S4) 14–16yrs; Fifth Year (or S5) 15–17yrs; Sixth Year (or S6) 16–18yrs.

5-14 Levels in Scotland Assessment levels prior to the development of a Curriculum for Excellence in the Scottish Context.

Level A - should be attainable in the course of the first three years at primary school by almost all pupils.

Level B - should be attainable by some primary three or even earlier; but certainly by most in primary four.

Level C - should be attainable in the course of primary four to primary six by most pupils.

Level D - should be attainable by some pupils in primary five or six or even earlier but certainly by most in their last year at primary school.

Level E - should be attainable by some pupils in primary seven or secondary one but certainly by most by their second year in secondary school

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Focus of the research project

The focus of this research is on young people who have or are in the process of dropping out of school. Such young people have a variety of labels attributed to them, e.g. truants, non-attenders disengaged etc. The choice of language used to describe them frequently implying that the source of the difficulty lies within the young person. This research project adopts a social constructionist approach, and as such it is important to be aware of the way in which language can serve to construct individuals in particular ways. As a consequence of this the young people in this study will be described as young people who are missing from school: a term which implies a more process based orientation, as opposed to an attribute of the individual.

This research study seeks to investigate the factors and issues involved when a young person goes missing from school, from the perspective of the young person and their parent and investigates what is maintaining them in that position. It seeks to reinterpret what it means when the young person goes missing from school from an ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) and social capital perspective (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1994). It explores whether adopting a social capital analysis of these factors and issues can inform an approach to their re-engagement with education or training. In attempting to answer the research questions it takes a ‘curative’ approach (Kendall & Kinder, 2005) to their school non-attendance. By curative it is meant that opportunities are provided to support a “*route back into learning or work related learning*” (Kendall & Kinder 2005, p.5). This linking of the research with action reflecting Rosenthal (1998), who advocates that the development of knowledge and intervention should go hand in hand; and James (2007), who also stresses the link between theory and practice by using research in an applied way.

1.2 Presenting the research in a written medium

In the following sections a written account of the research project is provided which provides an overview of the research project from initial inception through to completion. In adopting a social constructionist approach as is the case in this research, there is recognition of “*the dynamic and transactional models of shared or negotiated meaning*” (Kelly, 2008, p.21). It is important to recognise the importance of language in constructing meaning and knowledge (Willig, 2008). There is an awareness that, as researchers, we “*shape the writing that emerges*” (Creswell, 2007, p.179). We need to be aware of this; and make the contribution and potential subjectivity of the researcher transparent to the reader. There is a need to acknowledge the dynamic interplay between the researcher - the language used, and that of the reader whose role is to interpret and construct meaning through the written text. In line with this co-constructed knowledge (Freshwater, Cahill, Walsh & Muncey, 2010), what is being laid before you in the first chapter will be written in the first person. The aim of which is to make visible the researcher’s role in the design and focus of the research study and report. In terms of reflexivity, (Willig, 2008) there is a need to also share those factors within my own professional and personal background that have made me more attuned to the needs of young people who go missing from the school system, and which led to this research project. In Chapter’s 2, 3, 4 and 5, I will revert to the third person. In the chapters which follow, the metaphor of a journey is used to reflect the research process and the distance travelled. It is to this metaphor that I now turn.

1.3 The Journey Metaphor

From birth to death we are on a journey through life, travelling through different situations, meeting different people and, on occasion, deviating from our route- perhaps along a side street before finding ourselves back on the main road and heading to our intended destination. Sometimes we may lose our way, and find

ourselves lost and looking for a map. In the process of the journey, we meet people, some of whom can help, either by making our journey more enjoyable, taking us along a different route or, in some instances, making us want to get off the bus and walk. In those interactions we learn and grow, carrying those experiences with us and changing. This metaphor of a journey is one which I hope to use in bringing this research project alive for the reader. This research has been a journey for me, and hopefully has assisted some young people, who have travelled with me, reach a positive destination. It is hoped that their experiences, and those of their parents, will help in drawing up a route map for those who may follow.

Providing a route map

In the following section, the origins of the research are made explicit, highlighting my professional practice in a secondary school context, which initially brought to my attention the problem of some young people going missing from mainstream school. It will also look at factors at the macro system e.g. the social and educational inclusion agenda, and the More, Choices, More, Chances agenda (Scottish Executive, 2006) which impacted on my professional role as a practising Educational Psychologist, and led me to feel that there was a requirement to attempt to intervene in these young people's lives. It then addresses the research aims which explore the young people and their parent's views on factors which led to the young person going missing from school and what is maintaining them in that position: including the issues this raises for the young people and their parents'. Based on these factors and issues a fourth aspect of the research questions explores whether these factors and issues can be reconceptualised through a social capital and ecological lens, to inform an intervention strategy, which could support the young person's route back into education or training.

The time dimension of the research will be discussed to explain why it was undertaken during this time period, and what, within my professional context contributed to that. It follows with a section which positions the researcher and, in terms of reflexivity, highlights factors within my professional and personal

background which influenced my decision to undertake the research including the rationale for the research design and process. It concludes with a brief overview before moving onto Chapter 2, which surveys the research landscape.

1.4 Origins of the research and context

This research project emerged from my experience of working as an Educational Psychologist in a large inner city secondary school in Scotland, in an area of high social deprivation. The school has approximately 1552 young people, across all six year groups. In the course of my work within the school, a group of young people, who had stopped attending school, were highlighted by the Depute Head teacher (DHT), during a discussion about who should be prioritised for input from the school Educational Psychologists. These young people had shown a marked deterioration in their attendance and some had stopped attending altogether and school staff felt that they were unlikely to return to mainstream education. Some of the young people had no contact with the school, other than visits from the school liaison officer. Their role was to visit the homes of young people who were not attending school regularly and try to encourage them back into school or if necessary have them taken before the school attendance council. Two parents had limited phone contact with school guidance staff. Of the young people identified by the DHT four of the parents had social work input; and 4 of the young people were on supervision orders from the children's panel due, in part, to being missing from school. Despite these levels of involvement, the young people were either now complete non- attendees or well on the route to becoming so. Details of these young people's attendance rates and attainment levels are located in Chapter 3.

A number of the school staff felt that they should not be a priority for Psychological Services involvement as these children and their families were "*just not interested*" in school and were too entrenched as non-attenders to return to education. To a certain extent some school staff appeared to have given up on them as they were out with the school setting, and therefore, not seen on a daily basis. Partly due to their diminishing or non-existent school attendance, and the other demands on staff in a

busy secondary school, they were not seen as a high priority for the school whose main focus was on the young people who were attending school. Such a waste of human talent and missed opportunity was of ethical concern and their prospects - or lack of them, - beyond the statutory school leaving date was a concern.

As a practising Educational Psychologist, I am guided in my practice by the codes of conduct of our professional body the British Psychological Society (2009), and our regulatory body, the Health Professionals Council (2008). In addition, I also align my practice to a positive ethical approach (Handlesman, Knapps, & Gottlieb, 2005). Such an approach recognises the individual professional's personal value base, integrating it with our professional ethical codes and values. Positive ethics requires sensitivity to situations occurring where, although there is no breach of ethical codes, there is perhaps a need to challenge situations which do not promote the welfare of either the individual or group. In that sense it is aspirational to look at the social implications of our work, and, in particular, from my personal value base social justice and educational inclusion. As the late Donald Dewar once commented, "*A Scotland where everyone matters*".

Given that social and educational inclusion is a key part of current government policy in Scotland, and my own belief in non-discriminatory practice, it was not possible to ignore this group of young people who were missing from school. There was also a requirement that, as a local authority employee, professional practice should serve to support national and local authority educational and social priorities. In particular Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (Scottish Executive, 2004), which requires us to address barriers to learning. From my perspective there appeared to be barriers to their re-engagement with education and their social and educational inclusion e.g. teacher attitudes, family circumstances, school based referral routes to psychological services, and associated locational factors which were mitigating against this group of young people, who were missing from school. It was my ethical belief that this required to be addressed. It was particularly relevant in relation to my role as an Educational Psychologist, particularly in light of the report, *Implementing Potential: Realising Potential*-otherwise known as the Beattie Report (Scottish Executive, 1999): a

landmark report for our profession. It had led to an extension of the age range that Psychological Services in Scotland worked with from 19-years to 24-years, which now covered post-school destinations.

The Beattie Report suggested that Educational Psychologist become more involved in research to support the development of a more inclusive educational system. There was an expectation that improving transition planning for young people would lead to more positive post-16 destinations, particularly for those young people at danger of falling out of the school system. It highlighted that many young people begin to fall out of school systems prior to the school leaving age of 16 years and, as a Psychological Service, this issue had to be addressed through improved transition planning. As an applied Educational Psychologist working in education within the Scottish context, having identified an emerging issue which was adversely affecting young peoples' future opportunities, it was an ethical imperative to acknowledge it, investigate it and seek to do something about it. At this juncture, it is perhaps important to comment that in Scotland the Educational Psychologist has five core functions: assessment, consultation, intervention, training, research and development and training (Scottish Executive, 2002). Consequently, research and intervention, as in this research project, sat comfortably within our professional remit.

The issue of young people missing out from school was particularly pertinent in the light of research by Raffe (2003) which highlighted a link between young people being- what he termed, 'disengaged' from school and the increased risk of them ending up not being in education, employment or training (known by the acronym NEET) post-16 years. There was a potential negative impact, which not being in education employment or training could have in terms of the young person's life chances. In a literature review undertaken by the York Group for the Scottish Government (Scottish Executive, 2005), young people who were NEET were identified as being at risk of; financial exclusion; low attainment; stigma; negative attitudes of others and potential debt issues. These potential risk factors, coupled with the limited employability prospects, were a sufficient reason to choose to try

and do something to support them and attempt to re-engage them with education or training.

Following discussions, and in negotiation with the school depute head teacher and Psychological Services, this group of young people were prioritised for the involvement of psychological services as part of the service level agreement with the school. The remit negotiated was to provide outreach to their home community (a new initiative) in conjunction with the school liaison officer and/or social worker, with a view to attempting to re-engage with the young people and their families to ascertain what support was needed and what could be offered. The research, therefore, arose as a new component of my professional practice in this secondary school, although research was an aspect of our core function. It extended my role by following up non-attenders in their home community, which was not standard practice within the Psychological Service.

Over time, in getting to know these young people and their parents, it was my subjective experience that the labels attributed to them did not really reflect how they presented. In the school system and in the research literature, there appeared a tendency to focus on deficits, emphasising the family, the child, the school or various combinations thereof. Steer (2000) cautions about accepting what he terms 'reductionist' explanations, that attempt to attribute 'blame' on the individual, family, school or society. It was clear that there was a need to look at factors that were maintaining the young people in the position of being missing from school; and acknowledge the difficulties the young people and their families were facing in trying to interface with possible support networks. These barriers within the family context and local authority systems for young people and families required to be identified and addressed.

My subjective experience when visiting these young people was that they did not like being out of education and were worried about their future job prospects, as were their parents'. The terminology of subjective experience is used, as it was not just the experience, but my own particular interpretation of that experience, viewed from my perspective, which may differ to other interpretations of that experience:

or for that matter the views of the young people and their parents'. The mothers, generally the parent to whom you had access to during the day, frequently complained that they did not know where to turn for help; which is reflected in the following comment: *"we don't know about any of these kind things. Naebody tells you. Naebody contacts you and says to you"* (Parent 9).

Too often the young person and the parent appeared to be keen for help but did not know how to go about accessing that help. That they had their own particular story to tell was apparent, and these stories needed to be both elicited and heard, in order to explore their personal perspective on the factors and issues as they experienced them (Creswell, 2007).

Given that all the support services-careers, educational psychology, guidance etc. were all filtered via the school; it was not surprising that they were unsure where to turn. By being absent from school, they were doubly disadvantaged: missing out on their education and also being estranged from the means by which they could access the information and networks which would help them re-engage with some form of education, work or training. Becoming dislocated from the school system denied them access to the very systems that had the potential to support them.

It appeared that there were contextual factors home, school, community, which had contributed to these young people being missing from school, and what maintained their position was not they nor their parent's lack of interest in education but their lack of the right kind of social currency or capital which could support their journey back into education. By this I mean they did not have sufficient knowledge of how to navigate the education system and interface with its processes, nor were they aware of other non-mainstream educational opportunities that may have been available. It appeared that life circumstances had put them in the position of being missing out on school and the young person and their parent were keen to find a route back, but did not have a route map, or the 'appropriate education specific currency' to start the journey back into some form of education or training..

In attempting to conceptualise the nature of the difficulties they were experiencing, the concept of social capital, espoused by writers such as Bourdieu (1986), Putnam

(2000), Coleman (1994), seemed to offer a way of encapsulating some of the difficulties these young people and their parents seemed to be experiencing. Although a seemingly simple term, the concept of social capital is complex, and means different things to different people according to the varying interpretations given to it. Basically however, it advocates that social networks can be a powerful asset, both for individuals and for communities (Putnam, 2004) to gain access to knowledge and emotional support: what is termed social capital. Putnam suggests that it is the collective value of all social networks and their “*associated norms of reciprocity*” (Putnam, 2004) which can support participants to act more effectively to pursue shared objectives.

Determinants of social capital include, among other things, education and family (Putnam, 2000). Being part of the education system is associated with increased levels of social capital and, therefore, withdrawing from school limits or terminates access to these support networks. There is perceived to be a positive interaction between social capital and educational attainment (Aldridge, Halper & Fitzpatrick, 2002). This is not meant to imply that these young people and their parents had a dearth of social capital in general but rather that they were lacking the type of *educational specific social capital* that would allow them to change their present circumstances. As the following suggests: “*lack of social networks of the right kind helps to explain why individuals who live in neighbourhoods of concentrated disadvantage are even less likely to exit poverty than would be predicated by their individual characteristics*” (Aldridge, Halper & Fitzpatrick 2002, p.20).

Of particular significance in this research project is the specific concept of linking social capital (Woolcock, 2001) whereby, a social link is established between those with differing power differentials, to link them into networks that they may not have had access to, and in doing so potentially increase their social capital. In this research project the young person and their parent linking with that of the researcher/Educational Psychologist, who would use the social capital concept of linking social capital as a practical intervention, to bridge them into social networks that may facilitate their route back into education or training. Acting as a linking

social tie provides them with an opportunity to gain access to and information from formal institutions beyond their immediate environment (Saguaro Seminar, 2007).

The education system is complex, with much of the knowledge held by those within the system at an implicit level. The language too of Education can be difficult to understand e.g. IEP's, CSPs, and ACG's. Unless you are part of that system or have links to Education it can be a difficult to interface with. One needs to have the necessary knowledge to navigate around it. It was my subjective experience that a major barrier to young people who were 'missing from school' was a lack of appropriate type of social capital, i.e. linking social capital. This was needed to allow them to link into resource networks, support and the basic educational infrastructure, and bridge them back into some form of educational provision. It was against this background that this research project emerged.

1.5 Timing and context of the research

A decision to undertake this research was considered timely for a number of reasons. Firstly, in relation to research and context, whilst school non - attendance has previously been viewed as an educational problem, it increasingly is viewed as a social problem, with repercussions extending far beyond school boundaries (Raffe, 2003). Of particular significance, within the Scottish context and internationally, is concern about the social and educational inclusion agenda and the perceived need to increase positive outcomes for young people; especially in education (Bynner, 2002). The link between young people disengaging from school and long term outcomes in terms of engagement with employment education and training is very high on the political agenda, both locally and nationally. Research undertaken within the European Community (Kendall & Kinder, 2005), suggests that young people need preventative approaches to sustain their engagement in education, as well as 'curative' approaches to re-engage them.

The local authority within which this project was based had a high level of young people, 19.1% not in education employment or training post-16 years. This was

particularly high when compared to the national average of 13.3% (Scottish Executive 2006, p. 46): as such, this authority was designated as one of seven NEET hotspots in Scotland. There was concern, therefore, at a local and national level, about these young people. Their designation, as needing *more choices, more chances*, reflecting a social and educational inclusion agenda as well as an economic one. That there was apt to be little information available on their needs is articulated in the following which indicates that the: *“isolation of such young people who are not in regular contact with the statutory agencies due to have fallen out of the school system, means that there is liable to be very little information available on their needs”* (Scottish Executive, 2003, p. 3). A view which resonates with my own professional experience as an Educational Psychologist. As Weinstein (2002) highlights, *“the contextualisation of knowledge is important to create best practice interventions that are tailored to the populations towards which they are targeted.”* This was the background against which this research was felt to be timely and pertinent.

1.6 Research methodology and aims

The research is informed by a social constructionist world view, which utilised a qualitative methodology. A multiple case study approach was adopted. Individual structured discussions were used to gather data from the young people and their parents, which were tape recorded before being transcribed. They were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006), six stage thematic analyses. Details of which are provided in Chapter 3 which focuses on the research design.

Research questions

The specific research question comprised 4 component parts. In the first instance they sought to elicit and explore:

1. What are the perceptions of young people and their parents' about being missing from school?
2. What issues arise for young people when they are missing from school?
3. What are the key barriers to a return to education or training?

4. Can a social capital analysis inform an approach to young peoples' re-engagement with education?

In preparation for undertaking the research project, a small scale pilot project was undertaken as a component of the course requirements for a Doctorate in Educational Psychology. This pilot project looked at the relative merits of structured interviews and focus groups in eliciting young people's views. The outcome of this pilot informed the choice of methods for the current research project.

1.7 Positioning the researcher

In taking a social constructionist perspective, it is important to make clear the background of the researcher, and show reflexivity in relation to our "*own personal and professional reasons for asking the research question*" (Willig, 2001, p. 20) providing the reader with the opportunity to "*assess how these factors might have influenced the researcher's observations and design*" (Tong, Sainsbury & Craig, 2007). In the following sections I hope to make this transparent for the reader, although we cannot hope to "*fully capture our role in data production*" (Bishop & Shepherd 2011, p. 1290) due to what Bishop and Shepherd (2011, p. 2011) describe as factors "*that lie beyond our grasp,*" and which are not always available to us at a conscious level. Practising reflexivity helps the researcher to understand their part in the co-construction of knowledge. Reflexivity should not be a static process and should permeate the researchers thinking at all stages of the research process.

Professional background of the researcher

Although presently a Senior Educational Psychologist with a MCMC /PSPS (More Choices More Chances/ Post School Psychological Services) remit, my initial

professional life was spent as a teacher working in an independent residential school for adolescent boys who had become marginalised from the mainstream education system. In general, they had also engaged to some degree in criminal offending, which had resulted in them appearing before a Scottish Children's Panel via the Children's Hearing, and had subsequently been placed in a residential school on a compulsory supervision order. These young people came to the school with a variety of labels attributed to them such as: disengaged; delinquent; truant; under privileged; and maladjusted.

In the course of my 20 years professional practice working with these young men and their families, I was forced to question the way in which these young people were often defined and categorised by professionals looking in on their lives, as opposed to experiencing their lives. Working closely with them and their parents it appeared to me that, within their social context, their often perceived and professionally labelled 'maladjustment' was, in many instances, an appropriate adjustment response to their particular life circumstances, which could be extremely stressful. It appeared that, through the use of language labels, the issues surrounding these young people and their parents to a certain extent appeared to be constructed in a way which served to problematize them. It also ignored the contextual basis of much of the young people's behavioural presentation.

This growing awareness of the contextual basis of behaviour, and the various ways in which a young person's presentation could be interpreted, led me to become more critical of making assumptions about the young people and their families. It would be dishonest and somewhat naïve to suggest that young people's behaviour did not present behaviour management issues for staff; which of course, it did at times. However, as teaching experience developed through working with them; listening to them; eliciting their views; and treating them with respect, behaviour management issues lessened. This helped develop their sense of affiliation, agency and autonomy; in turn, increasing their self-motivation (McLean, 2009). In some ways you could say I was 'consulting' with children before it became 'fashionable'.

Retrospectively, it appears to me that the context, within which I worked at the time and the professional practice that I shared with colleagues and the young people, seemed to encapsulate the principles of a more dialogic approach, as advocated by writers such as Pruitt & Waddell 2005. Saunders (1999, cited in Pruitt and Waddell 2005, p. 45) defines a dialogic approach as,

“a process of genuine interaction through which human beings listen each other deeply enough to be changed by what they learn. Each makes a serious effort to take others concerns into his or her own picture even when disagreement persists. No participant gives up his or her identity but each recognizes enough of the others valid human claims that he or she will act differently towards the other”.

Adherence to such an approach is guided by the principles of respectfulness, openness, empathy, authenticity, patience, flexibility. This resonates with the work of Carl Roger’s and Humanistic Psychology, which emphasises the concept of unconditional positive regard for the individual, genuineness, empathetic understanding-regardless of age, creed or position. Concepts such as empathy, genuineness, positive regard, and what is now termed a dialogic approach (Pruitt & Waddell, 2007); continue to be very influential in my professional and personal life.

Parallel with my teaching career, I pursued a variety of continued professional development opportunities at postgraduate level, with an emphasis on quantitative research methods. My training as an Educational Psychologist introduced me to more qualitative methods, which appeared to resonate more with my view of the world and my professional practice. My research experience was limited and the little I had was mainly quantitative. I had a very basic knowledge of research methods and was acutely aware of the steep learning curve I would have to experience in order to inform and complete the research report. A somewhat daunting task.

During the course of my professional practice I became increasingly aware that the perspectives of many of the professionals, due to power differentials, seemed to have more currency than the perspectives of many of the young people and their

families: a frequently silent majority. A growing awareness that a lot of important perspectives were being ignored, or, at best, lost, highlighted the need to listen more to the views of those we were supposed to be acting on behalf of. Given my earlier career experiences as a teacher it was natural for me to incorporate a more dialogic and participatory approach in my professional practice with young people and their families.

Due in part to my background in working with these young people and their families, the remit I was given as an Educational Psychologist had a strong emphasis on working with hard-to-reach young people who were in the process of disengaging from mainstream education or alternative educational provision. My professional practice and value base in working with these young people, reflected a belief in unconditional positive regard for the individual; a questioning attitude to taken for granted assumptions about young people and their families; a belief in the contextualised basis of behaviour; a commitment to social and educational inclusion; a belief in listening to the views of young people and their families and an optimism that given the right circumstances all young people had the potential for positive change. It was against this background that I became increasingly sensitive to the issues for such young people and their families and, which ultimately, contributed to the identification of this the research topic.

It is also necessary to be aware that these personal factors had the potential to introduce bias into the research process and these must be made explicit. One such bias was the opinion that the study would highlight that the young people did not like school and some of their teachers. It was also the researcher's expectation that many of the young people missing from school would be among the bottom 20% in relation to their attainment levels as reflected in their 5-14 levels, and that one of the factors that may have led them to go missing from school would be curricular based. During my own school days I frequently went missing from school, and perhaps my advocacy on behalf of these young people may, in part, be a 'ghost' from my own past.

1.8 Summary

This chapter provides a rationale for undertaking this research with a group of young people who have gone missing from school and their parents. It specifies the research aims and why an ecological and social capital approach is felt to be a useful basis for exploring being missing from school. It also specifies the pilot study that was undertaken as a means of deciding on the most appropriate way to elicit the perspectives of the young people and their parents. The social constructionist paradigm underpinning the research is specified and in particular the implications for the language of the research. It looks at factors at the level of the school, professional practice and government to show how these coalesced and given impetus for this research. It illustrates how factors from my own school days, my career as a teacher and as an Educational Psychologist may have increased my sensitivity to the needs of this particular young people and their parents'. It also highlights my limited research experience prior to commencing the research project. The value base which is carried into the research project has been articulated including areas of strengths and potential biases. Chapter 1 also specifies the research design, research questions and focus of the research.

In Chapter 2, the research landscape is surveyed and a rationale is given as to why a reconceptualization of the issues of young people who go missing from school is required.

Chapter 2. Surveying the landscape: a literature review

Young people who go ‘missing’ from mainstream education-or as they are termed in France, *‘perdus de vue’* or *‘lost from sight’* (Hayden & Blaya, 2005) is not a new issue, and has been a concern since the inception of compulsory schooling in the late 19th century (Sheldon, 2009). This is evidenced in a report from that era by the Reformatory & Industrial Schools Committee (1896, p.14) which makes reference to having visited 11 out of 14 truant schools, making provision for school boards to use industrial training schools *“for children, who having failed to attend public elementary school in pursuance of an attendance order brought before the court”*. Although not a new phenomenon, current societal changes in the demands for skills and the government concern about the *“importance of lifelong learning together with more inclusive employment and the social inclusion agenda have made it a high priority policy area”* (Steedman & Stony, 2004, p.29).

2.1 Aims of the literature review

Continuing the metaphor of a journey, the chapter survey’s the research landscape and provides an overview of current and historical research in relation to young people who go missing from school. The literature review is not meant to be exhaustive, but is selective in order to address the research questions. The aim of the review is to provide a context and backdrop for the reader in the area of young people who go missing from school through non-attendance. As Grant (2011, p.1) illustrates *“reviews are seen as way of exploiting existing data more fully and can offer a summarised insight into the current understanding of the evidence and provide an overview of current evidence within the field”*. The emphasis will focus primarily, but not exclusively on the secondary school context, as this is the particular context from which this research emanates. It will firstly provide a

methodology for undertaking the literature review. It will then seek to identify the extent to which going missing from school at the secondary stages is perceived as a problem, and then considers how the problem has been socially constructed. It then looks at the reasons given as to why young people go missing from school and considers what may be maintaining them in that position. The implications which being missing from school at the secondary school stage has for the young person will be highlighted and why it is an important area to research.

