



**A qualitative study of how school practices can support generation of social capital, through analysis of parent views on participation with schools and with their child's learning**

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**Disclaimer**

I declare that this work is my own and has not previously been submitted for any other qualification.

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## Thesis Abstract

In recent years there has been a growing body of evidence within educational research that increased parental participation with children's learning will have a positive impact on the child's achievements. When parental participation does not take place, the locus of responsibility is often placed with the parents, who are positioned as 'hard to reach'. Drawing on theories of social capital, it has been suggested that parents differ in their access to capital that affects their ability to take action and participate with schools.

In this thesis, I explore parent views on how schools' practices in relation to parent participation may be seen as impacting on the parent, with regards to empowerment, voice and social capital. The thesis consists of a meta-ethnography, a bridging document, and a piece of empirical research. Five papers were selected for the meta-ethnography. Key concepts generated through this process were 'Cultural and Social Factors', 'Parental Expectations', 'Communication', 'Belonging' and 'Influence'. Each has been discussed and linked to existing theory and literature. This resulted in the construction of a line of argument from which a framework was developed for schools to support parental participation.

The empirical research involved interviewing five parents about partnership with their children's school, and conducting thematic analysis on the interview transcripts. Three main themes emerged from the analysis: 'Parental participation is positive', 'There are differing beliefs of whose responsibility parental participation is' and 'Schools can support parental participation'. These themes are explored with reference to existing theory and research, and findings are seen as being consistent with findings from the meta-ethnography.

This research suggests that schools can impact positively on parent participation and support generation of social capital. For this to occur successfully, I suggest that schools should attend to parents' personal expectations regarding participation, and work to develop positive, reciprocal relationships.

## Chapter 1 – Meta-ethnography - How can school-parental participation support the generation of social capital for parents?

### 1.0 Abstract

In recent years there has been a growing consensus within educational research that increased parental participation with their children's learning will have a positive impact on the child's achievements. When parental participation does not take place, the locus of responsibility is often placed with the parents, who are positioned as 'hard to reach'. Drawing on theories of social capital, it has been suggested that parents differ in their access to capital that affects their ability to take action and participate with schools. A review of the literature suggests that parental involvement and engagement are related to ideas of empowerment and parent voice.

In this research I have viewed social capital as a resource to be generated, within contexts of parental participation with schools. This is from a perspective that seeks to be critical of 'parental deficit' understandings of parental participation with schools. In the form of a meta-ethnography, I explored examples of parent-school relations which may be seen as impacting positively on parents, with regards to empowerment, parent voice and social capital. Five papers were selected for the meta-ethnography. In an interpretative process of analysis, key concepts generated were 'Cultural and Social Factors', 'Parental Expectations', 'Communication', 'Belonging' and 'Influence'.

To conclude, I suggest that primarily schools should invest in understanding the cultural and social lives of their pupils' families, as well as what the parents' beliefs and expectations are with regards to school-parent participation. This lays the groundwork for designing appropriate channels of communication with parents and generating positive relationships to create a sense of belonging for parents. In this context, schools can look for opportunities to promote parental agency and competence, to work collaboratively with parents, and to cede power to parents in relation to how they engage with their children's learning.

## 1.1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing consensus within educational research and government-commissioned review that parental participation with their child's education can positively increase outcomes in terms of children's adjustment and academic achievement (Castro et al., 2015; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Wilder, 2014). Desforges and Abouchaar's (2003) literature review suggested that, with regards to impacting positively on the child's achievement, the most successful form of parental participation comes in the form of 'at home good parenting' (p. 4), a finding echoed across the literature (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) argue that parents'<sup>1</sup> engagement with their children's learning should be the goal parent-school relationships are building toward, differentiating between involvement and engagement. It is suggested that parental involvement is driven by the school's needs, and is often school-based, and should be considered differently from parental engagement with the child's learning, which can be primarily home-based, and driven by the parents' goals (Furlong & Stimpert, 2009; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Parental engagement refers to learning activities taking place in the home, the presence of parent-child discussions, and a positive parental attitude towards learning (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) recognise parental involvement as a useful foundation, suggesting a continuum between involvement and engagement (see Figure 1). It is this area of foundational parent-school relationships and opportunities for in-school parental involvement that is 'often the beginning point for schools and parents' (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 403). I will use the term 'participation' as a catch-all term for involvement and engagement. Throughout much of literature, the term 'parental involvement' seemed to serve this purpose, until Goodall and Montgomery (2014) differentiated between 'involvement' and 'engagement' with their continuum. For ease of discussion, and to refer to the whole of their continuum, I will use the term 'participation'.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Parents' refers to parents, carers, and any person who has caregiving responsibilities for a school pupil.

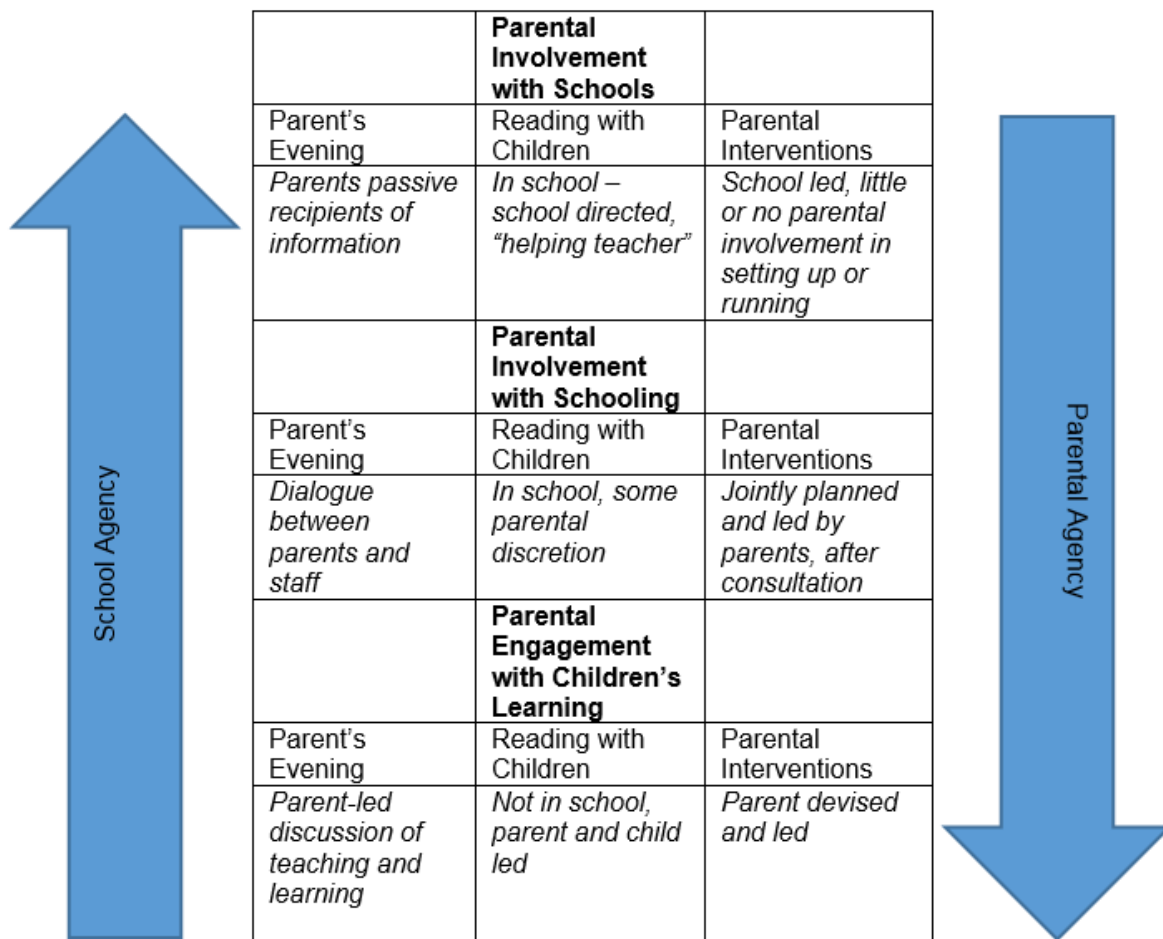


Figure 1 - Continuum: from parental involvement to parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery 2014)

Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) highlight several programmes that have proven successful in enhancing parental participation. Most of these programmes involve extensive financial input and support to facilitate them. The Family and Schools Together (F&ST) Model, for example, requires facilitators, counsellors, social workers, parent partners and additional volunteers, all with training in programme delivery (Terrion, 2006). This is not something that all schools or Local Authorities will be able to afford and facilitate. In this study I aim to explore how schools can approach parental participation, while recognising the funding constraints within which most schools are currently operating (Andrews & Lawrence, 2018). When considering parental participation it is important to look at the context within which that participation is taking place, and why so many families are thought of as 'hard to reach' (Watt, 2016).

### 1.1.1 Empowerment, Parent Voice, and Social Capital

Educational underachievement is often linked to social class, and the locus of responsibility is placed within sections of society labelled as “working class”, framed in terms of ‘cultural deficit of the underclass itself’ (Páll Sveinsson, 2009, p. 5). ‘Parents not socialized in traditional schooling practices are often viewed as “high risk” for failure’ (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006, p. 188). Rather than viewing parents as “hard-to-reach” and therefore responsible for reduced levels of engagement with schools, some researchers have approached the issue by questioning ‘Why are schools hard to reach?’ (Crozier & Davies, 2007). In their study of schools’ efforts to involve parents of Bangladeshi and Pakistani heritage, Crozier and Davies (2007) found schools’ actions to involve these parents did not include the sharing of ideas and views, and schools were not perceived as welcoming. Lack of opportunities for communication and participation can leave parents feeling isolated and disempowered (Hess, Molina, & Kozleski, 2006).

These examples suggest that parental involvement and engagement is related to ideas of empowerment and parent voice. ‘By empowerment, we mean that parents not only have equal voice but also participate in the decision making, planning and implementation of solutions to problems affecting their children’ (Bryan & Henry, 2012, p. 410). Goodall and Montgomery’s (2014) definition of engagement reflects these sentiments . Bolívar and Chrispeels (2011), as well as Bryan and Henry (2012), recognise social capital as a useful concept through which to discuss empowerment, noting that parents’ abilities to take action and participate in decision making can be related to their social and intellectual resources. There is debate about how social capital should be conceptualised and defined (Horvat, Weininger, & Lareau, 2003; Lin, 2000). However, there is an ‘emerging consensus that social capital is comprised of networks and norms of trust and cooperation’ (Patulny & Lind Haase Svendsen, 2007, p. 34).

The use of social capital as a means of approaching the concept of parental engagement is not without risk. Bourdieu (1986) conceived of social capital as a form of power held by networks of people, used to maintain and protect exclusive access to resources. This perspective suggests an acceptance of the status quo of power relations, and viewing social capital as a static quality which some families possess and others do not can lead one toward thinking in terms of cultural deficits. In this context, models designed to support parental participation can be vulnerable to

criticism that they place parents in a position of reduced power, by framing them as requiring “support” from schools (McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). Underpinned by my own values, working within Educational Psychology, I would wish to adopt a critical position on the status quo of power relationships. I hope for my research and practice to engage with a social justice agenda, in that I wish to challenge assumptions about power and privilege inherent in system policies and programmes (Reisch, 2002). From this perspective, understanding social capital as fixed is a disempowering position from which to work.

Indeed, there are many examples across the literature recognising that resources of social capital are not fixed, but rather social capital can be generated or enhanced within the relationships and mechanisms that define interactions between schools and parents (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Bryan & Henry, 2012; Sime & Sheridan, 2014). ‘Social capital [...] comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action’ (Coleman, 1988, p. 100). As noted by Bolívar and Chrispeels (2011, p. 10), Coleman’s understanding of social capital also ‘outlines key mechanisms through which social capital is generated and power relations altered’. These mechanisms are trustworthiness, potential for information exchange, and shared norms.

The understanding of social capital as something that can be generated opens up possibilities for a positive change in power relations, and the addressing of social justice concerns. Thus, I will draw from Coleman’s (1988, p. 98) understanding that social capital is functional, and that it makes ‘possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible’, involving relations amongst and within social structures. Coleman’s definition allows for an understanding of the social capital that can exist within an exchange between just two people. This lends itself to exploration of relationships and interactions that occur between individual parents and their child’s school, and is ‘not limited to the powerful’ (Field, 2008, p. 23). This view of social capital fits with relational models of social justice (Gewirtz, 1998; Reisch, 2002) and helps to avoid deficit thinking with regards to parents’ capacities. This position is in line with my own values, as discussed in detail in 2.2.1 Personal Motivations.

In my thesis I will view social capital as a resource to be generated, within contexts of parental participation with schools. As Bolívar and Chrispeels (2011, p. 9) state in their study on parental leadership, ‘rather than focus on cultural differences, we focus

on social capital as a theoretical lens of understanding the ways in which parent communities might be empowered...'. I aim to explore examples of parent-school relations which may be seen as impacting positively on parents, with regards to empowerment, parent voice and social capital, three concepts whose inter-relatedness with parental participation is apparent above. Finally, I will reflect on the implications of this research, and consider my role as an Educational Psychologist within this area. In summary, this meta-ethnography addresses the question: How can school-parental participation support the generation of social capital for parents?

## 1.2 Methodology

Following the example of Lumby (2007, p. 221), who recognised that within academic research, parents' voice is often silenced, or 'coloured by the assumptions and ambivalence of policy-makers, professionals and researchers', my literature review concerns itself only with the literature which includes the directly transcribed voice of parents. This is what I base my analysis on, as a necessary attempt to hear parental voice as of primary importance, rather than an alternative voice (McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). However, I recognise that this in itself is insufficient given that the entirety of the planning and completion of the research is in the hands of the academic researcher, myself. Acknowledging how the phenomena under investigation can be different when explored from different perspectives (researchers, parents, my own) makes necessary the use of an interpretive approach within which to conduct this research.

### 1.2.1 Method

Horvat et al. (2003, p. 320) argue that qualitative approaches 'can make an important contribution by providing insights into the underlying actions that produce or expend social capital'. I have chosen to use Noblit and Hare's (1988) meta-ethnography as my method, described by Britten et al. (2002, p. 210) as 'perhaps the most well developed method for synthesising qualitative data...'. This approach recognises the interpretive element of qualitative research, as well as appreciating the uniqueness of contexts in time and place. I chose not to attempt to measure validity of papers, judging it to be epistemologically incoherent with my methodology, which in the past has led to 'questionable and even meaningless practice in interpretive research' (Savin-Baden & Major, 2007, p. 837). Although I did not judge the quality of papers, part of my screening process involved the exclusion of papers that were not from

Peer Reviewed Journals. In this sense I could assume that the papers had undergone some quality control in their production.

