Crossing the boundary, connecting with communities: An action research exploration of school-community partnerships

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Overarching abstract

This thesis will critically consider and explore partnerships between school staff and individuals living in the community and will investigate an attempt to develop practice in one North East school in relation to school-community partnerships.

Chapter one comprises a systematic literature review which considers the question: what factors facilitate effective school-community partnerships? A systematic literature search resulted in seven qualitative papers considering factors supporting the development of school-community partnerships. Analysis led to a tentative interpretation that key concepts of 'community connection', 'mutuality and authentic impact' and 'partnership culture and resources' may be important for successful school-community partnerships. This interpretation is considered in the light of wider literature and implications for practice are offered.

Chapter two bridges the systematic literature review and the empirical project and explores my personal, philosophical, and methodological positioning. In this chapter I consider the impact my positioning has on the purpose of the empirical research and the methodological approach, and ethical considerations involved in planning this project.

Chapter three reports on a collaborative and action-based research project which aimed to explore how staff in a primary school in the North East of England might develop partnerships and engage further with their local community. It later evolved to consider the possible role of educational psychologists in facilitating school-community partnerships The project began with one Headteacher as a co-researcher and myself, a Trainee Educational Psychologist. The research purpose was transformative and aimed to better understand the relationship between the school and the local community; finding ways that they could work more collaboratively. The research is discussed in a way that demonstrates the iterative and active process of inquiry.

The inquiry involved an initial meeting with the co-researcher, a short survey shared with staff and pupils by the co-researcher, attendance at a network meeting for a group already supporting partnerships between schools and community organisations, and a parent focus group. After each research activity, my co-researcher and I engaged in critical reflection and discussion to decide where the project should go. The data from the focus group was transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis to generate themes to further our enquiry and lead to outcomes for practice in school. The considerations from the focus group related to how the school could improve relationships more widely with parents and how they could contribute to the school community. Unexpected external challenges during the project impacted on the process and the implications of these are discussed to provide a rationale for broadening the inquiry to other stakeholders within the final phase. This study demonstrates the ways in which action research can contribute to professional learning and create a space for transformative dialogue in the face of challenge.

The final chapter provides a reflective commentary on the experiences of conducting this research and how they have influenced me as a practitioner psychologist. This

chapter will explore the ways in which embarking on an action research project has supported me in considering my values and exploring how I can work with integrity and engage authentically with the co-researcher and participants.

18376 words

Chapter 1 has been presented in a format suitable for intended publication in the journal Educational Studies and Chapter 3 has been presented in a format suitable for intended publication in the journal Educational Action Research.

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Chapter 1 Developing partnership between school staff and community members: What factors are important?

Abstract

Schools have a central place within communities, and policymakers are becoming more interested in the potential for school-community collaboration to be prioritised in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children exist within multiple systems, and the influence is bi-directional, with children both influencing and being influenced by the systems in which they are developing. School and community are two such systems, and there is evidence to suggest that bringing the two together can positively impact children and young people. Therefore, with this systematic literature review I aimed to explore the factors important for developing effective school-community partnerships. A meta-ethnographic method was employed to conduct this review with seven relevant research papers. Concepts arising were systematically synthesised in a line of argument, and a possible school-community partnership model was developed. The analysis led to a tentative interpretation that concepts of 'community connection', 'mutuality and authentic impact' and 'partnership culture and resources' may support successful school-community partnerships. These key concepts are explored within the context of previous literature and implications within education are considered. It is implied that working to develop these key areas could support the functioning of school-community partnerships and have a positive impact for children and young people.

Keywords: Partnership; community; school-community relationships; connection

5,587 Words

1.1 Introduction

This paper uses meta-ethnography to synthesise qualitative literature on factors influencing the development of school-community partnerships. The following narrative will provide the reader with context from the broader literature, the analysis process, and subsequent data synthesis.

1.1.1 Context

Schools can be considered to have a central place within communities, involving parents and students from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds (Green, 2016). In England, the Full Service Extended Schools (FSES) (Department for Education; DfE, 2003) initiative launched in 2003 due to an emerging recognition of schools as centrally positioned in communities (Cummings et al., 2011). The aim of introducing FSES was to ensure at least one school in the local authority (LA) would provide access to services, including health, adult learning, childcare and other provisions that would normally be outside the bounds of the school (DfE, 2003). One aspect of the FSES strategy appears to be developing partnerships between school staff and community members to improve outcomes and positively impact children's well-being (Muijs, 2007). These policies have shifted over the years in England, and community partnerships have not been prioritised in more recent English political agendas, but the attention of policy-makers is being recaptured (Valli et al., 2018). Fogg (2023) argues primary schools in particular, continue to play a key role in connections between organisations and systems that sustain community, and suggests developing policies aimed at strengthening these links in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community is a complex concept with many meanings depending on one's worldview. Thus, when considering school-community partnerships, it is important to conceptualise community both inside and outside the school environment.

1.1.2 Community

In the past, community has been defined as geographically-, locality-, and interest-based (Nasar & Julian, 1995; Warren, 1978). Bradshaw (2008), however, contends that we are in a time of post-place communities and that traditional ties have been altered by urbanisation and industrialisation. This perhaps accounts for alternative community experiences, such as online communities, which transcend place (Chen et al., 2013; MacDonald et al., 2021). The implication is that, as a construct, community is rich and varied, perhaps making it difficult to achieve one definition (Beck, 1999). Levy et al. (2024) argue for community-generated definitions, as differing experiences will lead to alternative conceptualisations and perspectives. Considering these positions, I have elected to understand community as a product of relationships, shared history, and experiences which should be defined more comprehensively with key stakeholders (Lardier et al., 2019; McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021).

Individuals are said to feel a greater sense of community when they perceive themselves as sharing values, priorities, and goals with other members (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), which may lead to the development of similar attitudes and behaviours (norms) (Lupton & Kintrea, 2011). In-groups and out-groups may result from shared attitudes and norms (Gelfand et al., 2017), causing potential conflict and dissonance between communities. Dutta (2022) argues that crucial work must be done to dismantle the practice of othering communities of which we are not part. An underpinning principle of this argument is that cultural differences should not be considered through a deficit lens (Kessi et al., 2022). Critically, there is a need to recognise the risk of community deficit narratives within initiatives to develop and support communities, such as FSES, which tended to focus on areas labelled as 'deprived' or 'troubled' (Crossley, 2015; Cummings et al., 2011). These initiatives, although espousing a social justice perspective, which holds fair distribution of resources, equitable treatment, freedom of choice and peaceful living as central tenets (Kagan et al., 2019), may act to marginalise individuals further due to institutionalised patterns of cultural value (Fraser, 1996). This may reflect experiences in the school community (Egilsson, 2024).

1.1.3 School as community

Schools are collections of individuals with diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, including pupils, school staff, professionals, and parents (Green, 2016). Carrington and Robinson (2006) suggest the school community includes all key school stakeholders (school staff, children and young people, families, and professionals working with the school) and that a school's local community is all individuals living in the school catchment area (these are the community members). Schools tend to be conceptualised as separate from the community. Egilsson (2024) argues the community inside and outside school can often be quite different, but that a school community is at risk of reflecting dominant cultures and majority values, perhaps limiting consideration of alternative experiences (Hands, 2023; Puroila et al., 2023). Therefore, children may experience multiple communities and have a different sense of belonging and connection to each (Brodsky & Marx, 2001). Students' experience of belonging to the school community is important to emotional well-being and educational outcomes (Bateman, 2002). For example, Osterman (2000) advocates for changes in practice in school to reflect external community values to enhance pupil sense of belonging and motivation. As learning is argued to be culturally mediated (Vygotsky, 1978), challenging deficit thinking about pupils' cultures and communities to develop culturally appropriate and supportive practices appears an important step (DePetris & Eames, 2017; Hogg, 2011).

It may then be argued schools are important sites for development in understanding difference and operationalising social justice (Driscoll, 2001). Collaboration at the intersection of systems, such as school and community, can lead to change and transformation of practice due to the presence of multiple perspectives and understandings (Engeström, 2001).

1.2 School-community partnerships

In the previous section, I acknowledged some understandings of community and highlighted school as an important context for children, young people, and their families. I will now reflect on what partnership might mean.

There are theoretical conceptualisations implying that children do not develop in isolation but experience multiple systemic influences, for example, Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006. It may be that making links across, between and within these systems may be beneficial for children and young people (Jason et al., 2012). School-community partnerships may be one such linking of systems that could benefit pupils' experience of school (Carrington & Robinson, 2006). Engaging between systems will likely lead to dialogue, which may result in a deeper understanding and a greater likelihood of reflective practice. Such alternative understandings and reflection may then lead to learning and subsequently transformation of practice (Bahktin, 1986; Marková, 2003; Dekker, 2020). In this regard, transformational underpinnings could be considered of importance to both educational practice and research, as the aim is to develop a reflective knowledge base that appreciates multiple perspectives, critical consciousness and agency (Khedkar & Nair, 2016). Here, I am suggesting that school-community partnerships could support the inclusion of multiple perspectives leading to the transformation of practice and therefore positive outcomes for children and young people.

Both Bryk (2010) and Lupton and Kintrea (2011) argue that school-community partnerships are important for pupil outcomes and community development. A strengths-based understanding may promote positive staff perceptions of the community, which increases their engagement in partnership and expectations of pupils (Rouse & Ware, 2017). Staff openness to learning about and understanding the community may also lead to increased links with community services, therefore potentially increasing knowledge in the community which may address disparities in, for example, social capital (Gross et al., 2015; McCabe et al., 2021). There are also benefits to the school, with McAlister (2013) arguing that the power of multiple voices through partnership increases the likelihood of desired school reform.

Epstein et al. (2003) argued for greater involvement of community members in schools, developing a framework for types of involvement and how schools might achieve these. Later, Auerbach (2010) described educational partnerships as respectful collaborations between educators, families and community groups that value relationships, dialogue and equal power. Community engagement is defined as a continuum (Stefanski et al., 2016) where partnership reflects a fully integrated relationship between the school and community. Hardy and Grootenboer (2016) contend that activities to increase this integration might include inviting community members to actively participate in pupils' learning (utilising local expertise) or collaborating on a community-wide event. Importantly, however, Willems and Gonzales-DeHass (2012) argue that partnerships involve more than allowing out-of-hours access to school resources, meaning consideration of factors promoting authentic modes of partnership could be helpful. School-community partnerships should perhaps involve school staff and community members drawing on one another's strengths and working together to meet the community's and school's needs (Valli et al., 2018).

The following literature review will explore factors that may facilitate the development of school-community partnerships and address the question: What factors influence the development of school-community partnerships?

1.3 Methods

I have systematically reviewed the literature using Noblit and Hare's (1988) meta-ethnography method. This approach consists of seven phases, shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Noblit and Hare (1988) phases of meta-ethnography

Phases of analysis in Meta-ethnography	**Summary of stage as described by (Noblit and Hare, 1988)**
Phase 1 Getting started	The researcher identifies "an intellectual interest that qualitative research might inform" (p.27).
Phase 2 Deciding what is relevant to initial interest	The researcher makes a judgment about which studies are relevant based on "who the audience for the synthesis is, what is credible and interesting to them" and "what accounts are available to address the audiences' interests" and what the level of interest held by the researcher in the topic (p.27).
Phase 3 Reading the studies	This phase is identified as dynamic and involving repeated reading of the accounts and noting of key ideas.
Phase 4 Determining how the studies are related	The researcher will create a list of key ideas and make an initial assumption about the relationships between the selected studies. There are three potential assumptions: (1) the accounts can be directly compared in a reciprocal translation, (2) a refutational translation in which the accounts stand in opposition to one another, (3) each study says something different about a chosen phenomenon that complements what is said by the others to create a "line of argument" translation (p. 35).
Phase 5 Translating the studies into one another	The researcher will use noted key ideas to construct new meaning (translations) based on the assumption made in phase 4.
Phase 6 Synthesising translations	In synthesising, the researcher will make "a whole into something more than the parts alone imply".
Phase 7 Expressing synthesis	The researcher will express and inscribe the synthesis.

1.3.1 Getting Started

Concepts underpinning my question, such as community and partnership, are complex and difficult to operationalise. They are subjective and dependent on context, culture, and experience (Bradshaw, 2008). For this reason I have adopted a qualitative and interpretive approach to the literature synthesis (Britten et al., 2002). While planning this project, I considered several approaches to qualitative synthesis: meta-ethnography (Noblit and Hare, 1988), grounded formal theory (Kearney, 1998) and meta-study (Paterson et al., 2001) (see Table 1.2). It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore these in depth; see Barnett-Page and Thomas (2009) for a detailed overview.

Table 1.2 Summary of potential alternative methods for qualitative analysis and synthesis

Potential method of synthesis	**Pros**	**Cons**
Meta-ethnography – re-interpret the studies to develop a new understanding of phenomena.	• In line with philosophical stance. • Can include papers with diverse methodological approaches. • Can build a picture of the whole through re-interpretation. • Good for a smaller number of papers. • Models produced through this method may be more applicable to practice.	• Method itself involves a high level of interpretation from the researcher.
Grounded Formal Theory – study of phenomena involving contextualised understanding.	• In line with philosophical stance. • Development of a new theory. • Clear set of actions to be completed.	• Requires a more homogenous selection of papers that have used a theory generating approach. • About developing new theory with original data set, which does not fit my question/ aims.
Meta-Study – analysis of findings, methods and theory. The aim of use is to reveal differences and similarities in accounts.	• In line with philosophical stance. • Comprehensive analysis and unpicks various aspects of the identified studies.	• More about the interrogation of the method which does not fit with current aims and questions. • Appropriate method for higher number of papers.

In meta-ethnography, the researcher interprets and re-interprets the findings of the selected study to create a new understanding of phenomena (Soundy & Heneghan, 2022). This method is underpinned by idealism and interpretivism, making it an appropriate approach given the conceptual complexity of the topic. Doyle (2003) contends that meta-ethnography aims to reconceptualise data and contribute to human discourse, in other words, adding new interpretations to an ongoing conversation. Due to the nature of translation and synthesis in meta-ethnography, it is well suited to producing a conceptual model that can be applied in practice to support the transformation of thinking, for example about the formation of school-

community partnerships. Thus, I elected to use meta-ethnography as my approach to synthesis.

1.3.2 Deciding what is relevant

1.3.2.1 Search strategy

Using recorded key terms identified during scoping, I generated a search strategy. I then used an online thesaurus to identify and ensure the inclusion of alternative terms. Next, I entered the following search string into Scopus, Web of Science, British Education Index (BEI), Child Development and Adolescent Studies and ERIC databases:

School OR education* OR staff OR teachers AND community OR neighbourhood OR locality AND partnership* OR connection* OR link* NOT “teacher education” OR “social work” OR disability OR attainment.