It will argue that in looking at young people going missing from school it is necessary to take an ecological approach, looking at the individual in context and the networks which link those contexts. It will lead the reader through a process whereby the literature is critically reviewed and challenged and missing links identified, before providing a rationale for the decision to go down a social capital route in terms of intervention and in reconceptualising the issues. It suggests that in seeking to understand the phenomenon of being missing from school, it is necessary to elicit the views and experiences of those most closely involved; the young people and their parents' (Smyth, 2006). In the next section a methodology is provided for the literature review.

2.2 Methodology for literature search

There are several ways of surveying the research landscape and documenting that research process. This study takes a traditional approach, setting out a separate chapter to review the literature as opposed to having an embedded literature review, although some such as Harlen and Schlapps (1998, p.2) suggest that in adopting such an approach there is an "*element of subjectivity in the process of selecting and reporting findings*". From my own epistemological stance of social constructionism, it could be argued that this will always be the case given the subjectivity of the researcher and the social constructionist beliefs which inform this research project. Nevertheless, in clearly stipulating a literature search methodology, including inclusionary and exclusionary criteria, the rigour of the review can be made more explicit. The researcher in choosing what research to

include and in interpreting that research will have a central role in constructing the meaning derived from that literature review. It is your role as reader to interpret this from your own experience and judge to what extent the research project has been true to the research aims. A key aspect of the literature review is to offer a different perspective on young people who go missing from school to open up debate and discussion by challenging thinking and offering a different way of conceptualising the issue of being missing from school.

The process for undertaking this literature review operated at three different levels. In the first instance a broad brush approach was taken, which entailed undertaking wide and general reading in the area of young people going missing from school due to non-attendance. This included building on prior knowledge of the area and integrating it with knowledge of the *More Choices, More Chances* agenda [MCMC] (Scottish Executive, 2006) and reading key texts, government policy documents and legislation related to young people missing from school. It also included undertaking a pilot project and associated literature review on consultation with young people as a component of the Doctorate in Educational Psychology. These factors informed the choice of methodology for this research project.

The information obtained at this initial stage informed a level two stage where a more focused literature search was initiated using the electronic data base of Crossearch at the University of Newcastle to access a number of data bases: Science Direct, Psycho Info, Web of Science and Ebrary. The following key search terms were utilised: truancy/non-attendance/school disengagement/school completion, both with and without social capital; social capital and /or education; consultation and young people and/or parents. At this stage key texts were identified over the preceding 25 year period to provide a background, before focusing on research between 2000 – 2011. The option was retained to include earlier research papers if it was felt that they provided added value to the literature review; e.g.

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) paper published in the *American Psychologist*, was deemed to be a pivotal paper. There required to be some fluidity in terms of the literature search. This was necessary in order that references from individual papers could be followed up.

At the level three stage, references were followed up which had been highlighted from levels 1 and 2; and linkages made between reading, research hypothesis and professional practice. What follows in the subsequent sections is based the research literature, knowledge of the area and the context within which this study is embedded. It also includes a justification as to why it was felt that a reconceptualization of the issues was necessary.

Whilst my own subjective professional experience highlighted young people going missing from school as an issue in the particular secondary school context, it was necessary to investigate the extent to which young people going missing from school was generally viewed as a problem.

2.3 Summary

In this section a brief introduction is provided to illustrate that young people going missing from school is not a new phenomenon and has been with us since the beginning of compulsory schooling in the late 19th Century. This is followed by the aims of the literature review and the proposed structure of the review. An overview of the methodology for the literature search and the three stages of the process are described.

2.4 The Scottish statistics on young people who go missing from school: the extent of the problem.

Within the Scottish context, the extent of the problem is evident when we examine the Scottish Government statistics, Notice Education Series: Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools 2008/09 (Scottish Government, 2009). This indicates that the average overall rate of school attendance in Scotland for 2008/2009 was 93.2%; suggesting, therefore, that approximately 6.8% are not in attendance. Such a statistic is much more complex than at first it seems, because this global figure masks the variation that occurs regionally and between school stages.

When you examine the figures by primary context and secondary school context, the published figures show that nationally in Scotland, at the primary one to primary seven stages, average school attendance has remained quite static when compared to 2007/2008 (within the range 94.9% to 95.4%). Government statistics for the secondary sector 2008/2009 indicate that attendance rates at secondary are 91.1% on average but show a decrease to 89.7% by year four, before increasing slightly in years five and six. This latter figure possibly indicates the fact that those who stay on at years 5 or 6 may be more motivated to do so than those who leave. Or is it the case that those with poorer attendance levels are simply ‘encouraged’ to leave school?

One has to be cautious when interpreting the figures as in the first instance these are average figures, which, as we know, tend to hide statistical outliers; and if one looks closely at the statistics, one can see there are also regional variations. This can be seen from the statistics which suggest that overall secondary school attendance by local authority range from a high of in Local Authority A 91.5% (a rural authority) to a low of 83.8% in Authority B (a large inner city authority-the same context within which this research was undertaken); and an area with high levels of social deprivation. These differences in local authorities have also to be interpreted with care due to different authorities having different ways of recording attendance and non-attendance (Scottish Executive 2009, Section 1.2.). To further complicate matters, non -attendance is further sub-categorised according to whether it is authorised or unauthorised absence. It is then further divided into even more sub-categories; however, it is not necessary in this context to specify these categories in any depth-with the exception of the one which highlights the difficulties of trying to demarcate children under these categories.

One such sub category used for authorised non -attendance is “*receiving tuition via hospital or outreach tuition services*” (Scottish Executive, 2009). Certainly within my own professional experience many of those who are receiving outreach tuition services are young people who have gone missing from school and are at home or on a waiting list for an alternative educational placement. Therefore, although

deemed an authorised attendance, some may have, in fact, been a school non-attende-often for quite some time (Hallam & Rodgers, 2008). It is, therefore, quite difficult to ascertain the true extent of the problem of school non- attendance; nevertheless, even taking a broad approach, it is of concern to note that Scottish government statistics suggest that, on average, each day there are 43,000 pupils absent from school (for both authorised and unauthorised reasons).

In other parts of the UK it is suggested that there may be 10,000 missing in England (Home Office Research, 2004) on any one day, whilst the National Audit Office (2005) suggests the figure is nearer 50,000 unauthorised attendances on any one day. There is from my own professional experience, practices in recording attendance, which can mean that if a child is receiving home tuition for 2 hours per week or attending an alternative part time non-mainstream placement, then they are categorised as attending school, even if that is for a very small proportion of the week.

Whilst recognising the difficulties of taking these figures at face value-due to differing statistical processes and regional variations across the UK-there is considerable statistical evidence to indicate that young people missing from school remains a national problem. It could be suggested that perhaps some of the figures previously quoted may be a very conservative estimate, dependent on how we both define and record school non-attendance.

What is quite apparent is that for most of the twentieth-century school non-attendance has continued to sit around the 10% average (Sheldon, 2009). That does not necessarily mean that the profile of non –attendance has remained unchanged: a point highlighted by Reid (2008b), who, in the special issue of Educational Review, identifies some new reasons for non- attendance; for example, cyber bullying. This perhaps indicates the necessity of taking an ecological perspective, which takes into account the social and cultural context, within which young people go missing from school; and recognising that there may be changing influences. What is clear, however, is that there are considerable numbers of children who go missing from

school, and that this is an issue both for the young people themselves, their families and society (in relation to missed opportunities).

Ken Reid, who has written extensively in the area of school non - attendance comments that despite increased research into school absenteeism and truancy (his choice of descriptive label) the school non-attendance figures have remained pretty static over the last decade. Despite an array of government initiatives devised to improve school attendance, it persists as a problematic area, and one that would appear resistant to attempts to improve it (Reid, 2008; Sheppard, 2011). In the context of England this is reflected in a report from the National Audit Office (2005) entitled, 'Improving School Attendance in England.', a key message from this document was that levels of school non- attendance have shown minimal improvement in the previous eight years despite a considerable amount of money, being spent on initiatives to address it.

2.5 Summary

This section has highlighted the scale of the problem of school non- attendance: in Scotland and nationally, both presently and historically. It also recognises that the statistics may mask the actual magnitude of the problem. It suggests that despite attempts to improve attendance figures it remains a very problematic area, although a considerable amount of effort and money has been put in to address the problem.

2.6 The social construction of young people missing from school

In seeking to address the extent to which young people missing from school is viewed as a problem, it is necessary to take an ecological perspective, looking at the issue in context. This includes looking at the way in which young people missing from school has been conceptualised over time. It also includes looking at the way in which the language used to describe such young people has served to construct

them in a particular way; the potential range of factors involved at the micro level and the impact which being missing from school has for the young person.

As previously stated young people going missing from school is not simply a 21st century phenomenon and there are parallels with the 19th century in terms of government and societal concerns about young people not in schooling, and the perception that such young people may be at risk of subsequent criminality: children who came from what Mary Carpenter described as the *'dangerous'* and *'perishing'* classes (McHugh, 1992). In more recent times the riots in London in 2011, highlighted similar concerns to the 19th century, with the media and politicians linking absence from school with anti – social behaviour and criminal activity carried out by the young people who rioted. Interestingly, the Cambridge Study in Delinquent development, a major longitudinal study covering 411 males from 8-48 years from 1953 to the present day, indicated that school attendance was not an independent variable at age 8, and therefore cannot be presumed to be causal (Shepherd, 2011). They did however, identify a number of risk factors including; disruptive child based factors; criminality in the family; low attainment or intelligence; impulsiveness and economic deprivation (Farrington, Coid, Harnett, Joliffe, Soleriuou, Turner & West, 2006), thereby suggesting a more complex picture, than politicians would suggest.

The language used to describe such young people may have changed, and the means adopted to ensure young people attend school varied, but the underpinning discourse remains the same: concerns about social control; economic cost in terms of non- attendance per se; implications for the economy in terms of future job prospects and reducing financial pressure on the welfare state. Historically it could be argued, that young people missing from school in common with some other sectors of society have been constructed as being 'a problem' and perceived as 'lacking', often being viewed as posing a threat real or imagined to society. A perspective that is not lost on the UK Children's Commissioners (2008), who commented in their report to the United Nations on the Rights of the Child about negative public attitudes to young people in general. The power of society and

indeed the media to construct people or groups in a particular way should not be ignored. As a very young and inexperienced teacher working in a school for children who were termed ‘maladjusted,’ it quickly became apparent that although labelled “maladjusted’, in line with the medical model which influenced psychological theory at the time, many of the young people were well adjusted to their particular life circumstance. These circumstances being characterised by difficult life experiences, family breakups and poverty, highlighting the need to look at young people’s behaviour in context, and the factors that impact on it.

It could be argued that the way in which young people missing from school, have been constructed over the last 100 years, has to an extent been influenced by the ascendancy of differing theoretical positions in psychology; the rise in prominence of other professions, notably sociology, and changing societal beliefs. This can be seen in the range of terminology used to describe young people missing from school. There is a strong emphasis in the research literature on the use of medical terminology e.g. diagnosis, treatment, phobic, symptoms (Pellegrini,2007).This being particularly prominent in the earlier part of the 20th century and reflecting the strong influence of the medical profession and prevalent psychological theories of the time, which focused primarily on the individual. This individualisation is illustrated by the labels ascribed to young people missing from school e.g. truant and phobics. Such terminology serving to construct the young person in a way that implies a characteristic of the individual (Pellegrini, 2007).This has the potential to stigmatise them in a way that is not helpful (Gordon, 2001; Attwood, Croll & Hamilton, 2003) with Archer et al., (2003) cautioning that there is little point in labelling if it only “*generates assumptions*” and does not indicate what to do about the wider issues.

With the rise of sociology and social psychology in the 1960’s and 70’s factors in relation to school non-attendance, other than the child were considered e.g. the child’s context. The school effectiveness research of the 70’s indicated that schools themselves could make a difference to attendance (Ratter, Maugham, Houston & Smith, 1979), with studies showing that despite a similarity in catchment area,

patterns of attendance varied between schools (Reynolds & Murgatroyd, 1977). Recent research by OFSTED (2007) in their paper ‘Attendance in Secondary Schools’, suggests a link between what they termed “*good quality educational provision*”, and good school attendance with attendance decreasing in what were deemed as poorer quality educational establishments: although it was unclear what they meant by good and poor provision nor how they were defined.

Reid (1985;1987), a researcher who has written prolifically on the subject of non-attendance, highlights young people’s negative experiences of school as a contributory factor, in going missing from school. Such research recognises that school non- attendance does not occur in a vacuum, and there is an interaction with the school context and the young person. A new terminology emerges, the terminology of marginalised, disengaged or disaffected, which is more suggestive of a process of movement away from the context, as opposed to an attribute of the individual. Thereby illustrating the interactional basis of the relationship between the individual and the school. It is worth commenting at this juncture that not all disaffected young people go missing from school. This new terminology integrates with existing terminology. This change in emphasis away from the locus on the individual is also seen in the legislation, e.g. the Warnock Report 1978, acknowledging that the causes of learning difficulties may be due to social and cultural factors rather than intrinsic to the child. This change in emphasis was also seen in the HMIS (1978) report into ‘The Education of Pupils with Learning Difficulties in the Primary and Secondary Schools in Scotland’, which moved from a child deficit view to a curriculum based view of a child’s difficulties.

By the 1990’s the influence of the Civil Rights movement and the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the child, began to be seen in the legislation e.g. Children (Scotland) Act 1995. At the same time professionals and researchers were debating and challenging the way in which people were constructed, espousing a post modernism perspective. By this is meant that there was a questioning of commonly accepted realities in favour of an approach which recognised and valued

the “*subjectivity of the meaning giver*” (Timimi, 2003). Professionals including medical colleagues began to take a more ecological approach looking at the child in context, and the interactions between those contexts. The legislation espoused the importance of listening to the views of the young person, although in practice there was still a tendency to focus on the child as being the source of the problem, despite the legislative framework.

As a researcher who adheres to social constructionist view of the world, it is apparent that the research literature still reflects the professional lens through which the researcher views the problem of children missing from school. This can be seen in a study undertaken by Kearney (2008) which whilst taking an ecological view to absenteeism also includes psychiatric and medical issues. This is not an implied criticism, but given as an example of the way in which professional background will influence the constructs and language used in constructing our definition of the issue of school non-attendance. This is reflected by Sami Timini (2003) a psychiatrist writing from a post-modernist perspective, “*once a professional has been trained.....they take that ideology...and filter the clinical picture.... through their preferred frameworks*”. Young people missing from school are now high profile due to the impact that this could have on their post school employment/training opportunities, and life chance. These young people are now re-labelled as NEET not in education or training. Those who are under 16 years are also a concern as they are deemed in danger of becoming NEET an acronym for not in education work or training.

One of the issues that arises through the use of such a variety of research terminology, and the differing definitions applied to school non-attendance (Pellegrini, 2007) is that it is difficult to compare studies, as you are not comparing like with like (Kearney, 2008). An example of this complexity is exemplified in the study by McAra (2004), which looked at the links between truancy, school exclusion and substance abuse. This study differentiated truancy according to whether it was low level, intermittent or persistent truancy; all of which are

measured in relation to the number of days the child truanted. Persistent truants being defined as those that are off school for more than 10 days.

Compare this with the research undertaken by Archer, Filmer-Sankey and Fletcher-Campbell (2003), which asked local authority schools to specify how they identified school refusal and school phobia (their choice of terminology). Just over half of the schools which responded stated that they did not differentiate between the terminologies of school refuser, phobic or other non - attenders. When presented with a list of possible means of identification, the most frequent ways of identifying such pupils was accepting the view of the school welfare worker; teacher or parent; psychological assessment; or information taken from the school attendance register. Likewise, Lauchlan (2003) in his review of intervention approaches to chronic non-attendance, differentiates between truancy and school refusal, with truancy thought to be linked to separation anxiety and the latter with conduct disorder. This leads researchers like Gabb, (2007) and Steer (2000) to caution us against viewing the literature as reflecting a homogeneous group. Whilst the outcome for some young people can be, truancy etc. or whatever your preferred choice of language label, the routes that led them there will vary between individuals. With James (2007, p.206) warning about “*clumping children together as part of a category*” e.g. non-attender or truant. Whilst James and James (2004, p.16) point out that “*diversities that distinguish one child from another are as important as the commonalities they share*”. The implications being that “*each young person has their own story to tell*” (Steer, 2000, p.2), a perspective that has impacted on this research, by seeking to elicit not only the young person’s perspective but those of their parents.

2.7 Summary

This section has taken a historical look at the way in which being missing from school has been constructed and the various terminology used to describe the young people. It has looked at the context and the way in which changing societal perspectives, psychological perspectives and the rise of sociology has contributed to

this. It has also highlighted the difficulties the various terminologies cause when trying to compare studies, and caution us about viewing the literature as a homogeneous whole. The implications being that the situation is complex and whilst the outcome may be school non - attendance the routes to that position will be complex and individual. The implication being that young person's own perspective needs to be elicited.

2.8 What are the factors that can lead young people to go missing from school?

In a large scale research project undertaken by Malcolm, Davidson & Kirk 2003, which covered 143 LEA'S, parents (n-373), primary school children (n-662) and secondary school children (n-582) and LEA officials (n-143) a range of reasons were identified as to why young people went missing from school. The secondary aged pupils highlighted issues related to school e.g. bullying, teachers, peers, social isolation but very few self-reported truants mentioned home based factors. This is not necessarily surprising, as young people can be reluctant to share home based concerns with school, as Reay (2006, p.171) points out "*there are often issues that pupils do not feel comfortable talking directly about to teacher's*". In this research young people showed some self-awareness of how their own behaviours may have contributed to them going missing from school with Malcolm et al., (2003) commenting that the young people were "*disarmingly honest about their own habits or personalities*".

In this research by Malcolm et al., (2003) parents too seemed to locate the source of the young people's difficulties as primarily education based e.g. factors such as peer pressure, bullying and teacher related issues. LEA staff mainly emphasised home based factors, such as: parents putting a low value on education; children acting as carers; domestic violence; parents working long hours; and parents not being able to provide clothing or materials. The LEA staff also mentioned school based factors, such as bullying, dislike of teachers etc. This seeming to highlight that who perceives is as important as what is being perceived. Research indicates (Reid, 1985) that young people who truanted from school found it a negative experience,

as opposed to a positive experience, but the longer they were absent the harder they found it to return.

One of the factors highlighted in the Malcolm et al study as a cause for students going missing from school was a lack of school uniform and materials. Given the poverty that some families live in, this is a fact of life and can be a major barrier to a young person attending school. One of the young men in this current research laughed when he recounted to me that when he went to school he got “*dug up*” every day by the staff for not wearing school black shoes, or school uniform. He could not afford black shoes and there was no washing machine to wash his only set of school uniform. Sometimes as professionals in relatively well paid positions it is easy to lose sight of the poor economic circumstances of some, though by no means all of the young people we come in contact with. We cannot overlook structural poverty (Ferguson, 2004) as a source of exclusion. Yet, it is only a fragment of the picture and unlikely to be the sole contributory factor.

There are a number of non-school factors which have been identified as impacting on young people who go missing from school, in a review of studies undertaken by Rosenthal (1998, p.424) twelve clusters of non - school based factors were identified: socio economic status; minority group status; gender; community characteristics; household stress; taking adult roles; social support for schools; family process; student involvement in education. Rustique-Forrester (2002) cites disordered home circumstances, negative parental attitudes and lack of support as factors that can also lead to children not attending school. There also is a public perception that parents are in some way to blame and this is evidenced in the fact that parents can be prosecuted if their child does not attend school.

Bullying has also been identified as a factor in young people going missing from school. A study by Oliver and Candappa (2007), suggested that in relation to bullying a difficulty was that young people are not always willing to tell someone they are being bullied. In a study undertaken by Eliot, Cornell, Gregore and Fanb (2010), young people appeared to become more reluctant to seek help for bullying

as they get older. Although they acknowledge, that self- reports were used to gather information on the young peoples' help seeking behaviour, verbalised attitudes and behaviour may not always correspond. There seems to be a sense that seeking help is seen as sign of personal weakness. In a mental health context Timlin, Scalera, Ponterotto and Bulumberg (2003, p. 343), looked at help seeking behaviour among a group of high school students. They identified that one of the barriers to males seeking help was "*their perception of males who go for help as weak*".

There is also a time dimension when looking at school non- attendance with Reid (2008, p. 355) suggesting that the causes of non-attendance are not static and change in tandem with developments in modern life e.g. 'cyber bullying' has emerged of late, both on line and via social communication sites such as Facebook and mobile phones, thereby reflecting societal changes in communication media.

2.9 Why we should be concerned about young people being missing from school?

At the micro and macro-level, there are a number of reasons why we should be concerned about young people being out of school. At the micro level, there are concerns about the impact it has on the young person in terms of breaking the continuity of learning and the impact on attainment (Malcolm et al., 2003). Quintin and Martin, (2006) stress the impact which it may have in terms of difficulty getting started in the job market. From a financial perspective there are governmental concerns about the costs of non-attendance (Boyle & Goodall, 2011). There is also quite simply the moral argument which is reflected in the Australian research by Bland and Atweh (2007, p.38) who state "*social justice concern around marginalised youth suggest that ways be found to engage with their voices*" as this group of young people are the "*least likely to be heard*". Although occurring in a different continent, and within a different context, the sentiments ring true in this present research study.

At the macro level of government policy there is increasing recognition that such young people who go missing from the education system are a diverse group, and the factors involved when a young person becomes missing from school and the pattern of that non-attendance, as previously commented on will be very individualised (Edward & Malcom, 2002). There is also recognition that, far from being simply an educational problem, it is indicative of wider societal issues, e.g. poverty and social exclusion which are manifested through school non-attendance.

Equality of opportunity: the inclusion agenda

Social and educational inclusion is a key policy area across the UK and in Scotland, where the government rhetoric emphasises equality of opportunity and full participation in society. In particular, young people, who have gone missing from school through non-attendance, are perceived as lacking the skills or aspirations that would allow them to access the world of work (post 16-years) leaving them socially disadvantaged and excluded from the labour market. This has given rise to a number of government policies and initiatives designed to improve the life chances for such young people; including the extension of the Psychological Service up to 24, as recommended in the report *Implementing Inclusiveness: raising potential* (Scottish Executive, 1999), otherwise known as the Beattie Report

The aim of the Beattie Report was to support young people make the transition to a positive education/work or training destination (post 16-years). To improve transitions and reduce the number of young people not in education employment or training, it was recommended that Educational Psychologists work collaboratively with professional colleagues in schools, the careers service-now Skills Development Scotland-and staff in post school destinations e.g. further education colleges and training providers, to improve transition planning. There was awareness that some young people would drop out of the system prior to 16 years and would need transition support prior to school leaving age as the following quote highlights: *“Preparation for transition should start as early as possible particularly where young people are likely to need a high level of support to enter post school training*

or if they are in danger of dropping out of the system” (Scottish Executive 2000, p.2).

The Scottish Executive (2005, p. 96) in their report on Mapping Employability and Support Services for Disengaged Young People highlighted the limited: “*evidence of proactive projects which are providing outreach to identify the non-engagers in the community*”. Given that my remit as a senior educational psychologist was to promote the More Choices, More Chances agenda, and support young people into positive post school transitions, the focus of this research sat very comfortable with my remit as a psychologist. A core function of which was research.

An indication that school non -attendance is still very much alive within the research field is reflected in the fact that the Educational Review in 2008 had a special edition on the topic of truancy and behaviour.

2.10 Summary

An overview of the factors which are linked to young people who are missing from school was discussed. These risk factors attribute blame to the family, the school, the young person or various combinations therein. Although the end result may be school non-attendance, the pathways factors involved may differ and are complex and multi-faceted. The importance of eliciting the perspective of the child was highlighted. Discussion also focused on the impact which school non-attendance could have on the young person

2.11 Research Limitations

Whilst there is considerable information on risk factors linked to school non-attendance it has not placed sufficient emphasis on research projects on what to do about young people who have gone missing from school. Indeed, Reid points out the lack of reintegration strategies “*remains a weakness*” (Reid, 2005a as cited in Reid, 2008). Kendall and Kinder (2005) also comment on the lack of evaluative

data on the type of interventions that work with young people who have disengaged from the school system. They feel that, while ‘preventative’ measures are necessary, ‘curative’ approaches’ which attempt to re-engage the young people and offer them routes back into learning are also required. A view which concurs with that of the Scottish Executive (2005) who state that “*there is little evidence of proactive projects which provide outreach activity to non-attenders in the community*”. Furthermore, the research literature does not address the barriers that exist within the education system and home context, that militate against young people finding a route back in. Nor does it look at how the individual is located in different microsystem and how these intersect to produce social capital that is valued in some contexts but does not have equal currency in others. It could be argued that, in looking at young people who go missing from school and how to help them, it is necessary to take an ecological and social capital perspective. In the next two sections a rationale is offered as to why such an approach is required. It suggests that there are a range of risk factors which may impact on young people going missing from school. It also suggests that there is a tendency to problematize young people and their families, without an understanding of the context within which they live. As Berger (2002, p.176) as cited in Freshwater, Cahill, Walsh and Muncey, (2010) comments “*there is a huge gap between the experience of living a normal life at this moment on the planet and the public narratives being offered to give sense to that life*”. Although Berger (2002) offers this quote up in a different context, the sentiments are equally pertinent in looking in at the lives of young people who are missing from school.