In lieu of any further rating or ranking approach, I decided to employ Schutz's (1962) concepts of 1st and 2nd order constructs, in the manner used by other researchers (Britten et al., 2002; Vermeire et al., 2007). I do so recognising that synthesising qualitative findings is complex, as there can be several levels of interpretation (Toye et al., 2014). Rather than judging the quality of the papers from a supposedly objective viewpoint, this approach allowed me to interrogate the perspectives and viewpoints contained within each paper. 1<sup>st</sup> order constructs represent the participants' own common sense interpretations, and 2<sup>nd</sup> order constructs represent the journal author's interpretations (Atkins et al., 2008; Schutz, 1962; Toye et al., 2014). Following this, I aimed to develop 3<sup>rd</sup> order constructs: 'The synthesis of both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order constructs into a new model or theory about a phenomenon' (Atkins et al., 2008, p. 6).

Noblit and Hare (1988) propose seven stages to conducting a meta-ethnography. My journey through these stages is detailed below.

#### *Stage 1 – Getting started*

During my scoping reading I gathered ideas and inspiration, beginning with casual searching and reference harvesting from key papers. Through this exploration I was refining the areas in which I wished to focus, as well as gathering key search terms. The ideas and concepts I explored, as well as where they led me, are those which I have defined in the Introduction above.

#### *Stage 2 – Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest*

In this stage, considerations and decisions were made regarding an appropriate search for relevant studies. Noblit and Hare (1988) warn against being overly exhaustive in the searches without appropriate justification for doing so. With this in mind, I developed inclusion criteria with appropriate rationales (see Table 1). There is much written on parental participation and related concepts, so I attempted to find within that studies that gave examples of school practices which allowed for or generated an increase in parental capital, empowerment or voice. Other criteria were designed to make my research of relevant interest within as much of the field of education as possible.



<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Reason</b>
<b>From Western countries (socio-politically speaking).</b>	Similarity of cultural settings for synthesis and comparison.
<b>Must involve parental participation with school.</b>	Capital is context specific, so the research must relate to parental participation, not just decontextualized capital.
<b>Since 2006.</b>	For relevancy of current educational systems and climate, I limited search to the last 10 years (searching took place in 2016).
<b>Qualitative with focus on the actual words of parents.</b>	Appropriateness for focus of study, as it was the parental voice the research is concerned with gathering.
<b>Not Higher Ed / College or non-compulsory pre-school.</b>	Research is concerned with compulsory education.
<b>Inclusion of examples of parents gaining or creating capital, empowerment and/or voice, and schools playing a role in that, rather than a report on correlational or predictive factors of capital, empowerment or parental voice.</b>	Relevance to research question.
<b>School practices discussed within paper by parents did not require extensive financial input or the use of outside agencies.</b>	In order to make research relevant to current practice within UK where there are funding restrictions.
<b>Does not require parents to have IT access and proficiencies.</b>	Research is designed to be relevant to all parents, not just those with particular skills and resources.
<b>Original research – Not summaries / reviews of previous research.</b>	In order to allow my own interpretations based upon 1 <sup>st</sup> and 2 <sup>nd</sup> order constructs (Schutz, 1962).
<b>Papers not specifically restricted to parents of children defined by particular subgroups (e.g. with ‘gifted’ children, bilingual, attending alternative provision), although it is assumed these parents could be included within studies.</b>	In order to make research relevant to a general population of parents and schools.

*Table 1 - Inclusion Criteria*

I conducted a systematic search between September and December 2016, accessing the following databases: Psycinfo, British Education Index, Education Abstracts, Education Administration Abstracts, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, ERIC (Education Resource Information Centre), Teacher Reference Centre and Scopus. My search strategy was initially created within the Psycinfo database, and the final search terms were as follows:

*(“social capital” OR exp Social Capital/ OR “cultural capital” OR “empowerment” OR exp Empowerment/ OR “voice” OR exp Voice/)*

AND

*(“parental engagement” OR exp Parental Involvement OR “home-school links” OR exp Parent School Relationship).<sup>2</sup>*

The results were then filtered to include only peer-reviewed journals, and only papers from 2006 onwards (see Table 1). Subsequent searches within other database resources were adjusted minimally, only to allow for differences or availability of database-specific subject headings. After initial search within the databases, I performed the first stage screening, which involves judging the relevance of studies based on their title and abstract only (Torgerson, 2003). The search quantities throughout this process were as follows:

	<b>Initial Search</b>	<b>After First Screening</b>	<b>After removal of duplicates</b>	<b>After Second Screening</b>
<b>Psycinfo</b>	118	34		
<b>EBSCO</b>	241	28		
<b>Scopus</b>	117	16		
<b>Total</b>	476	78	<b>63</b>	<b>5</b>

*Table 2 - Search Process*

Given the subjectivity of some of my Inclusion Criteria, I was limited in how often I could include or exclude studies based on Titles and Abstracts alone. To explore whether parents had experienced increased capital, empowerment or voice, and whether that had been as a result of school actions, required a second stage screening (Torgerson, 2003). This involved reading the remaining 63 papers and judging whether or not they fit the inclusion criteria.

Many papers could be discarded quickly as they had no parent voice, no focus on school actions, or were primarily about barriers to parent engagement, with little

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<sup>2</sup> Search terms in quotation marks were searched as key words within a paper’s Abstract, Heading Word, Key Concepts, Original Title, Table of Contents, Tests & Measures and Title. Search terms within “exp /” are subject headings created by the database resource, within which all relevant search terms were included.

reference to successful examples of parental engagement through increased capital, empowerment or voice. For others, it was a matter of my own judgement as to whether there was sufficient discussion of positive examples of school actions leading to an increase in parental capital, voice or power. In the end, there were 5 papers I judged to be relevant and appropriate for my meta-ethnography (see Table 3).

Table 3 - Summaries of Papers

Study	Sime & Sheridan (2014)	Quintanar & Warren (2008)	McKenna & Millen (2013)	Symeou (2008)	John-Akinola & Gabhainn (2014)
<b>Sample</b>	13 service deliverers 6 head teachers 20 practitioners 25 parents 26 children	15 Latino parent volunteers	8 mothers	7 teachers. Their pupils. Pupils' parents. Headteachers.	218 parents of pupils ages 9-13 years old. (58.7% responded to the open-ended part of questionnaire) 231 pupils
<b>Data Collection</b>	Observations. Interviews with head teachers. Focus Groups (1 with parents, 1 with practitioners. Activity group with children.	Phenomenological approach. Interviews.	Focus groups Interview Hypothetical letters.	Individual interviews. Focus group interviews. Observations.	Questionnaire, in which was an open-ended statement: "Please write on the lines below how best you would like to take part in your child's school"
<b>Setting</b>	3 Primary Schools and 3 Early Education & Childcare Centres (high deprivation). UK.	2 elementary schools in low-income community. USA.	Local public school. USA.	6 state primary schools. A) Old village school – socially deprived, working class B) Inner City School – high SES, affluent urban area. Cyprus.	9 Primary Schools, randomly selected. Ireland.

Study	Sime & Sheridan (2014)	Quintanar & Warren (2008)	McKenna & Millen (2013)	Symeou (2008)	John-Akinola & Gabhainn (2014)
<b>Focus of study</b>	‘review provision to home-school links, initiatives aimed at disadvantaged families, identify opportunities for further interventions.’ ‘as perceived by parents’	‘an effort to understand how schools can be transformed to make parental involvement an integral component’.	‘...in addition to the presentation of models of parent voice, parent presence, and engagement, we seek to clarify the meanings and expectations that that accompany much of the writing and thinking on parent involvement’.	‘this study aimed at shedding light on the experience of collaboration of teachers and families in Greek-Cypriot state elementary schools...’	‘There is a need to explore and understand how parents would like to engage in their children’s learning and in the broader life of the school. Thus, there is an extant need to document both existing parental participation and their possible future participation in schools’
<b>Theoretical Orientation</b>	This study draws on sociological concepts of social and cultural capital. Research came from a qualitative understanding and exploration of parental view and experiences.	This study used a phenomenological approach, and narrative description of thematic analysis findings.	Based on philosophy of educational care, sociocultural theory and critical race theory. This study used a grounded theory approach to create a new theory on parent voice and parent presence.	This study draws on sociological concepts of social capital. The study was of an exploratory nature, emphasising a depth of understanding.	No explicit presupposed theoretical framework.

Study	Sime & Sheridan (2014)	Quintanar & Warren (2008)	McKenna & Millen (2013)	Symeou (2008)	John-Akinola & Gabhainn (2014)
<b>Findings</b>	Children and parents could receive social and cultural capital through engagement with school, but parents experienced that their disempowering social positioning and limited networks reduced their ability to generate capital.	Parent volunteers provided useful, actionable information in interviews. Gathering these views is critical to cultivating a strong parental involvement programme, and is possible for any school.	Models of parental voice and parental presence are presented, emphasising the importance of respecting, sharing and acknowledging parenting practices of parents from all backgrounds.	Findings suggested that active and frequent collaboration and communication between teachers and parents could benefit school-family relationships.	Qualitative data from parents suggest a number of ways in which parents can best participate with their child's school. It was concluded that schools could explore more feasible partnerships with parents by encouraging participation in everyday activities of the school.

*Stages 3 and 4 – Reading the Studies, and, Determining How the Studies Are Related*

Once I had chosen my final studies I read them again in more depth, creating lists of concepts for each paper. As noted by Noblit and Hare (1988), the phases of a meta-ethnography often overlap and repeat. As I identified concepts from one paper, and then moved on to the next, I began juxtaposing the concepts from the two papers in my mind. When one paper expressed a concept rather explicitly, at times I would notice that same concept was implicitly represented in another paper, which I had not noticed upon my first reading. Once I generated the concepts I believed fully represented the papers (see Figure 2), I grouped them into overarching themes using an inductive process, akin to thematic analysis.

- Current discourse around parental engagement
- Benefits to school of parental engagement
- Cultural and social class factors
- Parents aspirations for their children
- Parents views on education
- Responsibility for engaging parents
- Parental motivation
- Parents' views on being involved
- Competence
- Parent wishes to share info
- Communication
- Interactions with staff
- Home school boundaries
- Relationships with staff
- Belonging / School character
- Parent feeling valued
- Parents' views on the teachers
- Parents idea of how school views them
- Power
- Increased capital
- Barriers to engagement

*Figure 2 - Initial Concepts*

I followed the approach taken by previously published meta-ethnographies and used a grid (see Appendix 1) to display how my themes were represented across all the studies (Atkins et al., 2008; Britten et al., 2002; Vermeire et al., 2007).

### *Stages 5 and 6 – Translating the Studies into One Another and Synthesising Translations*

Using my thematic grid, I began the process of translating the studies into one another. This involved comparing concepts and matching themes across papers (Munro et al., 2007; Noblit & Hare, 1988). As I progressed, I continued completing the grid (see Appendix 1), to show 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order constructs represented in the concepts across the papers. This allowed me to better explore the different interpretations, and to begin to create my own themes informed by the interpretations offered across the 5 papers. The divisions between these stages were fluid in nature, allowing an ongoing revisiting and refining of themes and interpretations. Similar to Atkins et al. (2008, p. 3), as I compared the concepts which I had grouped together into themes I found that my 'initial broad groupings of themes was gradually refined by merging and collapsing categories', as I finalised the themes into which the data was best represented, in my view.

Based on my syntheses and my 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order constructs, I was able to infer a 'Line of Argument' synthesis as my 3<sup>rd</sup> order construction, 'the construction of an interpretation' (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 74). This represents my personal construction, and inevitably, unapologetically draws from my own experiences and motivations (discussed explicitly in Chapter 2). As Noblit and Hare (1988) emphasise, this interpretative journey is to progress discourse, and is never assumed to be a point of completion. These three levels of interpretation are presented in Table 4, and are discussed in more detail in the findings section, along with an exploration of how my line of argument draws both from my findings here, and from the wider literature.



Table 4 - Concepts, Interpretations and Constructions

Concepts	1 <sup>st</sup> Order (Participant Views)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Order (Author's Interpretation)	3 <sup>rd</sup> order (My Construction)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current discourse around parental engagement</li> <li>• Benefits to school of parental engagement</li> <li>• Cultural and social class factors</li> </ul>	<p>Parents discussed limited resources, work commitments, language barriers, but also did not wish to be pre-judged.</p>	<p>Understanding of cultural and social factors is important for schools, as there is often an assumption of parental deficiency. Families often have limited resources at home. Parents invest in countering / explaining negative assumptions. 'Schools and educators who are willing to put aside assumptions and preconceptions about parenting and the abilities of children and their families based on race and class will go a long way toward moving education forward...' (McKenna &amp; Millen, 2013, p. 44)</p>	<p><b>CULTURAL AND SOCIAL FACTORS</b></p> <p>Schools and families do not meet on neutral ground, as schools have often made a number of assumptions based on cultural and social information. There is a strong public narrative on poor parenting in poor areas, and an assumption of parental deficit. There should be increased understanding of these factors, and schools should understand the potential benefits of putting in the effort of engaging all families.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents' aspirations for their children</li> </ul>	<p>Parents wished to be involved with their child's school. They valued</p>	<p>Parents lacked confidence that their voice would be heard. They had much to offer and a willingness to</p>	<p><b>PARENTAL EXPECTATIONS</b></p> <p>Across all studies, it was noted that parents wanted their children to</p>

Concepts	1 <sup>st</sup> Order (Participant Views)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Order (Author's Interpretation)	3 <sup>rd</sup> order (My Construction)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents views on education</li> <li>• Responsibility for engaging parents</li> <li>• Parental motivation</li> <li>• Parents' views on being involved</li> </ul>	<p>education and had high expectations for their children. There was no consensus of whose responsibility it was to initiate more participation (i.e. school or family).</p>	<p>offer it. Parents cared for their children. Some parents sought involvement, whilst other didn't 'Teachers and administrators must unite with parents to create school cultures that encourage parent volunteerism' (Quintanar &amp; Warren, 2008, p. 123).</p>	<p>succeed and many wanted to be involved with the school, although not all.</p> <p>Parents' personal home-school relationship ideologies affected their expectations and beliefs with regards to participation. Schools should promote the benefits of parental engagement.</p> <p>School should not assume that when families do not engage, that it is because they don't want to. It may be confidence, or cultural reasons.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent wishes to share info</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Interactions with staff</li> </ul>	<p>Parents felt it was important for school to communicate with them regularly, to both give and receive information. Communication allowed parents to feel</p>	<p>Communication opportunities and positive interactions are valued by parents. Communication needs to be underpinned by respect and understanding. It is important for to improve parental participation.</p>	<p><b>COMMUNICATION</b></p> <p>The respect and understanding required for parent-valued communication is achieved by getting to know the parents. Communication built on these values can be</p>

Concepts	1 <sup>st</sup> Order (Participant Views)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Order (Author's Interpretation)	3 <sup>rd</sup> order (My Construction)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Home school boundaries</li> </ul>	welcome. Some attempts at communication were poorly received, with parents feeling judged.	'Active and frequent communication and collaboration of teachers and parents might provide interdependence and intensity in schools-families relationships' (Symeou, 2008, p. 24)	empowering and can generate social capital for parents. Schools should be flexible when considering channels of communication and consider parents' views on the matter.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships with staff</li> <li>Belonging / School character</li> <li>Parent feeling valued</li> <li>Parents' views on the teachers</li> <li>Parents idea of how school views them</li> </ul>	Parents shared that good relationships with staff were important. They wanted stronger relationships with staff, who treated them with respect, valued their opinions and were nice. They appreciated feeling welcome at school.	Parents value good relationships with staff and are helped by them. Good relationships and home-school networks allow for generation of confidence in parents and support parental participation. 'Schools could explore more feasible partnerships with parents by encouraging actual participation of parents in every day school life including school activities and events' (John-Akinola & Gabhainn, 2014, p. 393)	<b>BELONGING</b> This refers to a sense and experience by parents of belonging, which may be defined as 'the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there' (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 10). Schools should be seeking to create a sense of belonging and community for parents, through development of positive relationships based on understanding and respect for parents' agency and experience.