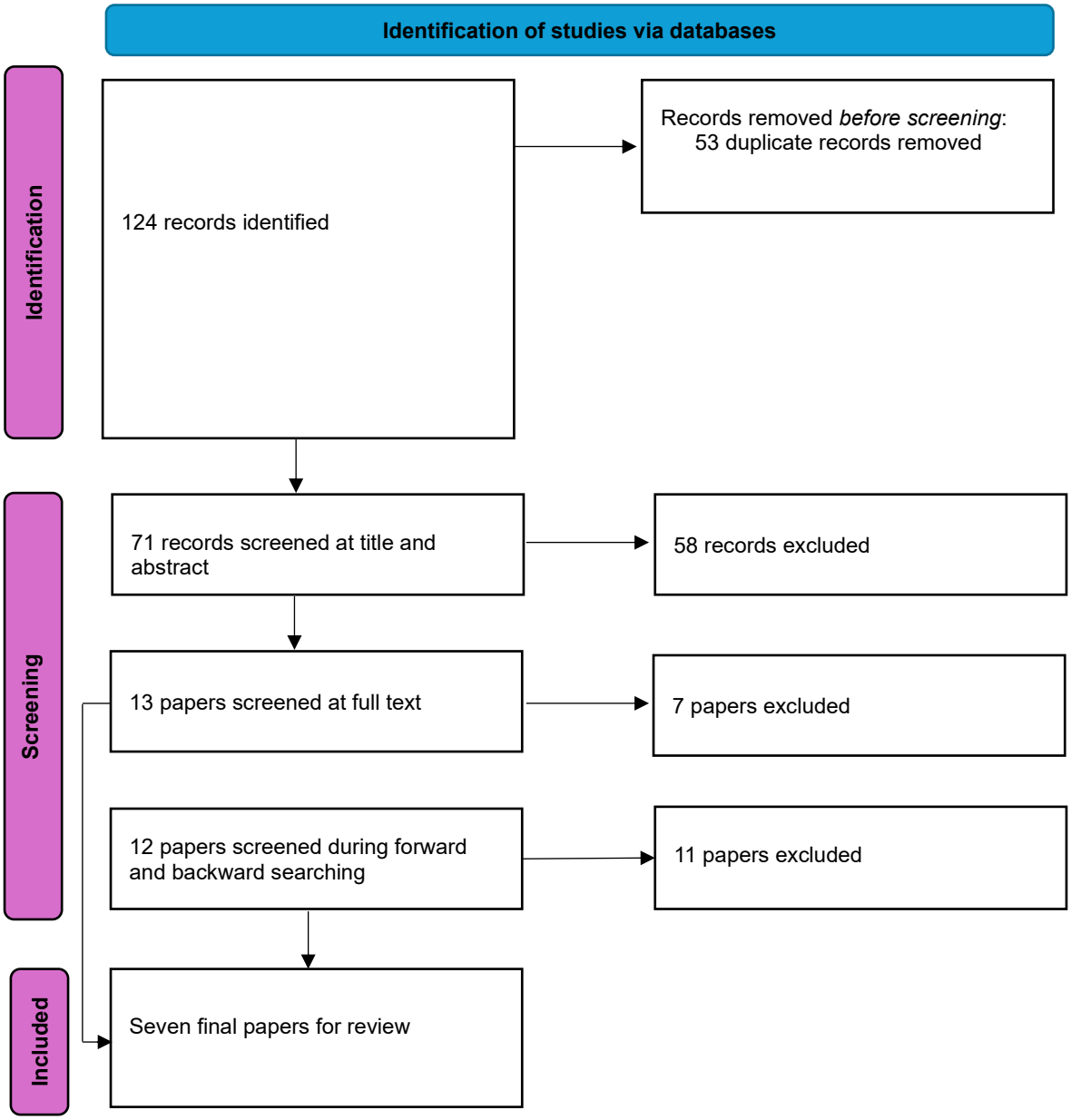
1.3.2.2 Developing inclusion criteria

Several inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure the research identified was relevant to the review question (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). In Table 1.3, I have detailed the inclusion/ exclusion criteria and my rationale for each. I then applied these criteria to the 71 records identified through the searches, and the PRISMA diagram in Figure 1.2 shows the number of records excluded at each point (final papers for review *n*=7). All searches were conducted between September and November 2022.

Table 1.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the systematic literature review

Include if…	**Rationale**	**Exclude if…**
It involves a partnership between the school and one or more community agencies.	Is relevant to the review question.	Not mentioned in abstract.
It involves a focus on specific elements of the partnership.	Is relevant to the review question.	Not mentioned in abstract.
It does not focus on one group e.g., individuals with low socio-economic status.	Is relevant to the aim of the review (to gain a general perspective/ understanding of school-community partnerships).	A specific sample group is specified.
It is published in a peer-reviewed journal.	May be indicative of quality research.	Not published in a peer reviewed journal.
It is published after 2003.	Epstein et al. (2003) published key guidance on school-community partnerships, which has inspired policy documents and research since its publication (flagged up in scoping).	Pre 2003.

Figure 1.1 PRISMA diagram showing the screening process.



1.3.2.3 Quality Appraisal

Within the literature, there is debate about the appropriateness of quality appraisal in qualitative research (Garside, 2014). This focuses on two key questions: firstly, whether there is a clear philosophical rationale for undertaking these assessments, and secondly, if this rationale exists, what criteria would be appropriate for informing judgments about quality. Responding to these questions, depends on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the researcher (see Campbell et al. (2011) and Garside (2014) for comprehensive discussion). One position taken is that the qualitative research paradigm involves accepting reality as mind-dependant and assumes that individuals construct reality based on experience (Smith, 1984). Thus,

Murphy et al. (1999) argue it is inappropriate from this position to deem one interpretation as more trustworthy and conceptually rich than another.

Despite debate and the implication from some researchers that quality appraisal is critical to the validity of qualitative reviews (Cahill et al., 2018; France et al., 2019); Noblit and Hare (1988) highlight the importance of conceptual richness. Conceptual richness can be defined as being a transformative rather than a descriptive interpretation (Cooper et al., 2020). Cooper et al. (2020) argue that assessments of conceptual richness are challenging to reach with only one researcher. I have therefore chosen to follow Garside (2014) and Noblit and Hare (1988), choosing studies based on what they may contribute to the meta-ethnography. I felt uncomfortable as a single researcher making judgments and assertions about the conceptual richness and quality of the interpretations of others.

The purpose of meta-ethnography is to consider the data and interpretations presented within the research and develop a new interpretation (translating and synthesising the review papers) (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Consequently, this new interpretation will inevitably be influenced by my own experiences and perceptions of the world.

1.3.3 Reading the studies

The process of meta-ethnography requires the included studies to be read and re-read to develop a comprehensive understanding of their content, which is an iterative process and not necessarily confined to phase 3 (Noblit & Hare, 1988). Initial contextual information and key ideas were recorded (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006) and can be found in Table 1.4. Following Britten et al. (2002), I recorded contextual information and key ideas explored by the primary researchers[1]. The key ideas (interpretations made by the primary researchers) recorded in this phase were those that described the factors facilitating school-community partnerships. Lee et al. (2015), suggest that each researcher will have their own intentions and techniques for organising their data; however, as they recommended, I recorded key ideas, accounts, and relationships between selected papers.

1.3.4 Determining how the studies are related

The key ideas identified from each primary researcher's interpretation were juxtaposed using the method of constant comparison (Willig, 2013). The constant comparison of data means continually moving back and forth between identifying similarities and differences between emerging themes. This process was helpful for me as a sole researcher and helped me to understand how my selected studies were related. During this process, I began to group each primary researcher's account and created my own overall code for similar second-order constructs. For example, a community liaison and a partnership broker were similar concepts; both involved an individual linking with the community and school; this became insider/outsider (an individual straddling the line between school and community).

[1] Please note that the term 'primary researcher(s)' refers to those who undertook the original studies included in this meta-ethnography.

Table 1.5 identifies the primary researcher's language through initial key themes, which are then reported as 2nd order constructs in Table 1.6, where their presence in different papers is highlighted.

I have assumed that the selected studies are related through a line of argument, which Noblit and Hare (1988) describe as dissimilar but related. I determined that although the primary researchers discuss similar themes, the underpinning language and conceptualisations about factors facilitating school-community partnerships are too different to be deemed a reciprocal translation. In reciprocal translation, the studies must be directly comparable.

The identified accounts did not directly oppose one another, meaning a refutational translation would not be appropriate. Rather, they highlight different aspects of the same phenomenon. For example, each agreed that a partnership broker was required to facilitate the school-community partnership; however, they were not similar enough to be described as reciprocal, some used school staff (Wheeler, 2018), some funded community partners (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006), and others utilised a community group approach (Lewis, 2008). Due to there being dissimilar but complementary ideas, the studies selected for synthesis are related through a line of argument.

Some authors from an objectivist perspective do not recognise a line of argument as a translation method (France et al., 2019; Sattar et al., 2021). Given the heterogeneous nature of educational and social research (in terms of types of research questions and methods) a line of argument can, however, be an important method of translation when synthesising differing but non-refutational perspectives as found in the papers included in this review (Hughes & Noblit, 2017).

Table 1.4 Key characteristics of the included studies

Study	Purpose	Setting	Sample	Design/ Method	Analysis	Key Themes
(Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006)	Explore how school-community partnerships can support student learning and engagement.	Australian middle schools	School staff, district office staff, representatives from community organisations Parents Pupils	Interviews with school staff, district office staff, community representatives and parents. Pupil focus groups	Data mapping	• Pupil positioning • School communication • Designated community liaison • Opportunity to work collaboratively on community events • Funding to support linking activities • Attitudes towards the boundaries of learning
(Hands, 2010)	Exploration of the reasons why secondary school staff establish school-community partnerships and what impacts the development of these relationships	Two US secondary schools, one rural and one suburban.	Headteachers, teachers, school support staff and community partners.	Thirty 45-minute semi-structured interviews Three focus groups	Thematic analysis (within-case and cross-case analysis)	• Education as a common responsibility • School leadership • Partnership culture • Funding offered by community partners • School reputation in the community • Staff motivation
(Lewis, 2008)	An exploration of how school leaders can develop shared responsibility and collective action	An Australian state middle school	School staff Parents	Interviews from a school revitalisation project (IDEAS).	Themed analysis	• School leadership • Sense of equality, trust and integrity • Shared goals and priorities

Study	Purpose	Setting	Sample	Design/ Method	Analysis	Key Themes
	between schools and communities.					• Community liaison group
(Monroe et al., 2016)	Investigating the promotion of youth community action through two-way school-community partnerships	Seven school-based wildfire education programmes in the US (Elementary, middle and high schools)	Program developers, program leaders, agency representatives, funders, educators, pupils, community members	Interviews, observations of program	Themed analysis, Analytic induction	• Boundary brokers • Common goals • Positive perceptions of role • Authenticity of the project • Permeable barriers • Supportive leadership • Norms and values of the partners • Low staff turnover
(Broadhead & Armistead, 2007)	Exploring the progression of relationships between early education providers and community childcare providers	Early years setting in one local authority in England	Headteachers Class teachers Private sector managers Childminders Voluntary sector representatives Parents Council representatives	Interviews and questionnaires Analysis of policy documents	Coded based on a theoretical model	• Shared understanding • Leadership taking initiative • Clear roles and responsibilities • Acknowledgment of existing links • Mutual interests • Continuity of staffing • Joint recognition of possibilities for long term impact

Study	Purpose	Setting	Sample	Design/ Method	Analysis	Key Themes
(Wheeler et al., 2018)	Extending Uzzell's (1999) school community relationship model. Exploring the impact of school-community partnerships on the environment and social cohesion.	Communities and primary/secondary schools in Australia	School staff Pupils Community representatives	Participatory action research – this included cycles of interviews and case studies.	Grounded theory analysis	• Identified need in the community • Appropriate resources • Context • Leadership commitment • Awareness of community partners • School-based champion
(DePetris & Eames, 2017)	An exploration of school-community partnerships leading to the development of a model for partnership development.	Communities and schools in New Zealand, engaging in Kids Greening Taupo environmental project (primary and secondary schools)	School staff Community representatives	Interviews Focus groups Observation Document analysis	Coded based on a theoretical model	• Generation of opportunity • Shared vision • Authentic context • Lack of time and headspace • Communication • Boundary broker

Table 1.5 Common second order constructs

2nd order construct	Hayes and Chodkiewicz (2006)	Hands (2010)	Lewis (2008)	Monroe, Ballard, Oxarart, Sturtevant, Jakes and Evans (2016)	Broadhead and Armistead (2007)	Wheeler, Guevera and Smith (2018)	DePetris and Eames (2017)
Insider/ Outsider	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Funding	✓	✓				✓	
Capacity		✓					✓
Leadership		✓	✓	✓	✓		
School-community relationship	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Shared goals			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Existing links	✓				✓	✓	
Attitudes, norms and values	✓			✓			
School culture		✓					

Education as a common responsibility	✓	✓					
Authenticity				✓			✓
Identified need in the community						✓	
Opportunity for long term impact					✓		✓

1.4 Interpretations

This section would usually be titled ‘findings’; however, in meta-ethnography, any ‘findings’ are re-interpretations by the researcher of second-order constructs. Thus, it was deemed appropriate to use interpretations rather than findings.

1.4.1 Translating the studies into one another

In translating the studies, I have used my own language to describe the second-order constructs. For example, partnership brokers and designated community liaisons are interpreted as insider/outsiders. The second-order constructs are organised thematically inTable1.6; to achieve this, I grouped key themes with dissimilar but complementary meanings before translating them into third-order constructs. Here, I have explored my interpretation of the second-order constructs, reflecting on these interpretations to create my third-order constructs (Table 1.6).

1.4.2 Synthesising the translation

Noblit and Hare (1988) suggest three forms of synthesis: reciprocal, refutational and line of argument. In line of argument, the translations are taken and synthesised to build a grounded theory around a phenomenon (Toye et al., 2014). I have constructed a line of argument synthesis. Toye et al. (2014) recommend supporting the synthesis with a visual representation. I used Table 1.6 to build and re-evaluate my visual model. This visual model was revisited and adapted over time as my thinking developed.

Table 1.6 Translation of studies to 3rd order constructs

2nd order construct (The primary researcher's interpretation)	**Interpretation**	**3rd order construct** (My interpretation of the 2nd order constructs)
Insider/outsider **School- community relationship** **Awareness of existing links**	The insider/outsider is an individual with a role in both the school and the community. They play an important part in brokering the relationship and facilitating the continuation of the school-community partnership. As an insider/outsider they are more likely to have the trust of the community partners as they have a greater depth of knowledge about the community needs and can ensure that the relationship is not school led. The school-community relationship is important to the formation of the partnership. When community members have trust and faith in the school, and the school has a good reputation within the community, they will be more likely to engage with the partnership. Trust is particularly important, particularly in terms of ensuring mutuality (where the partnership also meets the need of the community), this is supported by good communication between the school and the community. An awareness of existing links between the community and schools supports the initiation of further partnerships. These links may be an opening to engaging with community partners on a deeper level. These pre-existing links are particularly important in supporting school staff to see the potential benefits of working with agencies outside the school.	**Community connection** Is the development of relationships between the school and members of the community. Schools and communities often have pre-existing connections and relationships. For example, there may be staff in school who work in the school but also live in and engage in activities in their local communities. These insider/outsiders can work to highlight existing links or potential links within the community that could be developed to become school-community partnerships. These partnerships are more likely to develop

2nd order construct (The primary researcher's interpretation)	Interpretation	3rd order construct (My interpretation of the 2nd order constructs)
		when the community is trusting of the school and perceives it as having a good reputation. It is interpreted here that these factors likely contribute to a sense of connectedness between the school staff and community partners and encourage openness between the two.
Shared goal **Attitudes, norms, and values** **Education as a common responsibility**	It is important for both partners to have a shared goal for the partnership, this may not be their only goal, however for both parties to engage it is important that they have a joint objective. This joint objective will be important for a sense of partnership and agreement between the two. This is linked to the idea of power balance, if there is no shared goal then one partner will be working for the benefit of the other which is not a partnership. Having attitudes, norms, and values in common also contributes to the likelihood of a shared goal and a successful partnership formation. Sharing these things means community and school partners are more likely to engage with one another. When education is viewed as a common responsibility, rather than sitting only with the school and education professionals then the child's wider context is more likely to be taken into account. The school staff and community partners will perceive working together for the benefit of children	**Mutuality and authenticity** Mutuality (shared goals, attitudes norms, and values) appears to support the development of school-community partnerships. This ensures a common understanding of why the partnership could be useful/ important. There will be an understanding of the wider context in which children live and

2nd order construct (The primary researcher's interpretation)	**Interpretation**	**3rd order construct** (My interpretation of the 2nd order constructs)
Identified need in the community **Authenticity** **Opportunity for long term impact**	and young people as important. Learning will be viewed as something that anyone within the child's systemic context can contribute to. Identifying a need within the community is important both for community partner engagement and for the school staff to feel they have a role in the community. It is important that this need is one the school feels able to support and enables feelings of efficacy in contributing toward resolving that need. Authenticity of both the need and the partnership is important. It would be easy to engage on a tokenistic level, however this is not then likely to grow into a partnership. Tokenism will be easily spotted and may lead to a breakdown in relationships. Both partners are going to be more likely to engage in a partnership when there is potential for a long-term impact. It is likely that setting up a school-community partnership will take significant resources, so it is important that both partners can see the potential for positive outcomes in the longer-term. Although this is not to say that a brief partnership to meet a current need that would not necessarily be long-term is not appropriate.	that everyone has responsibility for children and young people's learning and wellbeing. Partnership formation likely requires an authentic and mutually identified need in the community that both school staff and community members feel efficacious in resolving. A potential for a longer-term impact is likely to promote a sense of motivation to develop and maintain the relationships.
School culture **Leadership**	A culture of partnership within the school means they will be interested in working with others to support pupils learning and education. When there is a culture of partnership, school staff will feel confident in developing relationships and have the resources and capacity to do so.	**Partnership culture and resources** A partnership culture within the school is likely to contribute to the