2.12 Young people missing from school: an ecological approach

Young people who ‘dropout’ of school do not exist in a vacuum and cannot be viewed in isolation from the contexts of which they are a part e.g. families, community, friends, school etc. (Christenson, Sinclair, Lehr & Hurley, 2000). The interactions within these contexts can be complex, with the young person influencing as well as being influenced by their environment and their interactions within it. This dynamic interplay between the individual and context was

exemplified by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1977; 1979). Bronfenbrenner who is widely viewed as the founding father of an ecological model of development and used this model as a basis to further develop his theory into bio-ecological theory. A key figure at Cornell University, his particular field of interest lay in child development. In discussing his model, it is helpful to firstly understand the context within which ecological theory developed and the impact it has made. During the period 1972-1974, when Bronfenbrenner was developing his model, a literature search at the time of 3 of the foremost psychological journals indicated that, out of 902 published articles, 76% of the articles employed an experimental laboratory based paradigm, with only 8% being based on the direct observation of children (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Little wonder that he felt the necessity to comment that research produced at the time tended to focus on the “*strange behaviour of children, in strange situations, with strange adults for the briefest period time* (Bronfennbrenner, 1977).

Bronfenbrenner (1977; 1979) drew from the field of biology to develop a conceptual framework, to explain the way in which an individual’s development is affected by, their interactions within-and between-a number of intersecting ecosystems. These ecosystems impacting on them over their life span. The focal point of these eco-systems is the individual and what they bring to those eco-systems in terms of their uniqueness as a biological human being, and how in interaction with that ecosystem the child’s development is supported or inhibited. Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model suggests that these ecosystems which impact on an individual operate at a number of different interrelated levels: These interrelated levels he named the microsystem; mesosystem; exosystem; macrosystem; and, later, the chronosystem. A diagrammatic conceptualisation of his model is presented below in Figure 1.

The first level of his model he termed the microsystem, and this is reflective of all the interactions and roles which occur within that initial system of which the individual is a part e.g. family, community or school. Elements of this microsystem include: time, physical features, roles, activities, participants. At any time the individual can be part of several microsystems e.g. family, school community. They provide a location for social, cultural and educational interactions that support the

development of the individual. The individual can be a part of a number of microsystems and over the life course these will have differing influences on them. An example would be a very young child who may be totally dependent on the family system for survival as a young child, but by adolescence the peer group may have begun to exert a stronger pull on them.

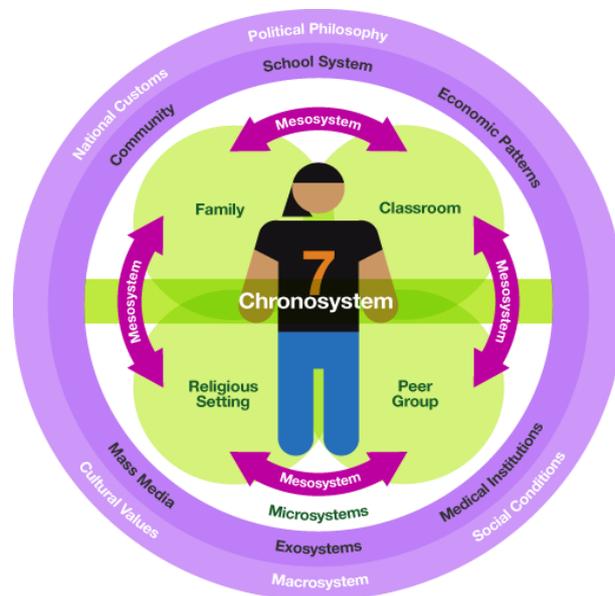


Figure 1 Pictorial representation of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model

Bronfenbrenner labelled the next level the ‘mesosystem’. This identifies where two of more of the micro systems of which the child is a part interact e.g. home and school. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 25) describes it is a “*set of interrelations between two or more settings in which the individual actively participates*”. In terms of young people who go missing from school, the mesosystem, is a key area terms of this research project, as the mesosystem is a venue for developing social capital.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggest an individual can link between contexts in one of four ways:

- Multi setting participation: where the individual actively participates in one or more settings and is a participant in the social networks between those settings.
- Inter-setting communication: where they use a communication medium to communicate between settings for e.g. letter, e-mail, telephone etc.
- Indirect linkage: through another person, where although the individual is not active in both settings there are links made through an intermediary.
- Inter-setting knowledge: where there is knowledge transfer between settings which enhances the individuals' development. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The linkages between settings are important because they have the potential to enhance an individual emotionally by providing support; cognitively by providing access to information and knowledge; and socially by providing access to increased social networks (McIntosh, Lyon, Carlson, Everette, & Loera, 2008). The idea of these linkages between settings, mediated through relationships which bring knowledge and support individual development resonates with the research on social capital, which highlights the importance of networks in building social capital. There are obvious parallels between Bronfenbrenner's mesosystem and social capital networks. This should not be too surprising given the influence that Ecological theory has had on the field of knowledge, and the rise of social capital theory, both of which to a certain extent grew up together in the late 1970's to 1980's.

Following on from the mesosystem Bronfenbrenner suggested the "exosystem," and this is where, although the individual is not directly involved, one or more of the persons in their microsystem are, and it can, therefore, impact on the individual indirectly e.g. work, media, and government departments. An example is when a parent is made redundant at work, having an impact on the family system and the individual child e.g. potential financial constraints on the family

The next system he identifies is the “macrosystem”. It differs from the exosystem in that it does not refer to specific contexts, but what Bronfenbrenner described as “prototypes”, which “*set the pattern for the structures occurring at the concrete level*”, (Bronfenbrenner 1977, p.515). This reflects the overarching beliefs and ideologies of society, filtering down to impact at all other levels. An example would be the social and educational inclusion agenda, which is reflected in policies and legislation that will impact on the individual throughout the system. A later addition to his model, the “chronosystem,” suggests a time dimension spanning the whole life term of the individual. This reflects the various influences which will change and impact on the individual during their life course. An example would be a young child who is totally reliant on the influence of his family but other influences e.g. peers or partner may have an increasing important role as they mature.

Taking an ecological approach is helpful because it takes a holistic view of the individual in context and the myriad of factors that can impact on their functioning in that context. Such an approach provides an opportunity to look systemically at the context to see where there is a mismatch between the young person and their environment. Bronfenbrenner suggests taking an ecological view in relation to research and “*wherever possible analyse the interactions between settings*” as the “*principle main effects are likely to be interactions*” (p.518). It is this interaction between settings at the level of the mesosystem that is of interest in this research project and its importance as a venue to develop social capital, particularly in relation to the link between the young person, home and school.

The setting which offer the most potential to address the research questions and perhaps explain some of the factors that may be a barrier to the young people’s return to education -occurs at the level of the meso-system: in the interaction between the young person, family and school. These linkages between the school, young person and family context have the potential to support the individual and share knowledge, potentially offering a site intervention. The mesosystem is a site for the generation of social capital. At the mesosystem level, which links between contexts there is an opportunity to make inter-setting linkages and in doing so

develop inter-setting knowledge, between contexts. In doing so there is an opportunity for knowledge transfer to increase the individual's level of social capital. Yet, the young people missing from school no longer have that option as they are no longer networked with the school system, which can have a major impact on their levels of social capital. The importance of the school context for generating social capital is exemplified by Semo (2011, p.45) writing from an Australian context as part of the longitudinal surveys of Australian youth he comments

“social capital gained through school networks translates into higher aspirations, better academic performance, and raised school retention, as well as an increased likelihood of future participation in education or training. Young people can accumulate social capital through their school network, including peers, their teachers and through the opportunities school provides”.

It is therefore a very valuable resource and knowledge network to link into.

2.13 Summary

In this section an explanation is given as to why it is necessary to look at young people going missing from school from an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979). It also provides an overview of the model, before focusing on the mesosystem level, as a site for the generation of social capital and a potential location for intervention, given that the young people in this study no longer have access to those school networks. The importance of schools as venues for developing social capital is highlighted. A perspective which is further developed in the next section on social capital

2.14 The young people missing from school: a social capital perspective

It could be suggested that one of the factors contributing to the young people in this study remaining missing from school, and a barrier to their re-engagement with education, is their lack of access to the right kind of social networks and appropriate

social capital i.e. links into the school network and its social capital. Education is viewed as a key site for the “*creation of social capital*” (Halpern, 2005). Being part of the educational system is associated with increased levels of social capital, at both an individual and group level. (Putnam 2000; Coleman; 1994). It could be argued, therefore, that, in being out of the school system, these young people ‘are cut off’ from the support and knowledge that could support their route back to some form of education or training. It could be suggested that it is at this level of the mesosystem, in the linkage or lack of it between home and school, that is a major barrier to the young person’s re-entry to some form of education or training.

This is particularly pertinent in that secondary schools in this local authority as well as with many other local authorities, the learning community is specifically education based. Although there are links with other organisations these are in the main accessed through the school. An example would be the Psychological Services whereby all referrals come directly through the school through a multi-agency support team and other agencies are encouraged to refer via the school. Therefore, young people are dependent to a large extent on someone else within the school highlighting them to one of the other professionals operating there or vice versa. This, however, does not necessarily occur; particularly if you have been out of the school system for as long as some of these young people. This demonstrating how accepted practices of having all referrals come via the school can provide structural barriers to young people and their parents, in accessing support. They are reliant on other people doing this on their behalf.

What is social capital?

We speak of economic capital to imply the economic resources that an individual or group might have in terms of financial capital. The metaphor of social capital is used to describe the benefits which accrue to the individual from being part of a social network and participating in social interactions within those networks. They are a conduit through which social capital is built and shared. It is perceived as a concept that exists within the relational bonds of human society. These relational bonds are

seen to be fostered by social networks (Putnam 2000 p.19). In the following definition offered by Putnam (1995, p. 664-665), social capital is defined as the “*features of social life-networks, norms and trust-that enables participants to act more effectively to pursue shared objective*”. Social capital refers to social connections and the attendant norms and trust. Like Bourdieu it is seen as a resource that can be used as a currency, which is able to be ‘cashed’ in when required (McGonigal, Doherty, Alan, Mills, Catts, McDonald, Mott & Buckley 2007). Like a commodity, bankable, tangible, exchangeable and an asset.

These networks can provide emotional support and knowledge, through generating inter-setting knowledge between contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), as well as access to other resource networks. Let us take as an example a teenager’s social network, where in times of trouble or joy they have friends to talk to and support them. They may share knowledge about where to find a Saturday job or even a new concert coming to town. They may link them into the group member’s different family networks, so enhancing the breadth and possibly quality of their networks. There is an expectation that you will reciprocate with them and anyone else in the network because you are part of that group. This can be very positive but it can also work in a negative way if your network decides not to allow another person to join the group, and keeps them from accessing the resources of your network; what is termed the dark side of social capital. It is this every day web of social interactions and strong ties that we are a part of which can benefit us socially both at an individual and community level, which social capital tries to encapsulate (Halpern, 2005).

Origins of the concept of social capital

As a concept social capital has become increasingly popular in contemporary research over the last 15 years much (Horvat, Weinger & Lareau, 2008). As a concept however, there is evidence of it having a much longer lineage; with Halpern (2005) tracing its origins to writers, such as Emile Durkheim and De Tocqueville, over a hundred years ago. The most prominent exponents of social capital theory

are Bourdieu (1986), Putnam (2000) and Coleman (1994), although, they theorise the concept from slightly different perspectives.

Bourdieu

Bourdieu was interested in cultural capital, social capital and economic capital, and the links between them. Economic capital, as the name implies is reflected in monetary terms; cultural capital reflects language, education etc. which can contribute to improving economic capital; and social capital which refers to social connections and networks which can provide benefits to the individual. Bourdieu (1986) views social capital from the perspective of privileged groups, using social networks to maintain their position and sustain dominant elite. He equates social capital, in the sense of being ‘well connected’ or ‘well networked’. Bourdieu (1986) emphasizes the importance of not only the extent of the social networks but also the quality of those networks. Bourdieu was interested in how structural systems and processes within society, contributed to unequal access, and maintained advantage for some groups of society at the expense of others. His perspective was very much influenced by his interest in the field of Marxist ideology. He did not adhere to the view that “*attributed academic success or failure to natural aptitudes*”, (Reay, 2005). It was seen to be determined in part and the amount and type of social and cultural capital the individual had access to (Bourdieu, 1986).

In relation to education, he felt that the personal background of families and their own educational experience influenced the degree to which they would become involved in their child’s schooling. There was the suggestion that there was an unequal playing field, in that your life circumstances, determined the social and cultural capital available to you. This was reflected in his 1964 publication in *Les Herriers*, which looked at why there were such a small percentage of students from working class families in higher education (Swain, 2002). Bourdieu believed that certain forms of social capital were valued over others and served to perpetuate social inequalities (Catts & Ozga 2005). Such a view concurs with Ferguson (2004.p.292), who also suggests that

“ historically the forms of inclusion that are privileged are those which have served the needs of some social and cultural groups least...it is only those which are centred round formal education and award bearing training that are constituted as legitimate modes of participation”.

In the context of this current research, Bourdieu’s view of social inequality of opportunity resonates with my conception of some of the difficulties, for young people who have gone missing from school.

Coleman

Coleman’s (1994) interest in the area of social capital by comparison, stemmed from his interest in the field of education and the interaction between home, school and community and the relationship with school performance. He views social capital as *“the stock of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organization and that are useful for the cognitive and social development of a child”* (Coleman, 1994, p.300) Although Coleman recognises the individual basis of social capital; it can never be truly individual as it is generated in interaction with another. He particularly emphasises the community aspect of social capital in terms of community social organisation e.g. the school community, family community, etc. A key component of Coleman’s view on social capital is the idea of closure (Croll, 2004), that is, the mutuality of relationships, which are perceived to strengthen social networks. In particular intergenerational closure where a young person has a relationship with adults who are known to each other e.g. the young person at school, whose mother makes friends with other mums and they support and keep a watchful eye out on each other’s children. Like Bourdieu he views social capital as a resource which develops in networking with others. For Coleman the family are a key area for the generation of social capital, albeit, not exclusively e.g. having two parents, higher parental expectation, all of which serve to enhance social capital. Coleman has been criticised for his focus on the traditional two parent family as a key basis to developing social capital.

Putnam

As a concept social capital perhaps owes its popularity to the work of Professor Robert Putnam (2000). His book, 'Bowling Alone: the collapse and revival of American community', publicised the concept in the process of examining what he perceived as the breakdown of American society and the impact on social capital, hence the title Bowling 'Alone'. Putnam's interest lies more at a state and national level. Putnam views social capital as the benefits that accrue to us through our social networks and norms, sanctions and reciprocity which can lead to collective action to solve issues (Putnam, 2000) e.g. a community council, working with the community to stop the opening of a waste processing plant.

Putnam, viewed social networks as important routes for the flow of information that supports us in attaining goals individually and collectively. From an educational psychology perspective an example would be a support group set up by probationary psychologists to support each other in their first year of practice. Each sharing expertise for their own needs and the good of the group, in turn developing social capital that can be utilised elsewhere e.g. when applying for a job. The emphasis which Putnam, takes to social capital focused initially on the regional and national levels. Networks are central to the generation of social capital.

Whilst networks and social capital is portrayed as a positive way of supporting the common good it, is not always positive and there can be a 'dark side'. By this is meant that the networks and links between individuals do not always work in societies best interests. An example in contemporary society would be the links between drug dealers, who may have strong bonding social capital, and perhaps linking social capital with corrupt officials within organisations, but they do not act in the public good. Such an organisation while having strong social networks (Halpern, 1999), operates in a negative way towards society, and is to a certain extent closed to outsiders and operating a values base that is generally in conflict with society.

As a concept however, social capital is not without critics, which is perhaps not too surprising given that this concept, has made the journey from sociology into a wealth of other disciplines, which each have their own interpretation of the concept. One of the criticisms, relates to the differing ways in which the concept is defined and used. This apparent “*conceptual murkiness*” (Horvat et al., 2003, p.321), implying that it means different things to different people (McGonigle et al., 2007). The potential benefits of the concept of social capital is that it provide the opportunity to look at factors other than at an individual level, which can lead to a successful outcomes in life. It also serves to highlight differentials in relation to the quality and density of networks, of which we are a part, and from an equalities perspective, look at the how these can marginalise some sectors of our society and privilege other.

Types of Social Capital

Social capital is thought to be accrued in a number of different ways and three distinct types are identified.

Bonding social capital - which reflects the networks of people with similar characteristics to reinforce homogeneity and exclusivity e.g. family, (Field, 2003). It can reinforce strong ties with Putnam (2000, p. 23) likening it to a “*a kind of sociological super glue,*” bonding people together. The down side of bonding social capital is that it can be exclusive and exclude others e.g. radical religious groups or gang cultures.

Bridging social capital - links people from a variety of contexts but with similar status e.g. links between work colleagues or associates. These are deemed to not to be as strong as bonding, although thought to be more diverse.

Linking social capital - refers to linking networks between people with different levels of power or social influence, allowing leverage to resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond their own community (Saquaro

Seminar, 2007; Woolcock, 2001). Szreter and Woolcock, (2004, p.6), define linking social capital as “ *norms of respect and trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalised power or authority gradients in society*” . An example would be member of the Chamber of Commerce taking a young school pupil under their wing and introducing them to business contacts. In doing so allowing the young person access to a network with higher levels of power and knowledge that the young person may otherwise have accessed and which may prove beneficial to the young person. The concept of linking social capital resonates with Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) idea of inter-setting linkage, where through a link person; there is knowledge exchange between settings. Knowledge exchange in this research context takes place through the researcher using their knowledge base, to support the young people to identify and access a positive educational /vocational provision. Filipowski, Kazienko, Bródka, & Kajdanowicz (2012, p.781) speaking from a business context views knowledge exchange as a “*transfer of knowledge from the place it resides to locations where it is needed and can be used*”.

Whilst in this study the focus is on the young person and their parent’s networking with the researcher to benefit from their knowledge base of the education system. There was also knowledge exchange from the young person and their families to the researcher which provided information on their experiences, which increased both the awareness and knowledge base of the researcher.

Trust and social capital

At the core of social capital is the concept of trust and reciprocity; the idea that trusting interactions can lubricate social interactions. Sander and Lowney (2006), suggest that, while there is no definitive view on how trust develops, there are deemed to be 3 crucial aspects to it, namely:

- Opportunities to interact with others and thus gain confidence in that interaction.

- Individuals are honest in those interactions.
- Individuals keep to all agreements they make.

Reciprocity means that, where there is trust within the social network: individuals will begin to do things for others, without any immediate gain but trusting that other members of that network may benefit, and perhaps sometime in the future this will be reciprocated (Sander & Lowney, 2006). This idea of developing a relationship based on trust is a key aspect of this research project, where the researcher uses the social capital concept of a linking social tie as a practical intervention to bridge the young people and their parent into networks not normally within their reach (through being missing from school) e.g. vocational programmes, knowledge of education processes and the capability to access them. Seeking to achieve a trusting relationship requires the three crucial aspects previously specified by Sander and Lowney (2006), opportunity, honesty in interactions and agreements will be honoured.

Social capital and equality of educational opportunity

Network routes at the level of the mesosystem are important as pathways through which young people both generate and access social capital. One of the key microsystems of which they are a part is the school, an important link giving access to the wealth of social capital shared within that particular school community. Social capital resources within the school building creating: “*potential opportunities for pupils to actualise the school communities social capital*” (McGonigle et al., 2007). As Weinstein (2002 p. 23) points out schools: “*function as door openers as well as gatekeepers for access to knowledge, and for meaningful participation in work and in the wider society*”. What happens, however, when that network closes because a young person goes missing from school? The student who stays in school has access to school social capital, but the one who, for whatever reason, is not within the school building is derived from drawing from that pool of capital, and has to suffice with what is generated within the family and local

community microsystem. Bourdieu would acknowledge that such families would still have access to social capital, but of a different quality.

2.15 Summary

In this section the concept of social capital was introduced by looking at its origins, definitions, types of social capital e.g. linking, bridging and bonding, before looking at the importance of trust within these networks. It then went onto identify the differences in social capital as it pertains to school. Differences were identified between working class parents and middle class parents in terms of the composition of their networks and how they interacted with school contexts. The importance of looking at issues of equality when exploring social capital was also highlighted, suggesting that all types of social capital are not of equal value. A perspective that reflects the views of Bourdieu (1986).

Does all social capital have equal value?

There is some evidence to suggest that there are differences in terms of the kind of social capital that exists between working class families and middle class families, particularly in relation to problems that occur in the educational context of the school. A key aspect of social capital and education, according to Coleman, is the idea of intergenerational closure; where there are networks connecting the parents of school peers and parental involvement in schooling. In terms of intergenerational closure, the advantage of this is that the parents in the network take an interest in each other children, supporting behaviour which is thought to have a positive impact in schooling and the regeneration of social capital. In research undertaken by Horvat, Weininger and Lareau, (2003) they looked at the impact of parent networks on children's schooling. Their study findings indicated that, when an issue emerged in school, middle class parents were more likely to have the support of other middle class parents-although they did not always choose to use it. The working class

parents tended to deal with problems that occurred in school on a more individualised basis, with limited backup. Middle class parents were also more likely to have, as part of their network, at least one professional person (and often more) and could make use of them when required for information and support. In comparison, the working class parents had limited access to professionals within their network. A general finding was that the Coleman idea of intergenerational closure in school was primarily a middle class phenomenon. However, the working class families had intergenerational closure at home but based round kinship groups. The emphasis of these networks was primarily in relation to day-to-day care and financial considerations. That is they did have social capital but it was of a different constitution, and less helpful when interfacing with the education system.

This research illustrates that, whilst both groups had access to networks which could build social capital, there was a qualitative difference between their social capitals in the form of resources. Thus, children from these middle class families not only benefited from economic advantage but also had the advantage of parents who were able to negotiate the often time demanding world of education. (Hango, 2007). This highlights the need to consider issues of equality when looking at social capital and developing it, to improve life opportunities. Particularly given that there are considerable patterns of continuity between the socio economic situations of parents and their adult children Croll (2004, p.391).

2.16 Listening to the views of the young person and their parents

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) was fundamental in paving the way for children's rights, Article 12, in particular. It states that countries

“shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”.

The requirement to consult with young people on decisions that affects them was enshrined in law in Scotland under the Children's (Scotland) Act 1995. This was instrumental in viewing children as rights holders on their own behalf, including their rights to participate and self-determination (Peterson, Badailand, Rick, 2008). The appointment of a Children's commissioner between 2001 -2005 in Scotland, Ireland, England and Wales, served to underline the importance of these rights and the seriousness with which the government dealt with it.

Yet in the UK Children's Commissioner Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2008), awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in the UK (UNCRC, 1989) is described as "low", among professionals, parents and the young people. They also acknowledge that in relation to education young people are still not viewed as key participants with "*discussions around improving education ...often adult led*" and failing "*to include children and their views*". In general terms whilst there have been some improvements in terms of implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in some instances they feel the situation has worsened particularly in relation to juvenile justice issues and attitudes towards children and young people. It is clear that legislation, policy and Children's Commissioners are not sufficient and there is still a long distance to travel, before Children's Rights are fully addressed, if ever. In relation to the legislation, the Commissioners acknowledge that in some situations the legislation, actually works against UNCRC.

Gordon (2002) suggests that we should be listening to children when it comes to looking for solutions to children who go missing from school. Rose and Shevlin (2004) go further, and question whether the views of the young people have been overshadowed by the discourse of "*professionals and policy makers*", which links in with some comments made by the Children's Commissioners' in their report. Yet, children who are most marginalised from the school system have less opportunity to express their views on issues concerning their education and support needs (Thomson, 2004). But precisely because the school system has not worked

for them, their experiences are central in ascertaining their support needs and in looking at ways to address them.

Todd (2003, p. 15) suggests that “*children know more than we think they know: they certainly know more about themselves than we do*”. The inference being that they can perhaps offer a perspective which we, as adults, would not necessarily think of (Nesbit, 2001). Smyth (2006, p. 288) contends that, if we are serious about understanding the experience of being missing from school, we need to listen to the voices of those most directly involved i.e. the young people involved. “*If we really want to examine phenomenon like ‘dropping out’ or disengaging from school and make.....then we need to access the meaning of these concepts and excavate them from the inside out*” (Smyth 2006, p. 288) i.e. listen to the students perspective and experiences.

This is particularly important due to the fact that: “*the isolation of such young people who are not in regular contact with the statutory agencies due to have fallen out of the school system, means that there is liable to be very little information available on their needs*” (Scottish Executive, 2003). Parental perspectives are equally pertinent, with research pointing to the positive impact which parental involvement in their child’s education can have on children’s performance Bastini and Wolfendale (2000). However, research undertaken by Gerwitz et al., (2005, p. 652) - in the English context-points out that there is a tendency to overlook the very voices of those, the policies are intended to assist. They Gerwitz et al., (2005 p. 652). highlight a need to work with, as opposed to on, parents, citing a need to “*engage properly with the concerns and interests of parents*” They speak of parents struggling to have their voices heard and feeling that they were not being listened to or their needs recognised. Furthermore, as described earlier, many working class parents are unable able to access the education system in as confident a manner as their middle class counterparts. They, therefore, also need some bridging back in to the system to allow them more fully support their children.

Consulting with young people

Seeking to elicit young people's views is often termed 'consulting with,' but the terminology of listening is more pertinent from my perspective because it implies a more active on going approach which is integral to supporting young people's continued participation. Clark, McQuail and Moss (2003) offer a definition of listening which recognises the co-construction of meaning and does not restrict the communicative intent just to language but encapsulates the totality of that interaction. Listening is an "*active process of communication involving hearing, interpreting and constructing meaning. Not limited to the spoken word. A necessary stage in participation in daily routines as well as in the wider decision making processes. It is central to 'recognising and respecting their worth as human beings'*" (Roberts 2008, p. 264). Consultation, on the other hand, implies a more one off, static approach, where there are always going to be power differentials; dependent on who is the consultant and who is the consultee. Whilst these differentials also exist if taking a listening stance, the language of listening conjures up a different dynamic.