Concepts	1 <sup>st</sup> Order (Participant Views)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Order (Author's Interpretation)	3 <sup>rd</sup> order (My Construction)
			Positive relationships are an example of social capital, which parents can draw upon to support their participation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power</li> <li>• Increased capital</li> <li>• Barriers to engagement</li> <li>• Competence</li> </ul>	Parents shared how school systems and limited access could be a barrier to their engagement. Some parents also shared that they wanted more support, due to their own lack of experience with education.	Parents welcomed opportunities and support which would increase social capital / empower them to be a part of their child's education. Some parents believed they had limited capital to draw upon.  'children and parents were both receptors of social and cultural capitals through their engagement with the school structures' (Sime & Sheridan, 2014, p. 338)	<p><b>INFLUENCE</b></p> <p>Schools should reflect on how they can share with parents the responsibility for children's learning, based on treating those parents as having agency and expertise. This should follow from attention being given to the previous factors discussed above, an experience which may increase school's awareness of parental experience and how they might respond.</p>

## 1.3 Findings

As I synthesised my studies, I interpreted the initial concepts as falling into five themes that were prevalent throughout all the studies. I will now explore these themes in turn, suggesting how they relate to one another, before presenting a visual model of my line of argument.

### 1.3.1 Cultural and Social Factors

Schools and families do not begin their relationship from a neutral place. Rather, there already exists a discourse surrounding families, often ‘an assumption of deficiency among socially disadvantaged families’ (Sime & Sheridan, 2014, p. 328). Throughout the papers, a theme emerged that whilst schools had the larger share of control over how and when parents could participate with the school, parents and families were apportioned a larger share of the blame when there was a lack of participation. With parents having little voice in how they could and would engage in home-school participation, school policies were not addressing families’ particular cultural contexts. Many parents were unable to participate with school due to various reasons, such as work commitments or limited resources, but they had little recourse available to address this issue. Schools’ often interpreted from this ‘that parents do not naturally operate in ways that are caring and involved for their children’ (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 11). Parents had to position and explain themselves in ways that served to counter these assumptions, particularly those from low income or minority families. “Don’t assume that low income means low intelligence or low caring. I raise my children to the best of my ability...Please don’t put me in a box.” (parent; McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 22).

My line of argument places the need for schools to understand the cultural and social factors of their pupils’ families as the foundation of empowering those families, and in turn, supporting their pupils more holistically. As much as this involves gathering information relating to families, this is also a relational task involving communicating and interacting with families. For example, in Quintanar and Warren’s (2008) study, parents appreciated when teachers made efforts to get to know them and their situation, through home visits.

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*“It makes you feel very good, and if other schools have this – home visits – I think it would open communication. It would make the parents feel more important” (parent: Quintanar & Warren, 2008, p. 122).*

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These actions may be seen as acts of recognition, which Gewirtz (1998) suggests is a dimension of relational justice. Recognitional justice refers to the absence of cultural imperialism, in which non-dominant voices ‘find themselves defined from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them’ (Young, 2011, p. 59). Actions to understand and relate to families’ experiences were appreciated, such as when schools responded to cultural needs, for example, by having staff who could speak the families’ language.

#### *Summary*

School staff are encouraged to be wary of making assumptions about why parents may have low levels of participation. Seeking to understand the cultural and social factors influencing individual families’ participation is important in order to recognise and relate to those families.

#### 1.3.2 Parental Expectations

The ‘assumption of deficiency’ discussed above is underpinned by a certain belief: When there is poor parental engagement, it must be due to a lack of interest or aspiration from these parents (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Watt, 2016). The findings generated through this meta-ethnography suggest that, in fact, parents placed great value on education, and wanted to increase their participation with suggestions such as cake sales, open nights, sports events, helping in class etc.

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*“In a general way, if there’s anything we can do to make life better, we’ll be happy to take part” (parent: John-Akinola & Gabhainn, 2014, p. 386)*

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The participants in the studies reviewed wished to be involved with their child’s education and schooling, but there were different ideologies of what this entailed.

Discrepancy amongst parent groups was seen most clearly in Symeou's (2008) study, which looked at a village school in a socially deprived 'rural' area, and also an inner city school in an affluent 'urban' area.

Parents in Symeou's (2008) study described as 'rural' were seen to subscribe to a traditional 'partnership' ideology, characterised by extensive communication and relationships between teachers and families. However, this communication did not extend itself to involving parents in school level decision making. *"Yes' to cooperation, but 'no' to interference...After all, I am not the expert"* (parent; Symeou, 2008, p. 19). This is 'parental involvement with schools' as described in Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) continuum (see Figure 1). In contrast to this were the parents described as 'urban', who were seen to subscribe to a 'consumerism' ideology. This was characterised by rare initiation or response to teacher communication, and a tendency to advocate for their children's education by 'monitoring the behaviour of their teacher' (Symeou, 2008, p. 23) and seeking to hold them accountable. Home-school relationships in this context were uneasy and fractious, and teachers felt defensive and powerless against individual parents and the school's Parents' Associations 'malevolent' (p.14) interference.

These parents from an 'urban' and affluent area appear to be agentic with regards to their role as a consumer, monitoring and criticising the educational service in which their child partakes. However, this agency does not seem to extend to engagement with their children's learning. Olmedo and Wilkins (2017, p. 577) suggest that with the increasing marketization of education, parents are 'encouraged to practice a consumerist orientation to education, for example – calculating, discriminating and individualistic'. This is where these parents are advocating for their children, but it is perceived by teachers as not caring about their children's learning (Symeou, 2008). Perhaps there is no need for them to generate and access social capital within the relationships of school staff, if they have alternative means of power at their disposal.

These 'urban' parents had a strong view that their children's learning was the teachers' role, and it was not for them to be involved. Drawing on Coleman's (1988) view that social capital is defined by its function, it may be that the parents here see no benefit in engaging with their child's learning, and so there is no function served from increasing social capital with school staff. My line of argument proposes that if parents from all backgrounds are to engage with school and their children's learning, schools should be promoting the benefits of parental engagement with their child's

learning, perhaps through meetings, school displays, and school websites. So this is not just a top down message that places added responsibility on parents, this positive framing of parental engagement should not be in isolation, but rather within a context of developing positive relationships and allowing two-way communication. This should be based on assumptions that parents all want the best for their children, no matter their background. In this context, when teachers encourage parental participation, it might be viewed without suspicion. This conversation should be underpinned by schools seeking to gather views and understand how each parent views parental engagement. This underpins the relevance of the next theme – communication.

### *Summary*

Despite occasional assumptions to the contrary, parents greatly value participation with school and with their child's learning, and are keen to increase their levels of participation where possible. However, parents differ in precisely how they wish to be involved, and what type of relationship they desire with their child's school. Schools are encouraged to promote parental participation and to seek opportunities to facilitate it.

#### 1.3.3 Communication

*“What is needed is a personal contact at least once a year with each separate parent to discuss with the teacher”* (parent :Symeou, 2008, p. 15). Parents across all studies displayed a wish for more communication with teachers. They were very positive when there was ‘successful, authentic’ (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 28) two-way communication in place, in which parents could provide information, not just receive it. This should be based on a foundation of respect and understanding. Such a foundation may be attained through attention given to the previous themes: those of the family's cultural and social world, as well as their expectations of parental participation. Related to the above theme, for a school to engage with this diversity of parent expectations and aspirations could be, in relational justice terms, an act of recognition: ‘We are speaking here of efforts to establish a dialogue of the interpretations of narratives where recognition of the diversity of subjects is established as a priority’ (Leonard, 1997, p. 164, as quoted in Gewirtz (1998)).



Parents also suggested ways and means of improving communication, such as having a communication folder between home and school. They responded positively when their own ideas were listened to and acted upon.

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*“I consider [the communication folder] as very pioneering and it is something that we have suggested ourselves [the parents] a few years ago...This year when [the teacher] introduced it, I was thrilled”*  
(parent: Symeou, 2008, p. 11).

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Parents were also keen to impress that they could make themselves available for communication. Opportunities for communication and the sharing of ideas and views can be seen as empowering (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Hess et al., 2006), and it is in communication that some of Coleman’s (1988) mechanisms for social capital seem to take place, in particular the potential for information exchange: “...speaking to the teacher or seeing what is going on at school is good, you can help [your children] more at home, but I’m not always confident to ask...” (parent: Sime & Sheridan, 2014, p. 334).

This is not only from teacher to parent, but parents also believed that they had useful information about their child that they could give to the teacher, as they know their children uniquely. Giving credence to a parent’s expertise has been shown to increase their sense of empowerment through reflection on their own resources and skills (McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). I propose that schools and teachers should be getting to know parents through open, respectful communication, treating parents as having information and expertise to offer. Aware that parents often don’t know how to create opportunities to open communication, schools should be allowing and creating contexts which welcome communication from parents. ‘Strong communication is fundamental to this [parent-teacher] partnership and to building a sense of community between home and school’ (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 117). I suggest that this will involve creating flexible opportunities for two-way sharing of information, based on understanding and respect for parents and families. Demonstrating this respect inevitably relates to relational practices, and to ideas of belonging, which will be discussed next.

## Summary

Parents wish for more communication with school staff, and greatly appreciate when systems allowing positive communication are in place. Parents believe that they can provide useful information for schools, and recognition of their own expertise can be an empowering act of relational justice.

### 1.3.4 Belonging

Related to communication is the idea of belonging, defined as ‘the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in a group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group’ (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 10). This definition captures the language and ideas of belonging used by parents across all the studies, who spoke positively of good relationships, feeling important, comfortable and welcome, having their opinions valued and being free to get a ‘feel’ of the school. These experiences and perceptions are valuable in and of themselves, but they also led to a number of other positive outcomes, such as parents tackling their own personal issues, providing a safe space for parents to discuss their children’s needs, and increasing likelihood of parents attending parent-teacher meetings.

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*“She was nice; she was welcoming. “Come anytime,” you know. She always called and invited me or vice-versa...she used to come to his basketball games. She was a really nice lady, really, really nice. So, it made me, you know, feel a lot welcome” (parent: McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 29).*

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There was also a number of examples of school facilitating contexts in which parents could get to know other parents and their children, such as volunteer groups and training events. These were seen as integral for generating social capital through the development of networks of support and knowledge from which parents could draw.

I suggest that schools should be seeking to create a sense of belonging for parents, through development of positive relationships based on understanding and respect for parents’ agency and experience. John-Akinola and Gabhainn’s (2014) findings suggested that when parents reported a positive relationship with their child’s school, they were more likely to suggest increasing parental participation. Harris and Goodall (2008, p. 286) propose that parents need to know they matter, by being treated as

‘an integral part of the learning process’, with schools supporting those who are involved, and reaching out to those who aren’t. A sense of belonging is a factor in the ‘membership’ element of the psychological construct of Sense of Community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Pooley, Cohen, and Pike (2005, p. 78) argue that Sense of Community is a correlate of social capital, noting that central to both concepts is ‘the context in which individuals relate and perceive their community’.

It seems that a sense of belonging is important to encourage parental involvement with schools, but what about further engagement with their children’s learning? While one paper noted that the positive relationships between parents and staff were ‘...important sources of cultural capital, as they facilitate parents’ access to knowledge...’ (Sime & Sheridan, 2014, p. 335), another said that despite feeling welcome and included, parents still felt that they were ‘...on the “outside” of their children’s educational experiences’ (McKenna & Millen, 2013, p. 32). It appears that a sense of belonging may be necessary for parental engagement, but not always sufficient unless schools are trusting parents to share responsibility for their children’s learning. Trust has been identified as one of the mechanisms of generating social capital (Coleman, 1988). In exploring the concept of trust within social capital, Uslaner (2015, p. 73) proposed that trust ‘rests upon a foundation of equality, optimism and a sense of control’. It is clear how being valued and listened to via positive relationships could work towards building trust and social capital, but the key to further engagement may lie within that equality and sense of control. These factors are related to the final factor: influence.

### *Summary*

Parents wish to have positive, personal relationships with school staff, and to feel that they are welcome and belong to the wider school community. This sense of belonging can allow the school to be a place through which parents can develop social capital, through opportunities to further their own understanding of supporting their child’s learning, as well as through development of positive networks of support.

#### *1.3.5 Influence*

Having noted above the relevance of Sense of Community theory, I have chosen McMillan and Chavis’s (1986, p. 12) definition of influence as ‘The group member believes that either directly or indirectly he or she can exert some control over the community’. As noted in the introduction, this can be manifested in parental

participation with decision-making and planning, as well as having a voice in their children's learning. In this respect, parental engagement with their children's learning can be seen as a context where 'agency belongs to the parents, supported by schools' (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 407). Some parents identified that a key step in this was gaining knowledge about how the education system was structured, and knowledge on how to help their children learn. There were rare examples of parents being empowered in this way throughout the papers. However, one school worked with social work services to run a parenting course.

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*"See, when they [the staff] show you what to do, and you do it, and then see a difference in the child, they tell you, well done, and you feel proud of yourself, you feel, I can do this" (parent: Sime & Sheridan, 2014, p. 335)*

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Unfortunately, beyond this area, parents mostly spoke of barriers. Many parents noted that they wished to be more involved in decision-making processes. 'This, of course, requires a change of mindset on the part of many staff, a move from seeing "teaching" as the sole preserve of school staff.' (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 407). This mindset was seen rarely throughout the papers synthesised for this meta-ethnography.

As noted above, schools have the power to set the parameters for parental participation, but they often blame parents when participation is not achieved. I suggest that schools should reflect on how they can share with parents the responsibility for children's learning at home, based on treating those parents as having agency and expertise. This should follow from attention being given to the previous factors discussed above, an experience which may increase school's awareness of parental experience and how they might respond. Many parents may also need support along that journey, learning how they can engage with their children's learning, and thus promoting a more equal power relation with school staff (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). As McMillan and Chavis (1986, p. 12) concluded 'Members are more attracted to a community in which they feel that they are influential'.