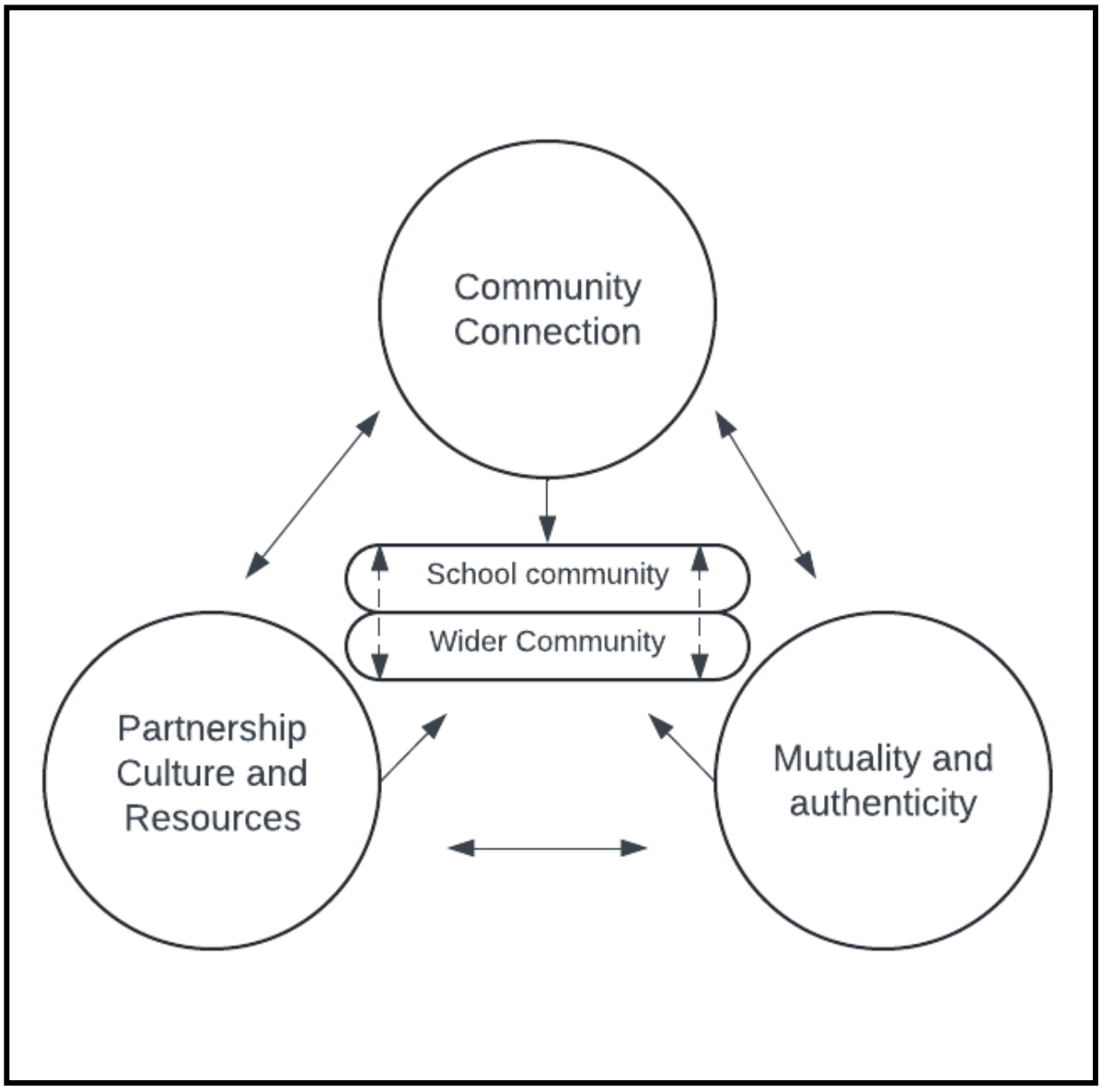
2nd order construct (The primary researcher's interpretation)	Interpretation	3rd order construct (My interpretation of the 2nd order constructs)
Funding **Capacity**	Leadership is crucial to the school's culture, the leadership team set the tone for the school. Supportive leadership enables staff to approach problem solving creatively and give them the confidence to build relationships outside the school environment. Partnership formation may require funding. Funding could support additional teacher time, or resources required to meet the need intended by the partnership. It may be that funding is used to begin the partnership, or funding comes from the partnership to support further partnership activities. This idea of capacity is mainly focussed on the school. Ensuring capacity could be around time and giving additional time for the partnership activities, or it might be ensuring that staff well-being is supported in school. However, building capacity within the community will be important and perhaps includes efficacy, both for community partners and school staff.	creation of school-community partnerships. When school staff are supported by leadership to play a role in engaging the community and forming relationships it may be more likely that a partnership will form. Access to resources both tangible and intangible is viewed as important for the initial formation of partnerships. It could be that the partnership brings resources or is begun by resources. Interorganisational partnerships can be personally, technically culturally and socially challenging. Thus, it is important that school staff and community partners feel they have the

2nd order construct (The primary researcher's interpretation)	**Interpretation**	**3rd order construct** (My interpretation of the 2nd order constructs)
		capacity for the partnership.

1.4.3 Expressing the synthesis

I elected to create a visual representation of the synthesis. Noblit and Hare (1988) recommend that researchers express their synthesis clearly to support reader understanding. As I have explored school-community partnerships, which are underpinned by connection, it seemed appropriate to visually demonstrate the complexities of the factors required for partnership formation (see Figure 1.3). This visual shows the relationship between the factors interpreted here as facilitating school-community partnership. I will be suggesting that these factors are of equal weight, and that there will be movement between all three when reflecting on and developing school-community partnership. School-community and wider community are shown as central to indicate the impact of the outer factors on the school-community relationship.

Figure1.2 Conceptual model expressing the synthesis of meta-ethnography interpretations.



1.5 Discussion

This review used a meta-ethnographic approach to explore the question: What factors influence the development of school-community partnerships?

This literature synthesis offers an interpretation suggesting several factors are important to the development of school-community partnerships, that is, partnerships between school staff and members of the community who may or may not be parents or carers of pupils. The three areas highlighted are community connection, mutuality and authenticity, and partnership culture and resources. I have interpreted these areas as supporting one another and that the work required will depend on context. Through the discussion, I will explore these factors in the context of broader literature.

1.5.1 Community Connection

Community connection is interpreted as the development of relationships between the school and community members before and alongside the shared responsibilities and goals of the partnership (see Table 1.6). The sense of connection in this construct appears to be bi-directional, with staff feeling connection to the local community alongside community members feeling connection to the school community. Some authors privilege types of activity, such as pupils working in the community (Crisp et al., 2015) or inviting community members into school spaces/ events (Hardy & Grootenboer, 2016), as developing partnerships rather than the experience of connection. The papers included in this review appear to highlight other factors as of greater importance than activity type, such as community connection, one of the key factors that may support school-community partnership.

Community connection does not necessarily need to be pre-existing; however, if it is not, its development could be the initial focus of partnership activity. For example, Lewis (2008) suggests trust, safety and understanding are important to building connections outside school. Two reviewed papers explicitly named reputation as important in building and sustaining trust and engagement with the school (Hands, 2010; Wheeler et al., 2018). Wheeler et al. (2018) suggest school reputation can also be improved through school-community partnerships, particularly where the school has taken an outward-facing role, for example, by supporting the development of a local park.

The papers suggest several modes of relationship development. Broadhead and Armistead (2007), for example, explore ideas of acknowledging the skills of community partners and actively listening to their perspectives. Similarly, Hayes and Chodkiewicz (2006) advocate using consultative approaches in which community members are included. They further indicate the importance of the school joining community-based activities such as cultural events and community youth projects to demonstrate interest (Hayes and Chodkiewicz, 2006).

Something interpreted as important in this meta ethnography for developing and maintaining community connection in the included studies is the insider/outsider. Within the reviewed studies, these were individuals from the community with school

links (DePetris & Eames, 2017; Monroe et al., 2016). Some examples were teachers who cross the boundary between home and school through collaboration with community members (Wheeler et al., 2018), groups formed of individuals such as community members, agencies (Lewis, 2008), or individuals specifically hired to engage with the wider community (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006). The insider/ outsider is both a part of the local and school communities. These individuals can support the development of trust between partners due to dual membership and can work to strengthen pre-existing links.

In Social Network Theory, insider/outsiders are seen as passing information from one partner to another (Long et al., 2013). The role outlined in social network theory requires minimal contact between partners. Within this review, however, the insider/ outsider is reconceptualised as someone who supports the development of relationships between partners rather than simply being a middleman. For example, Lewis (2008) had a community liaison group acting in this position to meet with other community members in consultation and use ideas developed together to enact change in practice. The insider/outsider could facilitate the development of mutual goals by supporting effective multi-agency communication (Lewis, 2008).

1.5.2 Mutuality and Authenticity

As a construct, mutuality and authenticity is defined by shared goals, attitudes, and values; it is implied that a shared understanding that is mutually constructed will support the development of partnerships (see Table 1.6). It is also interpreted here that partnership members should feel their contribution is valuable and that they will see a positive impact on issues considered important. DePetris and Eames (2017) highlight that partnerships should be mutually beneficial. Similarly, Lewis (2008) suggests that although a principal (headteacher) might be key in initiating partnership and change, they must share the responsibility and collaborate with partners for change to occur. This might be enacted through regular meetings with community partners or an insider/outsider (group or individual) (Lewis, 2008). Further, Hands (2010) highlights positive perceptions in the community of headteachers being seen to direct their own school resources towards community-based goals as this demonstrated joint responsibility. Bunar (2011) argues that collaboration in this is often characterised by a top-down perspective (coming from the school). The studies included in this synthesis suggest shared goals as an alternative to this, which is consistent with other perspectives arguing that a largely school-oriented partnership is likely to be destructive to community relationships (Cummings et al., 2011).

Hayes and Chodkiewicz (2006) emphasised mutuality (benefits both school and community partners), particularly the importance of a shared understanding that education is the responsibility of all involved, not just the school. Attitudes, beliefs and values are critical for creating alternative patterns of behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). One could suggest, therefore, that a shared belief in education as a joint responsibility and valuing partnerships will influence motivation to develop practice in this area.

Shared values and beliefs support the development of relationships; perhaps creating space for joint understanding and co-construction of meaning. Open communication and dialogue support the construction of these shared values (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006), which might then contribute to a deeper understanding of differing cultural contexts and needs (Smith & Sheridan, 2019). Swick (2003) argues that mutual recognition and value between school and community partners is important for constructive communication. These are important aspects of the concept of mutuality and are highlighted within three papers in this SLR (Hands, 2010; Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006; Monroe et al., 2016). Hayes and Chodkiewicz (2006) highlighted increased motivation from school staff and community partners when they felt mutual goals were being addressed. Additionally, Hands (2010) suggests a need for an exchange of resources across the boundaries of the school and community and uses the example of pooling school/ community funding to purchase new technological equipment for use in school. In these studies, perceiving the partnership as a collective asset made both partners feel valued.

How authentic a goal or activity is perceived to be, may determine the extent to which it will be valued as it reflects a mutually identified need to be addressed by the school-community partnership. For example, Lewis (2008) concludes that a place-focused goal of indirect benefit to the school may support a joined-up approach to problem-solving. Whereas Monroe et al. (2016), suggest focusing on a critical issue (such as wildfires) that impacts both the school and the community, goals around this would also meet school/community-specific needs, meaning there is value in all partners investing time. The COVID-19 pandemic could be seen as one such critical issue, in which partnerships between schools and communities were seen as crucial both during and in the aftermath of the pandemic (Fogg, 2023). When individuals feel they can facilitate a change sustained over time, they are more likely to see value in engaging (Snyder et al., 2002).

1.5.3 Partnership culture and resources

The construct of partnership culture and resources concerns the development of and emphasis on partnering within the school and how this impacts staff capacity and allocation of resources (see Table 1.6). The culture within school around partnership is an important factor in school staff engagement with community members (Hands, 2010). This is likely to involve the school leadership team (SLT), with Bryk (2010) suggesting school leaders, through their responsibilities in establishing strategic priorities and distributing resources, can play a key role in partnership formation. This implies that the school's involvement in school-community partnerships relies on the SLT perceiving this work as valuable. It is important to acknowledge that school leaders work in systems that may make stepping outside the school's boundaries challenging. Schools operate in a neoliberal context. Perkins (2017) considers partnership as a corporate tool within neoliberal discourses, such as strength in the market as a measure of success; in education, league tables and academic results could be interpreted as assessing schools' strength in the market (Hursh, 2007). This may lead to an espoused value of partnership. However, this perhaps limits the connection, mutuality, and authenticity of these as they are being developed for the school's achievement rather than for mutual benefit. Relatedly, Lunneblad and Johansson (2019) suggest school staff are less inclined to be viewed

as part of communities perceived as problematic, indicating greater concern for school performance over broader local outcomes.

In this synthesis, school culture appeared to influence access to resources for partnership work. School leaders who have nurtured partnership culture may direct funding and offer, for example, school spaces to develop school-community partnerships. Several of the included papers discussed how schools used resources to support school-community partnerships (Hands, 2010; Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006; Wheeler et al., 2018). For instance, as mentioned above, one paper highlighted the creation of paid posts to work directly with community members, requiring the allocation of financial resources (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006). This review included studies from countries with differing funding models to that of the UK, meaning some approaches may be difficult to replicate. Further, developing relationships and trust to underpin the partnership will require time (a finite resource in education), as this is not a short-term undertaking (Stefanski et al., 2016).

There were issues reflected in the reviewed papers, which appear to involve intrapersonal resources such as teacher headspace (DePetris & Eames, 2017) or internal capacity (Hands, 2010). Both appear related to teacher efficacy, which can be linked to school culture. School culture is important in staff well-being, efficacy, and capacity for creative working (You et al., 2017). Efficacy is understood to be an individual's belief in their capacity to engage in a particular activity (Bandura, 1986); meaning a likely increase in motivation where individuals perceive themselves as being valued and having the capacity to contribute. Although not highlighted across all papers, this is an important factor to consider. Teacher efficacy has been noted as having a significant impact on teacher-parent relationships (Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2006). Relatedly, teacher efficacy may influence staff-community partnerships. This may not be seen across the studies due to the differing nature of partnerships; some of the partnerships noted in the above research were more reliant on external partner contributions (DePetris & Eames, 2017; Lewis, 2008), suggesting staff capacity was not as critical in these instances.

1.6 Implications for Practice

Below are potential implications for practice for teachers, school leaders, and educational psychologists (EPs) in the United Kingdom.

1.6.1 Implications for Teachers and School Leaders

As several factors contribute to successful school-community partnership formation, it may be helpful for school leaders hoping to work more closely with community members to reflect on their pre-existing relationships. It is likely pertinent to consider where partnership may already be occurring in school, as there is potential expertise that could be built on. Professionals such as Educational Psychologists could use the above model as a consultative tool to support leader reflections in these areas. The outcomes of such dialogues could perhaps contribute to partnership planning; for example, some senior leaders may identify partnership culture and resources as an initial priority before making links with community members. These learnings may

then contribute towards the transformation of practice. When developing partnerships, it is likely important to keep in mind the idea of mutual and authentic goals, as this may promote effective and sustainable partnerships. The role of insider/outsider is important in the development of these goals, as they can facilitate an open dialogue about current local and school priorities. Therefore, identifying the insider/outsider in the initial stages of partnership development will be useful; some schools may, for example, already have staff living locally who could take this position. When connecting with community members, a period of contracting (clarifying individual perspectives of the partnerships) could support a joint understanding of purpose and contribute towards goal setting in which all perspectives are included. Reflection on suitable levels of collaboration and participation could be important to avoid tokenism, which may limit the sustainability of the developed partnerships. Finally, it is likely important to consider the resources required for partnership, such as additional time and perceptions of skill in working with outside partners. Having an initial plan of how school resources might be used within the partnership may increase the perceived feasibility of the endeavour, promoting more long-term engagement.