When listening to young people's and their parents views there is an expectation that the researcher will have in some way captured their views Yet we have to acknowledge the inter-subjectivity in that interaction (Trevarthen, 1998) - akin to a communicative dance between the participants. Each brings their own views and previous life experiences, ultimately impacting on that communicative encounter.

Even the language in that dialogue is "*likely to be saturated with values, frequently your own*" (Fielding, 2004), particularly when the researcher transfers that dialogue to a written medium. In deciding what to include or leave out, the researcher is shaping and moulding the researcher's views. Yet, despite this, there are issues in not attempting to listen to the views of the child: "*in choosing not to speak on behalf of those who are excluded or marginalised am I abandoning my responsibilities to name and confront issues*" which he termed 'political oppression' (Fielding, 2004, p. 300)

2.17 Summary

A key focus of this research, reiterated throughout the report, is the need to listen to the stories of the young people and their parents about the issues around being missing from school. In this section a rationale is provided as to why this should be so and also the importance of taking a dialogic approach to those interactions.

2.18 Overview of literature review

In the course of this literature review the extent of the problem of young people going missing from school has been explored particularly in relation to the Scottish context. It has looked at the research surrounding why young people go missing from school and has suggested that the factors involved are many and not homogeneous, with each individual having their own story to tell. A story that requires to be elicited. There appeared to be a lack of studies that looked at what is maintaining these young people in being missing from school, from a social capital and ecological perspective, as well as interventions to support their re-engagement with education or training. Historically the research has tended to emphasise the causes of non-attendance rather than taking a curative approach (Kendall & Kinder, 2005).

On investigating why young people go missing from school, it was suggested that it was necessary to look at the young person in context and the interrelationship between those contexts at the level of the mesosystem as this is a site for the development of social capital. In particular, the linkages between the young person, his school and the family were deemed central and this had not been addressed in the literature as yet, in relation to being missing from school. For the group of young people in this particular study their network with the school had been severed and they were now relying primarily on the social capital within their family and

community. The research, however, suggested that social capital-as it relates to school-did not necessarily have equal value, dependent on whether you were working or middle class families; and the young people in this study are all from working class families. The implication being that the social capital that families had, whilst strong in certain ways, lacked the currency which would allow them to engage more fully with the education sector to support their child. It appears an ecological and social capital reconceptualization of the issues was required.

It is hypothesised that these young people and their families may need a linking social-tie to bridge them into the education network that would support their re-engagement with education. It is this which may hold the key to explaining why the young people in this particular cohort have been unable to find a route back into education. The metaphor of linking social capital is central for this research project in exploring whether the concept can be used as a practical intervention. With their consent, the plan is to provide a linking social-tie i.e. myself as researcher to bridge the young people into education or training.

The conduit through which this will happen is by the researcher, providing outreach to them, as an inter-setting link, with them, their parents and the education system. The aim of which is to improve their levels of social capital by providing knowledge on possible options available; supporting their transition through the necessary processes; and providing what I would call 'hurdle help' to support them into some form of education or training. In line with a social capital approach, the development of a trusting relationship between the researcher and these young people and their families is fundamental. As Aldridge et al., (2002, para: 101) comments: "*if an individual manages to bond with someone connected in relation to families to mainstream society, the trajectory of their life can change dramatically*".

Aims of the research revisited

The specific research question comprises 4 component parts. In the first instance it sought to elicit;

1. What are the perceptions of young people and their parents about being missing from school?
2. What issues arise for young people when they are missing from school?
3. What are the key barriers to a return to education or training?
4. Can a social capital analysis inform an approach to young people's re-engagement with education?

Chapter 3. Planning the Route: the research methodology

3.1 Focus and rationale of research

Planning research in any area can be a daunting task, particularly so when negotiating entry into the private spaces of people's lives, as in this research project. There is an ethical responsibility on the researcher to ensure that, at all stages of the research process, they are respectful and reflexive in their approach and interactions with the young people and parents who are contributing to this research project. Remembering at all times that they are a visitor in their lives and, as such, require to adhere to high standards of professional practice operating within the ethical codes of the Health Professionals Council (2008), the regulatory body for Educational Psychologists and the British Psychological Society, our professional body. Ethical considerations will be expanded upon, later on in this methodology section.

The focus of this research project is to take a fresh look at what has been previously labelled as disaffection, truancy, disengagement or non-attendance from school (Archer, Filmer-Sankey & Fletcher Campbell, 2003). The aim being to offer a new way of looking at what is an old yet still current issue; namely school non-attendance, but which in the context of this research project is termed 'young people who go missing from school'. As stated in Chapter 1, this choice of term was felt preferable as it implied a process as opposed to an attribute of the individual. It was felt important that the language used to describe the young people, should not construct them in a negative way or imply a within child deficit. Although there is extensive literature related to risk factors associated with young people who go missing from school, this does not fully reflect the young people and their parents perceptions of the factors involved, and particularly the issues which being missing from school raises for them. Nor does the literature address what is maintaining them in the position of being missing from school. Official discourses, which focus on the general characteristic of apparently problem children- whilst helpful in identifying risk factors- can simply serve to reinforce stereotypes. They can serve to stigmatise, Gorden (2001), and in many instances fail to include the views of those

most closely involved i.e. the young people and their parents (Broadhurst, Paton & May-Chahal, 2005). The research literature fails to fully address support strategies that can be taken to encourage young people who are out with the school system- that is, those hardest to reach-find a route back into some form of education and training. The Scottish Executive (2005) commenting on the lack of projects providing outreach to young people missing from schools in their own community.

This research seeks to examine the experience of young people missing from school missing from the perspective of those most closely affected by it; namely the young people and their parents. In doing so it is hoped to generate new insights as to the factors involved and the issues which being missing from school raises for the parent and young person, including what is maintaining them in that position. It is envisaged that this will enhance our understanding and perhaps challenge some of our common misconceptions, e.g. that these young people's parents do not value education, by allowing the unique perspective of the young people and their parents to be highlighted. It is anticipated that this will provide fresh insights into the young person's experience of being out of school, which may inform intervention strategies to support transition back to education or training.

3.2 Research design

Overview

Given the flexible, qualitative design of the study, an exploratory, multiple case study approach was felt appropriate to address the research questions. The case study was multiple, in that it identified ten young people from one secondary school and their parents' who shared the common experience of the young person being missing from school. It seeks to explore their experience of being missing from an ecological and social capital perspective. It is descriptive in that it aims to provide a rich description of those experiences. Braun and Clarkes (2006) six point guide to thematic analysis is used to analyse the data.

3.3 Philosophical assumptions underpinning the research design

In designing any research study, it is necessary to make explicit the philosophical assumptions which underpin the research design Morse (2003, p. 840). The type of methods one chooses to employ during the research process will reflect the underlying epistemology and ontological position of the researcher (Robson, 2004), and the researcher needs to show evidence of reflexivity in relation to this and illustrate how this has impacted in their choice of methods.

For transparency use will be made of the framework advocated by Creswell (2007), and derived from the work of Guba & Lincoln (1988). The key components of this framework encompass ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological assumptions, with the addition of rhetorical issues suggested by Creswell (2007). These key concepts are utilised by the researcher to self-reflect and clarify the philosophical constructs which underpin the research. It would be accurate to say that this process of self-reflection, in terms of personal value base, philosophical position, and choice of methodology, generated a great deal of thinking and cognitive conflict. Further details of which will be developed in the discussion section

Ontological considerations

Ontological considerations ask that we specify our theory of knowledge. Grix (2002, p.179) suggests that one's ontological position requires to be specified because it "*shapes the types of questions we ask... ..how we pose them and how we set up answering them*". In relation to human social interaction and perception, this research design adopts a conservative relativist position, which acknowledges the social construction of knowledge and the inter-subjective nature of that knowledge, including the role of the researcher in its co-construction. Such a perspective questions the "*existence of a single reality or truth out there to be*

found” (Yates 2004, p 137) and supports the view that there can be multiple ‘truths’ due to the subjective and ‘phenomenological’ nature of knowledge (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008, p.101). Such an interpretation resonates with that of Burr (2003, p.6), who perceives all knowledge as “*derived from looking at the world from some perspective or another*”.

Epistemological perspective

The researcher takes an epistemological relativist view which suggests that ways of constructing knowledge are “*best understood... .. by locating them in the condition of their emergence*” (Smith, 2003). This implies taking an ecological perspective and looking at the young person and their parents experiences in context. It also suggests that the researcher should spend time in the most appropriate naturalistic setting and gain experience of the individual in that context. In this research project, this is addressed to a certain degree by the researcher having considerable experience of over 30 years working with young people missing from school in a variety of contexts and roles-both historically and currently. This includes having some subjective knowledge of the issues for the young people and their parents, as well as the institutional factors that can act as barriers to their social inclusion. In terms of reflexivity, the researcher recognises that, whilst this can be positive, there is also the possibility of bias based on the researcher’s previous experience. This will be commented on further when discussing axiological issues and positioning the researcher.

Axiological position

The values one carries with them through life impacts on our experiences and our interpretation of those experiences and, as such, acts as a lens through which we interpret the world around us. These values also impact on our professional ethical development. Each of us is unique and the lens through which we view the world will reflect our uniqueness and individual perspective, and these need to be acknowledged particularly when carrying out research.

When undertaking research, one should be aware that what emerges is not simply a reflection of the subject or objects observed, but is reflective of the “*characteristics and perspective of the observer*” (Robson 2004, p. 21); and, as such, is an interpretation by the researcher. As Gameson and Rhydderch (2008, p. 102) highlight there can be multiple “*truth*” due to the “*subjective and phenomenological*” nature of knowledge. Such a perspective reflecting knowledge as a social construction implying the importance of reflexivity about the researcher’s role in co-constructing that knowledge. There is an awareness that, at all stages of the process, the researcher’s values, life experiences, and biases will play a part in that co-construction of meaning-often at a subconscious level. It requires that the researcher makes explicit what they bring to the research process in terms of values and potential biases. It also necessitates practising reflexivity in preparing for the research project, in undertaking the research and in the written presentation of that research. To this end, a section on positioning the researcher has been included in Chapter 1.

Rhetorical considerations: The language of the research

In adopting a social constructionist perspective, it is necessary to be aware that the type of language we use to describe individuals or situations (Willig, 2001; Willig, 2008). As Burr (1995, p.39) cautions: “*the meanings carried by language are never fixed, always open to question, always contestable*”. In line with this, the terminology used to describe the young people contributing to this research will be young people who are ‘missing’ from school. This is an attempt to describe the situation, and avoid implying a negative characteristic of the young person. This is in response to the range of labels previously used to describe such young people, truant, disengaged, school refuser, etc.; all of which served to construct the young person in a way that infers a ‘problem’ located in the individual and implies a characteristic of that young person (Attwood, 2003).

In the same vein, the young people and their parents are termed contributors to the research process in order to indicate their central importance to the research process, instead of describing them as simply participants; although there are potential methodological issues with this which will be made more explicit later on in the discussion chapter. The fact that there are power differentials between the young people and their parents and the researcher is acknowledged.

In the process of writing up the research, there is an awareness that during that process no “*descriptive discourse can be value free*”, Fielding (2004, p. 297). There is also an awareness that the researcher’s personal background and history may impact on this project, as will power differentials between the contributors and the researcher. However, despite these difficulties in “*choosing not to speak on behalf of those who are excluded or marginalised am I abandoning my responsibilities to name and confront political oppression*” (Fielding, 2004.p297.) The ethical values of the researcher could not countenance doing nothing.

3.4 Implications of philosophical assumptions on choice of methodology

The philosophical foundations of the research, and the social constructionist underpinnings, indicate a need to adopt an approach which values the individual’s unique perspective and experience. Such a perspective necessitates the application of a methodology which seeks to elicit the perspective of the young people and their parents on the specific issues for them in being missing from school. Smythe (2006) proposes that, if we want to find out about young people being missing from school, we need to be more attentive to the students ‘voices’ and ‘experiences’: this necessitates adopting a methodology which aims to reflect these. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate allowed for an idiographic approach to be taken, the aim of which was to generate a rich description of the issues and factors involved when the young people went missing from school. Morse (1991) contends that qualitative methodology is appropriate when the researcher feels that current research in the area is incomplete or does not fully explore the area of concern. The

current research project aims to elicit this perspective of the young people and their parents by adopting a methodology which aims to reflect what Willig (2001, p.48) terms ‘social reality’, but which I would prefer to call ‘lived experience’, to reflect the individuals unique life experiences. A core focus of the research is to support the young person and their parent to share their story (Cresswell, 2007, p.40) and learn from it.

There were deemed to be a number of benefits in using a qualitative methodology. Firstly, it was seen to support the generation of a rich description of the unique experiences of the contributors. Secondly, it supports the collection of data in a naturalistic way and does not attempt to categorise it at the point of production (Willig, 2001). Thirdly, it allows for the verbal utterances of the contributors to be made explicit in the research study, which helps to highlight the contributors perspectives within the body of the text and so contribute to the development of that rich descriptive account (Silverman, 2010). To facilitate this, use will be made of direct quotes in the vernacular of the young persons and their parents to reflect, as far as is reasonably possible, their own use of language to express their views. This is an attempt to reflect their central role in this project and make their presence visible. In deciding which quotes to include recognising that this account will be a “*narrative construction*” (Bishop & Shepherd, 2011), and that the researcher will play a central role in the co-construction of meaning through the process of thematic analysis; however, as Angen (2000, p. 383) points out, “*we cannot step out of our interpretation*”. The use of a critical friend to check the coding’s, will contribute towards improving the credibility of the constructed meanings. The specific role of the critical friend, who was a research assistant, was to view the extracts and themes at stage 1 and 2 of the thematic analysis to see whether they agreed with the themes identified.

Whilst a social constructionist approach was adopted, the right was reserved to draw on aspects of pragmatism, to look at what works (Cresswell, 2007), in dealing with the problem of being missing from school for this particular group of young people. Given the vulnerability of these young people, in terms of being out of school and the potential impact this could have for them, it was planned to link the

research with intervention; details of which will follow in a later section. In practice, this meant that the information generated during the course of the research project would serve a dual purpose of addressing the research questions whilst also generating assessment information. This assessment information was necessary in order to meet the requirements of the local authority psychological service protocols for applying for vocational or alternative school placements. This being linked with intervention strand four of the project, which seeks to address whether adopting a social capital analysis of the data generated by the young people and their parents' can their transition back into education or training by taking what Kendall and Kinder (2005), term a curative approach.

The research project will run in conjunction with my professional practice in the secondary school acting as both researcher and participant in the research. It is hoped that this study will inform ideas for more systemic interventions in the young peoples' previous secondary school, to address the issue of young people going missing from school.

3.5 A case study approach

This research study adopts a case study approach. Yin (1994, p.13) defines a case study as an *“empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon, within its real life context”*, in this instance young people who go missing from school. Such an approach is appropriate in that the focus is to explore school non-attendance from the perspective of the young people and their parents. Mohd Noor (2008) suggests that case studies are helpful where there is a need to examine a phenomenon in depth; in this case young people missing from school. The study takes the form of a multiple case study, where there are ten cases, comprising parents and the young person who are missing from school. It was felt that this would allow for a rich description and at the same time increase rigour by utilising replication logic, i.e. to see if similar findings occur across the cases used. It is exploratory in the first instance because it seeks to elicit their perspectives on what

it means to be missing from school and what issues this raises for them. It also explores what is maintaining them in that position. The data gathered will inform the fourth aspect of the research questions: the intervention. This seeks to explore whether adopting a social capital analysis of the data can signpost a route back to education and/or training.

3.6 Intervention strand

In addressing an intervention strategy, the research will consider whether adopting an ecological Bronfenbrenner (1977:1979) and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1994; 2007) analysis of the factors and issues in being missing from school can inform an approach to the young people's re-engagement with education and training. The mechanism through which this will be explored is through the application and use of social capital theory; and in particular the concept of linking social capital (Woolcock, 2001). This will take a curative approach, (Kendall & Kinder, 2005) investigating routes back into education, employment or training for the young people. It will explore the use of the social capital concept of linking social capital as a practical intervention. The will be achieve by the researcher acting as a linking social tie, bridging these young people and their families, into education networks. The aim of which is to increase their educational social capital and in doing so facilitate their re-entry to education or training.

As previously described, linking social capital is where an individual links with someone at a higher level of power, who links and bridges them into a network they may not otherwise access on their own. In this case, the researcher linking with them at the level of the meso-system, to bridge them into wider opportunities in relation to vocational training, school systems, and the wider education system. The aim of which is to allow them to develop or re-establish networks and elicit knowledge and emotional support, that they are currently unable to access. This will necessitate the involvement of the researcher in supporting the young people over a

3 month period of time-or as long as required to allow for getting to know them- and working with them to support a route back into education or training. This time frame is thought to be necessary, as it reflects a realistic time frame for the intervention. The initial data collection to inform intervention will take place over two contact periods/meetings with the young people and their parent's.

In taking such an approach the research is aligned with intervention, both running in parallel. A view that resonates with my own value base which perceives the role of the Educational Psychologist, to work both directly and indirectly with others to make a positive difference to young people's lives. Due to the potential detrimental impact which going missing from school can have for young people and their life chances, a value of the researcher is that research and intervention should go in tandem. Ethically a primary concern was securing a positive outcome for the young people and their families.

3.7 Methodological considerations: The process of the research.

Ethical considerations

The Oxford online dictionary (2011) defines ethics as the “*moral principles that govern a person's behaviour or.....activity*”. As a professional group Educational Psychologist ethical behaviour is guided by the Code of Ethics of our professional body the British Psychological Society (2009) and the Standards of Performance, Conduct and Ethics of our regulatory body the Health Professions Council (2008). There are subtle differences between the two in relation to language with the BPS (2009), Code of Ethics written in terms of what a psychologist “should” do, whilst the HPC (2008), specifies what a psychologist “must” adhere to. These codes or standards provide guidelines for psychologists to inform their decision making in professional practice, to protect both the psychologist and those they work with. Failure to comply with these ethical codes or standards can lead to disciplinary action.

Flanagan, Miller and Jacob (2005) suggest that a psychologist with a “*broad base of ethical standards is likely to anticipate and prevent ethical problems from arising and make sound judgements*” (p.433). Whilst accepting that professional ethical guidelines can inform professional practice, it cannot be assumed that they are the only influence on ethical behaviour. Ethical behaviour is also influenced by the individuals personal values (Lindsey, 2009), their professional training (Gottlieb, Handelsman & Knapp 2008) and the organisational context within which they work (Elango, Paul, Kundu & Paudel 2010). Psychologists are also human beings and factors in their own lives can also impact on their ethical decision making. As a psychologist there is a responsibility to show reflexivity in relation to how our values and experience, impact on our ethical decision making. To address this, a section is included earlier in the research project where the researcher seeks to make clear the value base which influenced the identification of this research project.

A core key component of psychology and our work as professional psychologists is to promote human well-being. In relation to this, the researcher adheres to a positive ethical approach as advocated by Handelsman, Knapp and Gottlieb (2005), which whilst adhering to professional ethical codes, suggests that psychologists think aspirationally about their core ethical values. They advocate taking a wider perspective looking at the socio-cultural context within which actions take place, including wider societal issues, for example the social justice agenda. It is not simply a defensive stance in response to ethical codes of conduct, but an ethical position that is proactive, serving the best interests of our clients and in line with our highest ethical ideals. The decision to undertake this research project reflects this aspirational goal by seeking to achieve a positive outcome for the young people and supporting them to become re-engaged with education or training. This research arose not because of an infringement of an ethical code but out of a strong ethical value that it was the right thing to do, for the young people particularly given the current inclusion and social justice agenda.

In the context of this research project the following key principles taken from the HPC Standards of Performance, Conduct and Ethics (2008 p 8 - 14)), are

particularly pertinent in the current research context and have been influenced the report from inception to completion.

1. "You must act in the best interests of the service users".
2. "You must respect the confidentiality of service users".
3. "You must keep high standards of professional conduct".
4. "You must communicate properly and effectively with service users".
5. "You must get informed consent".
6. "You must behave with honesty and integrity".

Research approval

Ethical approval for undertaking the research was provided by the Area Principal Psychologist, the university and the Head Teacher of the secondary school. At the time, there was no formal system within the local authority for undertaking research approval; although this has since been initiated. Throughout the project, ethical considerations, were paramount and guided the structure, implementation and outcome of the research

Respecting the confidentiality of the contributors

In line with the 1998 Data Protection Act, issues of confidentiality were discussed with the young person and their parent, and it was stressed that only the researcher would know the identities of the research contributors, who would be identified only by number. They would be informed about their right to withdraw from the research project at any time and advised that they would retain ownership of any information they may have contributed. Permission was sought from the young person and their parent to tape record the structured discussion. If they chose to decline then the dialogue would be written manually. They would be informed that they could have a copy of the tape or transcript should they wish one and once the transcripts had been transcribed, the tape recordings would be destroyed, with the

written transcripts destroyed on completion of the research project. Principle five of the 1998 Data Protection Act stipulates that data should not be kept for longer than is required for the purpose stipulated. The research contributors would be informed that on request a copy of their transcript would be made available to them.

Any practical changes which would ensue from the research would be communicated to the young person and their parent at the end of the project. It is important researcher is accountable to the research participants at all stages of the research enterprise Goodson & Walker (1995).

Acting in the best interests of the service users

In initiating this research the researcher was aware that they were raising the expectations of the young people and their parents and it was important to ensure that these hopes were not dashed. Given their current remit of the researcher as an educational psychologist to support young people into a positive destination and their experience of the area and the commitment of the local authority to the More Chances More Choices agenda, it would be possible to secure an alternative educational/vocational placement for them should they young person and their parent wish this. There was a strong commitment within the local authority to support better outcomes for young people and the More Choices More Chances agenda was high profile. The young people were very keen that the outcome of their involvement would lead to getting them back into education or training. The parents were also very keen to have their child in some form of education. There was, therefore, a need to ensure that, as far as was reasonably possible, the researcher would do all in their power to facilitate this.

This would entail the researcher having to take two roles within the project being both the researcher and as an Educational Psychologist facilitating the intervention, which had the potential to lead to a conflict of interest and a possible ethical dilemma. Dailor and Jacob (2011) differentiate between an “*ethical transgression*”, where you contravene your professional code of ethics, as opposed to a dilemma when there is more than one view of viewing a problem, and more than one way of dealing with it. In this research the dilemma was related to

1. Having identified an issue which conflicted with my positive ethical values, should something be done?
2. Was the best way to do that through a research project?
3. How do you ensure that there is not a conflict of interest between your role as a researcher and that of an Educational Psychologist?

In relation to point one above having identified an issue which was negatively impacting on the young people, it was felt that ethically and morally it was important that action was taken in the best interests of the young people, and this necessitated that the situation be highlighted and something done to address it. Point two was slightly more complex, as it could be possible to intervene with the young people out with a research framework. Whilst the researcher has some degree of awareness of the issues that might be involved, these were the researcher’s subjective experiences, which may or may not have reflected those of the young people and their parents.

Undertaking research with the young people and their parents, allowed information on the issues for them in being missing from school to be elicited and these could perhaps signpost their transition back into education or training. At the same time taking a research approach could increase awareness, of the issues for this group of young people and their parents. In doing so it could perhaps raise the profile of young people in general who go missing from school and perhaps increase debate about the range of factors involved and in doing so offer a different way of viewing the problem in order to generate possible solutions. Given that research is one of the

five core functions of an Educational Psychologist it was considered appropriate to undertake this research project.

Pre- research pilot study

The purpose of the pilot was undertaken with two groups of young people to look at the relative merits of focus groups compared to semi-structured interviews as a means of eliciting the views of the young people. Group 1 comprised 14 young men aged 14-15 years, who had previously been ‘missing from school,’ taking part in a focus group. These young men had recently started attending a training provider, which the Educational Psychologist worked with, although the young people were not previously known. In group 2, a parallel group of 5 young men and 2 young women aged 15 years who had stopped attending school were interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview. The young people were currently attending a vocational placement. Whilst the Educational Psychologist knew the two girls they had not worked with the young men. Due to time constraints and access problems it was not possible to undertake a pilot with the parents.

Whilst there were merits in both approaches, i.e. focus groups and semi structured interviews, a number of issues emerged from the pilot which suggested that semi-structured interviews would, in relation to answering the research questions, be a more appropriate method of data collection.

It was evident that the group young people in the pilot study were unaccustomed to being asked for their views, as reflected in the statement expressed by one of them: “*why are you askin a bunch of neds*”? In addition, some of the young people appeared to be ill at ease and uncomfortable within the focus group setting, due in part to group dynamics with some of the young people being more dominant in the group. There was also a sense that some young people were reluctant to speak up and provide information that could leave them open to teasing or what they termed colloquially as “*slagging*”, which has a much stronger connotation. Michell (1999) suggests that focus groups may not be the most appropriate method for researching

sensitive issues in depth. This perspective resonated with my previous professional experience, in working with such young people, and from a research perspective felt that a more individualised approach was necessary.

Whilst the focus group was seen as useful in an exploratory stage, the organisation of group 1, identified issues that the group were willing to share in that forum, as opposed to the individual's particular perspective. Given that the research project was attempting to elicit the contributor's individual perspective, focus groups were deemed not to be the most useful technique in this particular instance. The young people appeared to feel more comfortable in the one to one setting of group 2 using the semi-structured discussion and more open to expressing their perspective.

Although a pilot was not undertaken with the parents, based on previous experience of working with parents-it was felt that they would prefer the confidentiality of a one to one interview instead of participating in a focus group. In research one has to be sensitive to the people we are working with, and ensure that the situation is emotionally safe for them.