## Summary

Parents sought to have more influence and increased voice in the decision-making processes relating to their child's learning. Allowing increased influence in this way may support a stronger sense of community for parents. Unfortunately this is an area where schools appears to have the most difficulty, and I suggest schools should consider how to support parental agency with their child's learning in the home.

## 1.4 Conclusion

As Harris and Goodall (2008, p. 286) note, 'parental engagement seems to be the worst problem and the best solution'. This relates to the idea that parental engagement is increasingly recognised as having huge potential for children's attainment and future prospects, but often proves frustratingly elusive to achieve for many schools. Following my meta-ethnography reported above, I have offered a framework for schools that may support them to engage with parents (see Figure 3).

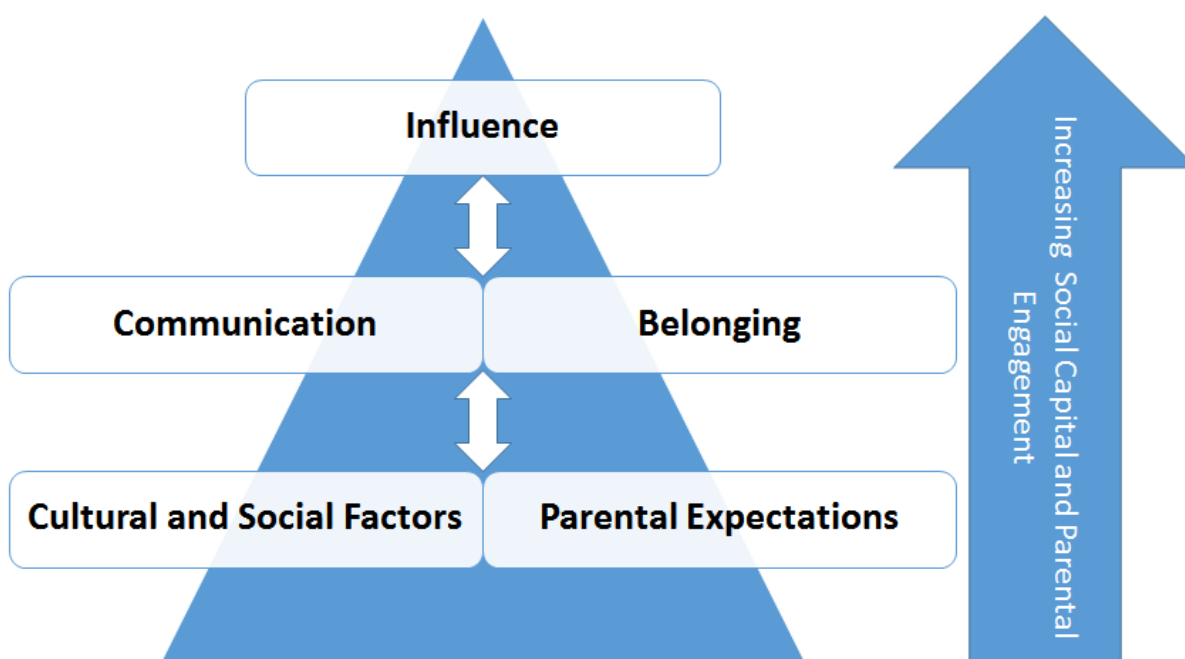


Figure 3 - Proposed Framework for Parental Engagement

This framework involves addressing the five themes discussed above, which I have presented across three 'levels'. With each level I have hypothesised an increase in social capital and a related increase in parental engagement. I suggest that primarily schools should invest in understanding the cultural and social lives of their pupils' families, as well as what the parents' beliefs and expectations are with regards to school-parent participation. This lays the groundwork for designing appropriate channels of communication with parents and generating positive relationships to

create a sense of belonging for parents. In this context, schools can look for opportunities to promote parental agency and competence, to work collaboratively with parents, and to cede power to parents in relation to how they engage with their children's learning. The model contains bi-directional arrows between each stage, suggesting that gains can work both ways. I propose that effort and attention given at any stage of the model will open opportunities both above and below. For example, trusting parents with more power may increase their sense of belonging, and establishing open channels of communication with parents may increase the school's understanding of relevant cultural and social factors.

#### 1.4.1 Implications

Given the interpretive nature of meta-ethnographic research, my interpretations and constructions are just that: *my* interpretations and constructions. There are therefore limitations as to how generalizable my findings are, and it cannot be assumed that the same findings would be found with a different selection of papers. However, qualitative research enables us not to predict but to "anticipate" what might be involved in analogous situations (Noblit & Hare, 1988), and, as explored above, my conclusions are in accordance with much written on the subject of parental participation. Although I have drawn much from Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) continuum (See Figure 1) in my analysis, this framework was not employed in any of the papers I studied. This could be a useful premise for further research, and one that I have undertaken as a result of this meta-ethnography (see Chapter 3).

I propose my framework could be used as a starting point for schools looking to review or update policies or practices regarding parental engagement. Examples of good practice from the perspective of parents have been given above, but it is important to remember that there should not be a 'one size fits all' approach to parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Perhaps the only certainty is that schools will likely need to be flexible in accommodating and collaborating with parents. In considering my own continued role in this area, I propose that this work could be supported by Educational Psychologists (EPs), as 'Just as teachers are skilled in the art of teaching, they also require knowledge and skills to effectively communicate with the parent community' (Graham-Clay, 2005, p. 126). EPs are practised in the use of collaborative consultation approaches that recognise that all participants bring unique expertise to a situation (Wagner, 2008), and as such I believe they have much to offer schools and parents in this regard.

## Chapter 2: Bridging Document

### 2.1 Introduction

This bridging document will serve to link the meta-ethnography (Chapter 1) and the empirical research (Chapter 3). Given that my thesis is entirely qualitative, I am not assuming myself to be an objective voice, and so this reflective process will explore my understandings of ontology, epistemology and methodology. I will explore the ethical underpinnings for the research decisions I made. For both pieces of work, the area of focus remained broadly the same – social capital and parental participation. This will serve as a space to engage in a reflexive process, exploring how the research process impacted on me, and how I impacted on the research process. To begin, I will talk about the personal and political motivations behind my research.

### 2.2 Developing a Research Focus

#### 2.2.1 Personal Motivations

My interest in parent-school relations is embedded in professional experiences I had before I began my doctoral training as an Educational Psychologist (EP). For some years, I worked in the role of ‘School Liaison Officer’ for an independent residential special school. Much of this role involved communicating with parents, trying to arrange and encourage attendance at ‘Information’ events, and responding to parents who had concerns. In retrospect, I can see much of my thinking being in terms of a ‘deficit model’ of parents, and I certainly viewed some parents as ‘hard to reach’ or ‘difficult’. There were also times when I found myself ‘taking the side’ of the parents, and was in disagreement with policies and practices in which the school engaged.

During doctoral training, I became more aware of the positive impact parents have on a child’s learning. As I explored literature on parental involvement, I came to view my own past experiences differently and was able to reflect on how I, and the school for which I worked, might have approached their relationships with parents more positively. This line of thinking spurred on my interest in supporting schools to reflect in a similar fashion, and parent-school relations emerged as a fundamental aspect of the education system as I gathered experience working as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP).

### 2.2.2 Practice Context

As far back as The Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967), UK governments have increasingly spoken of the importance of parents being in a good relationship with the school (Lumby, 2007). This has been seen in the Every Child Matters agenda, and more recently, in the Children and Families Act 2014. From my own experience as a TEP I have been involved in a number of individual cases where there appears to be little or no involvement from parents, with schools having little hope that a parent will show up for a meeting, with a view that they “don’t care” about their children. Conversely, I have spoken with parents who feel that the school have shut them out of decision making, and don’t listen to what they have to say. In the Times Educational Supplement (TES), Jonathan Owen wrote in December 2017 ‘Almost all teachers see the benefits of parental participation in schools, yet few have any idea of what their own schools are doing to support and promote it’ (Owen, 2017). 50 years on from The Plowden Report, it seems there is still much work to be done in this area. Given that much of an EP’s work is negotiated with and through schools, I felt there was a place to explore how schools might be supported to develop their practices in regards to parental participation.

### 2.2.3 Development of Empirical Question

My initial idea when beginning my meta-ethnography was that I might create some sort of “toolkit” of practice – approved by parents – that schools could use to inform their approaches to including parents. However, it quickly became clear as I explored my chosen papers that successful parental participation revolved around relational factors, and a sense of belonging. Parents’ individual backgrounds and unique experiences made the idea of a ‘toolkit’ seem a little one-dimensional. As McQueen and Hobbs (2014, p. 11) note ‘...‘how to’ strategies do not take account of the complex and diverse cultural and contextual experience of many parents’. The findings from my meta-ethnography emphasised the importance of relational justice in parental participation with schools, and the notion of listening to others as an act of recognition inspired my empirical research as focusing on interviewing parents (Gewirtz, 2006). Qualitative research ‘can aim to “give voice” to those whose accounts tend to be marginalised or discounted’ (Willig, 2013, p. 11). Adopting a qualitative approach (or any approach, for that matter) involves a careful consideration of the underlying ontology and epistemology, which I will reflect on below.



### 2.3 Ontology and Epistemology

As discussed above, there is a value-based motivation underpinning my research, in that I would like my research to have a positive contribution to the discourse regarding parental participation with schools and with children's learning. My ontological beliefs will shape my understanding of what this contribution might look like, and how it might be achieved (Grix, 2004). I approached this research from a critical realist ontology, believing that 'knowledge of the real cannot escape the limitations of our particular social context, but [it is] a mistake to abandon the task of searching for traces of the real in the manifestations which compose the actual world as we conceive it' (Brown, Pujol, & Curt, 1998, p. 79). I do not believe I can interview parents, and use that data as a reflection of a 'real' world, but I do believe the information I gather may relate to real underlying structures or processes, and may provide some explanatory power within a situation (Willig, 1998, 2013). In other words, I believe that there is a real world, in so much as there exist social structures 'which are independent of human understanding (e.g. hierarchies of privilege)' (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000, p. 14). Hierarchies of privilege is an apt example, given that this research concerns itself with, in a sense, the privilege accorded teachers and other dominant voices, over that that has been accorded parents.

As I planned this research, I grew concerned that there were some logical inconsistencies with it. Given that my goal is in part emancipatory, and involving the voice of parents, why was my final product designed to be something I could use with school? Was I being hypocritical, denying parental involvement and agency even as I criticised others for doing the same? Critical realism provided a context in which my approach made sense, in that I recognised 'the active role of the human agent, but this is with reference to their interaction with an independent external reality which can constrain or facilitate human action' (Johnson & Duberley, 2000, p. 153). I do not deny the essential negotiating and positioning of themselves many parents actively do in order to increase their participation with schools, and have their voice heard (Freeman, 2010). However, I wished to explore their views about the independent external realities (e.g. school policies, school practices) that impacted on the potentiality of their agency. As noted in my empirical research, I wished to avoid an entirely constructionist approach, which could lead to a sceptical postmodernism that 'dismisses the notion of social and political projects on the basis of the belief that

there is no truth' (Gewirtz, 1998, p. 474). The understanding of how my value beliefs should or shouldn't influence the research in this way will be reflected on below.

#### 2.4 Axiology

The role of my values in the research process is the domain of axiology. As noted above, I entered into this piece of research hoping that the research might have a positive impact on parental participation. The viewing of parents through a deficit model, understandings of them as difficult or 'hard to reach' has been discussed throughout the research as problematic. My axiological views could be described as 'critical', according to Ponterotto (2005, p. 131), in that I am concerned with 'unequal distributions of power and the resultant oppression of subjugated groups'. However, whilst I hope the findings I present can be supportive of redistributing power in some way, and improving relations between parents and schools, there is little in the process of my research that is explicitly emancipatory for those who took part, other than the act of being listened to. The resulting impact of research as a tool to lobby for change does fall under a 'critical' axiology (Johnson & Duberley, 2000; Ponterotto, 2005), but as I reflect I feel like there could have been more explicitly emancipatory or empowering forms this research could have taken. This might have involved a Participatory Action Research approach, in which parents share the role of researcher, or an Appreciative Inquiry approach allowing for dialogue between parents and school staff.

#### 2.5 Methodology

I was keen to listen to the voices of parents, and common sense told me that interviews might be the best approach for this. This is traditionally a qualitative method, which was not in conflict with my critical realist approach, although does warrant justification. Throughout my thesis, I have been clear to underscore that my analyses and findings are interpretative and tentative. I believe that my research can tell us something about parental participation, but there are no strong claims that I have wholly uncovered the real structures impacting on this. My use of interviews is fitting with this approach. For critical realists:

*“actors’ accounts are both corrigible and limited by the existence of unacknowledged conditions, unintended consequences, tacit skills and unconscious motivations, but in opposition to the positivist view, actors’*

*accounts form the indispensable starting point of social inquiry' (Bhaskar, 1998, p. xvi).*

This line of thinking can also be seen in my meta-ethnography, and in how I understood my position in terms of interpreting the papers. Munro et al. (2007, p. 1233) recognise that 'all reported data are the product of author interpretation', and so, as Atkins et al. (2008) conclude, participant understandings (i.e. 1<sup>st</sup> order constructs) taken from a research paper can never reflect the totality of those participants' experience. They suggest that 2<sup>nd</sup> order constructs (researcher interpretations of the phenomena) can therefore 'provide more insight' (Atkins et al., 2008, p. 21). However, the argument Schutz was making was that in hoping to explain social reality 2<sup>nd</sup> order constructs must be built on top of 1<sup>st</sup> order constructs. With this in mind, and given the fundamental importance I am subscribing to parent voice, I felt the use of Schutz's constructs to be entirely appropriate for my meta-ethnography.

Regarding my interviews, this approach assumes an awareness that such social research cannot remain neutral from my own knowledge, experience and values. The awareness that my themes and the knowledge produced are socially constructed does not necessarily undermine a realist approach, only that of a naïve realist approach (Willig, 2013). C. Smith and Elger (2014, p. 114) propose that 'research findings cannot simply be taken at face value, but [also imply] that patterns of data can be identified and alternative interpretations of processes can be explicated and subjected to critical scrutiny'. This is what I have aimed to do in a larger sense – provide alternative interpretations of parental participation that do not rely on a deficit model. I also invite my own findings to critique and do not claim that there are no alternative ways to interpret my findings, or even that different themes may be constructed by another. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2013), qualitative research doesn't provide a single answer.