1.6.2 Implications for Educational Psychologists

Although other professionals are also positioned to be involved in partnerships, educational psychologists (EPs) have some understanding of psychological perspectives underpinning partnerships, and have skills in several relevant areas such as consultation, training and clinical supervision. This means they may be in the position to facilitate thinking and reflection through consultation around how school-community partnerships could contribute to desired outcomes based on the concept of interconnecting systems. There may be a key role here for the EP as an insider/outsider due to their role crossing the boundary between the school and local authority. Although not necessarily a part of the community, their boundary-crossing role supports a distanciated perspective which is likely helpful in facilitating school-community partnership. EPs have a broad understanding of LA systems; this brings knowledge of other agencies and organisations with which the school could work in partnership, for example, commissioned services through charitable organisations. Professionals such as educational psychologists may also have a role in formal support of school staff, such as supervision. In this context supervision is not managerial and is about supporting staff to explore and make sense of their role within school-community partnerships in a supportive and safe environment. Supervision can play a part in developing teacher efficacy, which is important for collaboration and working creatively (Greenfield, 2015; You et al., 2017). The competencies described above may support organisational change and thus a developing culture of partnership in schools (Atfield et al., 2023).

1.7 Limitations

There are critiques of meta-ethnography as an approach to synthesis. Soundy and Heneghan (2022) suggest that if the selection methods are not thorough, the synthesis may lack depth. I have, however, made every effort to be clear about inclusion criteria (based on relevance to the research question). The decisions made about inclusion involved my own judgement, which may differ from that of other researchers. The scope of this project has been more limited than it would have been with a team of researchers. Although hand searching and forward/backward searching were used to reduce the chances of missing papers, there is still a risk that, as a solo researcher, I may have missed papers. Further, due to the interpretive nature of synthesis in meta-ethnography, another researcher with a different set of unique experiences and knowledge might have interpreted the data differently and have entirely different 3rd order constructs (Cooper et al., 2020). I have, however, aimed to offer a transparent account as to how I reached these (Arruda, 2003).

1.8 Conclusion

With this review I aimed to explore factors supporting school-community partnership development. In reviewing the literature through a meta-ethnography, I have interpreted that community connection, mutuality and authenticity, and partnership culture and resources are key factors in developing successful partnerships between community members and school staff. My interpretations are consistent with accounts of school-community partnership development emphasising the importance of connection, mutual goals, shared values and attitudes and authenticity. While accepting the limits of this review, the model developed could be helpful for educational psychologists and school leaders/managers in facilitating the establishment of partnerships between school staff and community members.

Chapter 2 Bridging document

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I aim to offer a critical commentary on the methodological decision-making process involved in this project. This will involve reflexive considerations as I move from my literature synthesis to my empirical research.

Reflexivity involves awareness of how the researcher's views, values and experiences influence inquiry (Macbeth, 2001). For this reason, I have grappled with my values and experiences to recognise their influence on decision-making. Who I am as a white, middle-class, educated woman from a rural community has influenced my interactions with others joining me in shaping the project. This chapter will provide commentary on key methodological decisions. First, I will consider motivations and interests leading to the focus on school-community partnerships. Next, I will share my conceptual framework and go on to consider ethicality in the context of this project.

2.1.1 A personal connection

Through my experiences as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), in several educational roles and growing up in a rural Scottish community with a strong connection to its local school, my interest in community has developed. One such experience was during the COVID pandemic, I was working within a primary school Language and Communication base. This school made significant moves to support the local community for example distributing food and sharing concrete resources. This informed my later thinking about the role primary schools could play within the community. Further, during my time as an assistant psychologist in Birmingham, which is by nature a highly culturally and ethnically diverse city; we had significant team discussion around culturally appropriate ways of working. We explored how we as professionals and how staff in schools might develop their practice to connect with others across difference and perceive differences as strengths that we could adapt to rather than discourage. Working in Birmingham highlighted to me the importance of challenging one's own assumptions and that the ways we work can inadvertently disadvantage others.

In my experiences as a TEP, I have heard school staff speak during meetings with professionals about their local communities, drawing on negative narratives that focus on the difficulties faced by, rather than strengths of, the community. The notion of community has been somewhat politicised in the UK, in particular within the English system. This politicisation of community is argued to have led to narratives that certain groups are troubled and in need of intervention (Crossley, 2015). Such discourses lead to some communities being perceived as good and others as bad (van Eijk, 2012). In education, these narratives may impact staff perceptions of the community, their expectations of pupils and the communities to which they belong and subsequently, how they interact with both.

This project aims to avoid deficit models of the communities within which schools are situated towards what Dutta (2018) has referred to as the de-colonisation of the community. For Dutta (2022), colonialised approaches involve expert intervention, and she argues for a shift from damage-focused research and damage-focused notions of communities. As a researcher and a TEP, I needed to critically engage with the idea of community and consider my perceptions and assumptions. Working in a way that is not damage-focused requires an understanding of communities we might be working with/in from the perspective of 'insiders', who are 'experts by experience' and hold a deep understanding of their local areas. In my current and previous roles within education, I have worked with families who, despite having always lived in an area, still experience apprehension at meeting in the schools they attended as children. School is not perceived as a part of their community and may not be a comfortable place for them.

There is a risk that school staff may operate a binary view of powerful professionals and powerless parents (Todd & Higgins, 1998), where families experiences of the school are less considered. However, this does not necessarily have to be the case. Growing up I attended two very different secondary schools; one where the boundaries between the school and community were tight and bounded and another where access to the school was flexible and it served as a community space. The staff at this second school were also members of the community, meaning they shared some lived experiences with pupils. Through these experiences, I have begun to consider the meaning of community and the role school plays in it.

2.1.2 From review to research: Deciding an empirical focus

I have chosen to focus my thesis on school-community partnerships between community members (those living in the community, parents and community members with no children attending the school) and school staff. Chapter 1 is a systematic review of the existing literature, where I explored the factors contributing to the formation of school-community partnerships. A focus on community members captures the range of individuals contributing to the experiences of young people. Interpretations of the review studies suggest several factors contribute to the development of successful school-community partnerships. One of these was community connection, the development of trusting relationships between the school and its community.

The literature review suggested less was known about how such partnerships are formed. I have also further considered how educational psychologists (EPs) could contribute to this process as what my SLR identified as an insider/outsider. EPs are individuals with some knowledge of the schools and communities, but are not a permanent part of either (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). It was my hope as a researcher to reflect on the phenomenon and consider the complex interactions and processes involved in the development and maintenance of partnerships.

I wanted to avoid making my empirical project an invasive and scrutinising process in which I adopted an outsider perspective. Action research was chosen as it involves collaboration with key stakeholders to support a change in practice or organisations (Cook, 2009). With this methodology, I could work with key stakeholders to transform

practice and promote social change through the research endeavour (Cho & Trent, 2006). The focus of my empirical project was how a school might work more closely with its local community to benefit both the school and the community.

2.2 Coherence in research: My conceptual framework

In engaging with research, it is important for me to work coherently and explicitly in relation to my values to practice with integrity. Here, I will set out my philosophical stance, demonstrating the principles underpinning my research project.

2.2.1 My Axiological, ontological, and epistemological stance

Axiology refers to the researcher's values and how these influence the research process. Values are the principles by which we make decisions and interact with the world (Roccas & Sagiv, 2010). One such value is respect, defined in the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2021) Code of Ethics and Conduct as valuing the dignity and worth of all persons. For me, this goes beyond ethical proceduralism and is part of our responsibilities towards others as humans (Todd, 2015).

This project was underpinned by espoused values of social justice and collaboration. However, despite its collaborative beginnings, circumstances explained further in chapters 3 and 4 meant this was not how it concluded. Consequently, those who I hoped would play a full and equal role in the project became one part of a subsequently broadened inquiry. Cook (2009) reflects in their paper that mess-in-action research has a purpose; it encourages creativity and spontaneity in response to a changing picture, leading to alternative ways of thinking. In the case of this project, one could suggest the purpose was to broaden the inquiry to include perspectives of educational psychologists, leading to new ways of thinking about school-community partnerships.

Ontology references assumptions held about the world and nature of reality, which then inform our epistemological and methodological stances (Grix, 2002). I lean towards a constructionist position, which is the view that social realities are a consequence of the interactions between individuals; this differs from an objectivist perspective, suggesting that reality exists separately from individual perceptions (Grix, 2010). From this perspective, I acknowledge the multiple realities we experience based on our interactions and relationships with others (Hosking & Morley, 2004). In this project I take a relational and dialogical approach, meaning I understand knowledge to be created in partnership with others and in the space between (Linell, 2009; Marková, 2003). Thus, I am led to consider cultural, historical, and social contexts in my interpretations of knowledge and reality.

Epistemology is concerned with how knowledge can come to be known and what is knowable (Grix, 2002). One’s epistemological position can range from positivist to interpretivist (Grix, 2010). Assumptions about knowledge and how it is obtained differ across paradigms, meaning knowledge about a phenomenon from a positivist stance will differ from an interpretivist position. My relational and dialogical ontology leads me to an interpretivist position by which I acknowledge the subjectivity of knowledge

(Wegerif, 2008). It is important for me to consider and understand how my perceptions of the world have been influenced by my experience of growing up white and middle class (Agboka, 2014).

The above axiology, ontology and epistemology are aligned with those of the Transformative paradigm, which espouses values of social justice and research to promote change for communities (Mertens, 2010; van der Riet, 2008). In the transformative paradigm, the aims are to produce research that serves those who are traditionally excluded from positions of power and collaborate to provoke change. It cuts through the dichotomy of knowing and doing by bringing the two together (van der Riet & Boettiger, 2009). The focus of this project on the development of school-community partnership reflects these aspects of the paradigm. Community members (even those who are parents) may have limited influence within school; thus, the school may not reflect the community within which it is placed. The transformative paradigm provides a framework for addressing power imbalances and encourages the consideration of cultural complexities within research, making it useful for community-based research (Jackson et al., 2018). It is crucial within this paradigm to hold in mind the importance of the multiple realities experienced by others. From my perspective, it is relevant to an educational context, aiming to develop inclusive, community-driven research that reflects the values I hold within my professional role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). For a summary of the perspectives I believe inform this research, see Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Perspectives informing the research

Perspective	Explanation	Influence on research
Social constructionism	In social constructionism knowledge is viewed as a production of language and reciprocal interaction between individuals (Renfrow & Howard, 2013). Further there is an acknowledgement that meaning is therefore culturally and historically located (Burr, 2015).	• Holding in mind the importance of local knowledge and assumptions I might be making from the role of researcher. • Considering how meaning is constructed within school-parent relationships. • Explore how perceptions of the school might be constructed between parents.
Critical community psychology	This perspective is concerned with the elimination of oppression and promotion of justice. It sees people within communities as agents of change who can individually and collectively instigate progress (Davidson et al., 2006). It espouses a view that change is produced through bi-directional interactions between people (Morrow & Torres, 2019). Critical community psychology holds a particular focus on issues of power and social action; implying social action requires understanding of and reflection on power	• Recognising the importance of power dynamics and working in collaboration with key stakeholders to support changes that are negotiated in partnership. • To engage in research in a way that promotes action and transforms practice (AR process).

	dynamics (challenging oppressive forces) (Davidson et al., 2006).	
Dialogic Thinking	In this perspective individuals are viewed in the context of relationships, where knowledge is constructed between people through language (Linell, 2009; Marková, 2003). Bakhtin (1986), argues that meaning can only be constructed when it is in dialogue with another. The implication being that different perspectives and meanings held in tension provoke new ways of thinking and challenge (Marková, 2003)	• Collaborating with my co-researcher and engaging in dialogue to incite change in the research process. • Broadening the inquiry to include a range of voices to expand understanding of other experiences.

2.2.2 Methodological decisions

The research methodology refers to the ways in which I have elected to understand my chosen phenomena (Grix, 2002). Through my empirical project, I aimed to work in partnership with a member of school senior leadership to reflect on practice in school regarding school-community partnership with the intention of bringing in community voices as the project progressed. I was influenced by critical community psychology, in which action research is often applied as an appropriate methodology for collaborative action and development work. Action research can be traced back to Lewin, who wanted a method that could bring democratic change to the communities in which it was practised (Adelman, 1993). Kemmis (2010) argues that action research should bring about change in understandings, doings and relatings (Kemmis, 2010). Action research offers a responsive approach to changing situations in real-life research and involves planning, action and reflection cycles to develop the research endeavour (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

In planning this research project, I aimed to engage in action research and have drawn on the principles of both community-based collaborative and participatory action research. Platteel et al. (2010) suggest that collaborative partnerships with action researchers can effectively support professional development; aspects of partnership with the action researcher can be seen in both participatory and collaborative action research. In both methodologies an aim is to reconsider the owner of knowledge produced by research and positions individuals who would typically take the role of the participant as co-researchers and partners within the process (Bleicher, 2014). In action research the primary researcher can take on several roles. It was my hope to engage in a way that meant both the co-researcher and myself could contribute skills to the partnership (Hall, 2001) and that others who later joined the project would have a similar experience. My initial aims were to explore how school-community partnerships might be developed.

I chose to do this through action research guided by the following inquiry question: How might a school-community partnership be developed in one primary school? The cyclical process of action research was chosen as it encourages reflection at each stage and is iterative and organic in nature. The action research methodology allowed flexibility to adapt the process as events developed through the project.

2.3 Quality in Research

My prior research and learning experiences have been within the positivist paradigm, and the AR process's messiness has the potential to provoke feelings of uncertainty about process and quality (Cook, 2009). As a novice doctoral researcher, I have considered how I could maintain quality whilst appreciating the flexibility and adaptability of the action research methodology. Some authors such as Heikkinen at al. (2012), question whether it is appropriate to evaluate the quality of action research based on traditional factors of validity. Validity is a customarily positivist concept, which refers to how well the results of a particular study represents the truth of a phenomenon (Patino & Ferreira, 2018). Action Research is underpinned by

positions such as social constructionism, meaning action researchers tend not to perceive themselves as ‘searching for truths’

Cho and Trent (2006) pose that validity in action research is about critically questioning the status quo and reflexivity for those involved. Their suggestion being, that one can maintain quality if one remains reflexive and collaborative within action research. Heikkinen et al. (2012) however suggest that quality of action research should be evaluated through more than just reflexivity and recommend consideration of the following factors: historical continuity, reflexivity, dialectics, workability and evocativeness. In Table 2.2 I will evaluate my own action research project using these five principles, I have elected to use scaling from 0-10 to facilitate my thinking and frame my responses. Although scaling is present in several approaches, I am understanding it from a solution-oriented perspective (Rowan & O’Hanlon, 1999) which supports consideration of both strengths and where change could be helpful. In solution-oriented scaling there is a baseline score and then a realistic next step (in brackets in Table 2.2).

2.4 Issues of Ethicality

The project followed the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2021) Code of Ethics and gained ethical approval from Newcastle University. Although ethics needed to be followed in these procedural aspects, it was important to the project that ethicality was considered and reflected on throughout. This was particularly important given the flexibility of the design and difficulties anticipating risks and challenges. I maintained an open dialogue with my supervisor and with the university ethics committee to ensure that any change was made with full consideration of risk.

2.4.1 Community centred research

Research ethics are generally, and were here considered outside the intended community within the university board of ethics, and is a process by which the “powerful” (the researcher) protects the “powerless” (Reid & Brief, 2009). The relationship between the researcher and the researched is assumed within the language of the ethical standards, the researcher presents their research process, and the participant can either agree or disagree to take part. This conflicts with the underpinning principles of community-centred action research, which are authentic partnerships, meaningful community engagement and capacity building. The context of this project (which espoused a collaborative process) is different from researcher-participant relationships in traditional methodologies. Rather than myself as a researcher making methodological and ethical decisions independently it was a process of co-construction. Eikeland (2006) proposes the idea of ‘condescending ethics’ which marginalises the community from knowledge production and positions them as ‘other’ within the process. Therefore, there needed to be a ‘living ethical agreement’ with anyone engaging in any aspect of this research, whether the co-researcher or those who might participate in the inquiry. It was important to recognise that relationships between people are messy and change over time, requiring adaptation and a process of internal ethical accountability.