Other issues that emerged during the pilot study which informed the research proposal, included issues of reflexivity and feasibility related to the knowledge base of the researcher and the area they were investigating, and the potential benefit of the researcher's extensive practical experience in terms of inter-personal skills in working with young people missing from school and engaging with them. This was deemed helpful as Wellington & Cole (2004) point out: "*practical aspects of research with disaffected pupils ... present unique challenges*".

The importance of undertaking the interviews in neutral venues negotiated with the young person and their parent was also highlighted. Neutral venues can be helpful in minimising positive or negative associations with a venue. In addition there was a need to take sensible precaution in visiting the homes of families not previously known: hence visits were always carried out in conjunction with social worker or school liaison officer who knew them.

It was felt that it was important to embed the interview in a natural dialogue. In accordance with previous comments made about the importance of language in constructing meaning, it was felt that the terminology of a structured discussion was the more appropriate terminology to use. By this is meant that key questions and prompts from the semi-structured interview were embedded in a natural dialogue, to facilitate conversation. It was considered important that, in undertaking these structured discussions, it was crucial to base them on a dialogic approach, Pruitt & Waddell (2007 p 49), whereby the following principles would guide that discussion:

- Inquire to learn
- Share what you know
- Listen empathetically
- Reflect back what you are hearing
- Explore underlying assumptions yours and those of others
- Acknowledge emotion as well as opinions
- Adjust course to reflect new knowledge and understanding

These were some of the guiding principles which informed the design and execution of the structured discussions, and, in fact, all contact with the young people and their parents. Such an approach sits comfortable with the belief stated in the introduction on the importance of unconditional positive regard for the individual, based on mutual respect.

A key component of social capital is the idea of trust. The importance of forming trusting relationships with the young people and their parents was an integral component of the research. Data from the young people and their parent would be collected over the two visits. There would be continued involvement with the young people intermittently over a period of 3 + months which would assist in the development of this trusting relationship

The information gathered during part of the pilot process informed my decision to use semi – structured interviews as the basis of a structured discussions, as the primary means of data collection. This is detailed in the following section.

Semi- structured discussions as a means of data collection

Based on the pilot study structured discussions were chosen as the primary method of data collection. As a means of generating data semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research, and King (1994, p. 16) suggests that interviews are appropriate when a study “*focuses on the particular meaning of the phenomenon to the participants*”. The use of a structured discussion combined the use of a semi structured interview, with a more dialogic approach to interaction, leading to a structured discussion which aimed to merge the two. This approach

1. was respectful to the individual.
2. generated data that could be analysed in a range of ways.
3. structured the discussion by using the semi- structured interview questions and probes allowing the researcher to provide a framework for the discussion in order to scaffold the young person or parents responses. This was necessary in relation to the young people who appeared to be unaccustomed to being asked their opinions.
4. it also lessens the potential to embarrass both parents and young people by asking them to read material or respond to personal questions in a group setting.

The structured discussion

The content of the semi-structured interview, which formed the basis of the structured discussion was designed based on my reading of the research literature; my own observations in working with the young people; the requirements of the research questions and the information needed to support the intervention. This was

piloted with two young women who had previously been missing from school, and with whom I had worked for some time and had a good relationship with, in order to get feedback from them. They had been asked if the structured discussion could be piloted with them and they agreed. The conversation flowed naturally, as the questions which informed the discussion had been memorised. The rapport between the young people and the researcher was good and the feedback from them was that it was relaxed and they did not feel under any pressure.

The structured discussion also included basic information about 5-14 levels and attendance levels taken from the school records. This data was necessary in relation to the fourth part of the research question, which sought to examine whether adopting a social capital analysis of the issues, and factors involved when young people do missing from school, could be used in a curative way to support their re-engagement with school, work or training. Therefore, information on 5-14 levels and attendance had to be gathered in order to complete the necessary local authority paperwork required to make application for an alternative training or educational placement should the young person and their parent wish this.

Young person	Age	Sex	Year 1 attendance	Year 2 attendance	Year 3 attendance	Reading	Writing	Maths
1	15yrs	male	29.76%	14%	13%	C	C	D
2	Young person	female	Not available	8.2%	7%	D	D	D
3	13yrs	female	11.3%	0%		A	A	B
4	15yrs	male	94%	87%	20%	C	D	D
5	15yrs	female	24%	9%	0%	C	C	C
6	15yrs	female	67%	50%	29.74%	C	C	C
7	15yrs	male	67%	24%	2%	E	D	D
8	15yrs	male	67.3%	47.14%	41.84	D	D	C
9	15yrs	male	77.11%	75%	12.11%	C	B	D
10	15yrs	male	79.4%	42%	52.63%	C	B	C

Figure 2. Attendance and 5-14 levels of the young people.

Details of their attendance and 5 14 levels are presented in Figure 2, which precedes. In terms of this research, a case of the data generated achieving multiple

goals, which was cost effective in terms of time and ensuring that knowledge generation and social action were linked. In addition the information could be collated on attendance and attainment as part of the case studies.

3.8 Method of data collection

Prior to deciding the chosen method of data collection, a pre-research pilot was undertaken prior to commencing with the research project the details of which follow below.

Pre- research stage pilot study

The purpose of the pilot was to look at the relative merits of focus groups compared to semi-structured interviews as a means of eliciting the views of the young people. This pilot involved 4 young men aged 14-15 years, who had previously been 'missing from school,' taking part in a focus group. These young men had previously been missing from school but had recently started attending a training provider. A parallel group of 5 young men and 2 young women aged 15 years who had stopped attending school-and their parents-were interviewed individually using a semi-structured interview. Due to time constraints and access problems it was not possible to undertake a pilot with the parents.

Whilst there were merits in both approaches, i.e. focus groups and semi structured interviews, a number of issues emerged from the pilot which suggested that semi-structured interviews would, in relation to answering the research questions, be a more appropriate method of data collection for a number of reasons.

It was evident that this group of marginalised young people were unaccustomed to being asked for their views. In addition, some of the young people appeared to be ill at ease and uncomfortable within the focus group setting, due in part to group dynamics with some of the young people being more dominant in the group. There

was also a sense that some young people were reluctant to speak up and provide information that could leave them open to teasing or what is termed colloquially in Scotland as “*slagging*”, which has a much stronger connotation. Michell (1999) suggests that focus groups may not be the most appropriate method for researching sensitive issues in depth and, given my previous experience in working with such young people, I tended to agree that a more individualised approach was necessary.

Whilst the focus group was seen as useful in the exploratory stage, the organisation of the group identified issues that the group were willing to share in that forum, as opposed to the individual’s particular perspective. Given that the research project was attempting to elicit the contributor’s individual perspective, focus groups were deemed not to be the most useful technique in this particular instance. The young people appeared to feel more comfortable in the one to one setting of the semi-structured interview and more open to expressing their perspective. Although a pilot was not undertaken with the parents, it was my view-based on previous experience of working with parents-that they would prefer the confidentiality of a one to one interview instead participating in a focus group. In research one has to be sensitive to the people we are working with, and ensure that the situation is emotionally safe for them.

Other issues that emerged at the pilot study stage and informed the research proposal, included issues of reflexivity and feasibility related to the knowledge base of the researcher and the area they were investigating, and the potential benefit of the researcher’s extensive practical experience in working with marginalised young people and engaging with them. This was deemed helpful as Wellington & Cole (2004) point out: *‘practical aspects of research with disaffected pupils ... present unique challenges.’*

The importance of undertaking the interviews in neutral venues negotiated with the young person and their parent was also highlighted. Neutral venues can be helpful in minimising positive or negative associations with a venue. In addition there was a need to take sensible precaution in visiting the homes of families that I did not

previously know: hence visits were always carried out in conjunction with a colleague.

It was felt that it was important to embed the interview or '*inter-view*' questions in a natural dialogue. In accordance with previous comments made about the importance of language in constructing meaning, it was felt that the terminology of a structured discussion was the more appropriate terminology to use. It was also felt to be important that, in undertaking these structured discussions, it was crucial to base them on a dialogic approach, Pruitt & Waddell (2007 p 49), whereby the following principles would guide that discussion:

- Inquire to learn
- Share what you know
- Listen empathetically
- Reflect back what you are hearing
- Explore underlying assumptions yours and those of others
- Acknowledge emotion as well as opinions
- Adjust course to reflect new knowledge and understanding

Therefore these were some of the guiding principles which informed the design and execution of the structured discussions, and, in fact, all contact with the young people and their parents. Such an approach sits comfortable with the belief stated in the introduction on unconditional positive regard for the individual and mutual respect.

A key component of social capital is the idea of trust, and the importance of forming trusting relationships with the young people and their parents was an integral component of the research. Continued involvement with the young people over a period of 3 + months assisted in the development of this relationship. Relationships were established in partly due to my previous experience working with young people and their families.

The information gathered during part of the pilot process informed my decision to use semi – structured interviews as the basis of a structured discussions, as the primary means of data collection. This is detailed in the following section.

Semi- structured interviews as a means of data collection

The result of the pilot study structured discussions were chosen as the primary method of data collection. As a means of generating data semi-structured interviews are widely used in qualitative research, and King (1994, p. 16) suggests that interviews are appropriate when a study “*focuses on the particular meaning of the phenomenon to the participants*”. The use of a structured discussion combined the use of a semi structured interview, with a more dialogic approach to interaction, leading to a structured discussion which aimed to merge the two. This approach

1. was respectful to the individual
2. generated data that could be analysed in a range of ways
3. structured the discussion by using the semi- structured interview questions and allowed the researcher to provide a framework for the discussion in order to scaffold the young person or parents responses. This was necessary in relation to the young people who appeared to be unaccustomed to being asked their opinions.
4. it also lessens the potential to embarrass both parents and young people by asking them to read material or respond to personal questions in a group setting.

The structured discussion

The information derived from the pilot study, the research literature and my own observations over time in working with young people missing from school contributed to the development of the semi-structured interview questions and formed the basis of the structured discussion. This was piloted with two young women who had previously been missing from school, and with whom I had

worked for some time and had a good relationship with. The areas for discussion were devised in order to address the first two components of the research questions looking at the factors involved and issues for the young people and their parents in being missing from school, as well as what was maintaining them in that position.

The structured discussion also included basic information about 5-14 levels and attendance levels taken from the school records. This data was necessary in relation to the fourth part of the research question, which sought to examine whether adopting a social capital analysis of the issues, and factors involved when young people do missing from school, could be used in a curative way to support their re-engagement with school, work or training. Therefore, information on 5-14 levels and attendance had to be gathered in order to complete the necessary local authority paperwork required to make application for an alternative training or educational placement should the young person and their parent wish this. Details of their attendance and 5-14 levels are presented in Figure 2. In terms of this research, a case of the data generated achieving multiple goals, which was cost effective in terms of time and ensuring that knowledge generation and social action were linked. In addition the information would be collated on attendance and attainment as part of the case studies.

3.9 The research contributors - the young people and their parents

Ten young people were invited to contribute to the research and all ten consented and took part in the structured discussion. The group comprised of 6 males and 4 females (Figure 3). All the males and three females were due to enter the secondary stage of fourth year and were aged 15 years old, (whilst the fourth female of the cohort was 13 years old and due to move into third year of the secondary school). Parents of the young people (n-10) were also asked to become involved for three main reasons. Firstly it was felt that their support would be needed to encourage the young people into an educational and vocational placement. Secondly, parents are made responsible for the school attendance of their offspring in the law, and with responsibility come 'rights', and it was their right to be involved. Thirdly, it was

felt that their views would provide a richer perspective in order to address the research question. Out of these 10 young people only one parent did not contribute to the research process and was not at home when we called, despite prior arrangements being made by the social worker: a point that raised an ethical dilemma for the researcher, on whether to enter the house when the parent was not present. The social worker and the young person however, who was an intellectually able young man, (and young carer) was looking for support and was keen that we should continue as planned. As the researcher, it was felt that the potential benefits outweighed any concerns that required to be considered. This will be discussed later in the discussion section. It was according to the social worker a regular occurrence for the parent's not to be at home due to other circumstances.

Age in years	Male	Female
15 years	6	3
13 years	0	1

Figure 3 The gender and age of the young people who contributed to the research

A total of ten parents consented to participate in the research. This included one male parent who was at home during the visit and who wished to give his views independently of his wife. One parent did not turn up, despite having arranged to meet. Of the parents, who participated eight were female and two were male. In terms of discussion venue, these young people and their parents opted to meet with the researcher in school (n-1), social work office (n- 3), at home (n-6). The majority of parents opted to be interviewed out with the school setting.

Young person 1	Lives with his mum and dad. His dad has a serious liver problem due to his alcohol addiction.
Young person 2	Has recently returned to live with her dad, due to mum's addiction issues. Has a baby. Transferred secondary's 1st year due to family circumstances and returned to secondary in second year.
Young person 3	Lives with her mum and dad. Struggles with the curriculum in secondary school. Mum thought she needed a special school.
Young person 4	Lives with his mum and dad. Family has to move out of area for a time for their own safety and went to England.
Young person 5	Lives with her mum who recently had a nervous breakdown.
Young person 6	Lives with mum and dad. A very quiet emotional girl.
Young person 7	Lives with his mum.
Young person 8	Dad in prison. Both dad and big brother have mental health issues. Mum has substance abuse issues. He is a young carer.
Young person 9	Lives with his mum and dad.
Young person 10	Lives with his mum.

Figure 4 Key background information on the young people

Whilst it is not intended to label or portray these young people and their families, in a way that would serve to diminish them, it is important to provide the reader with some background information. By doing so it is hoped that an insight is provided into their lives, and give the reader a context to support their interpretation of the research project. To facilitate this in Figure 4 appropriately anonymised information

is provided. This information is not extensive, as it was considered that too much detail would breach confidentiality and would be inappropriate and unethical.

How the young people and their parents were identified.

The young people (n-10) were identified following a consultation meeting with the school liaison officer, Year 4 Depute head teacher and Year 3 and 4 pastoral care staff: as vulnerable young people who despite school based interventions were deemed unlikely to return to school, and were in danger of becoming NEET that is, not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). This terminology used has since been replaced by the terminology of ‘children at risk of missing out’, which is deemed to have less negative connotations. Both the young people and their parents were an opportunistic sample in that they were also missing from school and were identified as part of the Educational Psychologist’s on-going work within the school. The parents (n-10) of the young people were identified by dint of their child being highlighted as a priority by the school.

Given that these young people are vulnerable in terms of their missing from school it was negotiated with senior management link who liaised with Psychological Services, that these young people should be viewed as a priority for outreach. By outreach is meant that the young people would be visited at a venue acceptable to the young person and their parent, to discuss educational and vocational options. The aim of which was to facilitate their re-engagement with some form of education or training. The plan was to prioritise them for an outreach visit accompanied by either the child’s social worker or school attendance officer due to the young person having had some level of previous contact with them, and the school liaison officer who had a remit to visit young people who were not attending school and their families in their home, to encourage them to return to school. Young people who have been out of school for some time can be quite isolated and difficult to reach and research evidence indicates that we need to provide outreach to the young person, and engage with them in their own locality (Scottish Executive, 2006).

Visiting the young people in their own locality with a known professional, allows an introduction to the young person and their family by someone who already knows them. Secondly, from a pragmatic point of view, it is health and safety issue to ensure that, the researcher, was not visiting families on their own. As researchers we need ensure the safety of others and our own safety.

Initiating contact with the young people and their parents.

Initial contact with the young people and their parents was made via the school liaison officer and /or social worker. They were informed that the school Educational Psychologist had a specialist remit to support young people who had stopped attending school and would like to make contact with them. They were also informed that the Educational Psychologist was planning to do some research into the area of school-non-attendance. The young person and their parent were then asked if they would agree to the Educational Psychologist coming to discuss the young person's non - attendance and to see if they could help in any meaningful way. If they were agreeable, then a joint visit with the social worker or school liaison officer was arranged to the family home, or a room in the social work department or any other venue suitable to the young person and their parent. The researcher felt it was important that this choice was left with the potential contributors rather than have the researcher presume they had the right to invite themselves into a family's home.

On the initial visit, the young people and their parents would be asked if they would be interested in hearing about the educational and vocational options that may be available to them and they were asked if they would like to consider any of them. It was explained to them that if they were interested in applying for one of the options (Appendix C) they would be supported by the Educational Psychologist who would assist them through the process. With the young person and their parent's agreement, the researcher would act as a linking social tie, bridging the young

person and their family with other networks which could facilitate their journey back into education. This would involve providing information on what the options were; completing paperwork to make applications; preparing and supporting the young people for interviews and physical taking them to those interviews or supporting them back into school, if required. The intention was to support and assist the young person and their family to navigate through the system by offering to support the young person at all stages in the route back into some form of education or training. In terms of educational psychology practice, this was not common professional practice.

Eliciting the young people and their parent's involvement?

With the parent and young people's agreement the Educational psychologist met with the young people and their parents between 2007-2008. They were informed that there would be no pressure put on them and their involvement was entirely voluntary. It was also explained that the Educational Psychologist had an interest in young people who were missing out on school and was undertaking some research in this area. The parent and young person were asked if they would consider answering some additional questions which were part of the research. The purpose of the research was explained verbally, remaining sensitive to the potential varying literacy levels of the individuals, and not wanting to make anyone feel awkward or self-conscious. They would then be offered a written information sheet on the research study (Appendix A).

If they were interested in returning to mainstream education this was arranged in a planned way, whilst if they were interested in an alternative provision, a structured discussion was undertaken the content of which was relevant for completing applications for alternative educational or vocational placements. The paperwork for this would be undertaken back at the office. If they agreed to participate in the research project more detailed discussion was undertaken. At this juncture the social worker or school liaison officer would absent themselves into

another room or area to allow for confidentiality. The young person and their parent would also be interviewed separately for the same reasons. The lead would be taken from the contributors as to the depth of their responses and whilst using prompts to elicit information were mindful of not putting pressure on the contributors. There is a fine balance between engaging the young people and their parents in a structured discussion, and putting too much pressure on them. The priority was to make them feel relaxed and comfortable. Sensitivity to their needs and feelings was a priority. Whilst there was a structure to the discussion it was allowed to develop in line with the principles of a dialogic approach as previously discussed.

The researcher approached the young people and the parents who were contributing to the research, with an openness and a willingness to accept their perspectives on their experience of the young person being missing from school. The fact that the research was taking initiated indicated a ‘problem’ existed but did not imply that the contributors ‘were the problem’. There was a sense that the parents and the young people, viewed themselves as the ‘problem owners’ and positioned themselves as people who needed ‘helped’ and the researcher as the ‘helper’. As the research process through the use of a dialogic approach, there was a joint exploration of issues with a focus on exploring solutions. There was a sharing of knowledge and perspectives.

3.10 Method of Data Analysis

Attride-Stirling (2001) stress the importance in qualitative research not only of specifying what one does and why, but being transparent about how the analysis was undertaken. Consideration was given to the use of a computerised package to analyse the data e.g. NVIVO a computerised package which allows you to analyse content from interviews. This was rejected as at the time the researcher did not have access to it nor training in its use. Given the limited research experience of the researcher, it was felt that direct immersion with the material to transcribe, code and theme the data, would allow for better processing of the content. In relation to the

‘how’ of this research, the data corpus would be analysed using thematic analysis based on the six point guide suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). This 6 point guide included the following;

1. Familiarising yourself with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

These transcripts were kept on a password protected computer, in line with data protection requirements. The interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings using the vernacular of the research contributors, which in most instances were transcribed phonetically. It was felt that this was important for authenticity and trying to stick as far as was reasonably practicable to the contributors own words. This would serve to provide an account which was reflective of their comments. Once the interviews were transcribed they were checked back against the original audio tapings and destroyed as agreed. Where the contributor did not want the interviews taped the interviews were written manually by the researcher. This process of transcription assisted in familiarising the researcher with the material and was a key phase of the data analysis. Each young person and corresponding parent was allocated a number to help identify the parent/young person pairings and increase the level of anonymity. A note was kept of the individuals to whom the numbers referred and this was kept in a locked filing cabinet in the psychological services office in line with data protection guidelines.

Generation of codes

The data was transcribed from the tape recording. Each of the contributors had a separate sheet which was split into two data sets: the young people’s responses and

the parental responses. With each data set, there was extensive reading and re-reading of the material. At this stage 'post its' and highlighter pens were used to code the content of the structured discussion, with extracts of text being transcribed onto 'post its' and coded. These codes were exemplified by aspects of the texts corresponding to the theme. They were analysed at an interpretative level (Braun & Clarke 2006). At this initial first level stage, it was felt that a manual system of coding using post-it, with extracts of text, would be more flexible than using a computer software programme for coding the themes. A colleague was elicited to act as a critical friend to scrutinise the initial coding's. Their role was to look over the extracts to check if they fitted under the initial codes and whether these codes reflected the extracts. There was agreement on the initial codes. The same process was undertaken with the final themes. With hindsight there were some methodological issues with this process, which will be commented on the discussion section.

Identifying the themes

At the stage of identifying the key themes, the mind mapping package Mind Genius was used to help in the identification of the key themes. Mind Genius is a visual mapping software package used in both business and in Education. It allows you to devise mind maps to visualise and manage ideas and information. A particular advantage is that you can link via the visual mind map to associated content in a Microsoft Word document. It was felt useful in this research project because it integrated visual mind maps and word processing. The post-its produced at the previous stage were entered into Mind Genius according to emerging themes and associated exemplars of written text taken from the transcripts, were linked to the visuals. Each of the extracts was coded according to contributor and where in the structured discussion the extract came from, e.g. 2:1 corresponded to contributor 2 and the extract came from question 1. The researcher then went over the transcripts to ensure that no areas of text had been overlooked. A subsequent stage was to further refine the themes and cross reference them, again using the mind mapping package Mind Genius.

Defining and naming themes

At this stage, the themes were reviewed and revised to make sure nothing had been omitted, and the main themes finalised. The data extracts from the young people and their parents were linked to the key themes and incorporated into the mind map.

Producing the report

Following completion of the report the tape recordings were destroyed; files and data other than the mind maps were shredded. The mind maps were kept until the project was submitted before being erased. The results of the data analysis were displayed as tables showing the young people and parents responses, to aid interpretation. The themes were identified in relation to the number of individuals who had highlighted the particular theme as it was felt this would assist understanding.

3.11 Strategies for ensuring rigour in the research project

Thomas and Magilvy (2001) suggest rigour in qualitative research is something that new and experienced researchers struggle with when undertaking qualitative research.

Whilst having an understanding of validity and reliability in relation to quantitative research, this terminology was not appropriate in this study, coming from a different ontological paradigm. Thomas et al., (2011) draw on Lincoln and Guba (1988), to identify 4 aspects of rigour, namely: truth or value (credibility); transferability; dependability and confirmability. Taking each in turn, a brief overview will be provided, before illustrating how these components have been addressed in this research project.

Credibility

Freshwater et al., (2010) views credibility as the “*degree to which the study findings are authentic and the interpretation credible*”. Credibility asks the researcher to evidence that the research undertaken has truth and value (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The question raised here is who decides what has credibility and is of value? The reader will come to this research project with their own criteria for judging its value, possibly based on their own research background and reading. The young people and their parents would probably say that the research has credibility and value for them if it meets their expectation that it is going to support the young person move into an educational or vocational placement. As the researcher credibility and value would be related to the extent to which it achieved the research aims and made a positive impact on the young people. The school staff would probably measure its credibility and value in relation to any positive change in attendance. Deciding on whether it has value is, therefore, dependent on who is viewing it.

From a research perspective, credibility reflects how thorough the researcher was in undertaking the research and how representative of the views of the parents and young people which it sought to elicit. In relation to this there are a number of strategies that one can put in place to increase the credibility or trustworthiness of a study: the use of audio taping (Campbell, 2002) to allow for accurate transcription (Dickson & Swift 2007); eliciting someone to act as a critical friend at the data analysis stage and the use of verbatim extracts from the contributors to incorporate into the text. Equally important is showing that the researcher is aware of the potential for research bias. In this research project, all of these components previously mentioned have been included in the research design: audio taping of transcripts, the use of a critical friend, including a section on making the researcher visible, and the use of extracts of verbatim text from the transcriptions. To support rigour use was made of COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) (Tong et al., 2007) as a guide to ensure that the research was open,

transparent and covered the main key areas required of good qualitative research (Appendix B).

Transferability

Transferability seeks to define the extent to which the reader is able to generalise the findings to other contexts (Morrow, 2005). Given the qualitative nature of this research project, transferability to other contexts is not appropriate due to the descriptive nature of the study. Transferability also seeks to establish what added value the research will make to existing research knowledge and practice. It is hoped that the data content provided by the young people and their parents, may inform a transition route back to education or training. It is also envisaged that it would illuminate areas for possible intervention at a systemic and individual level within their previous secondary school. A key emphasis in this research is to engage with the reader to offer another way of conceptualising the problems of young people who go missing from school, with the aim of informing debate, further research and professional practice.

Dependability

Dependability expectations are similar to reliability in asking the researcher to clarify the processes and procedures which would allow another researcher, to replicate what they did. Coming from a social constructionist perspective, there is awareness that nothing can ever be identical given the different lens through which people perceive the world. There are however, ways in which the researcher can make explicit what they did and allow for attempts to replicate that process e.g. by clearly specifying the research methodology, process and method of data analysis.