## 2.6 The Interviews

Recent government gathering of parent opinion has been conducted using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), whereby parents took part in phone surveys, answering questions by choosing from lists of set answers (Peters, Seeds, Goldstein, & Coleman, 2008). Whilst CATI is an efficient method for gathering large samples of information in a cost effective way (Choi, 2004), personal interviews are

better suited for rich explorations of people's experiences and understandings, with the key advantage of flexibility for respondents to raise issues that the researcher may not have anticipated (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These qualitative approaches can also provide information that could not be gathered through more conventional methods (Worcester, Nesman, Mendez, & Keller, 2008).

I opted for a semi-structured interview approach, which allowed me to be flexible and follow up with probing questions. In this way, I allowed myself some control in keeping the agenda within the theme of parental participation, but there was room to acknowledge how the participants interpreted that, and what they chose to discuss as relevant. With recognition that I am not a parent, I was aware that there may be much about participation from a parental perspective that I could not anticipate, and so the interview style allowed for this information to be brought forward (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

I drew from Braun and Clarke (2013) in designing my interview questions (see Appendix 2), adhering to the following criteria:

- Ask open questions
- Ask non-leading questions
- Ask singular questions
- Ask short questions
- Ask clear and precise questions
- Ask linguistically appropriate questions
- Ask non-assumptive questions
- Ask empathetic questions

With the semi-structured interview, of course, there is deviation from the original questions in the form of probing and follow-up questions. At these times, I endeavoured to keep these criteria in mind.

The original draft of my interview questions asked specific questions related to the themes that had emerged from my meta-ethnography. However, on reflection I considered that this was placing too much of a template on what I presumed to find from my interviews. In the end I changed the interview to more general, open questions about parental participation, involvement and engagement. I also included

some information on the definitions of 'parental involvement' and 'parental engagement' (See Appendix 2).

### 2.6.1 Ethics

From the early planning stages of my research, I endeavoured to keep in mind the ethical principles of the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009). These principles are respect, competence, responsibility and integrity. As the code specifies, these can only ever be guidelines to draw on when faced with individual decisions to be made in each unique context, rather than a checklist to tick off. For example, I explored the possibility of using focus groups, but decided against it on the basis that parents might feel more comfortable sharing potentially sensitive information in a confidential interview than they would in a group setting. Certainly within the interviews, there were moments when parents were critical of other parents, and I could not have ensured with a focus group that there would not be parents with prior relationships, positive or otherwise. I felt that the safer option, in terms of participant experience, would be individual interviews, with the assurance that no one would be identified at any point during dissemination or feedback from the thesis.

My interview protocol was designed with the above principles in mind, as well as adhering to the principles of the BPS' Code of Human Research Ethics (2010), including considerations of informed consent and confidentiality. I found many decisions less black and white however, and had to draw on my own empathetic considerations of how I could make the process a safe and positive one for all parents involved. Researcher-prompted interviews are not naturally occurring social situations, nor initiated by the participants, and I was sensitive to this 'ethical tension' (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004) between participant autonomy and my hope for research critical of a parental deficit model. I aimed to address this through a broad understanding of informed consent, not merely a signed document, but 'an interpersonal process between researcher and participant' (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). I spent time prior to interview discussing the research with participants, developing a clear understanding of consent, and answering questions. In practice, this was always a pleasant, relaxed conversation and served as a useful exercise to build rapport prior to the interview questions. It has been noted that the warm, trusting interactions created during the interview process can result in participants revealing too much of their private lives, which they may later regret (Kvale, 2006).

To guard against this, I was careful not to lead or coerce with my questioning, and I made it clear that participants could contact me if they decided they no longer wanted their interview to be used in the research.

### 2.6.2 Reflexivity

I propose that this Bridging Document as a whole is a reflexive piece of work, and perhaps the entire research process could be defined as reflexive, as I have maintained explicit awareness and reflection on my personal values throughout, and the impact between myself and the research (Willig, 2013). 'Our research interests and the research questions we pose, as well as the questions we discard, reveal something about who we are' (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). But I would like to include a relevant reflection for me, in how the research process impacted on my empathy with schools. During the participant finding stage, I sent research invites to parents (via the school office – see Appendix 4) and received no response. In the end I used opportunistic sampling (described in Chapter 3), and on one occasion a parent did not show up for the interview. Whilst reflecting on my own emotional responses to these setbacks, it became apparent that there was a certain irony in my struggle to find parents to participate in this parental participation research. What this allowed was for me to empathise with school staff who may have similar struggles in engaging parents. This reminded me not to frame my findings as judgemental of school staff, who I am inclined to assume are working to the best of their ability in their individual circumstances and it is entirely possible that I might experience the same difficulties. It also prompted me to reflect on how my approaches to initiate parental participation pay little heed to the factors uncovered in Chapter 1.

In the end I was able to recruit my participants, and conduct the interviews. The transcripts were then analysed using Thematic Analysis (TA).

### 2.6.3 Thematic Analysis

When choosing a method for analysis, I explored three options. Considerations leading to my final decision are given in Table 5.

Why Thematic Analysis (TA)?	Why not Grounded Theory (GT)?	Why not Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Can be used within a critical realist framework.</b></li> <li>- <b>Flexible, ideal for a project this size.</b></li> <li>- <b>Can be bottom-up, and top-down. I will likely use both, proposing reasoned analysis for the data I have generated and examining how that fits into wider theory in the area.</b></li> <li>- <b>Can develop descriptive accounts but can also be inductive or theoretical, allowing for further analysis.</b></li> <li>- <b>Can be used to give voice to participants.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I cannot commit to a fully inductive approach (having completed a meta-ethnography).</li> <li>- I don't have flexibility / resources for theoretical sampling. In fact, all my reading around GT says a fully GT approach is a very large undertaking, not possible for a student project.</li> <li>- GT-lite seems very similar to TA anyway. But I will be informed by existing theory and theoretical concepts, connecting by data analysis back to my meta-ethnography, and wider psychological theory.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I wish to focus on patterned meaning across the data set, rather than having an idiographic focus.</li> <li>- Primary focus is on participant's perspectives, rather than phenomenological experiences (although experiences may also be relevant).</li> </ul>

Table 5 - Consideration of Analysis Approaches

As observed by Braun and Clarke (2013), thematic analysis can involve bottom-up and top-down approaches combined in one analysis. I would suggest that this is the approach I have taken. Initial thematic coding was achieved in an inductive manner, acknowledging that I could not help but bring my own awareness of theory into the proceedings, not to mention awareness of my meta-ethnography themes. However, I attempted to induce my themes from the codes alone. When it came to further analysis of those themes, it is here that I used a more top-down approach, drawing on wider literature and theory as a way of positioning my findings in a broader context.

## 2.7 Summary

In this bridging document I have explored my personal and professional experiences shaping my views of parental participation. This has evolved throughout my doctoral training as I have become increasingly aware of the prevalence of a deficit model of

parental participation. For much of the last half-century, national education policy has emphasised the importance of developing positive relationships between home and school, and yet, for many, this continues to prove elusive. Informed by a relational justice perspective, I aimed to explore this area primarily through listening to parents share their views and perspectives on their own participation with schools and with their children's learning. I have based my methodology on a critical realist approach, acknowledging the interpretive nature of my thematic analysis of these interview transcripts, whilst recognising the existence of social structures within which we live our lives. This piece of research is described in full in Chapter 3.



## Chapter 3: Empirical Research - A qualitative case study within a Primary School, exploring parental perspectives on school's practices regarding parental participation.

### 3.0 Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing body of evidence suggesting that parental participation with their child's education can positively increase outcomes in terms of children's adjustment and academic achievement. An exploration of the literature suggests that parents' voices may not always be included in these conversations, and that parents are vulnerable to being blamed when participation with schools and with their child's learning does not occur. An alternative perspective is discussed, exploring social capital and social justice.

The purpose of this empirical research is to hear these parents' views, experiences and hopes for the future, and to reflect on how this information can be useful for schools to develop their own practices of parental participation. Based on a qualitative approach, I opted to use qualitative semi-structured interviews with the parents, given that the research concerns itself with parental voice. Interviews with 5 parents from a single Primary School were conducted. The interviews were transcribed and analysed using Thematic Analysis.

Three main themes emerged from the analysis: 'Parental participation is positive', 'There are differing beliefs of whose responsibility parental participation is' and 'Schools can support parental participation'. Exploration of these themes concluded that it is possible for schools to support parents in the generation of social capital, and in doing so, attend to social justice. In conclusion, I suggest that schools can achieve this by attending to relationships with parents, and by allowing parents to have greater agency in their participation with school and with their children's learning. This could be summarised as recognition, respect and involvement in decision making. In doing this, parents may feel empowered with a sense that they are part of their school's community.

### 3.1 Introduction

Dating as far back as The Plowden Report (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967), UK schools have been encouraged to promote participation from parents (see 2.2.2 Practice Context). There has been a growing body of evidence suggesting that parental participation with their child's education can positively increase outcomes in terms of children's adjustment and academic achievement (Castro et al., 2015; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Wilder, 2014). Alongside this there have been efforts made to explore best practice in achieving parental participation (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011), and the dynamics of parental participation in schools (Peters et al., 2008). Whilst it is undoubtedly important to have up to date, valid research on the mechanisms and impacts of parental participation, it is equally important to be wary of unintended messages that may be inferred from discourses around parenting.

Sime and Sheridan (2014) propose that this focus on parental participation can lead to a deficit view of parents who are in need of support, and in whose hands responsibility for children's education rests. This deficit view could be inferred from a quote such as the following: 'It would seem that if the parenting involvement practices of most working class parents could be raised to the levels of the best working class parents in these terms, very significant advances in school achievement might reasonably be expected' (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 87). From such a discourse, concerns have been raised about "hard to reach" parents (Aronson, 1996; Campbell, 2011; Feiler, 2009), a view which Crozier and Davies (2007, p. 296) suggest 'pathologises the parents, laying the blame on them for something which...is, to a large extent, out of their control'. In the public sphere, media coverage has positioned parents as 'ever more irresponsible, more litigious and more violent' (Lumby, 2007, p. 220).

#### 3.1.1 Social Capital

As an alternative to positioning parents as being wholly responsible for engaging with schools, I chose social capital as a lens through which to explore parental participation. With this approach, I intended to move away from a deficit view of parents, to a focus on the social capital that is made available to parents through their interactions with school, and an exploration of parents' perspectives on these interactions. As noted by Bolivar and Chrispeels (2011), 'Individuals do not purposefully bring most forms of social capital into being; instead, these forms are a by-product of other activities within the community'.

Over the last century, social capital has been defined in different ways and given different emphases (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2001), as discussed in Chapter 1. There is, however, an 'emerging consensus that social capital is comprised of networks and norms of trust and cooperation' (Patulny & Lind Haase Svendsen, 2007, p. 34), involving relationships, networks and competencies (Pooley et al., 2005). As a framework for Social Capital, I have used research from a community psychology study (Pooley et al., 2005), which content analysed many different definitions of social capital to arrive at three themes: relationships, networks and competencies. I used these themes to explore whether social capital can be generated within home school relations and interactions. Pooley et al. (2005) suggest that from a psychological perspective, the generation of social capital is inherently related to developing and strengthening the connections between people. The emphasis is therefore on the relational aspects of social capital, rather than how much each individual possesses. 'Social capital in a school context often refers not only to the connections made between people but the quality of those interactions which build mutual trust and reciprocity' (Roffey, 2013, p. 39).

### 3.1.2 Social Justice

Listening to parent voices has also been approached from a social justice perspective. When Cooper and Christie (2005, p. 2249) shifted their focus to privilege parental views, when evaluating a parent empowerment programme in a school, they viewed it as a social justice issue, as subsets of these parents were viewed as the least powerful stakeholder group. Through their research they came to realise that these parents had important and unique perspectives of which no one else involved in the programme was aware. These unique perspectives provided important insight into the parents' educational needs. With this approach, Cooper and Christie (2005) demonstrate that a social justice oriented process can be effective for research. Other researchers (Power & Gewirtz, 2001) have used concepts of justice as a context within which to explore educational practices themselves. Gewirtz (1998) speaks of relational justice, and delineates it into recognitional justice, defined as 'the absence of cultural domination, non-recognition and disrespect' (Gewirtz, 2006, p. 74) and associational justice, defined as the absence of 'patterns of association amongst individuals and amongst social groups which prevent some people from participating fully in decisions which affect the conditions within which they live and act' (Power & Gewirtz, 2001, p. 41).

This is particularly relevant as this piece of empirical research follows on from a meta-ethnography (see Chapter 1) exploring practices and elements of parent participation with their child's education, in which ideas of relational justice emerged. Those findings suggested that important themes for positive participation included 'Influence', 'Communication', and 'Community'. It is clear that these are resonant with the ideas of relational justice. This research was within a context of empowerment, parent voice, or relating to the generation of social capital, and as such I would suggest concepts of social justice can sit comfortably alongside those of social capital, as noted by Bryan and Henry (2012). Looking at parental participation through these lenses may serve as an important counter discourse to that of parental deficit, as well as provide information regarding contextual and relational factors that can inform parental participation.

### 3.1.3 Parent Voice

As noted above, a deficit model can position parents as responsible when parental participation does not occur, and there is often no forum for parents to share their perspectives on this. The positioning of parents in this way deserves our critical attention. On a micro level, case studies have shown how parents can face difficulties and frustrations trying to have their voice heard and their opinions respected (Gewirtz, 2006) and on a macro level, Lumby (2007, p. 230) notes that 'government discourse tends to privilege the voice of teachers'. Approaches to research can serve to counter this privileging of dominant voices, and, similar to Cooper and Christie (2005), my research concerns itself with listening to the voice of parents. As noted by Worcester et al. (2008, p. 509) '...the voices of parents often remain unheard, regardless of widespread acknowledgment that parents play a critically important role as their child's most important teachers'. When attention is given to the voices of parents, the stories and reports generated can provide new information and understanding, as well as providing evidence that can be readily applied to policy and practice (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). This is what I hope for my research to achieve.

### 3.2 This research

A politics of recognition entails 'listening before we act' (Gewirtz, 1998, p. 476), and this is at the heart of this piece of research. A model was generated based on the

themes that emerged from the meta-ethnography (see Chapter 1), and in this empirical research, I aim to listen to parents within a single primary school in the North East of England, and explore their views in relation to the model, and alongside ideas of social capital and social justice. The goal is to hear these parents' views, experiences and hopes for the future, and to reflect on how this information can be useful for schools to develop their own practices of parental participation. I have also chosen to explore the area regarding the ongoing, day to day workings of a school, rather than within the context of a larger project aimed at increasing parental participation. These projects exist, and can be successful (Fiel, Haskins, & Turley, 2013) but require significant resources to complete, which not all schools can be assumed to have (Andrews & Lawrence, 2018).

### 3.2.1 Methodology

Based on a qualitative approach, I opted to use semi-structured interviews with the parents, given that the research concerns itself with parental voice (further detail in Chapter 2). I wrote open-ended questions around the themes of parental involvement and parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), and differences between the two were discussed (see Appendix 2). I then analysed the data using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and final themes were explored and considered alongside the model generated in my meta-ethnography (see Figure 3).