Table 2.2 Reflection on quality of this action research project (from Heikkinen et al., 2012)

Principle	**Rating of presence in this project (0-10) and where it could be in the next project** *0 – not presence at all* *10 – presence is clear and explicit*	**Justification for rating**	**How could this be considered in the future?**
1.Principle of historical continuity ***Analysis of the history of action:*** how has the action evolved historically? ***Emplotment:*** how logically and coherently does the narrative proceed?	**7** (next step 9)	My interpretation of history in this context is understanding and highlighting how my own experiences have underpinned the action leading to my initiating this project. Further, I perceive this as how understandings of community, partnership and work to develop school-community partnership has changed over time. I feel I have made these understandings relatively transparent within this write up. I believe I have shared some understanding of the local context through the parent interview; however, I could have demonstrated a greater understanding of the local context within the other stages. Further, I believe each step within the cycles of this research were logical and a clear narrative has been presented for how these steps came about and what led to our focus on parental perspectives.	I feel I could have better understood the local context of this project and considered in a more measured way how the local history could have impacted on the action research process. For example, doing greater level of initial exploration on the local area could have supported my understanding and contributed positively to the project itself. In the future I could provide a greater level of detail around how each cycle informed the next (see principle of reflexivity for further comment). I would like to present a clearer picture of process.
2. Principle of reflexivity ***Subjective adequacy:*** what is the nature of the researcher's relationship with his/her object of research? ***Ontologic and epistemologic presumptions***: what are the researcher's presumptions of knowledge and reality?	**9** (next step 10)	As a construct, reflexivity involves awareness of how the researcher's views, values and experiences influence their inquiry (Macbeth, 2001). This understanding of the researchers influence on inquiry is something I have tried to keep in mind throughout the duration of the project. Some of this thinking is highlighted in the above paragraphs, for example in how I came to do this research in this way at this time. Although reflexivity is perhaps relevant to other types of research, it appears particularly relevant to action research. In action research the researcher often works in collaboration	Through subsequent processes I have considered that further reflection on action could have been incorporated into Table 3.1, which briefly outlined the cycles of action. I have now demonstrated how the thinking in the final stages of reflection in one cycle impacted decisions made in the next. It will be important in the future even if in brief to be explicit about how each cycle was influenced by the last.

Principle	Rating of presence in this project (0-10) and where it could be in the next project *0 – not presence at all* *10 – presence is clear and explicit*	Justification for rating	How could this be considered in the future?
Transparency: how does the researcher describe his/her material and methods?		with others, meaning their perceptions and assumptions can have unintended influences on the process. In working with my co-researcher, I needed to be reflexive about the power dynamics within the relationship and how our individual world views could influence the research through our dialogue. In our initial meeting we explored our alternative definitions of reality, and how we could be influenced by held privileges such as being white, educated and in positions of relative financial stability. Regarding transparency, I believe I have been transparent about my methodology, the challenges that were faced as the project progressed and my response to these. Further I have made clear how our thinking developed through dialogue and how this led to changes in the progression of the project. It is important for me to also consider here how I might have been more transparent in this regard. The word limits of the thesis meant that it was more difficult to describe each step in detail, but it will be important for me to consider how I can remain transparent and clear about change through cycles of action.	

Principle	Rating of presence in this project (0-10) and where it could be in the next project *0 – not presence at all* *10 – presence is clear and explicit*	Justification for rating	How could this be considered in the future?
3. Principle of dialectics ***Dialogue:*** how has the researcher's insight developed in dialogue with others? ***Polyphony:*** how does the report present different voices and interpretations? ***Authenticity:*** how authentic and genuine are the protagonists of the narrative?	**7** (next step 9)	Several voices were included within this action research project, including various school staff, pupils, a parent and a team of Educational Psychologists. These are represented throughout the project, however due to the methods used for collection such as school staff survey and EP World Café I may not have been able to represent these perspectives as authentically as possible. I have attempted throughout to clarify different views; however, I also acknowledge that these have all been to an extent interpreted and borrowed by myself. Therefore, the views expressed within this project are those I have deemed as most important and relevant, and I have been unable to explore these selected representations with the original discussants. Meaning that although several perspectives have been represented, their authenticity has only been interpreted by myself. One aspect of quality I feel is present in this report is the level of dialogue at each phase of the project, any ideas and data were discussed with others at each level. To uphold this principle of action research I sought alternatives to the co-researcher after they left the project and considered the parent interview data in dialogue with the EP team. Analysis of the EP team dialogue was perhaps the only stage which was not subsequently reviewed dialectically.	In the future I would like to review the representations of views with those who engaged with me on this project. It could support the authenticity of the project and ensure my collaborators are able to share their views on what they wish to be shared or not. In qualitative research this is called 'Member Checking', which some argue is more about researcher validation than increasing authenticity. From my perspective however, I wonder whether this is dependent on how collaborative the member checking process is, perhaps more tokenistic member checking such as sending the final paper/ transcripts for comments is about validation whereas opportunities for further dialogue may be more supportive of authenticity.

Principle	Rating of presence in this project (0-10) and where it could be in the next project *0 – not presence at all* *10 – presence is clear and explicit*	Justification for rating	How could this be considered in the future?
4. Principle of workability and ethics ***Pragmatic quality:*** how well does the research succeed in creating workable practices? ***Criticalness:*** what kind of discussion does the research provoke? ***Ethics:*** how are ethical problems dealt with? ***Empowerment:*** does the research make people believe in their own capabilities and possibilities to act and thereby encourage new practices and actions?	**6** **(**next step 8)	Throughout the project I was required to be adaptable and flexible, in this respect I was able to address ethical dilemmas as they emerged during the project. I was able to critically consider the ethical standards to which we are bound through the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct and take a more considered approach to ethics in which there was ongoing reflection and negotiation between myself and collaborators to ensure for example consent and safety throughout. Although I would like to think the research facilitated self-efficacy and development of practice due to the changing collaborators, I am unsure whether significant or sustained change has occurred. Although there were points of change in practice for the co-researcher these may not have been sustained due to reduced capacity. Further I was only able to meet with the EP team on one occasion and it is likely that for change in practice to occur/ be maintained further sessions would be required.	In future projects I feel it could be important to consider timescales and that perhaps the changes desired at the beginning of this project were too great for the timescale and therefore it was more difficult to evaluate or notice smaller changes due to too great a focus on the end goal. I could in future projects facilitate thinking around smaller step change which may be more likely to increase positive perceptions of capability.
5. Principle of evocativeness ***Evocativeness:*** how well does the research narrative evoke mental images, memories or emotions related to the theme?	**6** (next step 8)	In my interpretation of this principle, I feel the range of perspectives and stories told within this write up may lead to thought along with emotion. From my own experience of engaging with these different perspectives and hearing some of other perspectives first hand it was difficult not to feel an emotional connection to the stories shared and when thinking about how professionals in education might work to facilitate further thinking and understanding about parental and community experiences of working with school.	In the future it may be helpful to gain consent to share further quotations and first-hand perspectives to increase the emotional as well as cognitive response to the narratives. Further I might do more to build the context of the research and highlight its importance, particularly for the school with which I was working.

2.4.2 Informed consent

Pittaway et al. (2010) present a framework for Action research in which informed consent is negotiated with groups rather than individuals at first. The suggestion being ethical ideas can be discussed and changed collectively rather than one individual having the power to make ethical decisions. In this project, the co-researcher and I would regularly check in about the ethicality of the project and consider their continued consent. In this project, informed consent is grounded in the relationships between individuals, and again, like all ethical processes being considered, it must be reflected on continuously rather than viewing individual consent at one specific point in time (Homan, 2001).

2.4.3 A reflection on changing power dynamics and ethical dilemmas

The project detailed in chapter 3 involved a significant amount of change. This meant that the idea of a 'living ethical agreement' mentioned in section 2.4.1 was highly pertinent throughout. I was required to make several in the moment ethical decisions, such as when only one participant attended what was meant to be a focus group and when the headteacher who had joined as my co-researcher chose to leave the project due to circumstances outlined in chapter 3. Further due to the cyclical nature of AR and the changing direction of inquiry I went back to the Newcastle University ethics board three times to ensure I had to correct ethical permissions in place. When only one participant attended, I had to decide whether I could ethically ask them to stay and have an in-depth interview, as this was an unexpected change. In the moment I explained to them that we could wait until just after the planned start time to see if others would arrive and that if they wanted to, we could complete an interview rather than focus group, but that they had no obligation to stay. The participant chose to be interviewed as they felt it was important that their views would be part of the ongoing project. I also explained that reflections from the discussion would be shared with other professionals, but anonymously.

The head-teacher and I perhaps had a more complex dynamic in that they were a significant collaborator and gatekeeper to the project and without their continued involvement it would be challenging to recruit parents. Initially our relationship had been about trying to balance the power dynamics, where I saw her as holding the power due to her status as Head-teacher and she saw me as the power holder in my role as researcher. As our relationship progressed, and we contracted that we both had an important part to play within the research and this dynamic seemed to become more balanced. When they elected to leave the project however, there was a shift, and I had to unpick the ethicality of continuing to ask her to recruit participants for the focus group when she had made it clear her capacity for the project was low. As this project was a crucial part of the doctorate process I tentatively asked if she had capacity to send recruitment information to local parents, but that she did not have to do this and there was no obligation for her to continue. Perhaps due to the shifting power dynamics she agreed to recruit, but did express that although she would like to hear about the outcomes of the focus group, she did not want to be a part of any ongoing cycles of action. I wonder whether at first, she

felt agentic, she was choosing to join and then perhaps she did experience a sense of pressure from me at the end which may have reduced this. This is something I continue to reflect on.

2.5 Collaborative processes

In the construction of new knowledge, collaboration is important as it allows space for otherness and, therefore, the creation of unique perspectives (Cranton, 1996). Space for otherness requires collaborators to experience psychological safety; in this regard, it was important for the co-researcher and I to contract explicitly with each other and share our perspectives on the project. Being open about expectations and assumptions, I hoped we could ensure a joint role in the endeavour. Relevant to this, Kerrissey et al. (2022), highlight the need for individuals to experience a sense of value and contribution to joint inquiry for the dialogue to feel psychologically safe. Thus, the goals of the work would be co-constructed with the co-researcher. The flexibility of the action research methodology supported this collaboration as it created space for multiple levels of inquiry that could meet the needs of both the co-researcher and I. This could be described as reciprocity, and within research, reciprocity can increase the relevance to the lives of those involved in the project (Trainor & Bouchard, 2013). Petersen (2011) suggests reciprocity goes hand in hand with the vulnerability involved in the researcher and co-researcher openly sharing their reflections with one another.

2.6 Summary

With this chapter of my thesis, I aimed to set out a rationale for the design and the philosophical, political, and methodological decisions made, offer a commentary on the research design, some of which were developed as the project unfolded, and give an account of my research journey.

3519 Words

Chapter 3 An Action Research project: How might a school-community partnership be developed in one primary school and how can educational psychologists contribute to this?

Abstract

Partnership working appears to be of great importance within education; children develop within multiple systemic influences, including their wider communities. This project, initially focusing on schools and their relationships with communities, will later consider the role of educational psychologists in facilitating school-community partnerships in England. To explore this phenomenon, an action research design underpinned by concepts of transformation and action was employed. In line with the initial focus, this research was initiated in a North East primary school in collaboration with one Headteacher as the co-researcher. There were three cycles of planning, doing, reviewing, and acting to develop our thinking and transform practice through dialogue. Within the third cycle, unforeseen systemic influences became a barrier to the co-researcher's engagement with the project, who thus chose to step back. The inquiry was then opened back up to the local educational psychology service, and the data from a parent interview was explored using a World Café. The learning from the project is subsequently framed within the challenges experienced and the final sections involve reflection on how the project adapted, what could be done differently and how educational psychologists could take this learning forward in working with staff and parents to facilitate school community partnership.

Key words: Partnership; school-community partnership; parents; action research; community

7350 words

3.1 Introduction

This paper explores an action research (AR) project investigating the development of a school-community partnership in one English primary school. The work initially involved collaboration between a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) and a headteacher. Unpredicted external factors led to the headteacher stepping back from the partnership and opening the inquiry to the local educational psychology service (EPS) to consider the role of EPs in developing school-community partnerships. The following account will offer a transparent narrative of the project and a new understanding of the phenomenon: school-community partnerships. The introduction will follow concepts developed from an unpublished systematic literature review and provide a rationale for the reported action research study.

3.1.1 Context

The context for children's development is broad and involves a range of stakeholders (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Across their childhood and adolescence, they experience multiple systemic influences which play an important role in their development. The children's local and school communities are two crucial spheres of influence (Carrington & Robinson, 2006). These systems are also seated within a broader societal context of history, culture and politics. In England, the current political system, which is arguably underpinned by neoliberal ideologies (Perkins, 2017), may make it challenging for schools and communities to work in partnership to support the outcomes of children and young people (Lunneblad & Johansson, 2019). This is perhaps due to the current emphasis on academic achievement to demonstrate school effectiveness, which places schools in direct competition with one another and may lead to negative perceptions of the local community when academic achievement is not similarly valued by other community members (Hastings, 2019).

3.1.2 Defining the terms

3.1.2.1 Community

In an unpublished SLR, I explored the operationalisation of community across this thesis, defining it as a product of relationships, shared history and experiences (Lardier et al., 2019; McIntyre & Neuhaus, 2021). This definition considers the contemporary debate on community and how it has changed with the urbanisation and industrialisation of Western society (Bradshaw, 2008) and perspectives such as Levy et al. (2024), who argue that defining community should be done contextually and based on community member perspectives. This thesis considers two different communities: the school community, which is suggested to include pupils, parents, school staff and professionals (Carrington & Robinson, 2006; Green, 2016) and the community outside the school, which is defined as all individuals living in the school catchment area (Carrington & Robinson, 2006).

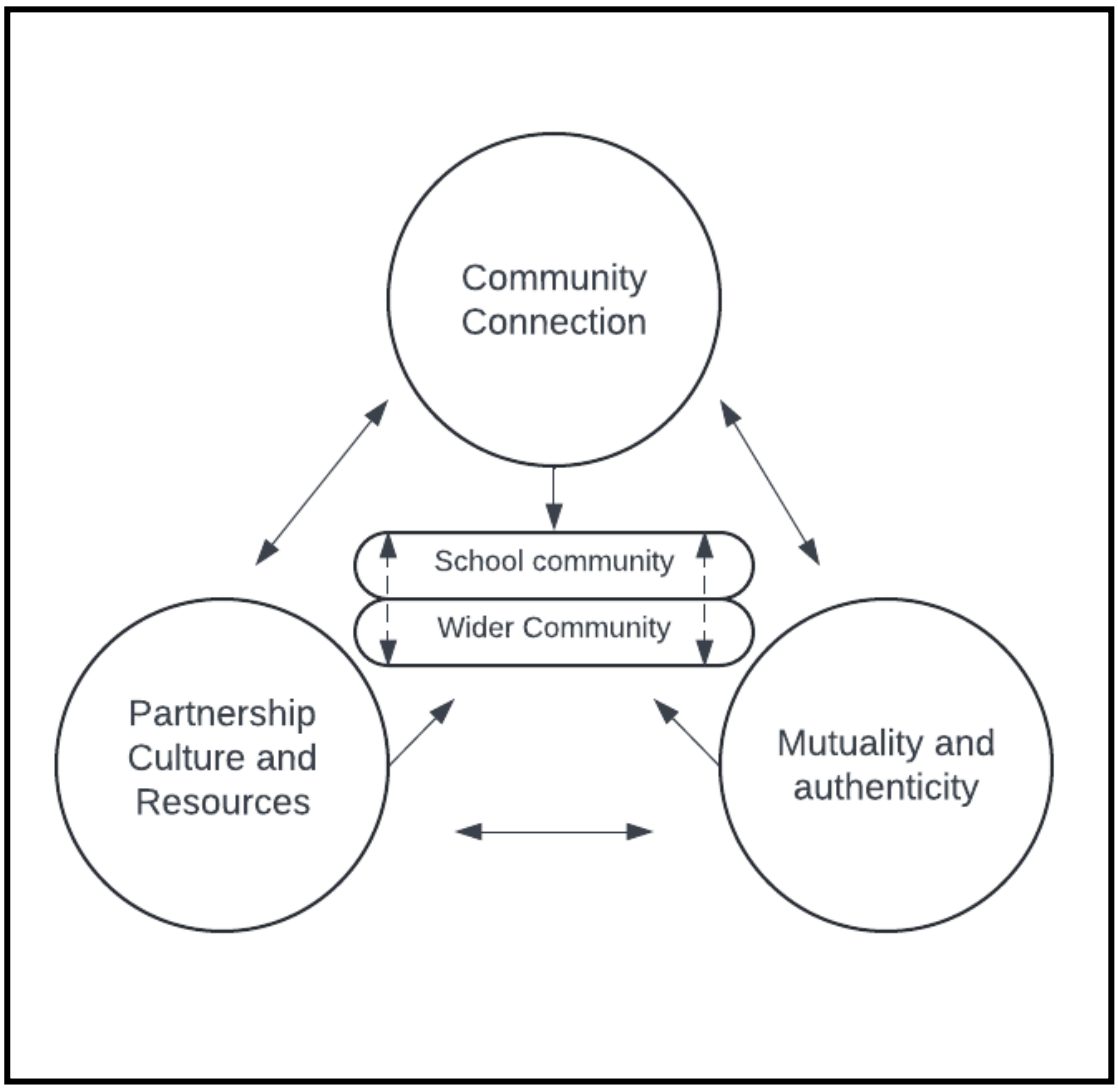
3.1.2.2 Partnership

Partnership can be defined as involving collaboration and joint ownership of responsibilities and outcomes (Glueck & Reschly, 2014). Working from this definition and the idea that community is underpinned by connection and a sense of belonging (Lardier et al., 2019), school-community partnership could be defined as school staff and community members connecting collaboratively through one another's strengths to meet school and community needs. School-community partnership involves more than allowing community access to school buildings; it requires working together to develop local knowledge and a greater understanding of community priorities (Gil & Johnson, 2021). However, this assumes that community members and families want to develop collaborative relationships, which may not be the case, for example, when the school's reputation is poor (Wheeler et al., 2018).