RIGOUR AND TRUSTWORTHINESS	CONFIRMABILITY	DEPENDABILITY	TRANSFERABILITY
Including a section on positioning the researcher	Use of audio recordings and transcripts	Clear description of contributors to the research	Details specific in the research report
Showing evidence of reflexivity and criticality in undertaking the research	Showing evidence of reflexivity and criticality in undertaking the research	Establishment of positive relationships with contributors over the course of the research. Including taking a dialogic approach to interactions with them.	Details provided which would allow for replication of process but given ontological position of the research including time frames, who the researcher is, background etc. - would not necessarily mirror these findings.
Having a critical friend to check the themes emerging from the thematic analysis	Audit trail of research process Using multiple case studies	Providing sufficient detail in write up of the whole process of the research i.e. audit trail of research process.	Providing sufficient detail in write up of the whole process of the research i.e. audit trail of research process.
Knowledge of young people who go missing from school spanning 30 years. Plus time period spent working with them in the field.	Impact on the young people in terms of their priorities for involvement	Describing clear data analysis details.	Describing clear data analysis details.
Taking a dialogic approach and structured discussion approach to the semi-structured interviews.	Use of a structured discussion	Details of how and why participants selected	Details of how and why participants selected
Including verbatim extracts of their words in the text. Interviewing young person and parent separately.	Providing new insights By looking at missing out from an ecological and social capital perspective	Discussion of interpretation and presentation of the results in both written and tabular form.	Discussion of interpretation and presentation of the results in both written and tabular form.
Use of COREQ to ensure all components of a qualitative report included	Use of COREQ to ensure all components of a qualitative report included	Use of COREQ to ensure all components of a qualitative report included	Use of COREQ to ensure all components of a qualitative report included

Figure 5 Details of strategies to improve rigour in the research process (COREQ)

Confirmability

Confirmability is akin to being objective in the research process by being reflexive and making explicit how your own background may have impacted on the design and execution of the research as well as in the interpretation of the findings. Issues such as audio taping the interviews, using extracts of speech from the contributors and positioning the researcher all support the confirmability of the research. In figure 5 which follows examples are provided of ways in which this research has been undertaken to improve the overall rigour of the research.

3.13 Summary

In this chapter a rationale provided as to why a qualitative, exploratory multiple case studies approach was employed. The link between the methodology and the philosophical foundations of the research were identified, to illustrate how they impacted on choice of methodology. The method of proposed data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was specified as was strategies used to increase the rigour of the research project.

Having described the research route map, I will now go on to highlight in Chapter 4 the co-constructed knowledge based on the young people and their parents comments during the semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 4 Journey outcome: constructed knowledge.

In introducing this section on the research findings it is important to draw the reader's attention to a number of issues to consider when interpreting the information being presented. In the first instance these findings do not occur in a vacuum but emerge in dialogue between the researcher, the young person and/or parent, within a particular social context. Although attempting to capture the essence of these dialogic encounters the words used to express their perspective do not capture the intonation, emotional responses or physical context of those surroundings: all of which will have shaped my interpretation of their views.

4.1 Route map

To facilitate the analysis and synthesis of the results this chapter will be structured in accordance with the research questions, which will be restated below

Research Questions Revisited

The research questions sought to elicit,

1. What are the perceptions of young people and their parents about being missing from school?
2. What issues arise for young people when they are missing from school?
3. What are the key barriers to a return to education or training?
4. Can a social capital analysis inform an approach to young people's re-engagement with education?

4.2 Young people and their parent’s perceptions of the factors involved when the young people went missing from school.

The factors and issues generated from the research contributors are presented in the following sections. These factors and issues are important in that they may offer an insight into how best to intervene, to support the young peoples’ re-engagement back into education or training. Weinstein (2002), comments that “*the contextualisation of knowledge is important to create best practice interventions that are tailored to the populations they serve*”

Key emerging themes from young people

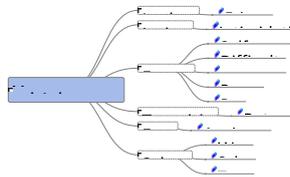


Figure 6 Thematic map on the young peoples views on the factors which contributed to them going missing from school.

The key themes to emerge from a thematic analysis of the young people’s responses to this question highlighted in figure 6, are as follows, where *h* indicates the number

of times the theme emerged and n indicating the number of young people who identified this theme;

- Intimidation/bullying ($h-8, n-6$)
- Factors related to self ($h-7, n-6$)
- School based factors ($h-7, n-5$)
- Lack of peer relationships ($h-3, n-3$)
- Transitioning back to school after absence ($h-2, n-2$)
- Family factors ($h-1, n-1$)

Each of these themes will be further elaborated on sequentially in the following section.

Intimidation/bullying by other young people

Intimidation/bullying by peers, was mentioned by six pupils as being a contributory factor in being missing from school, of these four comments were made about intimidation/bullying out with the school setting, with one young woman commenting “*people that fight with each other from different schemes and all that. There's hundreds of fighting after school and all that*” (Young person 5). This young person suggesting a territorial component to the bullying. Whilst young person 2 commented on the fact that they “*took my jewellery and that off me on way to school*”. This intimidation/bullying involved not just name calling but also physical confrontation as expressed in the following quote, “*before a left school a boy battered us, doon at X. Liked being in the classes, there were other boys from and not just that one Y... Z..... following me from school*” (Young person 4). The geographical locations in the quotes have been abbreviated to preserve confidentiality.

This bullying exemplified above, appeared to suggest that it was territorially based. The impact of this re-emerges later on when some of the young people are asked to consider other educational options, as part of the intervention aspect of this research

project. In making choices a key consideration for them was where the option was located geographically.

The young people identified both intimidation/bullying occurring both within the school setting and on the way to and from school. In relation to bullying within school four comments are made, *“Boys started to threaten me in schooltoo risky told you” (Young person 9)*. The implication being that they were frightened to go to school. Interestingly of the four young people who highlighted a change in perspective about school from positive to negative all of them cited intimidation/bullying by peers as a contributory factor to going missing from school and their changing attitude towards school.

Factors related to self

Factors related to self also emerged in relation to missing out on school. Issues in relation to personal behaviour were highlighted (*n*-6), where the young people had some awareness of the impact which their behaviour had on their interactions with teachers as exemplified by the following comments, *“I used to balm them up all the time. Everybody in the class did it and I end up being cheeky back to them (teachers) and I cannae stop myself. They always try and say control your anger but I cannae. It’s just different teachers trying to tell you what to do all the time. I cannae handle it.” (Young person 8)*

One young person (*n*-1) identified a theme related to their perceptions of personal ability when they commented that *“Sometimes they are harder for me the spelling and all that” (Young person 3)*. In another instance one (*n*-1) highlighted how pregnancy had been a major factor for her but went on to comment that *“I wanted out anyway” (Young person 2)*. This young person had also cited issues in relation to bullying, but pregnancy was from her perspective the main factor. Practical issues were pointed out by another young person who stated that he just had difficulty in getting up for school *“A could’nae get up for school” (Young person 7)*.

A subtheme related to perception of personal coping ability also emerged when another young man, who was also a young carer verbalised his difficulty when he stated that *“Sometimes too much for me. I always go and after I've been there for a wee while I can't cope with it anymore I like to go but sometimes it's too hard for me sometimes”* (Young person 8). This young man's parent was the only parent who had failed to turn up to meet with the researcher and the social worker and consequentially did not participate in the study.

School based factors

Issues related to school based factors were highlighted on seven occasions by five young people. A range of sub themes were subsumed under this theme, with some of the young people (n-4) commenting on the class work in some classes e.g. *“P.E. and music was the only bits I really liked at secondary”* (Young person10) and *“I liked some of the work”* (Young person 1). A further subtheme to emerge was in relation to school discipline with one young person (n-1) commenting that *“A know it's good to be strict but it's too strict”* (Young person 2). Views of teachers as a subtheme also emerged (n-2) with one young person stating that *“I didnae like some of the teachers and they didnae like me”* (Young person7).

Lack of peer friendship group in school

Three (n-3) of the young people identified lack of a peer friendship group in school as a contributory factor in going missing from school, with one young man commenting that, *“all my pals don't go to that school they go to X...ma wants to keep me at Y”* (Young person 5), whilst another reported that *“I didnae really have any pals there. One or two of them left for the same reason I did. Nothing to dae with the teachers that's the reason I left because of the pupils.”* (Young person 9). Again a further reference to intimidation/bullying. A third young person, a young woman commented that *“Pupils were nicer at X (previous secondary school). They*

were alright a bit rougher” in the new school. (Young person 2). Again this was a young woman who stated that she had been intimidated/bullied in school.

Transitioning back to school after absence

Two comments were made by young people about the difficulties of returning to school after absence, as reflected in the following quotes. *“Some of the time I was sick and then I just got into the routine of being absent. I just think it was facing it, going back and then everybody asking me why I was off. I was trying to get back to it. It was getting routine back in there and back again.....It was good up to the time I started staying off”* (Young person 7). Whilst another young person stated *“see when I was off and I had to go back in I didnae like doing that. Because it was embarrassing being off and then back in so I usually just stayed off.”* (Young person 6).

Family Factors

Family related factors were commented on by one young person (n-1), where his anxiety about his dad’s wellbeing was quoted as a contributory factor, *“Ma dad went into hospital drinking all the time. Collapsed the first time when I was sleeping. Second time I found him and got a fright.... thought he was dead. Tried hiding the bottles but it didnae work....wanted to stay with him.”* (Young person 1)

Key emerging themes from parents

The key themes to emerge from a thematic analysis of the parents perceptions as to the factors which led to their son or daughter going missing from school are highlighted in figure 7 which illustrates the themes which were derived from parental responses. These themes were as follows,

- Intimidation/ bullying (h-5, n-5)

- Young person factors (*h-3, n-3*)
- Parental self-perceptions of blame (*c-2, n-2*)
- Do not know (*h-2, n- 2*)
- Family Issues (*h-2, n-2*)
- Influence of peer group (*h-1, n-1*)
- School based factors (*h-1, n-1*)

These themes will now be discussed in the following section.

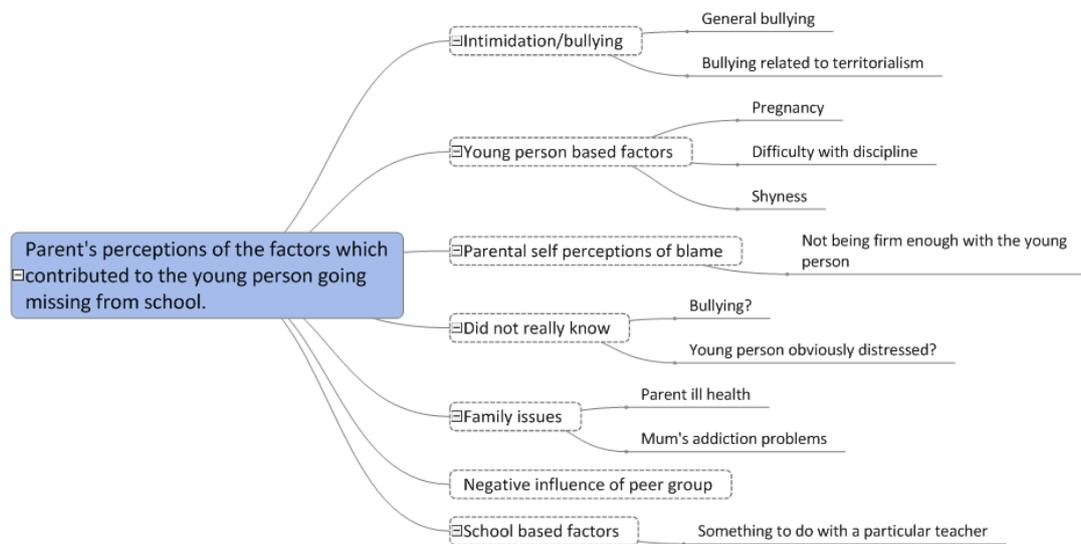


Figure 7 Parental perceptions of the factors which contributed to the young people going missing from school.

Intimidation/bullying

The most frequently mentioned factor identified by parents related to intimidation/bullying issues, which were mentioned on five occasions by five parents. The actual word bullying was used by four of the five parents to express why their son or daughter went missing from school. General bullying was specified on one of these five occasions, as evidenced in this quote “*Some bullying which did not get sorted out but did not really want to go after this*“(Parent 7). Four

out of the five parents suggested that the bullying was occurring out with the school with the inference made that it was linked to young people coming from different geographical areas i.e. territorialism, as exemplified in the following interview extract, “*Couldn't travel on the bus because of the bullying. Other kids slugging her and throwing things at her.*”(Parent 3). Whilst another suggested “*I think it was problems with other kids as well, because of all the different schemes fighting*”. (Parent10).

In relation to this factor two parents commented on the response of the school to the bullying with Parent 7 stating “*that the bullying did not get sorted out*” whilst parent 5 felt the head teacher “*couldn't have been nicer.... Got the lassies from X..... so the bullying stopped*”, thus indicating mixed views. Where bullying was involved parents highlighted the impact this had on the young person emotionally “*it was just a fear after that and she didn't want to go back to school*” (Parent 5). Intimidation/bullying was of a name calling variety in this instance although others indicated that there was actually physical fighting.

Lack of Knowing

In relation to this theme two parents indicated that they did not know why their child had stopped attending school with one parent stating that “*some mornings she gets up and just cries and says she doesn't want to go and I start crying cause she is upset*” (Parent 4), whilst the other felt it might have been bullying but stated that “*I asked her and she said no she wasn't getting bullied*” (Parent 6).

Parental self-perceptions of blame

Two parents commented on their self - perceptions of blame suggesting they may have contributed to the non -attendance by not being firm enough with the young person, with one parent voicing the view that, “*I was as much to blame. I let it go on. He was off maybe 2 days one week and 3 off the next and then it just got longer and longer and he got into a rut. I wasnae hard enough really with him*”. (Parent 4).

Family issues

The impact which family issues had on the young person's non-attendance was identified by two parents, with one expressing the view that her son was *"was worried about his dad and found him on the floor. He has a drink problem. He's dyin"* (Parent 1). A reference to the fact that the father has serious health issues in relation to his alcohol intake and had been refused an organ transplant unless he stopped drinking. Whilst another parent made reference to *"all the family problems her mum and that"*, which his daughter experienced (Parent 2), a reference to his daughters pregnancy and the mum's addiction issues. The young person now residing with her father.

Young person related factors

A further three parents commented on within child factors, which may have contributed, with Parent 10 commenting that the young person was *"no very good with discipline"* and Parent 8 commenting that their daughter was *"quite a shy girl"*, whilst parent 2 made comment on the fact that the child had a *"baby"*.

School based factors

Parent 1 commented on the impact of school based factors *"I think it was something to do with the PE teacher"*, although they were not too sure.

Impact of peer group

Parent 9 highlighted the impact of the young person's peer group *"to be honest I think it's because of his pals. Some of his pals are aff and they can do what they want. He's just going along with them. Until he started going about with this group and that's when all things went downhill"* (Parent 9). Two general themes were also commented on by some of the parents which are worth noting. Parents 5, 7, and 9,

highlighted that there appeared to be change in attendance pattern at the secondary stage, “*First year she was great. Into second year started of with the bullying*” and “*Primary, if you look back his attendance was quite good.*” referring to a deterioration in attendance. Parents 5 and 9 highlighted issues around lack of intervention at an earlier stage by agencies, as exemplified in this comment “*I think mair support, I felt they’ve left it too long that x settled into no going to school.*”

Theme	Young person	Parent	Parent child identifiers
Intimidation/Bullying	n-6	n-5	**YP 1, 2, 4,5,7,9 **P 3,4,5,7,10
School based factors	n-5	n-1	YP 1,2,10,7,8
Factors related to Self (young person)	n-6	n-3	YP 2,,3 ,7,8,10,5 P 2,8,5
Negative peer group influence	n/a	n-1	P9
Lack of peer relationships	n-3	n/a	YP2.3.9
Transitioning back after absence	n-2	n/a	YP 6,7
Family factors	n/a	n-2 *	YP 1 P1,1*
Self-perceptions of blame	n/a	n-2	P4,5
Not knowing	n/a	n-2	P6,4

Figure 8 Comparison between parent and young peoples’ responses on factors which contributed to the young person going missing from school.

*These were both parents from the one family.

** YP refers to young person and P refers to parent

In comparing the themes emerging from the young people and their parents in figure 8 there are some similarities and differences. The parents and the young people highlighted a theme around intimidation/ bullying, and this was the most

commonly cited reason for going missing from school. In relation to this some parents and young people referred to the emotional impact which this had on the young person and the effect it had on their willingness to return to school. The issue of territorialism in relation to bullying emerged in their responses. This bullying /intimidation took the form of name calling and also physical confrontation in some instances.

The young people commented more frequently on school based factors than parents with the young people being able to express what aspect of the school experience was problematic, whereas the one parent who responded was unclear, but thought it was because of school based factors. In relation to the young people four commented on problems with class work in some of the classes. Other individual comments were made in relation to discipline and teachers.

Both the young people and parents identified within child factors as playing a contributory part in the young person going missing from school. The young people identified within person factors more than parents, six as opposed to three. Both the young people and the parents identified a range of factors involved within this overarching theme, with three of the young people highlighting their own personal behaviour as the most dominant sub-category.

Peer relationships were highlighted by both parents and pupils in different ways. The young people's comments reflected a lack of an appropriate peer group whilst the negative influence of the peer group was highlighted by one parent. There was a difference in perception between one parent and her son, with the parent feeling that her son stopped attending school because her son had been influenced negatively by the peer group and the son saying he and his friends had stopped going because of the bullying.

None of the parents commented on the difficulties the pupils experienced in returning to school after a prolonged absence. However, it emerged as an issue for two of the pupil's. This was a surprise to the researcher as in my professional

capacity as an Educational Psychologist, returning after absence is often voiced by pupil's as a reason for not returning to school.

Family factors were identified by two parents, and one child. There was consistency between two of the parents and their child, but in the other case the young person had chosen not to comment on family factors and stated that it was her pregnancy which impacted in her going missing from school, although she was not happy there, as she had been bullied.

Two of the parents were full of recrimination about their part in the young person's non - attendance and felt guilty about this, with one parent feeling that they should have been "*tougher*" with him. Two of the parents identified the theme of 'not knowing' why their child had stopped attending school, although one person had thought it might have been due to bullying. None of the young people claimed not to know why they went missing from school.

In terms of reflexivity as a researcher, it was unexpected that the issue of Intimidation/Bullying came across so strongly. It had been anticipated by the researcher that most of the young people who went missing from school would have low attainment levels but this was not the case.

4.3 Issues raised by the young people's absence from school for both the young people and their parents and what may be maintaining them in that position.

Following on from the previous question this seeks to examine the issues that going missing from school raises for the young people and their parents, with the aim of eliciting their perspective. It seeks to inform current research literature on what the issues are from the perspective of the young people and their parents. It is anticipated that these issues will both inform and challenge the current research literature, as to what are the barriers to their transition back to education or training. At the same time an analysis of the issues and factors may provide a potential 'key' to both understanding and supporting the young people to re-engage.

The young people’s perceptions of the issues

The young people identified a range of issues in relation to not attending schools as shown in figure 9, all of which were negative. None of the young people identified any positives about not being in school. The two most common issues identified were concern about exams and fear of prosecution.

Theme	No of comments	Extract of comment
Concern about education and exams	n-2	<i>‘You don't get to do your exams’</i>
Boredom	n-6	<i>‘Get fed up. There's nothing to do. In the house all day’</i>
Fear of prosecution	n-2	<i>‘Ma mum keeps saying she will be arrested if I don't go back’</i>
Implications for future job prospects	n-6	<i>‘I want to go back to school in case when I'm older I don't get a good job and all my pals have’</i>

Figure 9 Issues highlighted by the young people in being missing from school.

The first issue related to boredom, with one young person commenting that they “*Get fed up. There’s nothing to do... in the house all day*” and another saying that “*boring aye lying in your bed all day. Daen the same things every da.*” (Young person 5). The message portrayed by them was that being out of school was viewed in a negative way. The second issue concerned the implications for their future, as one young person commented “*I want to go back to school in case when I'm older I don't get a good job and all my pals have*”. Whilst another stated “*when you try to get job you'll no be able to get one because you haven't been to school*”. There were

two comments made about learning per se and educational progress, with one young man lamenting, *“You don't get to do your exams. Would have liked that I know am brainy, person I just can't (go to school) it annoys me quite a lot because I always think about it all the time. I mean what am I daen no at school It annoys me I always think about the things I'm missing out on”* (Young person 7).

The issue of fear of prosecution was highlighted on two occasions with concerns evidenced in the following statement *“Ma mum keeps saying she will be arrested if I don't go back”* and another young person commenting *“sometimes if I go a wee walk the police pull me up and ask why I'm not at school. That's how me ma was trying to get me into something soon”*.

4.4 The parent's perceptions of the issues raised by the young person being missing from school.

All of the ten parents interviewed expressed negative feelings about the young person not being in school. There were no positive comments given about the young person not attending school. These were variously expressed from *“not happy about it”* to *“I'm ill with worry over it.”* It was clear that the parents were concerned about the young people, not attending school. The responses from the parents focused on six main themes, as exemplified in figure 10.

The main theme to emerge focused on the lack of education their child was receiving and the potential impact this would have on future job prospects. Parents were concerned that the young person would not get the opportunity to sit exams which they perceived as a barrier to getting a job. The parents had aspirations for their children which included getting a job, as Parent 7 stated quite emotionally *“I mean in this day and age you will not get anyplace if you've no”* a reference to education and then goes on to say *“it's just a case of signing on and living his life that way. You're not wanting that for him...you know what I mean”*. In this latter comment the implications being that they wanted a better future for their child.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Number of times highlighted</i>	<i>Extracts from comments</i>
Concern about education linked to future job prospects	(h-10, n-8)	<i>“I know he’s not getting any education and he will need it. I mean in this day and age you will not get anyplace if you’ve no.”</i>
Feelings of not being listened to and not knowing where to turn	(h-8, n-5)	<i>“For people to listen.....If I had got the help back when I first asked, he would have been back at school maybe another school, but he would have been somewhere” “We don’t know about any of these kind of things. Naebody tells you. Naebody contacts you and says to you.”</i>
Concern about what they were up to when not in school	(h-3, n-3)	<i>“When am at work what’s she doing in the hoose. Whose in the hoose.”</i>
Issues about the level of social work involvement	(h-2, n-2)	<i>“ I cannae understand why they put him on supervision every time he goes to the panel...I don't see a social worker from one panel to the week before the next.”</i>
Concern about legal issues	(h-2, n-2)	<i>“then you get worried and all about them going to a panel and them getting put away into a home for 6 months that turns into 18 months and things like that.”</i>
Issues about lack of information about educational options.	(h-8, n-8)	<i>“Nobody contacts you and says to you. I don’t know how many times attendance officer came but we never heard of any options till X decided to get you (the researcher)”.</i>

Figure 10 Issues highlighted by the parents in the young people being missing from school.

A subsequent theme related to parental feelings of frustration at not being listened to and not knowing where to turn as exemplified in the following comment *“I’ve told them for ages she needs a special school but nobody listened to me”*. With two parents commenting that, *“We don’t know about any of these kind of things. Naebody tells you. Naebody contacts you and says to you. If they said what about this. You’re (the researcher) the first person that’s ever been near and said anything like this”* (Parent 4).

This was in response to the researcher telling them about a range of other possible educational option. Another parent attempted to be proactive, following a lead given to her by a friend of her son. *“We tried a few other options ourselves that we heard of from his friends and whatever, like S..... (a specialist educational day placement only accessed via an Educational Psychologist) and I actually went over there and they said I had to see a psychologist. I went right into their office”* (she laughs) (Parent 10).

In this latter instance the parent had used someone within their own social network, in this instance her child’s friend to identify a place and was so concerned about getting her son back into education that she actually went to a school. She was however, unaware of the process she had to go through in order to secure him a place there i.e. through Psychological Services. Further she did not know how to access the psychologist to help her process this. This perhaps highlighting the fact that being out with the school system, further disadvantages parents and young people, as the supports they require are all school based. In relation to Scotland generally and this particular local authority context Psychological Service is a school based service with most referrals being processed via the school.

Feelings of parental frustration about their child’s non-attendance at school and concerns about what the young person was doing when not at school, were each expressed on three occasions by three parents as evidenced in the following statement *“When am at work what’s she doing in the hoose. Whose in the hoose”?* (Parent 6). There were also issues around the legal implications of non –attendance,

as expressed on two occasions by two parents *“you get worried about going to the panel”*, their perception being that the Children’s Hearing System may take the young person away from home and put them into care or the child might start *“getting into trouble”* with the police.

An issue was also raised by two parents about the level of social work involvement *“as I said I’m under a new social worker now and I have only seen her once and that’s been months now”* with another one commented *“I asked about homework.....until the social work department got something done. But the social worker who was assigned to me at the time, wasnae doing anything”*. This seeming to suggest that some parents were unhappy with the level of social work and were confused about their role. They had the perception rightly or wrongly that the social worker should be doing more.

The theme of lack of information about educational options was commented on by eight parents and were voiced during discussion with the researcher on other educational options. One parent encapsulated this when she said, *“nobody contacts you and says to you. I don’t know how many times attendance officer came but we never heard of any options till X decided to get you”* (a reference to the researcher) (Parent 5).

These comments seeming to imply that they lacked knowledge of what options were available, therefore appearing to illustrate they were lacking access to the kind of education specific networks and social capital that they needed. As we will go on to see in the next section there were a range of people who tried to help, but they appear not to have been able to provide the kind of information that the parents felt they or the young person needed.