### 3.2.2 Participants and Procedure

I approached a Primary School with an invitation to take part in this research, to which the Head Teacher agreed. The reason I chose this school was that it was relatively large, in terms of pupil numbers, and I believed this would increase my chances of finding parents willing to participate in the research. The criterion for recruiting parents was that their children had attended the school for at least two years. This was to ensure that there had been sufficient time for those parents to experience the school enough to have perspectives and experiences on parental partnership. Flyers were created and sent home to all parents asking for volunteer participants, but these led to no response (see Appendix 4). Instead, I resorted to opportunistic sampling, positioning myself at school in the morning, alongside the school's Inclusion Support Manager, who facilitated introductions with parents as they brought their children to school. From these introductions, I was able to briefly explain the research and, for those who were interested in taking part, arrange a time

to meet for interview, in a room provided by the school. All parents agreed to come back later the same day for interview. In total, 6 parents agreed, although 1 parent did not show up for their allotted time.

I interviewed 5 parents in total, each in a separate interview. One parent was accompanied by their adult daughter, who made a small number of contributions during the interview. Meetings began with a discussion and explanation of the research, and the interview process, with an emphasis on informed consent and their right to withdraw. After this they were presented with a consent form, and once that was signed, verbal permission was requested to start audio recording, and begin the interview. After the interview, participants were thanked and presented with a debrief form (see Appendix 3) to take away, with information about the research and my contact details. Participants were reminded that they could contact me if they decided they no longer wanted their interviews to be included in the research.

### 3.2.3 Thematic Analysis

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents, by a professional transcription company. I chose Thematic Analysis (TA) as the method of analysis, for reasons discussed in Chapter 2. The process is detailed in Table 6.

Stages 1 - 5 of analysis were primarily an inductive process, as I spent time with the data, reading, re-reading, developing my initial codes, and refining them into themes that I believed best represented the data as I had interpreted it. Examples of this process are presented in Appendix 5.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description of the process</b>
1. Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing potential themes	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

*Table 6 - Stages of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006)*

As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 97), TA is limited in its interpretative power if it is not used within wider theoretical frameworks ‘that anchor the analytic claims that are made’. Although I am aware that my own experiences and training in Educational Psychology will have informed the production of themes, it is in Stage 6 where I explicitly considered the themes in the context of wider theory and literature to construct my overall findings. This is presented in the following section.

### 3.3 Findings

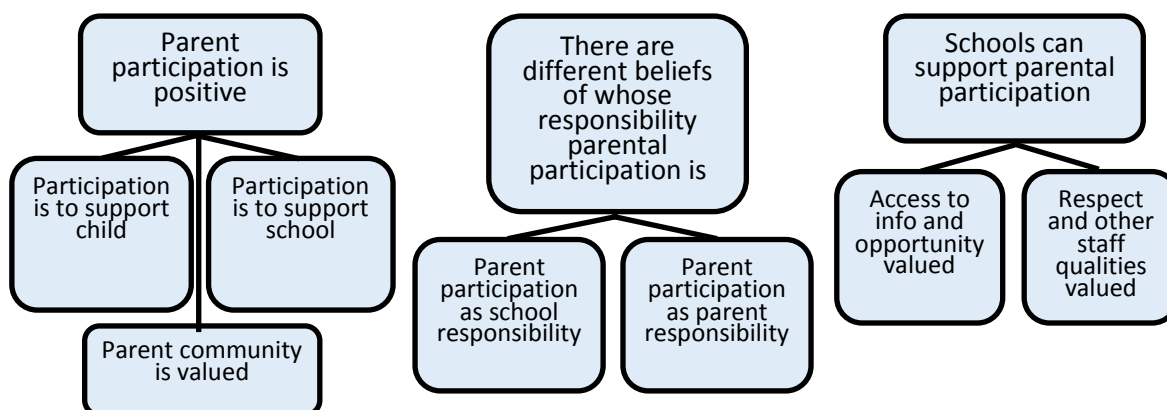


Figure 4 - Thematic Map of Findings

Three main themes (see Figure 4) were generated from the thematic analysis:

1. 'Parent participation is positive'
2. 'There are differing beliefs of whose responsibility parental participation is'
3. 'Schools can support parental participation'

These are broad themes generated to facilitate understanding and discussion of what the parents talked about, but they are constructions and as such they are not perfectly discrete from one another. Indeed, it will become clear that they relate and impact on each other, and some broader ideas of relationships and agency can be seen within all of the themes.

With recognition that TA is a subjective process, and that others might come to different conclusions and understandings than me, I have allowed space for description of the themes with inclusion of original quotes from parents, for the reader to reflect on. Following this I then include my further interpretation and relation to wider theory and research. Quotes from parents in this section are labelled P1-P5.

#### 3.3.1 Parent Participation is Positive

##### *Description*

My initial interview question asked about participants' thoughts on parental participation with school and with their child's learning. I did not define anything more specific at this stage, to allow room for their own ideas and conceptualisations of parental participation. All parents spoke positively of participation. They used words such as "good", "great", "important", "fun", and said participation "does make a difference" (P1). Whilst participation was generally agreed upon to be positive,



different ideas were presented as to who benefits from this participation, and in a sense who participation is for, a similar finding from previous research (Harris & Goodall, 2008).

#### A. Participation is to Support School

Parents spoke of participation in terms of “helping” the school, usually in terms of attending school trips and school fairs etc. The implication was that parents were an extra resource that school could draw upon for staffing and for supporting non-curricular activities, selling raffle tickets or painting eggs at Easter. Parents were happy to be involved in this way: *“I’ll do anything they’ve asked us to do. Like you say, trips and things like that. I’ll do anything”* (P1).

#### B. Participation is to Support Children

Parents also spoke of participation for purposes of supporting their child, often with learning. This was not seen as mutually exclusive to supporting school, but rather spoken of as a different form of participation: *“Oh I’m involved a lot, aren’t I, with [child]. I’m up all the time like with the problems what she has at school. I’m in meetings and that all the time about it”* (P3). Participation was at times spoken of as an action that was triggered by concerns about their child: *“Because a couple of year ago I thought she was dyslexic. So I went straight to see them [the school] and they knew straight away she wasn’t”* (P4), *“Yeah, if I have any problems with [child] I just come in and they like get it sorted for us, so”* (P3). Parents appeared satisfied to participate in this way, and where there was dissatisfaction, it was with regard to the child’s learning: *“I think it’s important that we’re kept up to date with what areas a child’s struggling with, rather than just being told to go home and read three times a week, when that’s not always what a child’s struggling with”* (P2).

#### C. Parent Community is Valued

A third strand of participation that seemed positive for some parents was the sense of connecting with other parents and families. One parent spoke proudly of using her confidence to advocate for other parents: *“I seem to be the voice for everybody on that yard at the moment unfortunately [laughs]. Cos there seems to be a lot of issues where parents have got something to say but they don’t say it to the teacher”* (P1). Another parent shared her positive experiences being part of a ‘Parent Helper’ team: *“We call it a coffee morning on the Friday morning. We have a coffee, we have a chat, what can we do to make the school better”* (P5).

### *Discussion of 1<sup>st</sup> Theme*

This theme encapsulates the involvement/engagement continuum as presented by Goodall and Montgomery (2014). Participation as supporting school aligns with the notion of parental involvement, characterised by school agency, in which 'Parents may be involved in activities, but these activities are instigated and controlled by the school' (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 402). This is seen as a useful starting point for parent-school relationships, and a good foundation to build upon. The parents I spoke to were positive about this aspect, and they seemed to look forward to being able to help the school. Although the next subtheme relating to participation as supporting children is a shift towards engagement in children's learning, rather than simple involvement with school, the interviews show that this doesn't necessarily bring with it a shift in agency. Even when children's learning was the focus, much of the participation of parents involved seeking information and reassurance from school. The transmission of information often remains as school to parent. As one parent noted, *'I think it's important that people accept that [school staff member] might be a professional, but we know our children'* (P2). From a relational justice perspective, this suggests a need for recognition and respect (Gewirtz, 2006).

As noted above, relationships are a source of social capital (Pooley et al., 2005), and it may be that attending to relational justice concerns can promote relationships likely required for a shift from involvement to engagement. Similar sentiments were expressed by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003, p. 24): 'The case studies suggested that when a special relationship between parents and professional educators [was] obtained, in terms of shared aims, good learning progress could take place...' However, it seems that alongside relationships there needs to be both trust and influence, to further promote social capital and encourage parental engagement with their child's learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014; McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Ideas of agency are reflected further in the following theme, regarding the responsibility for parental participation.

#### 3.3.2 There are Differing Beliefs as to whose Responsibility Parent Participation is

##### *Description*

Parents did not explicitly say whose responsibility it was for them to participate but they seemed to express blame, guilt, pride, in ways which at times suggested it was their own responsibility, and at other times suggested it was the school's

responsibility. These two ideas overlapped and parents often displayed both beliefs, suggesting that it is neither wholly the school's, nor the parent's responsibility.

#### A. Parent Participation as Parent Responsibility

With regard to their child's learning, there was a belief that the parent needed to be proactive, whether that be at home, or in sharing concerns to school staff: *"We have one side of our living room is full of high frequency words all over the wall...that was just an idea we came up with, you know, as a bit of a last resort cos we were quite distressed"* (P2). As noted above, a concern with their child was often the trigger for participation. *"So, come in and ask the teachers for help. Don't be scared because the teacher's there to help you, or help the kid"* (P5). Parents referenced their own qualities of being brave, or not being scared, as the reason they were able to take their concerns to the school.

One parent spoke in a way that suggested it was parents' responsibility to earn the school's respect, and to make an effort to respond to school requests, thus allowing for parent participation: *"I think it's a kind of a respect thing, where you've got to respect the teacher, for them to come back...I think they respect me for the fact that I'm gonna go to them..."* (P1). There was a narrative that the parent was to blame if they could not participate: *"You see I tend not to do a lot with us working. So sometimes I haven't got the time...it's hard with my work and family life"* (P4). This extended beyond themselves, and other parents who did not participate were acknowledged, at times, as having work commitments, but at other times as not seeing parent participation as important.

#### B. Parent Participation as School Responsibility

In contrast, there was also a narrative that schools have responsibilities to ensure parental partnership, and the question of parental work responsibilities was here seen as something school try to account for: *"If you can get, like, more than one parent evening. Sometimes you can't get off work"* (P5).

This suggested a recognition that schools were in control of parental involvement within school. This seemed to be a disempowering context for parents with concerns about their children: *"I think you get a parent's evening once a year and that's not really a great deal because when you're told something's up you don't really get told if things are getting better, worse or staying the same, you just sit there until next year really"* (P2). In this way, parents positioned themselves as passive, viewing their

participation as a response to school invites or school arranged meetings. For some, there was an understanding that it is difficult for school and teachers to make time for parents. As one parent described the school arrangements for parents to observe their children in school: *“They don’t do it much, but they do it when they can do.”* (P5).

#### *Discussion of 2<sup>nd</sup> Theme*

Taking responsibility for participating, or for making contact with their school was seen as an act of bravery, and parents who did so were proud of themselves. It is notable that parents wanted to participate more, but many seemed to express a fear of speaking up. Even when these parents believed they had a responsibility to act, they did not feel not able to. Crozier and Davies (2007, p. 309) observed this when their research suggested that parents who may be labelled as ‘hard to reach’ were not as indifferent as the label suggests, but rather ‘there was little or no recognition of the nature of the parent body or their particular needs or perspectives’. Critiques of the ‘hard to reach parents’ view have noted that there are often ‘cultural differences, fewer material resources and a lack of personal education’ (Watt, 2016, p. 32) that make many parents less able to participate within their school community. My findings suggest that a sense of belonging can also be a major factor in parental participation. Drawing from the ‘membership’ element of Sense of Community theory (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 10), a fear of speaking up could suggest that these parents don’t feel a sense of belonging in the school community, involving ‘the feeling, belief, and expectation that one fits in the group and has a place there, a feeling of acceptance by the group’.

In the second subtheme, that parent participation is the school’s responsibility, some parents were explicitly discussing wishes for more contact and more involvement. This can also relate to the Sense of Community theory, particularly the ‘influence’ element (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), in which to be a member of the community means being able to have some influence over what that community chooses to do. This may involve attending to associational justice issues (see 3.1.2 Social Justice), allowing parents decision-making participation (Gewirtz, 2006), rather than have them remain in a passive position. According to Goodall and Montgomery’s model (2014), this may be the start of a move towards greater parental participation with schooling. To use the example of parent teacher meetings, as the parents in this research have, Goodall and Montgomery (2014, p. 404) envision that this would

mean 'parents and staff would share control of the information: parents would have the chance – and time – to ask questions and probe answers'. It is clear that some parents in my research wanted more time, but the school retained agency as to how, when, and what form such meetings were.

Despite the issues discussed here, there were many examples of how schools supported and encouraged parental participation, in ways that parents valued. These will be discussed below. Some of the positive practices parents described appear in contrast to the experience other parents talked about, which underlines the fact that individual parents may experience their relationship with the same school in very different ways.

### 3.3.3 Schools can support parental participation

#### *Description*

Throughout all the interviews, there were clear examples of school actions and policies that parents felt positive about, and that seemed to support parents in their participation with school, and with their children's learning. Alongside this, there were suggestions from parents as to what would support their participation, if it was not already in place.

#### A. Access to Information and Opportunities Valued

Parents suggested that they appreciated being given information about the curriculum in advance and being shown specific teaching methods so they can better support homework activities. *'So I'll go to the teacher and say I can't understand this, explain this to me in a way that I can understand, and then I can go tell [the child]'* (P1). This extended to a wish for ongoing, up-to-date information about how their child is doing at school, with awareness of specifics, again for the purposes of being able to support them at home: *'I think it's important that we're kept up to date with what areas a child's struggling with, rather than just being told to go home and read three times a week, when that's not always what a child's struggling with'* (P2). It was suggested that receiving this information just on parent's evenings could come as a surprise.

Opportunities to see their children in school were also valued when they occurred. *'...we can come and see who he's playing with and what kind of work they do and things like that...And do you know what? I'm so happy I did'* (P5). Seeing things with their own eyes seemed to resolve fears of the unknown, and information about the

child's social life at school, as well as their learning, was comforting to parents. This appeared helpful for parents building trust toward schools, once they saw how the school were supporting their children.

#### B. Relational Qualities of School Staff Valued

The relational qualities of school staff when interacting with parents was spoken about, with parents showing appreciation for staff who were 'open', 'inviting', 'supportive', 'lovely' and 'approachable'. *'They take time to talk to you as well, don't they?'* (P3). When staff were discussed in ways that opposed this, it was in a context of why there had been, or still were, limited opportunities made available for participation. Having positive relationships between staff and parents seemed an important part of facilitating participation: *'It's just been a bit of a transition this year into, sort of a teacher who's not as, kind of, forthcoming, and she seems to be a little bit more working on her own and there's a little bit less involvement there'* (P2). Parents also commented on a wish to be respected as having a valid opinion about their own children.