3.1.3 Framework for the Research

Several factors facilitating school-community partnership were identified in an unpublished SLR: community connection, partnership culture and resources, and mutuality and authenticity (see Figure 3.2). The review concluded that these factors influence how the school community and wider community interact and how partnership works in this context.

Figure 3.1 Visual representation of the factors facilitating school-community partnership



3.1.3.1 Community Connection

The construct of community connection included several ideas that support the development of school-community relationships, including reputation (the way parents speak about a school impacts community perceptions) (Wheeler et al, 2018), school representation in the community (staff are actively involved in community spaces) (Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006) and the role of an insider/outsider (an individual with dual membership) (DePetris & Eames, 2017; Monroe et al., 2016).

3.1.3.2 Mutuality and Authenticity

The second factor highlighted in the SLR was mutuality and authenticity, which describes the need for shared goals and values and the potential to have a sustained and noticeable impact for both partners (DePetris & Eames, 2017; Hayes & Chodkiewicz, 2006). Shared values and goals appear to promote positive relationship dynamics that enhance feelings of safety and contribute to collaborative

processes (Chen & Tjosvold, 2012). It is important to acknowledge that individuals may not share the same personal values, however shared understandings can be developed over time to promote co-production (Monroe et al., 2016). It was interpreted that feeling valuable within the partnership process to feel efficacious and motivated in taking on the challenge of a common goal (Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2006).

3.1.3.3 Partnership culture and resources

The final factor considered in the SLR was partnership culture and resources; it was highlighted that when school-community partnership was valued in the school, it was increasingly likely that resources such as funding (external) and capacity/efficacy (intrapersonal) would be designated for this work. Fullan (2007) defined school culture as the guiding values and beliefs behind school operations; partnership culture means partnerships are actively encouraged and supported within school, such as creating a shared vision, building capacity and advocating for community concerns (Valli et al., 2018). Jentsch et al. (2023) suggest that when teachers feel efficacious and supported by their SLT, their levels of stress are reduced, and therefore, their capacity to work in novel ways increases.

3.1.4 Rationale: Applying the framework

The importance of partnership working between school staff and children's parents and families has been emphasised in educational literature (Christenson, 2004; Freeman, 2011; Kambouri et al., 2022). Partnerships are important as children and young people develop in the context of bioecological systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Interactions between and within systems such as schools and communities shape young people's identity and future aspirations (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022). Education is an inherently social activity; therefore, practice may be supported by including community knowledge (Kernan, 2010; Sujutha, 2011). The wider community is considered as all individuals within the local community who are not school pupils' family members (Valli et al., 2018). The implication is that accounting for a broader context supports pupil well-being and facilitates the achievement of goals; Crisp et al. (2015) suggest this is particularly important for those often marginalised in the education system. Further, Hardy and Grootenboer (2016) contend that school-community partnership can increase pupil engagement, and community relationship building increases staff creativity and adaptiveness to students and families.

There is potential that when school-community relationships are poor, school staff may not feel efficacious in developing partnerships or view this work as important despite evidence to the contrary (Bryk, 2010; Lupton & Kintrea, 2011). In cases where partnership is deemed a priority by school staff/ senior leaders, but they doubt their capacity to enact change or are not confident in getting started, there may be a place for external professionals who can take a distanciated perspective and utilise curiosity in supporting partnership development (Lewis, 2008). Educational psychologists (EPs) are an example of outside professionals working closely with staff in schools. McGuiggan (2021) argues that EPs should have an increasingly community-oriented position to facilitate positive outcomes for a greater range of children and families, extending their role beyond special educational needs (SEND).

Although working outside the bounds of the school may be complex within the context of traded services (Lee & Woods, 2017), supporting the development of school-community partnerships may be a way of extending the role into children's wider systems.

As outlined above, several factors are important in supporting school-community partnership development. Each factor could inform educational psychologists and suggest ways of extending their role. Educational Psychologists could act as insider/outsiders, as they work with school staff but are employed by the local authority rather than the school. EPs have relational and consultative skills that could support partnership development. In their role, EPs are experienced in facilitating meetings and supporting key stakeholders in communicating and interacting with one another (Cording, 2011). Educational Psychologists could also, for example, engage in dialogue with the senior leadership team (SLT) to support the development of a school-wide partnership culture, promoting sustainable change through systemic rather than individual working (Eloff et al., 2006). Atfield et al. (2023), interviewed multi-agency professionals who highlighted that EPs enabled them to better identify the needs of the local community within their LA. An EP could also work with staff through consultation and supervision to reflect on practice and maintain their internal resources (such as self-efficacy and resilience) (Osborne & Burton, 2014). Their potential contribution across the model suggests they are in a key position to work with schools aiming to extend their partnerships with the community.

This empirical project will explore how partnerships might be facilitated. The project began with the following research question:

How might a school-community partnership be developed in one primary school?

Due to difficulties alluded to in the introduction, the research question was adapted to reflect change during the inquiry. The final question was:

How can educational psychologists support the development of school community partnership?

3.2 Overview of the research process

In this section, I will outline the methodology and research context and offer an overview of the stages of the research process. This section will offer an initial insight into the project's iterative nature before the study is reported in detail. I will first outline key aspects of the inquiry with my co-researcher before it was then opened to the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) as what emerged in these initial stages informed the later dialogue with members of the EPS.

3.2.1 Action research

Action research was deemed an appropriate methodology for research in this area as it supports the challenging of power dynamics, learning in practice and reflexivity

in messy real-world contexts. In this project I drew on principles of both community-based collaborative (knowledge regarding the power to change is held in the community) and participatory action research where the research process was developed between myself, teachers and outsiders (van Gelderen, Krumwiede & Fenske, 2018; Feldman, 1999). I worked not as the owner of knowledge but as an active partner of the co-researcher and research partners (Bleicher, 2014). Action research cuts across the divide between knowledge and practice as knowledge is developed through acting on the world (Stetensko, 2014). Further, AR is underpinned by a dynamic and relational epistemology responsive to real-world situations (Kemmis, 2010); making it suitable for a project aiming to transform partnership practice.

3.2.2 Research context

The initial co-researcher of this project was the Headteacher of a primary school in a Local Authority (LA) in the North East of England. They became involved in the project through purposive sampling, a method of selection based on knowledge and appropriateness for the project. The school had an existing relationship with the educational psychology service (EPS) in which I am on placement. The headteacher had expressed interest in developing relationships with their community to the school EP. This project intended to build on this initial interest. When the co-researcher unexpectedly stepped back from the project, the inquiry shifted focus to the local authority (LA) EPS to explore how EPs might support school-community partnerships. The rationale was, that the school EP could apply these ideas in their continuing relationship with the headteacher and the wider team might consider how they could support partnerships between local schools and their communities.

3.2.3 The research process

Action research is a dynamic and iterative process allowing for change and rethinking (Leitch & Day, 2000) (see Figure 3.3). This flexibility can create mess and uncertainty but enables researchers to respond to changing contexts and transform practice for all involved (Cook, 2009). The cyclical nature of AR supports the researchers in exploring and reflecting on new positions, leading to further cycles of inquiry (McNiff, 2014). In the case of the current project, there were three cycles (outlined in Table 3.1); each cycle led to reflection and the consideration of alternative routes of inquiry.

Figure 3.2 Visual representation of an AR cycle

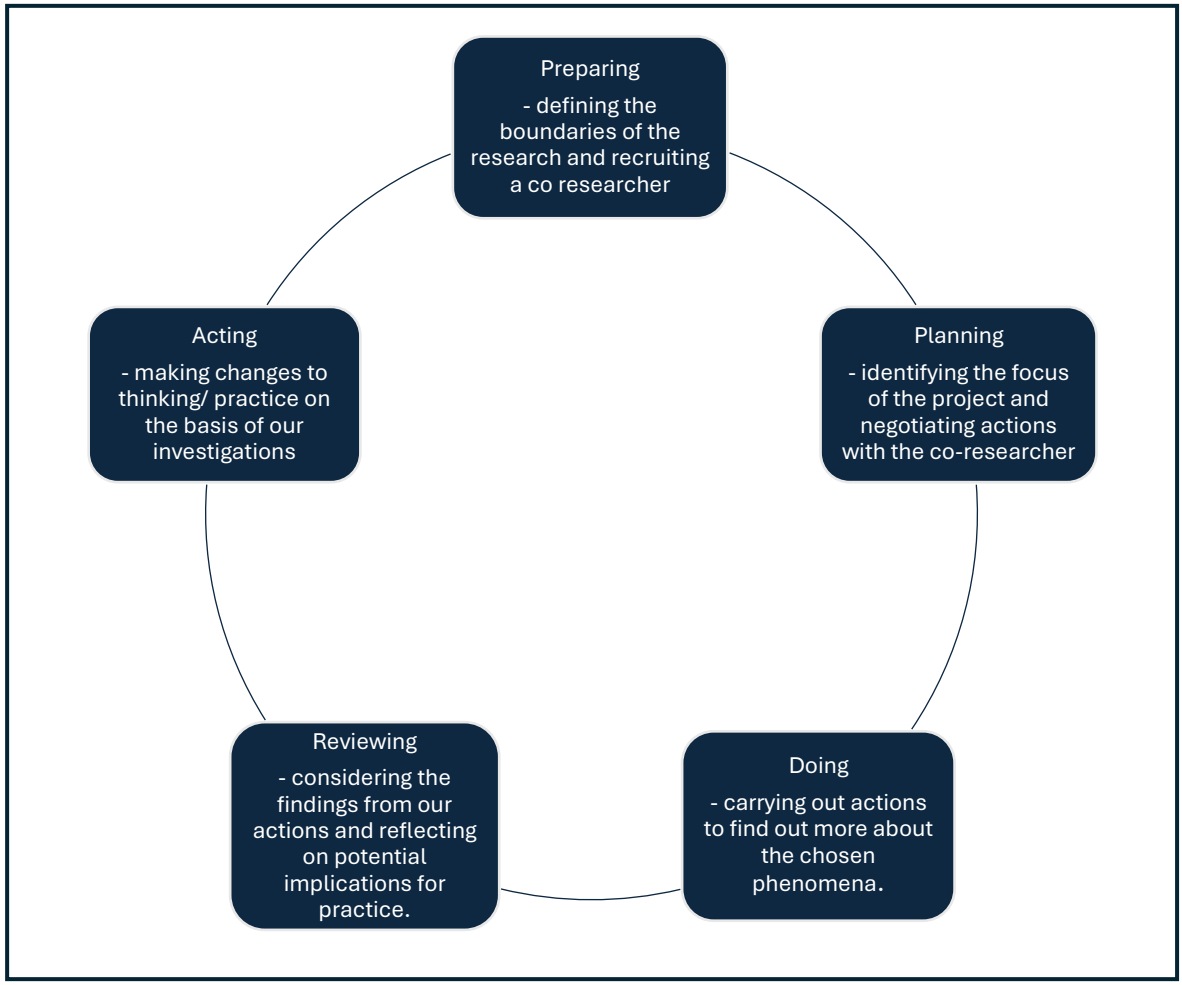


Table 3.1 Description of the research process (see contact logs in Appendix A for contact summaries)

Cycle number	Phase of action research	Stage within the project	Key activities	How cycle data informed the next phase of the project?
Pre-cycle	***Preparing***	Stage 1: Preparation October 2022 – April 2023	• Deciding the overall focus of the project, a guiding research question and selecting a suitable research methodology. • Gaining first stage ethical approval from the university ethical review process.	Informed recruitment and initial ethical approval.
		Stage 2: Recruitment April 2023 – May 2023	• Discussing possible schools with Educational Psychologists in my placement authority • School Educational Psychologists approached potential schools. • Contact with interested headteacher and arrangement of an initial meeting.	
Cycle 1	***Planning***	Stage 3: Introductions and Contracting June 2023	• Initial meeting with my co-researcher – exploring school priorities and the parameters/ possibilities of the project. • Exploring and agreeing responsibilities as well as expectations.	The data informed and stimulated dialogue between myself and the co-researcher. It highlighted that staff had limited awareness of community-based activities with the children highlighting more than were identified by staff. We also discussed the finding that few staff lived locally, which likely impacted their knowledge of available amenities and on their perceptions of the community. Additionally, we discussed my summer activities involving an exploratory conversation with a university representative of a NE community working group. We engaged in
		Stage 4: Negotiating Action July 2023	• Developing shared aims and focus for action. We agreed that some initial scoping would be helpful, regarding what is available in the local area in terms of community organisations and perceptions of school staff towards the community.	
	Doing	Stage 5: Collecting initial data July-September 2023	• Co-researcher sent a questionnaire for school staff to complete during the summer holidays and then at the start of the new term used a similar questionnaire to explore pupil views around the community and what community spaces they use outside of school time. • Responses collated on an excel spreadsheet.	

Cycle number	Phase of action research	Stage within the project	Key activities	How cycle data informed the next phase of the project?
		Stage 6: Analyse initial data September 2023	• Co-researchers analysed key themes from the questionnaire data, staff and pupil views were considered first separately and then comparatively to develop our understanding of staff knowledge (see Appendix C).	further activity around this in cycle 2. This dialogue raised questions about how we could better understand what was available in the community and how local knowledge could be voiced within the project, hence cycle two was to engage with the working group in exploration of these questions.
	Reviewing	Stage 7: Reviewing the data together September 2023	• Co-researchers reviewed the key themes together and explored how they might influence our decisions going forward.	
	Acting	Stage 8: Next steps based on initial data September 2023 – October 2023	• Identifying next steps in our project based on the initial data	
Cycle 2	***Planning***	Stage 9: Negotiating Action September 2023	• My co-researcher and I decided it would be helpful following our data gathering to gain a greater understanding of how we might engage with the community and explored other local school-community partnerships in the North East.	During the Networking Event key discussion from the community partners was, when parents were involved in planning outcomes and events there was a greater level of engagement and change. In dialogue after the event, one of our key reflections was that parents are a critical part of the local community and them having a greater voice in and ownership of planned activities could be important in our project (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). This led to a key turning point in our
	Doing	Stage 10: Collecting data October 2023	• The deputy head (in place of the co-researcher) and I attended a networking event for a community group in a different North East Local Authority with the deputy head.	
		Stage 11: Analysing Data October 2023 - November 2023	• I analysed information from the networking event and pulled out key reflections based on post-event discussion with the deputy head.	