4.5 Can adopting a social capital analysis of these factors and issues inform an approach to their re-engagement?

A key aim of this research was to have research and intervention go in tandem with each other. The final research question which we shall go on to discuss in this

section sought to take a curative approach to the young people's absence from school. It looked at whether adopting a social capital analysis of those factor and issues identified by the young people and their parents could inform an approach to their re-engagement in some form of education and training. This necessitated a two dimensional approach. In the first instance it required an analysis of the factors and issues from a social capital perspective, to identify whether a lack of the appropriate kind of social capital was acting as a barrier to the young person's re-engagement. In the second instance it necessitated the researcher utilising the social capital concept of linking social capital in a more pragmatic way. This would be achieved by using the researcher to provide outreach to the young people and their family. The aim was to provide information about educational options, and provide a link to guide them through the process to achieve those options. In other words using the researcher to network with them provides the educational currency or social capital which would assist the young person's re-engagement.

Whilst the parents recognised that the young person not being at school was a big issue for them, they had limited awareness of other potential educational options. In relation to these young people who had gone missing from school it was not until the researcher provided knowledge of other educational alternatives that parents appreciated there were options available, to help the young person re-engage. As table 11 indicates, parents were feeling somewhat adrift and unsure how to solve the problem of their child's non-attendance. Educational systems and processes are complex, and more so when one is out of the system, particularly when most of the resources you need are located within it. These families did not appear to have the networks that would allow them to link back in and so they were left feeling quite powerless.

In order to address the first dimension to ascertain whether adopting a social capital analysis of these factors and issues could help, it is necessary to further interrogate some of the research findings that emerged during the course of the research. In doing so it is necessary to look at not only who tried to help them but what did they tried to do.

4.6 Young people's views on who tried to help.

Both the young people and their parents were asked if anybody had tried to help them get back to school and how successful this had been. The young people mentioned several people who tried to provide assistance to get them to return to school. These included social workers ($n=4$), attendance officer ($n=1$), young carers organisation ($n=1$) mum ($n=2$) teacher ($n=1$) and one unidentified person ($n=1$). The type of support that was offered fell into one of the following four main categories.

- Physically taking them to school.
- Spoke to them about another educational placement (in general terms only).
- Letter from school suggesting they would be better off going to college.
- Talked about 'other things' (unspecified).

One young person felt that the support they received from Young Carers was helpful, in that *"she tells me things to dae and that"* (Pupil 8). The majority of young people did not feel that any of the other professionals involved had been helpful to them. For example one comment was that the social worker *"didnae tell me anything about jobs and things.....no he wisnae helpful"*. (Pupil 5). However, one young person commented positively that the social worker *"made me feel really motivated"* (Pupil 7), but not sufficiently motivated to go back to school. Of these young people three specifically mentioned that the researcher (Educational Psychologist) coming to visit them had been helpful in telling them what the options were. They felt it would help them get into some type of educational provision *"you came and visited my house and are going to try and get me into X....."* an educational and vocational training initiative (Pupil 2).

4.7 Parent's views on who tried to help

Parents too identified a range of people who attempted to help as detailed in table 12. Whilst there were a number of people who tried to help e.g. school, social work and even their child's peers, these were not felt to be effective. School provided for

some emotional support or alerting them to the child's attendance. There was also an inference with one parent, that their parenting was responsible, and school had invited them into school to attend a parenting course. What the parents found useful was when the attendance officer or social worker brought the researcher, which they valued because the researcher was "*someone who could provide us with information*" (n-6), as exemplified in the following comment "*you told us about things he could do....nobody told us that. We never heard of any options till X decided to get you*" "*you told us what we could*". There was almost a tangible sense of relief from the parents that someone had appeared who could possibly help, with one parent commenting "*when I got a phone call to say you were coming today I was all over the moon*' ... '*I was at my wits end*' (Parent 5).

Figure 11 Parental views on who tried to help.

This is presented on the next page.

Parent Identifier	No of responses	Agency	Emerging theme	Extract from comments
5,6	2	School	Provision of emotional support	<i>“He phones to see how I am and how I’m coping. I took a nervous breakdown. They have been brilliant with me”.</i>
9	1	School	Alerting parent to young person’s attendance	<i>“ was phoning up and telling me when he wisnae at school”.</i>
9	1	School	Offer of parenting classes	<i>“I got a letter a couple of weeks ago to go and attend secondary school parenting”.</i>
1, 10	2	Social work	Trying to encourage child back to school	<i>“Over the last couple of months she’s tried”.</i>
10, 4	1	Child’s friends	Providing information on alternative schools	<i>“We tried a few other options we heard from his friends and whatever like Spark of Genius and I actually went right over and they said I needed a Psychologist. I went right into their offices”.</i>
1,2,3,4,7,8,	6	Bringing someone who could provide information on potential educational options	Researcher	<i>“Told us about things he could do nobody told us that. / we never hear of any options until X decided to get you/ you told us what we could do”.</i>

4.8 Young people views about the possibility of returning to school

As part of the third strand of the research question the young people were also asked if they would consider a return to school. Only one responded in the affirmative saying yes they would return to school, and five saying no with four saying maybe they would return. A total of five young people said definitely not, with three commenting that they had *“just been off too long too hard to go back”* (Pupil 4). A total of four young people commented that they maybe go back, but it would depend on which one (school) as there were certain ones they would be unable to attend: a reference to territorial issues (Pupil 9). Whilst another young person stated that a barrier to their return was that they had *“nae school stuff”*, a reference to lack of school clothing.

4.9 Parental views about the possibility of the young person returning to school

Nine of the 10 parents interviewed felt that their young person would not now return to secondary school, because they were out too long as reflected in the following comment *“they’ve left it too long that X settled into no going to school”*, with one parent saying that they did not know if their child would return to secondary school. The inference being that there should have been earlier intervention.

Parents and young people were asked if they knew what other educational options may be available. Of the ten young people asked eight had no idea and two had some idea of what would be available, having heard through *“pals”*. Eight out of the ten parents interviewed stated that they did not know what other options were available. Of the two parents who had some idea of what was available one knew only about the possibility of special school, whilst the other had learned about a possible option through a friend of her son’s. There seemed to be a lack of awareness of other routes into education, what these might be or how to access

them. There was a sense that the parents were keen to support their child back into school, but did not know how to go about it.

In response to a discussion with the researcher about other possible alternative educational routes, the young people were asked if they would like to consider some of the options discussed with the researcher. All ten of the parents and young people expressed the view that they would like to consider one of the educational provisions discussed. The researcher provided information on these options. The researcher undertook the role of a linking social tie to bridge them into some form of education or training. This involved networking with them to provide information on options; how to access them; and facilitate their movement through the educational process.

This necessitated providing outreach to them with a social worker or school attendance officer to provide information on what could potentially be available and completing the necessary back ground information in terms of 5-14 Levels. This was necessary in order to complete application forms on their behalf for the local authority and more generally advocating on their behalf. It also involved the researcher preparing them for interviews and physically accompanying them to interviews, It became very apparent in the course of acting as a linking social tie that the young people required this level of support and scaffolding, with one young person stating that *“I wouldnae have gone by myself”*. My own perception is that as adults we sometimes forget that some young people lack confidence in new situations particularly when they have been out of school for a long time.

4.10 Outcome of intervention in terms of re-engagement with education

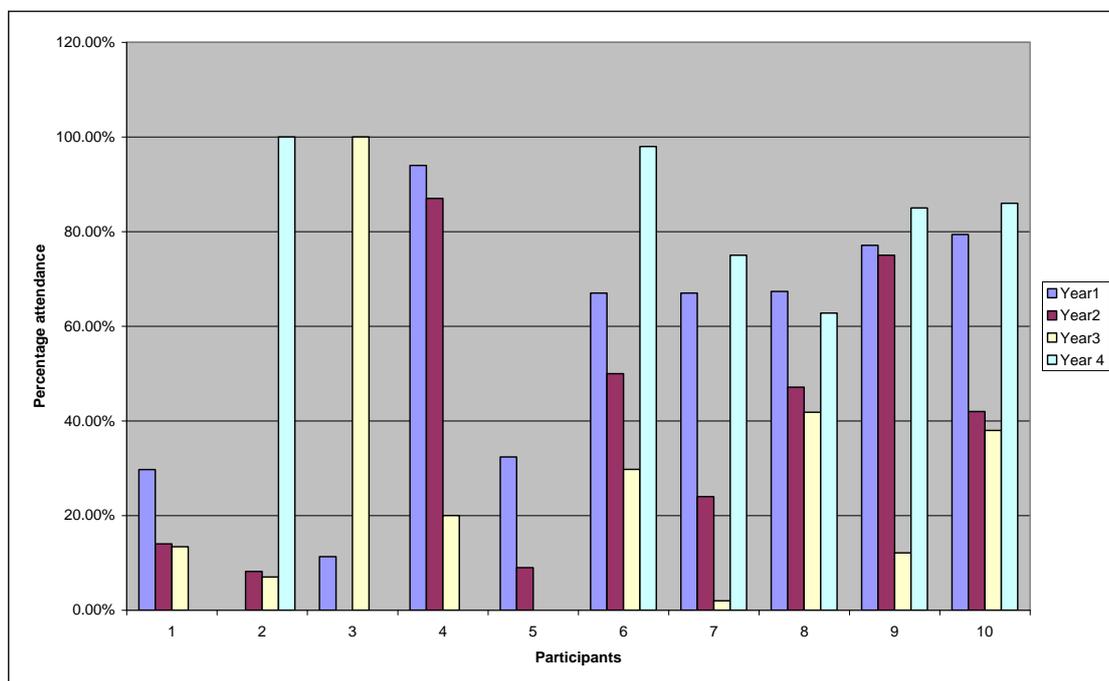


Figure 12 Attendance levels prior to and following intervention.

The results indicate that 6 of the young people in year 4 increased attendance to between 60 and 100% as reflected in figure 12 above, with the young person in year 3 increasing attendance to 100%. Three young people did not re-engage. Of these one young person was prevented from doing so due to unavailability of an appropriate training place within the authority, whilst two did not engage and subsequently moved to another authority and could not be tracked. Figure 13 below provides details of the positive destinations which the young people who did re-engage moved onto. There may have been a variety of factors which contributed to this other than the research intervention, however several of the young people did move onto a work or training placement. It is important to note that due to time restrictions this is a snapshot taken a month after re-entering the educational or vocational placement.

Young person1	Did not take up the offer partially due to local authority factors
Young person2	EVIP Vocational training hair and beauty course
Young person3	Went to an Additional Learning Needs Secondary School
Young person4	Moved out of the authority
Young person 5	Moved out of the authority
Young person 6	Vocational training hair and beauty course
Young person 7	Vocational training construction course
Young Person 8	Back at school sitting exams
Young Person 9	Vocational Sport and recreation course
Young person10	Vocational Sport and recreation course

Figure 13 Illustrates the Educational or vocational provision the young person engaged with.

As can be seen from the table above six of the 10 young people re-engaged with E..... which is an Educational and Vocational Training Initiative run by the Local Authority in conjunction with local colleges. One young person took up a place in an ALN secondary school. It is particularly worth noting that one of the young people, who was a young carer successfully, returned to school, and was very well supported by the school in very practical ways. It is also important to recognise that these were the outcomes noted at a particular point in time. It would have been interesting to note how long they maintained the placement, but due to time frames this could not be followed up further.

Chapter 5. Reaching your destination: a discussion of co-constructed knowledge.

In the discussion which follows the perspectives provided by the young people and their parents, are explored. The aim of which is to answer the research questions which were concerned with looking at the factors involved when young people went missing from school and the issues this raised for the young people and their parents. It investigated what was acting as barriers to their return to school or training. Further it explored whether analysing these issues and factor from an ecological and social capital perspective could inform an intervention, to support their route back into education or training. To guide the reader this chapter, as with previous ones, will be structured in line with the research questions. It will also include a section on methodological considerations; personal reflections of the researcher; implications for practice and further research opportunities. In presenting this discussion the reader is reminded of the social constructionist basis of this research, and by implication the role of the researcher in co-constructing this interpretation of the young people and parents views.

A diminishing attendance

In looking at the overall pattern of attendance of the young people who contributed to this research, it is interesting to note that despite seven out of the ten young people, expressing a positive view about secondary school, all of them showed a diminishing school attendance over the secondary school stages. This was particularly marked at secondary year 2 and year 3. This trend reflects the Scottish Executive (2007) publication entitled 'Included Engaged and Involved', which also points to a decline in school attendance over the secondary school stages up to year 4. Some would argue that this decline in secondary school attendance may be

related to *“the structure of the curriculum, its mainly academic focus and the way that subject choices are presented in secondary years 2 and 3”*. (Scottish Government, 2007, p. 24). Such a perspective has contributed in part to the development of a Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland which aims to introduce more vocational opportunities at the secondary stages. As we will go onto discuss there were a range of factors which may have contributed to these young people going missing from school, the majority of which did not appear to be curricular based for this particular group of young people or their parents.

5.1 Factors involved when the young person went missing from school

Parents (n-5) and young people (n-6) highlighted bullying/intimidation as the main reason why the young person went missing from school. An association between bullying and school non-attendance has previously been noted by Reid (2008; Reid, Challoner, Lancet, Jones, Rhysiart & Challoner, 2010) and the National Attendance and Behaviour Review (NBAR, 2008) with Reid (2010, p.101) reiterating that the *“link between bullying and non-attendance is a common denominator”*. The NBAR study suggested that the link between bullying and school non-attendance merited further research. In the current research project bullying /intimidation seemed to occur primarily outside of the school building either on the way to and from school, or outside the school premises e.g. at lunch time when they went to the local shops or food van. This despite school staff and senior school managers being very high profile in the school and in the neighbourhood, prior to and during breaks and at the end of the school day school.

Some of the young people, who had been bullied, claimed to be frightened of going to school, a view that was backed up by their parent who had been interviewed separately from the young person. This suggested that there was a degree of consistency between them in relation to this. There was also a sense that it was experienced by some in the school building, but this occurred in a less open obvious way and took the form of verbal threats. Bullying can have a major impact on the

victims and research has shown that it can impact on social and emotional well-being (Esbenson & Carson, 2009) and anxiety issues (Sourander et al., 2007); loneliness and may increase the risk of suicide (O'Moore, 2000). It has the greater impact on those who have been repeatedly bullied (Esbenson & Carson, 2009). Their research also indicated that *"bullying was more prevalent than is commonly reported"*. (Esbenson & Carson, p. 221, 2009).

The type of bullying/intimidation experienced varied. In some instances it took the form of name calling, threatening behaviour, taking personal items from the young person e.g. jewellery and in some instances actual physical attack. There was a sense both in talking to the young people and their parents and in their responses that a key aspect of the bullying/intimidation was related to issues of territorialism. By this is meant that young people from different geographical areas, intimidated and threatened other young people from different areas *"people that fight with each other from different schemes"* (Young person 5), with another young person commenting *"boys started to threaten me....followed me from school"* (Young person 4). This was a real concern to the young people so affected, and it came across very clearly during the structured discussion with them.

There were two young people who said they experienced bullying/intimidation, but this was not reflected in their parents' responses, which indicated that either they were not aware of it or the parent had attributed the young person's non-attendance to something else. There were also some young people, mainly male who had chosen not to say anything to the teacher's about the bullying, due to not being what they termed *"a grass"*. This seems to back up previous studies related to bullying, which suggest that young people, particularly males do not always seek help for bullying (Oliver & Candappa, 2007), with young people viewing telling as reflecting personal weakness as reflected in the Timlin et al., (2003) study. One can imagine the stress bullying generates in the young person travelling to and from school and even within the school. It should not necessarily surprise us that in terms of a fight or flight response, some may choose to escape the school environment.

Yet as a professional psychologist working with secondary schools there still tends to be reluctance among some schools, to acknowledge bullying as a contributory factor in young people going missing from school. Is this because they are not aware of it? Are they not sure of how to deal with it or do they just see it as part and parcel of school life?

Bullying is a complex “*social phenomenon*” (Thronberg, 2011), but what is clear is that it can have a marked negative impact on young people. They need to feel safe going to school, and as Terranova (2009, p.254) points out being the victim of intimidation is “*one of the most salient social stressors that youth face*”. It can lead to them experiencing depressive symptoms, difficulties with attendance, and increased levels of anxiety (Rueger et al., 2011). The potential impact on the young person is reflected by one of the young women in this study who became extremely distressed each morning when her mum tried to get her to go to school and also with the researcher during a home visit. There is some evidence from a study undertaken by Rueger et al., (2011) to suggest that victimisation may impact immediately from the onset with girls, but the duration aspect of victimisation incidents was important for males in relation to impacting on them emotionally. This emotional impact was reflected in this research by one parent who stated the following in relation to their daughter, who had been the victim of bullying/intimidation “*it was just fear after that, and she didn’t want to go back to school*” (Parent 5). Rueger et al., (2011) stress the importance of early intervention in identifying who is being victimised.

Two of young people in this current research study illustrated that sometimes when they did speak out, the bullying did not stop: “*I was going to the meetings and they asked how it is? I stopped going (to school) and I told them. They said they would get it sorted (a reference to the bullying) but it never happened*” (Young person 9). This young man was also honest enough to admit that he too had become involved in bullying but stopped going to school because he could be a “*wee bit frightened*” and it was “*nothing to do with the teachers..... that’s the reason I left because of the pupils*”.

The bullying/intimidation raised a number of questions, particularly since seven out of ten pupils, who were previously positive about school, were now negative about school. Four of whom had experienced a change in perspective from positive to negative following transition to secondary school. It raised a question as to possible contributory factors for this? One such thought was that at the primary education stage they would be in their own local geographical area in most cases, but on their move to secondary school the likelihood was that they would have to cross geographical boundaries. This may have increased their anxiety levels, real or imagined, due to the possibility of territorial issues. Whilst not specifically looked at in this study it is perhaps an area worthy of further research and investigation.

Whilst not suggesting that this would be the only reason for young people opting out of school the issue of territorialism was identified as a contributory factor by six of the young people and five of their parents. In the latter part of the project when discussing other educational options with young people the first question they would ask was about the geographical location of the prospective placement. The inference being that if it was not in an area they perceived as safe they would not go. Interestingly in this study, whilst a number of parents were aware of bullying only two parents had contacted the school directly about it. One of the parents felt that it had been effectively dealt with, whilst the other felt it had not. Certainly it was very apparent from discussions with the young people contributing to the study that it was a very emotive subject for them. It is also interesting to consider why so few parents had not contacted the school.

Peer group factors

A number of young people highlighted lack of peer relationships as a factor involved in going missing from school, yet there was also an underlying inference that this impacted on them emotionally and made them feel vulnerable, particularly

since a number had identified bullying /intimidation issues. The importance of peer support was highlighted by young person 9, who indicated that lack of peer group impacted on him *“Some of my other pals stopped going tae and I thought it would be dodgy fur us, cause of all the other people from different areas”*. Apart from the issue of bullying as previously stated, peer group is very important to adolescents. Secondary schools are big complex institutions and adolescents can be quite self-conscious if not seen to have a friendship group. Again this is an issue which emerges frequently in professional practice as an Educational Psychologist working in secondary schools. Yet the significance of this for young people is often overlooked by schools.

Whilst the young people highlighted lack of peer group in relation to feelings of loneliness or vulnerability, this taken in conjunction with the concerns about bullying previously stated, can place some young people in a very vulnerable position possibly contributing to them wanting to opt out. From a social capital perspective, peer relationships and networks can either enhance young people’s school experience or act to marginalise them through social exclusion from the group. Only one parent, perceived peer based factors as contributing to the young person’s difficulty with attending school. Their view differed from that of the young person in that the focus was on the negative impact of the peer group in contributing to the young person going missing from school *“ things have gone downhill since he started going about with this group ”* (Parent 9).

School related factors

The findings confirmed previous studies which highlight the contribution which school based factors have on school disengagement (Malcolm, Davidson & Kirk, 2003). Yet there was not one particular factor that was prominent but a range of factors. In terms of personal biases, the researcher had expected dislike of school and teachers to have perhaps been more prominent but this was not borne out in the research results. Also not borne out was the expectation that the young people who went missing from school would have been those at Level A and B of the 5-14

levels (Figure 2). The young people in this study had a range of attainment abilities mainly at levels C and D, with one at level E for reading, which suggested that they were operating within the average range of ability, if in fact the levels were accurate. The one young person who was working at level A, a standard expected by the end of the primary 3 stage, expressed the opinion that she found the work in school hard. What was clear was that there were a number of factors which impacted on the young people going missing e.g. discipline, class work and teachers. Only one parent highlighted school factors as being a contributory factor. Yet in recounting the school based factors, the young people did not present with the same emotive overtones as when they were discussing the bullying/ intimidation. In fact a number of the young people emphasized specifically that the reason they went missing from school was because of the other children not the teachers.

Transitioning back after absence

The issue of transitioning back after absence was also provided as a reason for going missing from school, and this seemed to reflect a self-consciousness on behalf of the two young people who identified this as a contributory factor “*it is embarrassing being off and then back in*”. They were sensitive about walking back into classes they had not been in for a while, and catching up with work. In particular teachers asking them publically where they had been was a concern for the young people, probably due in part to feelings of self-consciousness. Interestingly this was not identified as a factor by any of the parents.

Family related factors

Only one young person identified family related issues as contributory factors to being missing from school. In this instance it was a young man whose father had alcohol dependency issues and was in fact now terminally ill. It was very clear in

talking to this young man that he was trying to protect his dad from his drinking and the young man himself was under a great deal of emotional stress, with his eyes filling up with tears when he spoke about his dad and had *“tried hiding the bottles but it didn’t work (Young person 1)*. Yet another young person who had equally difficult family circumstances chose not to highlight this, and located the source of his difficulties as being due to himself (Young person 8). Parent 3 also highlighted his ex-wives addiction problems which had caused him to move his daughter’s school and take her to live with him, yet his young daughter who was pregnant had not spoken about this. This seems to confirm the research by Reay (2006) which suggested that young people can be reluctant to share home factors with schools. Another young man, whose family had to be moved out of the area for their own protection by the police, chose not to mention this as a contributory factor although over time in working with him he did disclose this, but did not perceive it as a factor in him to go missing from school. This despite the fact that the whole family had to relocate.

What came across quite strongly was that many of the young people had significant family based difficulties and these were not always shared with school and tended to be kept private. Nor did not they want to attribute blame to the family, even when over time they discussed these issues with the researcher, there was no sense of them seeing these family factors as causal. The exception being the one young man who had identified a family related factor, in relation to his a fathers addiction problems. Again this has implications for schools in terms of how to support such young people.

Within person factors

Three young people identified within person factors as contributing to their absence from school. They seemed to be aware of their own contribution to being missing from school, as opposed to solely blaming others and indicated some level of personal insight and honesty. Something that Morrow et al., 2003, had also commented on in relation to their research study previously mentioned. The within

child factors identified differed in that some had difficulty getting up for school; some commented on their difficulty with the curriculum and one young girl identified her pregnancy although she stated that “*she wanted out anyway*” (Young person 3) - a reference to school. The within person factors they identified reflected a wide variety of perspectives and complexities. This can be best exemplified with reference to young person number 8, who I shall call Chris. He suggested that he was as much to blame in that he used to “*balm up*” the teachers. A colloquialism that indicated he deliberately set out to annoy teachers and at times was overwhelmed with anger when they tried to tell him what to do. This was also the young man whose house was visited but the parents were not at home.

In getting to know him a bit better over the course of the research project it appeared that some of this anger he spoke about was due in part to his life circumstances. He was a young carer who looked after a younger sibling and was involved with a Young Carer’s organisation. Both his father and elder brother had mental health difficulties, with his father spending time in prison and his mum with addiction issues. On entering his house he was very welcoming but kept apologising for the state of the house which was cold and very poorly furnished. Yet despite this he was a very resilient young man who was keen to get on and who had aspirations for a better future.

His situation highlighted the dangers of trying to look for simplistic reasons as to why young people go missing from school. Life is complex and from an ecological perspective there are complex arrays of factors which impact on people’s lives at a number of different levels. Whilst recognising that, it is important to identify risk factors, as a practising Educational Psychologist it simply affirmed my view of the central importance of negotiating practical solution focused approaches to supporting young people.

Three of the parents also highlighted within young person factors but these related to child personality factors e.g. shyness or difficulty with authority, with one highlighting their child's pregnancy. In relation to this young woman, despite her pregnancy she wanted to continue her education and her father had stated that he was going to help look after the baby to allow her to do that.

Parental self - perceptions of blame

In the same way as young people had implied within person factors that contributed to the young person going missing from school, two parents felt that they themselves could have been part of the problem by not being firm enough with the young person and expressed feelings of guilt about this.

5.2 Summary

Feedback from the young people and their parents about why they went missing from school highlighted a range of factors which may have contributed to them going missing from school. The young people rated the three main factors as intimidation/bullying, within young person factors, and school based factors. Other factors highlighted were lack of peer relationships, family factors and transitioning back after school. Parents also highlighted bullying as the main issue, which seems to point to this being a major contributory factor, for more than half of the young people. Parents also identified within child factors but this differed from the young people in that the focus was on personality factors e.g. shyness and health i.e. pregnancy Only one parent highlighted school based factors, with two identifying family factors and two taking personal responsibility for their child going missing from school. So what does this tell us?

It seems to confirm the view that young people go missing from school for a variety of reasons, and they are not necessarily a homogeneous group. As Steer (2000, p.2) commented "*they each have their own story to tell*". Yet with this group of young people bullying/intimidation was a key factor, perhaps not the only one but certainly a significant one. Two additional points were highlighted by parents (n-3)

which are worth commenting on. Some parents commented that there had been a gradual deterioration in attendance during the secondary school stage. Whilst other parents (n-2) complained that they felt that there should have been some form of intervention at an earlier stage by professionals. They felt that this may have prevented their child's school deteriorating to the extent that it had.