Related to the above subtheme, it seemed that parents valued opportunities to talk and share their concerns with staff, often in an informal way. This was highlighted through recurring appreciation of a specific staff member, whose role appeared to involve parental liaison in this way. *'...my daughters usually get picked on, and I needed to be coming in to school all the time. And then [staff member] said, 'come on. Let's go and have a cup of tea'* (P5). Examples were shared of this particular staff member showing flexible, responsive ways to support parents and families: *'I know a couple of kids didn't want to come to school and they were crying, and [staff member] went out in her own car, she went to the house, made sure that the kids is alright, made sure the parent's alright, and brought the kids in to school'* (P5). This story was given as a reason why parents should not feel scared about speaking up, as school staff were helpful, supportive people.

#### Discussion of 3<sup>rd</sup> Theme

Examples in this section provide a view into what positive participation looks like from a parental perspective. Taken together, the sub-themes suggest parents wish to increase their understanding of what is happening in school with regards to their child, and to be treated with respect and warmth. These examples show that social capital can indeed be generated, following Pooley et al's (2005) typology. Parents

value opportunities to increase their own competencies, with respect to supporting their child with homework. Regarding the networks in place, parents value knowing that there are staff available to talk to, the potential for information exchange, and the availability of a parent community. With relationships, parents valued being treated with warmth and respect by staff who were “lovely”, “supportive” and “inviting”.

As apparent as it is that schools can generate social capital in their interactions with parents, it is equally apparent that this is not, by itself, enough to move from parental involvement to parental engagement. From a relational justice perspective (see 3.1.2 Social Justice), the examples provided more evidence of recognitional justice, than they did of associational justice (Gewirtz, 2006), in which parents have decision making responsibility. It may be the case that creating social capital between parents and schools is necessary but not sufficient if parental engagement with their child’s learning is the goal, remembering that it is here where the greatest benefits to the child are seen (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Parents may, of course, be already engaging in their child’s learning in myriad ways. As noted above, one parent had been very proactive in creating flash cards and activities to support their child at home, but they felt unsure and unsupported by the school as they did. Indeed, parents can support their children’s learning with a fervour, but if seen as separate, or in opposition to school, it may lead to tension and mistrust between home and school (Symeou, 2008).

To address this, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggest a shift in agency from school to parents, toward a sharing of responsibility for the child’s learning. Teachers are free to teach, but parents are recognised as responsible for their engagement with their children’s learning, which can still be informed and supported by school, but not dictated. Crozier and Davies (2007) note that this can be difficult for schools, who can interpret parental involvement in this way as a challenge to their ideas of teacher professionalism. This may be a question of schools being unwilling to share agency, which may create the opposite effect of maintaining influence: ‘those who always push to influence, try to dominate others, and ignore the wishes and opinions of others are often the least powerful members’ (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 11).

### 3.4 Overall Discussion

In their analysis of Families and Schools Together (FAST), an intervention aimed at building social capital amongst schools and families, Fiel, Shoji, and Gamoran (2015, p. 266) concluded that:

*'FAST aims to decrease anxiety related to school for both children and parents, reduce barriers to parent involvement, make the school a more welcoming environment for families, and foster the creation of parent networks within schools, where resources and social support can be exchanged'.*

Whilst not trying to take away from positive achievements of such interventions, what my research has shown is that such goals can be achieved within the ongoing interactions and relationships between school staff and parents.

Table 7 provides an overview of how schools can provide for the generation of social capital within their interactions and relationships with parents, as suggested by this research.



Table 7 - Examples of the generation of social capital

Social Capital (Pooley et al., 2005)	Examples from Empirical Research of parental requests and preferences	Suggestions of how Schools can meet these requests (based on parental voice).
<p><b>Competencies:</b></p> <p><i>The individual's personal resources (e.g. self-esteem, self-efficacy).</i></p> <p><i>Capacity to interact effectively with the environment.</i></p>	<p>Parents wished for flexibility around Parents' Evening etc., to accommodate work etc.</p> <p>Parents wanted opportunities to increase their own abilities to support their child with homework (e.g. specific Maths methods).</p> <p>Parents valued that they could get involved and get school involved when they had concerns about their child.</p>	<p>Provide variety of options for Parents' Evenings. <i>"longer talking...more than one parent evening"</i> (P5).</p> <p>Provide in-school events to show parents specific methods for learning activities. <i>"I don't think it would be a bad idea [to set] this week up in May if [parents] want to come in and find out how we learn and things...rather than two people trying to pull a child in opposite directions"</i> (P2).</p> <p>Provide opportunities for parents to clarify learning activities with teachers. <i>"If I have a problem with something homework wise I'll just go to her teacher and say..."</i> (P1).  <i>"If you ask the teachers to do something, they'll help you as much as they can"</i> (P5).</p>
<p><b>Networks:</b></p> <p><i>Relating to trust, goodwill, reciprocity, interaction, structure, density.</i></p>	<p>Parents want to be kept up to date of what is going on with their child's learning, with specifics.</p> <p>Parents having a role in school (e.g. Parent Helper teams).</p>	<p>Provide parents with curriculum information, targets, word lists etc. termly or yearly. <i>"She said oh well, I can give you a list of all the words that they need to learn in Year 2...And you think great, but why couldn't I have had that ages ago?"</i> (P2)</p> <p>School providing opportunities and spaces for parents to develop community (e.g. coffee morning). <i>"We have a coffee, we have a chat, what can we do to make the school better?"</i> (P5)</p>

Social Capital (Pooley et al., 2005)	Examples from Empirical Research of parental requests and preferences	<b>Suggestions of how Schools can meet these requests (based on parental voice).</b>
<p><b>Relationships:</b></p> <p><i>Relationships between individuals and between groups.</i></p> <p><i>Including factors of Relational Justice (Gewirtz, 2006):</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Absence of domination, recognition and respect</i></li> <li>• <i>Involvement of all, allowing for decision making participation</i></li> </ul>	<p>Positive relationships with teachers were seen as key to facilitating participation.</p> <p>Parents appreciated relational qualities of staff who were open, inviting, supportive, lovely, approachable etc.</p> <p>Parents appreciate staff taking time to talk to them.</p> <p>Parents all viewed parental participation as positive, and wanted to be involved, to varying degrees.</p>	<p>Schools policies and practices should address relationships with parents, and communication opportunities should be provided to build positive relationships. <i>“They respect me for the fact that I’m gonna go to them and they know they can come to me” (P1).</i></p> <p>Staff to prioritise positive relational qualities in their interactions with parents. <i>“We’ve just met with the new SENCO, who’s lovely, very different to the old SENCO who wasn’t as approachable” (P2).</i></p> <p>Providing designated staff or flexibility to allow responsiveness to parental concerns. <i>“Well, like I said, my daughters usually get picked on, and I needed to be coming in to school all the time. And then Miss N said, ‘come on. Let’s go and have a cup of tea’”(P5).</i></p> <p>Schools can discuss and ask parents how they would like to participate. <i>“Just like as long as the school tells us when stuff is” (P4).</i></p> <p>Schools should also provide opportunities to listen to parent’s expertise. <i>‘I think it’s important that people accept that [school staff member] might be a professional, but [parents] know our children’ (P2).</i></p>

This is not to be considered as an exhaustive list of how social capital can be created. Nor, in practice, will the three components of social capital be addressed separately. Indeed, even in the examples above, it is clear that some practices could be included in more than one category at the same time. Essentially though, these are practices that may serve to support parental participation without viewing parents through a deficit model. Generating social capital in this way can be supportive of a move beyond parental involvement to parental engagement.

This research is limited in terms of how generalizable it is, given that it is small scale qualitative research with 5 parents, within a single Primary School in the UK.

However, I have shown that the themes emerged correspond to wider research and theory, as well as my previous meta-ethnography. As Horvat et al. (2003, p. 320) argue, qualitative approaches 'can make an important contribution by providing insights into the underlying actions that produce or expend social capital'. I have shown the importance of relational factors in school-parent interactions.

Relationships can be difficult to address through policy alone, and so I would suggest research following this would explore how this might be addressed, perhaps through exploring school climates.

From my own perspective working in Educational Psychology, I am well positioned as a potential change agent, with an awareness of the how systems (i.e. home and school) can impact on and interact with each other (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). EPs can encourage ongoing communication and collaboration, being well practised in the use of consultation approaches that recognise that all participants bring unique expertise to a situation (Wagner, 2008). As a further example, EPs could facilitate approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry, allowing school staff and parents to reflect on parental participation together, allowing each side to hear the voice of the other (Ryan, Soven, Smither, Sullivan, & VanBuskirk, 1999). EPs could also support generation of social capital (particularly 'competencies') through developing confidence and self-efficacy of parents through empowering approaches such as Video Interaction Guidance (Kennedy, Landor, & Todd, 2011).

It may be worth speculating as to why the concept of 'hard to reach' parents remains such a common construct in education. Undoubtedly there are individual examples of parents being reluctant to engage with schools, but as this research suggests, many assumptions made about families' and communities' aspirations and expectations may be misplaced. Research on in-group favouritism suggests that people can

attribute blame to others to protect their self or group identity (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). School staff may be vulnerable to this bias when faced with lower levels of parent participation than is being asked of them from national and local parental engagement policies.

I would not suggest that school staff alone should be responsible for resolving this situation. It has been noted that between groups there is often an unequal power dynamic (Joffe, 1995).

‘Since more dominant groups have more power to shape social discourse, the absolution of ‘self’ and blaming of ‘other’ for risks often functions to perpetuate these intergroup inequalities’ (N. Smith, O’Connor, & Joffe, 2015, p. 1.8).

The perpetuation of the ‘hard to reach’ parents construct might simply reflect that we are not listening to parents’ side of the story.

What this piece of research contributes to our understanding of parental participation and parent voice is a drawing together of sociological parental engagement literature as well as psychological theory regarding sense of community. Attending to or neglecting social justice issues impacts on the psychological factors that parental engagement may involve. We cannot ask for parents’ engagement, whilst denying them a voice. Within this context I suggest that the necessary puncturing of current narratives will involve addressing social justice issues (Gewirtz, 2006), and allowing parents to define their own experiences.

### 3.5 Conclusion

In summary, I would suggest that school can go far in supporting parents by attending to relationships with parents, and by allowing parents to have greater agency in their participation with school and with their children’s learning. This could be summarised as recognition, respect and involvement in decision making. In doing this, parents may feel empowered with a sense that they are part of their school’s community.

*‘Schools that have successfully built a sense of community within their walls-that is, schools that are collaborative, communicative, and inclusive, appear to have the greatest success in developing strong connections with the community outside their walls’ (Epstein et al., 2002, p. 36).*

For me, this research primarily involved listening to parents, hearing what works for them, and what concerns they have. I would suggest this to be a good starting point for schools and Educational Psychologists wishing to improve parental participation.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1 – Meta-Ethnography Grids

I followed the approach taken by previously published meta-ethnographies and used a grid to display how my themes were represented across all the studies. This grid evolved as I gathered pertinent information and quotes, developing initial concepts and larger themes. The size and content of the grid changed throughout, at one point reaching as long as 41 pages. For this reason I feel it is best represented here by showing examples from the grid at various stages, showing how it evolved over time.

<p><b>Belonging (2<sup>nd</sup>)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationships with staff</li> <li>- Home school boundaries</li> <li>- Belonging / School character</li> <li>- Parent feeling valued</li> <li>- Parents' views on the teachers</li> <li>- Parents idea of how school views them</li> </ul>	<p>Key factors in supporting parental engagement were 'strong leadership and commitment from the EEC/school manager to genuine parental engagement, flexible provision and opportunities for engagement, open channels of communication and a positive school ethos, which treated parents with respect and believed in their ability to support children's learning' (p. 339).</p> <p>'Positive relationships with the school staff are important sources of cultural capital, as they facilitate parents' access to knowledge about the demands on children, as well as ways of empowering parents to support their children' (p. 335).</p>	<p>'Authentic relationships require <i>confianza</i>, and this is what these parents wanted' (p. 123).</p> <p>'Teachers and administrators must unite with parents to create school cultures that encourage parent volunteerism' (p. 123).</p>	<p>'We see evidence of parents as advocates who, if they were asked, would provide information they believed would help their child and further solidify the parent-teacher-student relationship' (p. 19-20).</p> <p>'...the fact that Latisha felt the need to counter assumptions was powerful evidence of the view parents believe teachers have of them. In part, it is this process of clearing up assumptions, both coming and going, that allows teachers and parents to connect in new, robust, positive, and productive ways' (p. 22).</p> <p>'...parents recognised that sharing some types of information could be considered tangential or inconsequential to</p>	<p>When teacher emphasised importance of parent-student-teacher cooperation and communication, 'parents then apparently felt free to express their own expectations and worries and communicated them very articulately' (p. 10).</p> <p>'When parents met him, he consciously cultivated the most welcoming atmosphere. He always appeared very friendly and warm and welcomed them with a genuine greeting...Parents generally responded positively to this approach' (p. 12).</p> <p>'Homer's success in earning parents' confidence to cooperate with him</p>	<p>'Improvement in the quality and frequency of meetings between parents and teachers also emerged as a suggestion from this study' (p. 392).</p> <p>'It has been proposed that the extent or frequency of parents' involvement in the child's school may be influenced by their "motivational beliefs for involvement", that is, if they perceive that their contribution at their child's school would be valued and appreciated...' (p. 392).</p> <p>'School could explore more feasible partnerships with parents by encouraging actual participation of parents in every day school life including school activities and events' (p. 393).</p>
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Each of the 5 columns represented one of the 5 papers. The image below shows two colours being used as I developed the grid. These two colours denoted the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> order constructs.

As this process continued, and I engaged with the concepts across the papers, I began to interpret and construct larger ideas and themes into which the ideas could be grouped, as seen below. I gathered initial concepts on the first column, and interpreted how the papers addressed those concepts throughout the other columns.