Cycle number	Phase of action research	Stage within the project	Key activities	How cycle data informed the next phase of the project?
	Reviewing	Stage 12: Reviewing data and reflecting. November 2023	• The co-researcher and I reviewed the key reflections from the networking event and how this information might impact on our process.	inquiry to explore parental engagement and school-parent relationships, we wanted to develop our understanding of parent perceptions and the facilitators/ barriers to parent relationships.
	Acting	Stage 13: Next steps November 2023	• The co-researcher and I reflected that we wanted parents to be more involved in the process of the project based on data from the networking event. • My co-researcher and I subsequently discussed how we might involve parents and discussed several options (see negotiation of cycle 3 for our final decision).	
Cycle 3	***Preparing***	Stage 14: Preparation	• Gaining secondary ethical approval from the university board of ethics.	This cycle was the final cycle in is described in depth later in this chapter as it was not possible due to the word count to explore each cycle in great depth and cycle three involved perhaps the greatest level of data analysis and review and was informed by cycles one and two.
	Planning	Stage 15: Negotiating Action November 2023	• Previous data highlighted importance of parents as partners and decided together that gaining parental insights on the community and involving them in project planning would be a positive step.	
	Doing	Stage 15: Collecting Data February 2024	• Engaging in a focus group with parents to explore their views of the community and of relationships with the school, due to difficulties experienced in recruitment, one parent attended changing the approach from focus group to interview.	
		Stage 16: Analysing data February 2024 – March 2024	• Completing a thematic analysis of the interview transcript to identify key themes that could inform practice.	
	Reviewing and Acting	Stage 17: Reflecting on potential next steps	• Due to unforeseen circumstances imposed on the school, I was unable to feedback to the headteacher post interview. Due to unforeseen circumstances out of the schools control the co-research informed me	

Cycle number	Phase of action research	Stage within the project	Key activities	How cycle data informed the next phase of the project?
		March 2024 - ongoing	they could no longer be my partner in the project, although they expressed an interest in the project continuing. To ensure the principles of action research and critical community psychology were upheld, the themes from the parent interview were considered with the EPS in order to consider their role within partnership development.	

3.3 Reporting the study

The unfolding nature of action research involves a process of knowing and doing, leading to new understandings (Dick, 2002). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) suggest a good quality AR report should move people to action and reflection.

I interpreted this as describing turning points in the project that led to new understandings or offered a critical consideration of the status quo (Cho & Trent, 2006). To guide the reader on this journey to action and reflection the process must be transparent and demonstrate how new knowledge was generated. Therefore, it is recommended that a first-person narrative approach be taken (Fisher & Phelps, 2006; Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002). During this section, I will reflect on the AR process.

3.3.1 Preparing

To ensure transparency in the process, I will first share the actions I took prior to the involvement of the co-researcher to shape the project and initiate the action research process. Although we were working collaboratively on this project, due to the ethical and academic requirements of the university I led some steps, including seeking ethical approval.

3.3.2 Deciding the overarching focus and ethical approval

Before engaging in the process of identifying a co-researcher, an overarching focus to guide the project was crucial. I needed to plan a project to fulfil the requirements of my academic programme, uphold the principles of AR, and have meaning to the co-researcher and the community within which they worked. The unpublished SLR preceding this empirical project suggested several factors that facilitate the development of school-community partnerships, and it seemed important to develop an understanding of the partnership process. Hence, this project aimed to consider the development of school-community partnerships and later the possible role for EPs.

3.3.3 Ethics

University processes required prior planning before I could engage with my co-researcher. Thus, I received initial ethical approval with the understanding that the ethics process would be reviewed as the project developed. In line with ethical practice any participation in the project needed to be voluntary (British Psychological Society, 2021). I contacted the interested school, and we had an initial phone conversation about the project; during which the headteacher agreed to join the project as a co-researcher and meet to explore further. Further, in line with ethical standards, any other individual providing data was required to give informed consent and any data were anonymised and stored on a secure university server. Although ethical approval was provided by the university, ethical consideration involved a

process of continuous reflection and the potential for ethical issues to arise at any time during the process was recognised.

3.3.4 Recruiting the co-researcher

Once partnerships are established it is argued that school leaders must see power as held jointly by partners in addressing their shared agenda (Valli et al., 2018). In most UK education provisions, the headteacher manages and distributes the school's budget and resources (Hulme et al., 2023). Consequently, the values and beliefs of the SLT will be key in agendas prioritised within school; if partnership work is not a priority, resources are less likely to be allocated to this (Epstein et al., 2011). Thus, it was deemed important to work in partnership with a member of SLT.

The school was purposefully chosen as colleagues within my placement EPS were aware the headteacher was considering the development of the school's relationship with the local community. This school was in an area of relatively high deprivation in the North East of England (Index of Multiple Deprivation, 2019). The Headteacher gave consent to join as a co-researcher (Appendix A), their ongoing consent was also regularly checked as the project progressed (Appendix B).

3.3.5 Relationship development and negotiating the research focus

An AR researcher acts as an insider/outsider to support the development of a distanciated perspective. This means seeing from an alternative view through dialogue with another; requiring relationship development between the AR researcher and co-researchers (van der Riet, 2009). This dialogue provokes change, not through the force of the researcher, but that all parties may have their thinking/ practice transformed through the process. Therefore, we needed to build a relationship based on trust, communication and mutual respect (San Martín-Rodríguez et al., 2005). For example, we had to consider the balance of power; if the power is unbalanced, certain voices can be dominant, limiting whose voice is heard. This risks the closing of alternative explanations, reducing the research dialogue's transformative potential (Norris et al., 2012).

To reduce the risk of power imbalance, we explored our individual and joint aims for the project (see Table 3.2), reflecting on how we could ensure mutuality. Mutuality is important for AR to ensure joint ownership and responsibility (Kemmis, 2014). I was transparent about the project being a postgraduate degree requirement.

Table 3.2 Shared and individual aims selected through dialogue with the co-researcher

Shared aims	Individual aims
- To develop an understanding of how school staff might develop a connection with the local community.	- My individual aim was to reflect on how professionals, in particular Educational Psychologists might facilitate the development of school-community partnership.
- To identify a mutual goal that could be achieved through developing the relationship between the school and the local community.	- The co-researcher's individual aim was to increase awareness in school of the importance of the local community and the strengths within this.

After working alongside the co-researcher for several months on the project, unforeseen external pressure led to the co-researcher having to step away from the project. This shift from a collaborative project to a primary researcher-led project meant a return to my individual aim, which was to explore the role of EPs within the process of school-community partnership development. As indicated previously, this then became the primary aim of the project, and the inquiry was opened to the EPS. See Table 3.1 for details on the cycles of the research project.

3.3.6 A developing focus on parent perspectives

As a consequence of learning in cycles one and two, there was a key turning point in our understanding of this school's relationship with the community. Through our dialogue we recognised that developing parent-school relationships could bridge links with the wider community. Therefore, this became the key focus of the inquiry in cycle three.

Developing relationships with parents should be considered in context, as several factors can impact parental desire to engage with schools, including their past experiences of school, culture and ethnicity, and educator expectations and understandings of parental involvement (McKenna & Millen, 2013). It was the co-researcher's perception that parents who had worked directly with school staff had positive attitudes towards the school and had felt supported with, for example, their child's special educational need (SEN). However, there was concern this positive perception was not generalised to other parents/carers, as there had been little positive response to invitations to attend activities in school (such as coffee mornings). This was suggestive of potentially poor school-parent relationships.

Parental perceptions of schools and parents' sense of belonging within the school community are critical to their engagement with school-facilitated activities (Witten et al., 2007). The co-researcher, however, was also interested in exploring what parents were engaging with and what helped them feel connected to the local community. There is some argument that models of engagement that are not school-

centred but rather community-centred can encourage parental involvement (Gil & Johnson, 2021; Rodela & Bertrand, 2018). A conclusion that might be drawn is that school involvement in the community is positive for both school-parent and school-community relationships. Recognising community and familial strengths within this process brings meaning for families and perhaps leads to an experience of being heard (Gil & Johnson, 2021). This may suggest that schools could be involved in and learn from existing community programs to develop relationships with stakeholders. We agreed, therefore, to explore parents' lived experiences of school-parent relationships in addition to their experiences of the community (McLafferty, 2004; Ward et al., 2018). We aimed to use this understanding to reflect on how multiple systemic relationships could be developed (Jackson Foster et al., 2018).

Parental agency is a key goal and prerequisite for successful educational partnerships (Murray et al., 2015). Some define this as parents viewing their perspectives to have a meaningful influence on practice in school (Rautamies et al., 2021). As a concept, agency is described as an individual's presence, participation, and active influence in their social, cultural and material environment (Giddens, 1984). Parental presence and active influence in schools can be limited despite them often being physically present in that environment, for example, at school collections or parents' evenings (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Further, when their voices are sought, there is a danger of this being tokenistic, not leading to transformation of practice in school (Mcdonald, 2018). In bringing these ideas together, the co-researcher and I perceived the importance of including parents in the project.

The co-researcher and I developed the following research questions to refine our focus and purpose on parent experiences of the school and community (Freeman, 2006).Table 3.3 shows these research questions and the chosen method of data collection.

Table 3.3 The research questions and method for data collection

Research Question	Data Collection
How do parents perceive the school and how does this impact their relationship with the school?	Focus group with parents and reflection with co-researcher.
How do parents engage with organisations, activities and supports already available in the community?	Focus group with parents and reflection with co-researcher.

We planned to meet with parents of pupils from the co-researcher's school. We aimed to capture everyday knowledge and generate a rich description of parental experiences through a focus group (McLafferty, 2004), which would inform reflection and change in practice within the AR methodology.

3.4 Parent Recruitment and collecting the data

In planning the focus group, we took steps to mitigate the risks of parents being unable to attend; for example, we booked a local community space (identified in cycle one) for the early evening so as not to exclude working parents and reduce the potential power imbalances of meeting in school. Although the headteacher had stepped back from the co-researcher role at this stage, they agreed to support recruitment due to ongoing interest.

The headteacher shared the study details and recruitment poster with parents. The information sheet and consent forms (Appendix D, Appendix E, Appendix F) were provided to parents before starting the focus group, which required completion before participation. Despite multiple attempts to recruit via the headteacher, even changing the date to give more time, one parent attended. At this stage, in the moment ethical decisions were made about changing the approach, the parent gave verbal consent to be interviewed with the understanding that they were not obligated to do so. I also expressed that reflections from our conversation would later be discussed with other professionals to facilitate practice development around school community partnership. Subsequently an unintended in-depth interview with one parent was conducted, drawing on questions prepared for the focus group and open-ended dialogue. When one individual attends, it suggests strong views, which has implications for generalising the experience to other local parents (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). Due to time constraints and the ethical duty to respect the headteacher's wish to no longer be involved, it was not possible to complete further interviews, focus groups or questionnaires. Further, the intention of this phase was not generalisability but to inform reflection and dialogue, which one perspective could fulfil.

The co-researcher and I developed a semi-structured schedule to explore our chosen research questions (Appendix G). The questions were asked explicitly about the parent's experiences of the local community, facilities and organisations they accessed and their perceptions of the school. A semi-structured approach was operationalised to create space for dialogue and an open exploration of parent perspectives. The interview was audio recorded.

3.4.1 Interpreting the data

At this stage, I carried out independent transcription and analysis of the interview data. To respect the co-researcher's decision to withdraw from the process, I intended to open the inquiry to my placement EPS (Heron & Reason, 2006). Reflecting on the findings in this way would give new perspectives on issues arising from the inquiry and the challenges faced in the research partnership.

In selecting a method of data analysis, it is crucial to consider the purpose of the research and the chosen research questions (Gaur & Kumar, 2018). In other methodologies, the data might underpin the empirical endeavour; however, in this project, it was important that findings facilitated dialogue in the action research process. In this case, the data were not used solely to describe and define a phenomenon but as part of a wider inquiry to support new understandings and

actions. As the focus of this cycle was parental experience, I elected for a process of inductive thematic analysis, which is data-driven (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). It was also important to maintain a clear understanding that due to recruitment challenges, this was one parent's perspective and, therefore, cannot be viewed as universal; the analysis, however, was to be used to discuss along with the other learnings from the project with the educational psychology team.

To capture the content of the discussion, I transcribed the recording. The recording and transcription were then reviewed simultaneously to ensure the transcription was accurate and any errors were corrected. This transcription was then read and re-read to familiarise myself with the data, and an excerpt of the transcript is presented in Appendix H; during these readings, I highlighted references to perceptions of the school and the community. These initial codes were revisited, and I began generating and reviewing themes. A visual representation of themes is shared in Appendix I. The inductive analysis process allowed emergent points of interest to be considered and reflected in greater depth (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 Themes developed from the parent interview data

Themes from the interview	Interpretations and reflections on interview themes
Positive parent-school relationships	The theme of parent-school relationships was highlighted as a critical factor. There was a sense that parents in the local area did not perceive their relationships with the school as positive and this impacted on their engagement in school; for example, the parent said *"Unfortunately, on different occasions have upset a couple of key parents who are so well known and are so vocal within the community that it's then echoed so wide everybody finds out about it … things like that, it promotes negativity and if one parent is feeling it and voices that concern in the yard, then you get everybody else"* The parent described the community as close knit and insular, suggesting when there was a negative perspective or when the school had a poor reputation this was much more quickly shared throughout the community. The parent also described the potential for more effective home-school communication in supporting relationships with parents across the school community, considering this as facilitating a shared understanding. The parent also described that the multi-generational nature of the community could make it difficult for newcomers. *"the community that we've been allowed to be part of up to now is still the transient community in the area where we're not really in with the in crowd, as it were… Because when new to the area, you know of only being here two years, that's it's a very small amount of time compared to you know 4th and 5th generation."* In a previous discussion with my co-researcher, we explored the idea of judgment and that parents may have perceived the school's attempts to build relationships and support the community as damage-focussed (Dutta, 2018). This perhaps worked to further alienate the school from the community; the parent interview highlighted the need for a shared understanding between parents and school staff. Interestingly their focus was on building empathy for the school staff. For example, saying

Themes from the interview	Interpretations and reflections on interview themes
	"…but things like educating the parents to how the whole SEN and EHCP system works… yeah, how the school actually run and what the finances are actually like and how challenging it is" A shared understanding is likely to support the development of relationships (Deslandes et al., 2023). The parent also expressed that she personally felt supported by the school and appreciated what was on offer, feeling that for her this supported a positive relationship with the school as she felt it was meeting her needs as a parent. The parent said *"The Breakfast Club is free. So that in itself is huge, my son goes to breakfast club every morning … because if the school either didn't have a breakfast club or charged for the breakfast to leave them to the pound a day, I would probably end up moving my hours and working 9-5 instead"*
Understanding support available within the community	It was highlighted that the focus community had several strengths, including its close knit and multi-generational population. Community members were described as looking after one another and sharing resources such as cars, spaces, and food. For example, speaking about the local pub, which acted as a key community space. This suggests that the community was creative in their uses of the spaces available, perhaps implying a need for a more connected approach that was driven by what the parents considered to be more important spaces in the community. *"We have got a lot of families who will come in and they'll have, you know, a couple of pints of pop each and play with the games so that that makes it a bit more community oriented and stuff"* The parent also explored ideas around making links between different agencies which she had seen when living in another local authority. She explained that this could also act to support relationships between the school and community members as they would be seen as contributing positively to the wider local area. For example, saying *"We did a cross-generation project with the library where they came down and they made some wooden seats and painted them whilst we got the guys from a company who were just on the other side of town. They came and helped build plant pots and we planted vegetables. So that it then brought in the Community Garden area gardeners as well, but then got the kids to make soup with the vegetables they grew the following spring, so there's loads of, there's loads of ways, there's loads of ways of getting involvement"* This suggests that for this parent, community involvement could be arranging and contributing to activities designed to increase connection alongside having a potentially positive impact for individuals within the community e.g. supply food and teach children skills for independence such as cooking. Within research around school-community partnerships acknowledgement of strengths and positive school staff perceptions of the community are important for relationships with both parents and wider community members (Mills et al., 2023). The co-researcher was passionate about this and had an understanding that although she had this perspective that this was not necessarily replicated around the

Themes from the interview	Interpretations and reflections on interview themes
	school due to most staff living out of area (other than one teaching assistant).
Parental sense of belonging in school	The interview data suggested the importance of parental sense of belonging to not only the school community but the wider community. A role was identified for the school in facilitating these connections, the parent said *"The school could somehow facilitate some form of communication platform to where parents could then connect with other parents outside of school that could really help with creating more opportunities to actually engage with the actual peers that he's going to school with"* This suggests that making more connections between parents might also benefit pupils and support connections between them outside of school. It was felt that opportunities to link with other parents and feel like a part of the school and wider community were limited. This parent was motivated to develop relationships with other parents utilising the school community as the vehicle for this. The parent suggested that increasing contact between parents could also have a positive impact on pupil engagement with activities in the community as parents could contact one another any time to arrange contact, the parent said *"So, if we had you know. The WhatsApp group with all of the parents … Then you can put in say. You know you've got a Tuesday afternoon off who's available for a play date on Tuesday afternoon, and then that creates that connection. You could then organise something, even if it is out of the area"* It is important to consider that although this may not be a generalised experience for all parents in the area, there is space to consider how parents might be facilitated to support one another where belonging and connection are not already felt. Warner and Andrews (2019) suggest that schools can act as an important social space for parents and that schools could perhaps do more to promote this.