5.3 Issues raised due to the young people's absence from school

This component of the research question was designed to illuminate issues which being missing from school had for the young person and their parent. What was striking was that the young people and their parents, viewed being missing from school as a negative experience, a view that has previously been highlighted by Reid (1985). They could highlight no positive benefits from being out of school and in fact some parents expressed their anxiety about the young person not being in school in terms of being *"sick with worry"* over it. Issues related to boredom were highlighted by the young people (n-6). This raises the question as to why if it was such a negative experience did they not choose to return to school? Particularly since the majority of them (n-6) had expressed the view that they were concerned about the implications for future job prospects. This indicated that they had positive aspirations about the kind of future they wanted and this included getting a job, as reflected in the following comment by one young person *"I want to get back to school in case when I'm older I don't get a good job"*.

A high proportion of the parents (n-8) were equally concerned about the implications which being missing from school would have in relation to their child's future job prospects. There was a sense that they had positive aspirations for their child and wanted them to have better opportunities than they had experienced in relation to employment. One parent commenting in relation to her own work history: *"you're not wanting that for him"* (working in a shop). Whilst another two were concerned about not getting the chance to sit formal exams, which again seemed to be linked to future aspirations related to work. Despite giving the clear message that being out of school was not a positive position to be in and the emphasis of the parent and young person in relation to it limiting job prospects, why

were they still missing from school? There seemed to be something acting as a barrier to the young person's return to education?

Concern was also expressed by two young people about the possibility that their parents might be prosecuted due to the young people being out of school and were quite anxious about this. A parent also worried about the young person going to a Children's hearing due to being out of school, and worried that their child might be taken into care.

Parental feelings of not being listened to came through very strongly from over half of the mothers (n=5). Such a perspective concurs with research undertaken by Reay (2000), which suggested that working class women often come away from school meetings feeling as if they haven't been listened to. Reay (2004) suggesting that mothers personal histories and experiences with education may influence their confidence in becoming involved in their child's schooling, as exemplified in the following quote *"for people to listen... if I got help when I first asked he would have been back at school maybe"* (Parent 10). This perspective mirrors that of Horvat et al., (2003), whose study suggested that non- middle class parents may lack the appropriate educational specific social capital which would support them in dealing with school issues. This is reflected in this study where there was a sense that parents did not know where to turn for help with one parent stating that she *"wanted people to listen"* and *"naebody tells you..... naebody contacts you and says to you"*. There was an implication here that someone would come to them. These latter comments a reference to the lack of information they had about other educational options for their child.

There was a feeling that parents were unsure how to get their child back into education and they seemed to feel that there was a lack of information about what to do and how to proceed. They were to a certain extent out of the school loop, and unsure how to go about re-engaging with education. That is not meant to say that

there was no involvement from outside agencies but these agencies appeared not to be giving them the information that the parents felt might have helped. A perspective which was also evident in the young people's responses. This view is exemplified in the comments made by two of the parents in relation to social work involvement (n-2) in Figure 10. They were unclear of the role of the social worker and seemingly expected more active involvement, given that their child was on a supervision order. There appeared to be some confusion about professionals' roles and when the child was placed on a supervision order, expected that this would lead to more active and regular contact with social work. There was a belief that the social worker would find a school placement *"there was a social worker turned up and I hadn't seen her before and she didn't know anything about X" her son (Parent 7). "She said he wasn't at risk enough for them to come out and it was only school"*, which seems to infer Education in that instance was not a high priority. Even when parents discovered that they needed to access an Educational Psychologist, for placements they did not know how to go about accessing this service.

These findings seemed to suggest that the parents in this study had various degrees of bonding social capital within their family microsystem and networks, as highlighted in discussions with them. Four parents also had network links with other microsystems e.g. social work and in three other instances the child's school. The type of support provided tended to be emotional support, information about attendance or the offer of parenting classes. In relation to the parenting class the implication being that in some way they were lacking as a parent, which was how the parent had interpreted it in this particular instance, and as a result chose not to attend. Approximately half of the parents had no support from anyone other than their immediate families, or a friend of the young person (n-1). They had networks but these seemed to be kinship based, and did not network into the school or education, which reflected the research by Horvat et al., (2003), who suggested that parents coming from a non –middle class background had difficulty in interfacing with schools, when problems occurred, and often had limited support to deal with these issues. This seeming to highlight a differential in relation to qualitative

differences in type and breadth of their networks, in line with Bourdieu's (1986), view that these can impact on equality of access to institutions such as schools. It is not that they are lacking in social capital, but that they do not have access to the type of educational specific currency social capital, which would allow them to interface with the school. This is not helped by the fact that most resources are school based.

5.4 A social capital analysis to inform an approach to their re-engagement.

During the course of this research with the young people and their parents it was clear that the young people were reliant on their parents to advise them on how to move things on in relation to education. Yet it was equally clear that the parents were unsure how to go about this *“we don't know about any of these kinds of things. Naebody contacts you and says to you.”* (Parent 4). Another parent took action into her own hands and turned up at the door of a non-mainstream school with her son *“we tried a few ourselves that we heard of from his friends, like school X, and I actually went over there and they said I had to see a psychologist. I went right into their office”*.

There had been people involved with the young people and their parents, but the type of support provided did not provide the kind of knowledge of what was required in terms of educational options and how to access it them, to support the young person to re-engage with education or training. Some of the emotional support offered was appreciated by the young people particularly the support offered to one young man (Young person 9) by the young carers organization. Even the emotional support offered by individual school staff was appreciated with one parent commenting that the head teacher *“ couldn't have been nicer”* (Parent 5). Nevertheless, out of the ten parents eight had no idea of what might be available to allow their child to continue their education and equally important how to access it.

The parents identified concern about their child's future linked to future job prospects and lack of information about educational options as their two highest rated issues, each of which were identified by eight out of the ten parents. It was clear that the parents had aspirations for their children, but did not know how best to help their children get back into education. What they found helpful was when the researcher visited and was able to provide information on what educational and vocational options were available to the young person and how the process for securing a placement worked. The researcher was able to facilitate this for the parent by providing information on a range of options and offering to support them and the young person through the process.

Some of these vocational options available could have been accessed by the school, but being out with the school prevented them accessing these options. Even though the school liaison officer knew of these potential educational alternatives this had not been discussed with the families. When this was queried with the school the response was that this was not part of their role? It appeared to me that part of the difficulty these parents had was not their unwillingness to support their child but their inability to access a network or linking person, who could bridge them back into the system.

There was clearly a sense that the parents in this study were unsure about how to interface with the educational system to support their child. The networks they had were mainly family based, and did not bridge into the education system. They therefore had limited access to the networks which would facilitate this. The knowledge constructed as a result of this research seems to resonate with the research study undertaken by Horvat et al., (2003), which indicated that parents, who do not come from a middle class background, have restricted networks to support them in interfacing with the school. Whilst this is quite a wide generalisation, this present study indicates these parents showed a lack of confidence in initiating contact with schools. They were also unfamiliar with the educational processes and the differing professional roles as shown in their

expectation that the social worker could get their child into a school. Even when there was some residual link with the school the type of capital that this produced was more in terms of emotional support and did not provide knowledge or information what the options were. To an extent they appeared to lack the type of social capital and support that would allow them to support their child. Nor, with the exception of one parent did they have the confidence to be proactive, in looking for support from the school.

5.5 Impact of the intervention using the researcher/Educational Psychologist as a linking social tie.

Of the 10 young people only one stated that he wanted to return to mainstream secondary. This was the young man who was involved with the young carers and who was very keen to get formal qualifications. He was also the young man whose parents had not been at home when visited. This young man was operating as a young carer in the family setting and was quite open in stating that sometimes things just got *“too much”* for him. Once school was informed of the pressures this young man was under they took steps to support him back into school including very practical things e.g. getting the home economics teachers to do his washing as he had no washing machine at home, which perhaps reflects positively on the ethos of that particular school.

What was apparent in working to get these young people back into some form of education and training was the frustration that the researcher experienced in overcoming some of the structural barriers which existed within the local authority in getting the young person back into a placement e.g. protocols, time frames, criteria for admission and the fact that the young person had a poor or non-existent attendance record. Despite this six young people were successful in obtaining a vocational placement, and one young man returned to school. Three young people did not re-engage. In one instance it was due to there not being an available place within the local authority. In this situation he was referred on to Skills Development

Scotland for support. In the other two instances the young people was unable to engage although why remained unclear and they moved home to another local authority.

5.6 Research process and design issues: lessons learned.

This research project was a very powerful learning situation and raised a number of issues in relation to research process and design, which merit further comment.

Perhaps the main issue which emerged in this research concerned the researcher's perception that through sensitivity in interactions with the young people and their parents; use of language; and choice of research design these young people and their parents would be contributors to the research process. In terms of researcher reflexivity, this was a quite naïve perception, and perhaps reflected the limited research experience of the researcher. Despite the use of the term contributors they were in fact operating more as participants during the research process, which was being undertaken on behalf of these young people as opposed to with these young people and their parents'.

It challenged my thinking about how to undertake research with young people in future. Perhaps partly out of fear of giving up control of the research process, a research design was utilised which left the researcher in control of the direction of the research, to a certain extent. In undertaking future research, it would be my intention to explore working alongside young people as co-researchers, in a more participatory approach to research. Lois, Jedloo, and Latour (2010), offer a definition of participatory research "*as a collaborative undertaking aimed at more involvement of the community being studied in all aspects of the research process. It is carried out with and by the research subjects rather than on*". They highlight some of the difficulties which they experienced in adopting this approach e.g. the difficulties the young people had in involving other participants and the limited depth to the interviews the young people undertook.

Nevertheless, they felt it was a worthwhile approach, but stress the importance of training for the co-researchers and being creative in how you work with them. From my own perspective, one of the strengths of using young people as co-researchers would be in the design and methodology of the research, by allowing a different perspective to be taken, i.e. that of the young people. Whilst there are potential ethical issues in relation to confidentiality of information elicited, this could be addressed during the design of the study in relation to the anonymity of the data.

A second factor related to the fact that a formal research journal was not kept during the course, although paper copies of field notes were kept, which often got lost. Keeping a formal research diary would be a priority in any future research. To a certain extent, due to the fact that contact with the contributors was extensive, this helped develop a trusting relationship and the young people became more open in expressing their thoughts. This allowed for getting to know them really well, and served as another way of cross referencing the responses they gave during the structured discussions. Nevertheless, in any future projects, a research diary would be crucial in improving the transparency and credibility of the research.

A third omission relates to the baseline of attendance taken on the young people over the first 4 years of secondary schooling. In retrospect, it would have been helpful to have looked at the attendance rates in the year prior to their transfer to secondary school, to see if this had been an issue at the primary school stages. An example of having to be very clear about the parameters of the research before getting to the write up stage. A fourth issue worth commenting on was my decision to record not only the number of parents who commented on specific issues but also the frequency of comments made relating to that issue. Whilst my rationale for this was to highlight the extent to which this was a priority for the parents, it now feels that it was a relic from my previous quantitative research background and was unnecessary, given the epistemological and ontological perspective of this research and the methodology employed.

Point six, relates to measuring the impact of the intervention where a decision was taken to measure this in terms of improved attendance and re-engagement with some form of education or training. With hindsight there are a number of things I should have done to improve the credibility of the findings. Firstly, rather than solely looking at their engagement in relation to attendance 1 month after entry to the new placement, it should have been followed up at the 3 month level to see if the placement had been maintained. Secondly, it would have provided more richness to the data if the research had attempted to capture the parent and young people's views of the young person having re-entered education

Ethical issues

An ethical dilemma arose during the course of the research when a young person was visited at home, but his parents were not present although his social worker was. Young people of 12 years or over under Scottish law are able to give consent on decisions which affect them although our psychological service practice, suggests that parental permission be sought for young people under 16 years. In this particular situation, knowledge of the parent's difficulties meant that it was unlikely that they would be in a position to give informed consent. The young man however, was keen for support. As the social worker had already turned up and the young person had asked for us to continue as planned the decision was taken to do so. In this instance the needs of the young person took precedence over the service guidelines, although still within the requirements of Scottish law. This highlighting the need to make ethical judgements, but ensuring that you have a rationale for why you took that decision.

Issues in relation to power were highlighted during the course of the project in particular the fact that the young people had been out of school for some time when the researcher visited. Being a perceived authority figure and with power linked to the role, during the course of the research, the researcher reflected on the degree to which parental consent to participate in the research was fully informed at the initial

stages. Although an intervention would have been taken whether or not they agreed to the research project, the parents and young people may not have been clear about this. This issue of informed consent would be given more careful thought in future research.

That there were power differential between the young people, their parents and the researcher is clear. The research itself was premised on linking social capital, which entails linking with someone in a more powerful position. Power, though can be defined in many ways. Is it measured by success; knowledge; ability to enforce your will on others; or how you communicate with others? The researcher takes the view that power is produced in interaction with others and in how you treat them in that interaction. Whilst there was a power differential between the researcher and contributors in the research in terms of knowledge base of educational processes and resources, there was a two way sharing of information or knowledge exchange. The use of a dialogic approach to interactions during the research process served to balance the power differentials as did the young people and their parents' belief that the researcher was trying to act on their best interests.

It had been planned to provide feedback to the research contributors at the end of the research project but this was not fully implemented, as some of the young people moved out of the authority, with informal feedback given to the rest of the contributors in my contact with them. The young people who managed to re-engage with Education or vocational training, and their parents viewed attaining a placement as a successful completion of the project In future though it would be good practice to have feed back to the group in a more formal rather than an informal way.

5.7 Implications for practice

There are no simple solutions to young people going missing from school. This research project highlighted the variety of factors that can contribute to a young person going missing from school and the need to take a very solution focused; ecological; and social capital approach to the nature of those difficulties. Punitive approaches to attendance e.g. referring the young people to the Children's reporter for poor attendance, just increases the pressure on families, who may already have significant a number of stressors in their life. The fact that some of the young people were worried about the possibility that their parent would have to go to court due to their non- attendance, whilst concerned about it, this did not encourage them to go back to school. Adopting a solution focused approach is perhaps more helpful and does not attribute blame.

There needs to be multi-level interventions to support young people who go missing from school and their parents.

- Increased transition planning with young people coming from primary which starts at the primary 6 level. To include opportunities to meet up with children from other primary schools e.g. activity weeks run in the secondary school over school holidays.
- Better monitoring and tracking of attendance both at the primary and secondary stages. Early intervention to address any issues which emerge.
- School liaison officers should be encouraged to discuss other possible alternatives when visiting young people who have been missing from school to show them what other options are available.
- There needs to be a range of initiatives which offer increasing levels of safety nets for young people in danger of going missing from school.
- Consulting with young people is a key aspect in current Educational legislation. Supporting young people to carry our supported research in schools to help develop our knowledge of bullying but also what the young people think would help?
- Research with parents to ascertain their views on what would support their involvement with the school community. Do all activities have to be school

located ? Could better use be made of local facilities, particularly in areas with poor levels of parental involvement.

- Information sheets for parents on how to access support routes for their child and who they could contact.
- Several young people in the study had major family stressors in their home environment, yet did not feel able to confide in teachers about this. It suggested the need for schools to look at finding out who in school a young person gets on well with, to perhaps take on a mentoring role with them. Peer support is also vital and it highlighted a potential role for training young people in solution focused approaches to support their peers.
- Bullying was highlighted as a major issue and has implications for schools, parents and professionals to consider how best to support this. The importance of a positive school climate where young people feel able to tell someone is important. The Nurturing School initiative may be a helpful tool.
- The parents views about not being listened to and not knowing where to turn, highlights a role for the school in terms of intervening early where they see a child's attendance deteriorating, and taking a dialogic and solution focused approach to working with parents to ensure parents are actually listened to, and their views taken into account.
- There is also the need to have a number of safety nets, in place when a child starts to go missing from school in order to ensure that opportunities are provided to maintain that link with school at a number of different levels. One way this could be achieved is to ensure that young people who are disengaging are brought up for discussion automatically at the multi-agency joint support team, to see how best to support the young person and keep a link open between home and school. A second way in which this could be done is by ensuring that when it becomes apparent that the young person is not going to come back into the school system that a meeting takes place, not necessarily in school, to make clear the other options that may be available, and the parent and young person should be supported in navigating the route towards that option. As Steer (2000, p.6) commented when looking at how to tackle disengagement you need to "*establish an*

equal relationship in which the participation of the young person is completely voluntary and they are entrusted with choices”.

- The issue of bullying/ intimidation, is a major concern, and obviously in this study impacted a great deal on the young people. Although the issue of bullying is given high priority, staff are not always aware of the extent to which it is occurring. Issues which can be used to address this include increasing opportunities for in-service training for staff on bullying; using some of the 5th and 6th year pupils as co-researchers to work with the young people to highlight bullying issues and elicit their suggestions as to what might help. This would include providing information on locations where the bullying takes place to ensure a high staff profile in those spaces and working collaboratively with the community police. Research suggests that where there is a supportive school ethos young people may feel more able to speak to staff about bullying.

- As mentioned earlier in the research report this project ran in parallel with my professional practice in the secondary school. During the period of the research a senior member of staff was given a remit to push forward the More Choice, More Chances agenda within the secondary school, to ensure positive destination for the young people. There were a number of issues highlighted in this research, that were felt to be helpful in moving this agenda on and these were operationalized within the school. All young people with diminishing school attendance were automatically brought to the multi-agency joint support team for discussion. The school became more proactive in providing outreach to young people, in collaboration with social work, educational psychology, health and school liaison officer. A wider range of vocational courses were developed to encourage young people who were disengaging to remain engaged and to entice those who for whatever reason had gone missing, to be supported back into some form of education

and training. The school also adopted a more solution focused approach to dealing with the young people and their parents.

5.8 Personal reflections

This research project taught me a lot about how to undertake research and how not to. Perhaps the strongest lesson was in terms of timing. Undertaking research over a protracted time is not cost effective and only generates additional work. The best strategy is to timetable in a period of time for each component part and keep to it. The process of the research itself was helpful in developing my skills base in areas such as; end note web; using on-line research engines and data bases; qualitative research methodology and developing writing skills. Writing has never been one of my strengths and tends to be 'convoluted'. Reviewing my writing alerted me to the style issues e.g. the overuse of terms such as *further*, *more*, *also* etc. Becoming more aware of these has developed my academic writing style.

The research also generated a lot of thought about what my epistemological position was and my view of the world, which led me down a social constructionist route. This resonated with my view of the world, which was reinforced through this project. It is easy to look in on a situation and make assumptions, but it is only when you are in there with young people and their families that you see the reality of their lived experiences. Even then it is only viewed through your lens. Human experience is complex, and there are many facets to it. Only by taking an ecological perspective can you hope to gain even a glimpse of their lived experience.

5.9 Areas for future research

It would be interesting to do a longitudinal study following a group of young people, moving from primary to secondary school, to look at their views of school and how these develop over the course of their school experience. It would also be

of interest to know the extent to which bullying / intimidation is an issue within this particular learning community at both primary and secondary level. The most interesting issue is how to improve links between schools and their parent community, to improve access for all. For this to happen schools need to become more aware of how their systems and processes can act as a barrier to parents, and work at ways to engage more fully with their communities. In relation to parent-school links and perceived qualitative differences in social capital, this would be an interesting topic area to undertake research in order to make schools more accessible for all parents, regardless of background.

5.10 Conclusion

This study sought to understand the issues and factors involved when a group of young people went missing from school. A social constructionist approach was taken to eliciting those views, using a qualitative methodology. Braun and Clarke's 6 point step to thematic analysis was adopted to analyse the data. The results indicated that the main reasons, given by parents and young people for going missing from school were bullying and intimidation. The next most common factors related within young person factors. Issues related to school for the young people also emerged although parental feedback suggested that family factors and the parent themselves may have contributed to them going missing from school. What was clear when working with these young people and their families was that there were a number of family stressors in the home, which were not always acknowledged by the young person or the school made aware of. Bullying/intimidation was however, a contributory factor for many of these young people going missing from school.

Issues raised by the young people and their parents, in being out of school suggested that both groups did not view it as a positive factor and were concerned about the implications for future job prospects, which suggested that they had positive aspirations. A social capital analysis of these issues and factors suggested that the parents and young people were keen to re-engage with school, but a

significant barrier to their re-entry to education or training was their isolation from school networks and information on what was available and possible routes to re-entry. It is suggested that their lack of appropriate social capital of the right type, i.e. education specific, was a major barrier to their re-engagement.

When an intervention was introduced using the researcher as a linking social tie between home and school six out of the ten young people manage to re-connect with education. Implications for professional practice and future research opportunities were discussed

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Appendix A

Information on research for parent and young person.

Dear parent or young person,

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. I am an Educational Psychologist who has an interest in young people who have stopped attending school and am going to be doing some research on young people who are not attending school. This is to see if there is anything the school and I can do to help young people who find themselves in this position. I am looking for some young people and their parents who would be willing to answer some questions related to this research. There is no pressure to do so, but if you agreed I would like to ask you a few questions about school. If you would like to participate, please let me know when I visit. Please note that you are under no pressure to take part, but your experience and knowledge of school non – attendance would be very helpful.

Best wishes

Senior Educational Psychologist

Appendix B

Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (Tong et al., 2007)

Domain 1: Research team and reflexivity

Personal Characteristics

- 1 Interviewer/facilitator -which author/s conducted the interview or focus group?
2. Credentials- what were the researcher's credentials? E.g. PhD, MD
3. Occupation-what was their occupation at the time of the study?
4. Gender- was the researcher male or female?
5. Experience and training -what experience or training did the researcher have?
6. Relationship with participants - was a relationship established prior to study commencement?
7. Participant knowledge of the interviewer - what did the participants know about the researcher? E.g. personal goals, reasons for doing the research
8. Interviewer characteristics - what characteristics were reported about the interviewer/facilitator? E.g. Bias, assumptions, reasons and interests in the research topic

Domain 2: study design

Theoretical framework

9. Methodological orientation and Theory- what methodological orientation was stated to underpin the study? E.g. grounded theory, discourse analysis, ethnography, phenomenology, content analysis

Participant selection

10. Sampling- how were participants selected? E.g. purposive, convenience, consecutive, snowball

11. Method of approach- how were participants approached? E.g. face-to-face, telephone, mail, email

12. Sample size- how many participants were in the study?

13. Non-participation- how many people refused to participate or dropped out?
Reasons?

Setting

14. Setting of data collection -where was the data collected? E.g. home, clinic, workplace

15. Presence of non-participants- was anyone else present besides the participants and researchers?

16. Description of sample -what are the important characteristics of the sample?
E.g. demographic data, date

Data collection

17. Interview guide -were questions, prompts, guides provided by the authors? Was it pilot tested?

18. Repeat interviews- were repeat interviews carried out? If yes, how many?

19. Audio/visual recording -did the research use audio or visual recording to collect the data?

20. Field notes -were field notes made during and/or after the interview or focus group?

21. Duration -what was the duration of the interviews or focus group?

22. Data saturation -was data saturation discussed?

23. Transcripts returned - were transcripts returned to participants for comment and/or correction?

Domain 3: analysis and findings

Data analysis

24. Number of data coders- how many data coders coded the data?
25. Description of the coding tree- did authors provide a description of the coding tree?
26. Derivation of themes- were themes identified in advance or derived from the data?
27. Software- what software, if applicable, was used to manage the data?
28. Participant checking- did participants provide feedback on the findings?

Reporting

29. Quotations presented- were participant quotations presented to illustrate the themes / findings? Was each quotation identified? E.g. participant number.
30. Data and findings consistent - was there consistency between the data presented and the findings?
31. Clarity of major themes- were major themes clearly presented in the findings?
32. Clarity of minor themes- is there a description of diverse cases or discussion of minor themes.

Appendix C

Semi- structured interview for structured discussion: young person version.

Parent of young person:

Number: 1

Year Group:

Age:

Questions for structured discussion

Question 1 Why do you think (young person's name) stopped going to school?

Question 2 How do you feel about (young person's name) not going to school?

If they give a positive response ask -Are there any bad things about (young person's name) not being at school.

If they give a negative response ask -Are there any good things about (young person's name) not being at school?

Question 3 Has anyone tried to help you get (Young person's name) back to school other than the researcher? Who? What did they do? Was it helpful?

Question 4 Do you think there is any chance (young person's name) would go back to the secondary school? If no continue to 6. If yes negotiate a reintegration plan with parent and young person.

Question 5 If you do not think they would go back to the secondary, do you know what other options there are available for them to continue their education?

Question 6 Would you be interested in (young person's name) trying for one of these options? Describe Options

Vocational e.g. X

Alternative educational provision e.g. x

Mainstream return

Key working from Careers Scotland

Which ones?

Any other comment?

Appendix D

Semi-structured interview for structured discussion: parent version

Young person:

Number:

Year Group:

Age:

Attendance rates

Year 1

Year 2

Year 3

Year 4

Attainments

5-14 Levels

Maths

Reading

Writing

Questions

Question 1 Tell me what school was like for you?

Like/dislike/expand

Question 2 Why did you stop going to school?

School/teacher/other kids/family circumstances / Expand

Question 3 How does it feel not being at school?

If they give a positive response ask -Are there any bad things about (young person's name) not being at school.

If they give a negative response ask -Are there any good things about (young person's name) not being at school

Question 4 Has anyone tried to help you get back to school apart from me?

Who? What did they do? Was it helpful?

Question 5 Is there any chance you might go back to your secondary school?

Question 6 If you don't go back to the secondary, do you know what other options there are available for you to continue your education?

Describe Options

Vocational e.g. X

Alternative educational provision e.g. x

Mainstream return

Key working from Careers Scotland

Which ones?

Any other comment?

Question 7 Would you be interested in any of these options? (if yes start the process for making an application)

OUCCOME FOR THE YOUNG PERSON