<p><b>Belonging (1<sup>st</sup>)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Relationships with staff</li> <li>- Home school boundaries</li> <li>- Belonging / School character</li> <li>- Parent feeling valued</li> <li>- Parents' views on the teachers</li> <li>- Parents idea of how school views them</li> </ul>	<p><b>PARENTS VALUE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF AND ARE HELPED BY THEM</b></p> <p>'Parents valued good relationships with the staff and spoke of how <b>these have enabled them</b> to tackle serious and personal issues, such as literacy issues, addiction or domestic violence' (p. 335).</p> <p><b>PARENTS VALUE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER PARENTS AND ARE HELPED BY THEM</b></p> <p>"You had learned to hide things, but we can now tell each other. It's <b>gein</b> [given] me confidence..." (p. 337).</p> <p>"If one of us has problems, we gather around to help" (p. 337).</p>	<p><b>PARENTS VALUE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF AND ARE HELPED BY THEM</b></p> <p>'The volunteers also cited home visits as a vital means for parents to get to know teachers'..."<b>it makes you feel very good</b>, and if other schools have this – home visits – I think it would open communication. It would make the <b>parents feel more important</b>" (p. 122).</p> <p>'Though many of the parents said that they were embarrassed the first time they experienced a home visit, they quickly realised that the visits were essential in building stronger relationships with the school' (p. 122).</p> <p>'To the parent volunteers,</p>	<p><b>PARENTS VALUE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF AND ARE HELPED BY THEM</b></p> <p>'All but one parent specifically cited experiences and situations where communication was positive and <b>allowed the parent to feel welcome</b> within the school' (p. 28).</p> <p>"I'm willing to listen and want to have a good relationship with my children's teacher" (p. 22).</p> <p>Describing a teacher: "She was nice; she was welcoming. "Come anytime," you know. She always called and invited me or vice-versa...she used to come to his basketball games. She was a really nice lady, really, really nice. <b>So, it made</b></p>	<p><b>PARENTS VALUE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF AND ARE HELPED BY THEM</b></p> <p>'Even families that had been less inclined to come to the school in previous years or whose children were not doing so well academically pointed out that they found in the face of Homer a teacher actively interested in their children, one who was honest with them and <b>who valued their opinions</b>' (p. 13).</p>	<p><b>PARENTS VALUE GOOD RELATIONSHIPS WITH STAFF AND ARE HELPED BY THEM</b></p> <p>When parents had positive relationships with schools, their suggestions regarding parental participation were more likely to involved schools inviting parents get involved. For parents without positive relationships, vice versa (p. 387-388).</p> <p><b>PARENTS VALUE HAVING A ROLE WITHIN THE SCHOOL</b></p> <p>"We are presently taking part in our child's schooling by activities such as 'maths for fun', Parents Association, etc. This not only means we get a feel for the school, but also for our child's friends, his</p>
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This stage brought me to my final list of Initial Concepts (see Figure 2).

**Participant interview script**

Hello. Thanks for agreeing to meet with me. My name is Jonathan, and I'm a Trainee Educational Psychologist, working for \_\_\_\_ and studying at Newcastle University.

Just before we start, I would like to explain what the interview is about, and how the interview will work:

	The participant has confirmed verbally that they understand (tick if so)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain the concept of informed consent, and explain that they do not have to answer any questions if they don't want to. Explain that they have the right to leave at any time.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain the reasons for our research, making clear that I cannot impact on their personal situation with the school</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain what the meeting will involve should they choose to stay</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain that interview will be recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>explain how I will make the data confidential, (no one apart from me (and transcription service) will know what we discussed. The school will not know what we discussed). In the final report there will be nothing that identifies parents, and no names mentioned or recorded anywhere.</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are you happy to sign the consent form? Or do you have any more questions?</li> </ul>	

Sign consent form

Ask permission and **BEGIN RECORDING**

I'm going to ask you some questions about your participation with school and with your child's learning. There are no wrong answers. Do you have any questions you'd like to ask before we start? Are you happy to continue with the interview?

**Key: Italics = probing questions**

- 1) Can you tell me how long your child/children has been attending this school?
- 2) Can you tell me what 'parental participation' means to you?
- 3) What do you think about 'parental participation'?

Some of the research that I have read suggests parental participation can range between two different forms of participation.

First, there is parental 'involvement' with school. This is when schools give parents information, and parents are involved in activities, but those activities are usually decided by and controlled by the school. These activities might mostly take place within the school.

Second, there is parental 'engagement' with their child's learning. This may more home-based, and whilst it can be guided and influenced by school info and advice, the choice of activity and how to do it is made by parents.

Confirm understanding of the two types of participation.

- 4) Can you tell me about your involvement with school?
  - *How does the school impact your involvement, if at all?*
- 5) Can you tell me about your engagement with your child's learning?
  - *How does the school impact this engagement, if at all?*
- 6) Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about 'parental participation'?

General prompts:

*You mentioned \_\_\_\_: Can you tell me some more about that?*

*Would you be able to expand on that?*

*How did that affect your: involvement?*

*engagement?*

*participation?*

Finish interview by thanking participant, and presenting them with a debrief sheet (see Appendix 3).

**THANK YOU** for taking part in this research on parental participation in Primary Schools. I appreciate that you took the time to share your views and experiences with me.

This information will be recorded anonymously. No one will be able to identify what you have said, and neither your name, nor the name of the school, will be included in any reports or presentations from this research. Once audio recordings have been transcribed, they shall be deleted. Until then, recordings will be saved in a private, secure University drive, which only I shall be accessing.



The information you have shared with me will be anonymously analysed alongside information from other participants. I will be looking at this information to increase understanding of how schools are allowing parents and carers to feel empowered and to have a voice when it comes to participating with their child's schooling and learning.

My findings will be included as part of my Educational Psychology Doctoral thesis and submitted to University of Newcastle, with consideration of publication in an Education journal.

If you decide that you no longer want the information from your interview to be included in the research, then please let me know using the contact details below.



If you have any further questions or would like an update regarding the research then please get in contact with me or my research supervisor ([david.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:david.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk).)

Yours sincerely,

**Jonathan Cleland**

[j.cleland2@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:j.cleland2@newcastle.ac.uk)





**Research on parental engagement in Durham**

My name is Jonathan Cleland. I am an Educational Psychology doctoral student, currently on placement with Durham County Council. I would like to invite you to take part in a research project about how schools support parental engagement.

Are you a parent or carer who has had a child attending this school for at least two years? If so, I would like to talk with you (and your partner, if preferred) about how your child's school has helped you to engage with them. I am keen to hear your point of view and to understand what matters to you.

The research will involve a single, recorded interview with me. The process is entirely private - All info will be kept confidential and only I will have access to it. No one from your child's school will know or hear what we discuss. Please be aware that I may not be able to interview all parents, should there be a high level of response.

If you are interested in taking part in this research, please fill in your name and phone number, and return this form to your school, or alternatively you can email [j.cleland2@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:j.cleland2@newcastle.ac.uk)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

I look forward to hearing from you! ☺

Jonathan Cleland

**Parental Engagement in Schools**

**Would you like to share your experience?**

If you are interested in taking part in this research, or have any questions, please email:

[j.cleland2@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:j.cleland2@newcastle.ac.uk)

or

Ask your school to pass your contact details to me, using the attached form, and I will get in touch.

You can also contact my supervisor at:

[david.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:david.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk)

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Communication and  
Language Sciences  
King George v1 Building  
Newcastle Upon Tyne  
NE1 7RU



## Appendix 5 – Thematic Analysis

Sample of coding from Stage 2 of the analysis:

	<b>Transcript</b>	<b>Ideas of Codes</b>
<b>P</b>	So we probably have a parents evening once a year. Other than that there's nativities, that would be about it really.	Parent position is passive.
<b>I</b>	Yeah.	
<b>P</b>	The only kind of other activities that you would do in school would be at the end of year you would go on a picnic or a beach day. So it's not actually in school.	
<b>I</b>	Yeah.	
<b>P</b>	...which means that you don't kind of get a good look at what they're doing, who they're playing with...	Wish for chance to see pupil in school
<b>I</b>	Yeah.	
<b>P</b>	...what kind of areas of the classroom do they enjoy being. What areas they're reluctant to be because they're not quite sure what- what they're doing.	Wish for more detail about child's learning and areas of difficulty.
<b>I</b>	Yeah.	
<b>P</b>	So I- I think it would be helpful to spend time in class with your child...	Wish for chance to see pupil in school
<b>I</b>	Yeah.	
<b>P</b>	...and I know it's not always you know, logistically the most easiest thing to do.	Consideration of teacher/school position.
<b>I</b>	Yeah, yeah.	
<b>P</b>	But it would kind of be- be beneficial I think.	
<b>I</b>	Yeah, yeah. Okay.	

P = parent

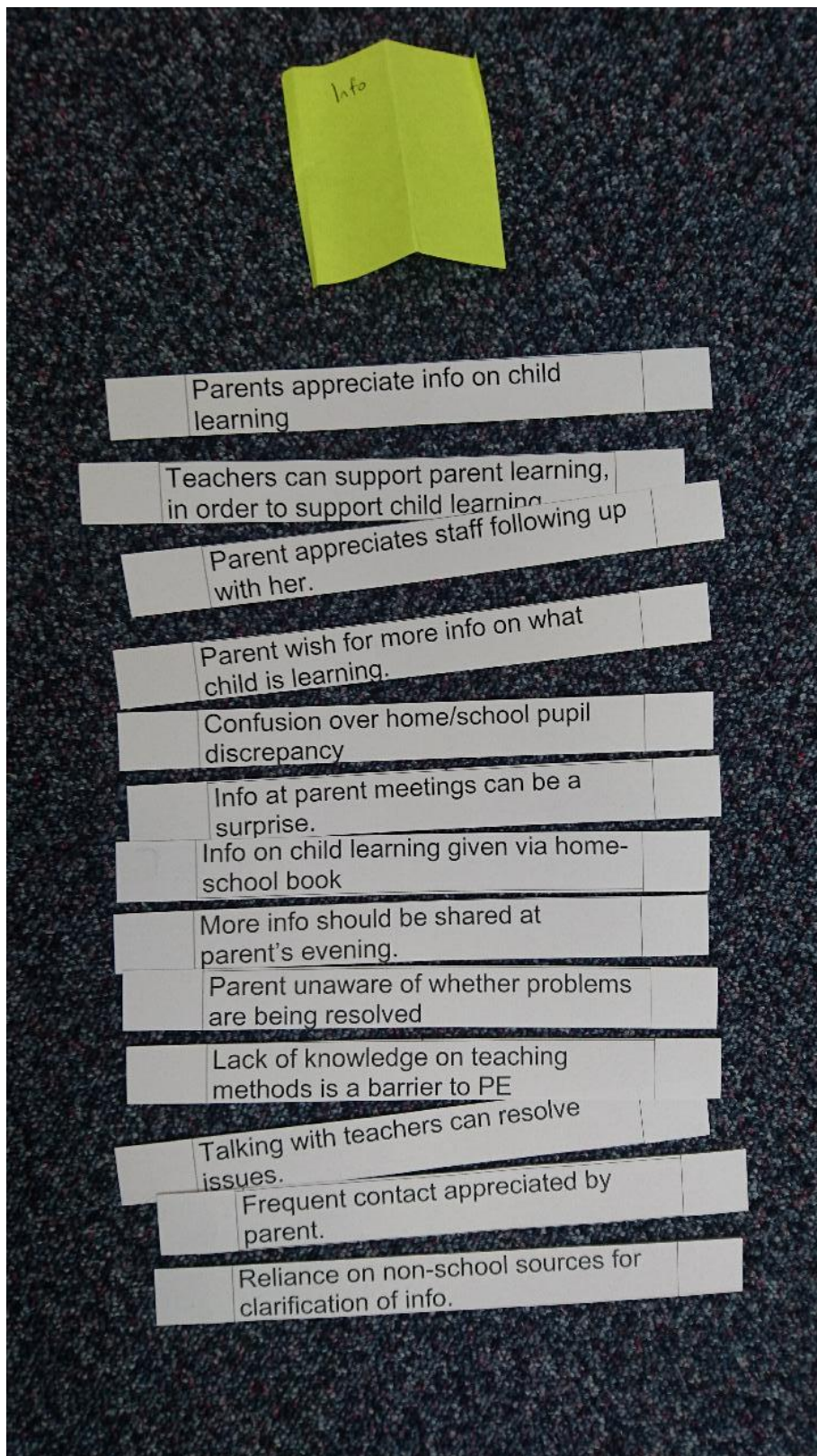
I = Interviewer

Following the coding process for all interviews, codes were collated and a list was finalised.

<b>Final Codes</b>
Defined Parent helper role
Parent participation is to support school/teachers.
Participation is good
Not all parents are the same.
Children lose out if parents don't participate.
Participation = Caring
Good parent-child relationship impacts positively on child's behaviour
Child sees PP as positive.
Wish for more parents being involved.
Non PP parents don't see school participation as their role.
Role of a parent.
Looking after your child involves PP.
Role of a parent.
Role of a teacher.
Lack of confidence is barrier to PP.
Work commitments are barrier to PP.
It's parent's responsibility to make PP work.
Responding to teacher concerns.
Sharing concerns with teacher.
Talking with teachers can resolve issues.
PP requires bravery.
Some parents mediate between school and wider parent community
Parents need to speak up.
PP parents speak for non-PP parents.
Non-PP parents don't report concerns to staff.
PP encouraged by earned respect from school.
Working together around the child.
Parents can provide different perspective than teachers.
Consideration of teacher/school position.
PE is supporting with homework
PE – parent is teacher outside of school
PE – using own resources to support learning.
Importance of education
Parents doing their best.
Teachers can support parent learning, in order to support child learning.
PP requires time
PP requires effort
PP is to support children.
Key members of staff play positive role.
Parent appreciates staff following up with her.
Wish for more PP opportunities
Wish for recognition of parental knowledge.
Wish for more contact between parent and school.
Parent unaware of whether problems are being resolved
Parent position is passive.
Lack of knowledge on teaching methods is a barrier to PE

Wish for chance to see pupil in school
Confusion over home/school pupil discrepancy
Approachable staff valued by parent.
Sharing what works with teachers.
Takes time to build relationship with teacher.
'Good' teachers take parent views on board.
Difference between EY and KS1
Teacher qualities appreciated by parent.
Frequent contact appreciated by parent.
Teacher qualities not appreciated by parent.
Teacher qualities impact on PP
Info at parent meetings can be a surprise.
PE is supporting emotional wellbeing
Parent appreciates dialogue with staff.
Time wasted waiting on opportunities to talk with school
Parents appreciate info on child learning
Parent wish for more info on what child is learning.
Wish for more parental participation
PE – finding ecological opportunities for learning
Sense that teachers disregard parent views
Reliance on non-school sources for clarification of info.
PI is non-academic events with children
Easy access to teachers
Learning activities at home guided by child
Info on child learning given via home-school book
Appreciation of staff availability
Sense of staff valuing parent voice
Parent community
Wider family responsibilities impact on PI
Parent wishes they could do more PI
PE is building on teacher-set homework
PI – values opportunities to come in and see child play and work
Seeing child in situ reduces worries about unknowns.
PE is opportunity for bonding
More info should be shared at parent's evening.
Needs more flexibility for working parents.
Welcoming environment.
Staff going extra mile is valued

At this stage, codes were printed and cut out allowing for me to manipulate the codes, exploring how they fit into different themes and sub-themes. An example is given below:



This stage was complete once I had generated a final thematic map (see

Figure 4) that I felt best captured my interpretation of the data.