3.4.2 Preparing for the Shared Review

In both action research and the discipline of community psychology, research should lead to planned action (Kagan et al., 2019). Therefore, I considered it crucial that the data be reflected outside of my analysis and interpretation. Opening the inquiry to further voices would support the development of thinking and make space for alternative perspectives (Sagor, 2011). Further, Kessi et al. (2022) advocate for multiple voices in academic knowledge production, suggesting that a greater number of voices limits the risk of a reductionist perspective of the community. Therefore, I brought the data to my placement EPS for a shared review, prompting thinking and ideas for practice in supporting school-community partnerships. I use the term shared review as what we did involved joint reflection and dialogue around recorded data to produce new understandings and develop practice.

The shared review focused on the three key themes from the parent interview (positive school-parent relationships, understanding support available in the

community and parental sense of belonging in school). For ethical clarity it is important to note that the parent's direct quotes were not presented during the review with the EPs, only general themes as interpreted by myself in the analysis. I summarised the themes and broader perspectives from the literature as a stimulus for dialogue (see Table 3.5). A World Café approach (see Figure 3.4) was chosen to facilitate a rich discussion between the psychologists as this approach fosters collaborative conversations and the sharing of practical knowledge (Schiele et al., 2022). The world café has been used similarly to deepen thinking around survey data, suggesting it was an appropriate approach to use in this context (Brennan & Ritch, 2010). Drawing on ideas from Schiele et al. (2022), I developed guiding questions based on the interview and broader literature to support initial engagement in the discussion and consideration of implications for practice (see Table 3.5).

Figure3.3 The World Café set up and movement of discussants

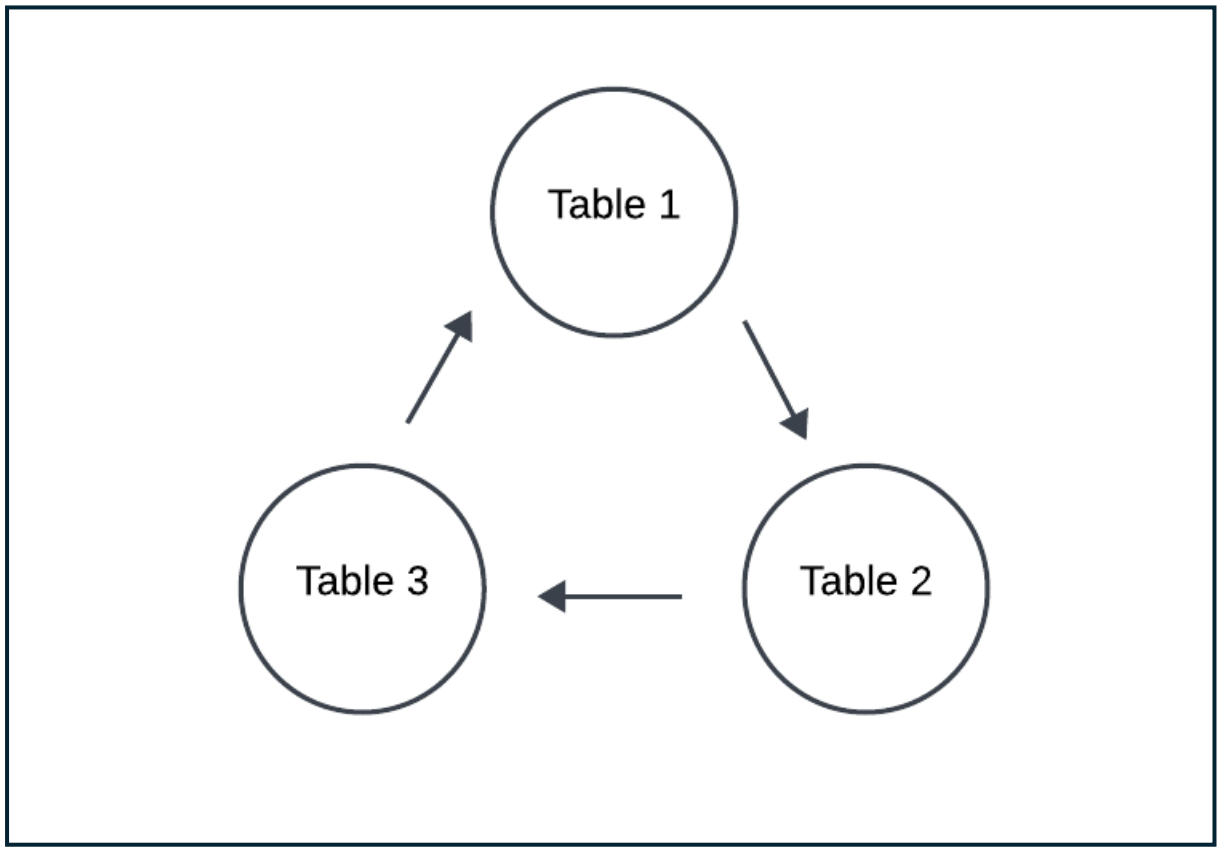


Table 3.5 Shared Review/ World Café guiding questions and prompts

Table	Table Theme	Guiding Questions/ Prompts
One	Development of positive parent school relationship	• How do we facilitate this in our role? • Are there ways our practice could change to support this? The parent interview highlighted negative perceptions of the school for parents and in the wider community. It was described as a long-standing perception maintained by complaints in the playground and reduced contact with teaching staff outside of SEND processes. Perhaps leading to limited engagement when activities within the school have been planned. Different understanding of what support should be in place. The literature also suggests that parent's engagement with school is important for children's learning outcomes suggesting that facilitating this relationship is important. Parent engagement relies on the relationship built with the school – trust, communication, and mutual respect as key in successful collaboration.
Two	Understanding support available in the community support	• What is our awareness of support available in communities, what are the strengths of the community? • How can we understand this and reflect on this in schools? • Are there ways practice could change to support this? • Are there ways we could expand our role to partner with communities? The parent interview highlighted that the local community is very tight knit, the local community members support one another in various ways including sharing cars, meals prepared for community members in the local pub (which does not usually provide food).

Three	Parental sense of belonging	• How does this appear in our work, what ways do we practice that might enhance parents' sense of belonging? • Are there ways practice could change to support this? The parent interview suggested there was a reduced sense of parent belonging in the school community, in part related to a sense of limited links with other parents due to reduced involvement from parents within the school. The broader literature suggests that parents may benefit from a sense of belonging to school to feel they can engage in school-based activities and that to achieve this perhaps school staff need to be seen engaging with parents and communities in a non-school based way. This way of working demonstrates and understanding of community strengths and supports parents to be heard.

3.4.3 Reviewing the data

The shared review with the EPS took place in a confidential local community space to give the team time outside the pressures of casework to reflect. Using framing questions and themes from the interview data acted as prompts if needed; otherwise, table dialogues could be flexible. The table themes were as follows: table 1 - *positive parent-school relationships*, table 2 - *understanding support available in the community* and table 3 - *parental sense of belonging*. All discussants had the opportunity to engage at each table apart from one self-selected moderator who would recap the previous group's discussion to facilitate the building of conversation (Schiele et al., 2022). The dialogic space was, therefore expanded, with each discussion building on and between tables (Wegerif, 2007). The data were recorded in written form on the tables, and at the end, the discussants were asked to highlight key outcomes for them with an asterisk; this positioned them as fellow inquirers who could take learnings from this session into practice. In addition, I engaged in further thematic analysis of the written data to deepen my understanding of and engagement with the highlighted outcomes (see Table 3.6 for codes/themes, see Figure 3.5 for thematic map). This analysis is to be shared with the EPS in a future team meeting. The analysis at this stage was deductive as I explored EP perspectives through the lens of themes from the parent interview (Braun & Clarke, 2012) (see Tables 3.6 and 3.7, and Figure 3.5). Therefore, I viewed the data in relation to the original themes, assuming EPs could reflect and contribute to them. Although World Café is a useful participatory tool, it is important to note that due to the nature of recording in the World Café method which is reliant on the table

moderator capturing key ideas there may be missing data (Lohr, Weinhardt & Sieber, 2020).

Table 3.6 Codes and themes from the World café analysis

Theme from focus group	**Codes**	**Theme/ outcome**
Development of positive parent-school relationships	- Facilitate an understanding of the wider context. - Support repairing of relationships. - Support thinking around who is best placed to build relationships with parents. - Consider what parents own experiences of school have been. - Highlight to and reflect with staff around barriers experienced by parents to relationships. - Acknowledge parent perspectives of the school positive or negative.	EPs could engage with school staff in reflection on their relationships with parents and identify potential supports/barriers. EPs could reflect upon how they work with parents and how they might model a relational 'way of being' this involves some self-challenge.
Development of positive parent-school relationships	- Unpick and acknowledge power differentials. - Awareness of group dynamics. - Facilitating difficult conversations. - Model a relational 'way of being' with parents. - Demonstrate active listening and the valuing of all perspectives.	They could use psychological skills and knowledge to support a sense of safety within the meeting space.
Development of positive parent-school relationships	- Staff getting out into the community. - Build understanding of parent's sense of belonging to the school community. - Facilitate parent voice and preferences.	EPs could consider where meetings are held and where parents may feel most comfortable and empowered.

Theme from focus group	Codes	Theme/ outcome
Understanding support available within the community	- Explore staff understanding of the community. - Develop own understanding of the community, engage with local organisations to understand broader goals of the community. - Reflect on and consider how as EPs we can be more embedded within communities.	EPs could use these skills to facilitate empathic attunement and reflection with community members about their lived experiences of community.
Understanding support available within the community	- Perception of parents as experts by experience in their community. - Facilitate conversation with parents about life in the community. - Avoid other parents	EPs might create space in meetings for parental knowledge and take steps to give this equal weight to professional knowledge.
Understanding support available within the community	- Engage in multiagency working and develop own understanding of community strengths. - Find an 'in' to enable working more closely in the community as an EP. - Embed this community knowledge and strength-based perspective within the curriculum.	EPs might support the use of asset mapping and develop a greater understanding of local organisations and services that support within the community.
Parental sense of belonging	- EP can challenge as insider/outsiders/ critical friends. - Make the EP role more accessible through coffee mornings and other less formal means. - Connect as humans and find spaces of similarity alongside acknowledging difference.	EPs could make intentional steps to reduce power imbalances (thinking about positioning).

Theme from focus group	Codes	Theme/ outcome
Parental sense of belonging	- Where are parents and staff able to connect. - Consider number of staff living in the community and how this might impact on their sense of belonging and understanding. - Facilitate reflection on the physical boundaries between school and parents – how can physical environment contribute to sense of belonging.	EPs could facilitate school staff reflection on their own sense of the school being a part of the wider community.
Parental sense of belonging	- Encourage staff to reflect on how they could facilitate parents to connect with one another. - Consider how parents relate to one another. - Parents may feel a stronger sense of belonging to the school than the wider community.	EPs could initiate dialogue (through planning meetings or others spaces where their work is negotiated) in school around parent-parent relationships and how staff promote a wider sense of belonging though school.

Figure 3.4 World cafe thematic map

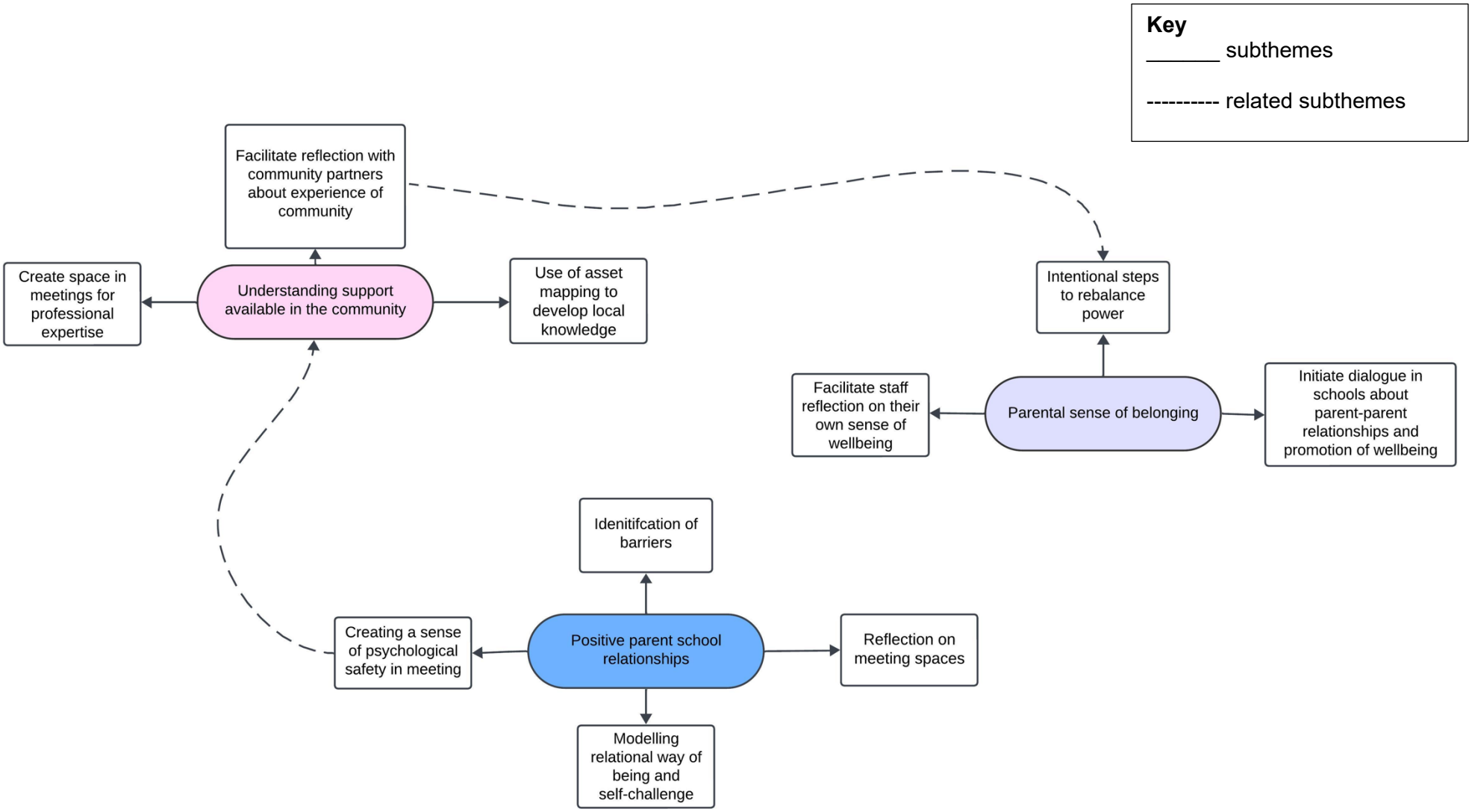


Table 3.7 Themed potential actions from the World Café for educational psychologists to facilitate parent-school relationships

Related Theme from focus group	Potential actions decided by EPs	Rationale
Development of positive parent-school relationships	EPs could engage with school staff in reflection on their relationships with parents and identify potential supports/barriers.	Educational psychologists tend to meet parents once or twice, and have much closer links with school staff, meaning that in their role they can act as a critical friend and support staff to move out of the school into the community space if this is desired. For example, one EP discussed encouraging staff to meet parents in an ASDA café as this was their preferred space and meeting in school had been a barrier to their relationship. EPs might also use their planning meetings with staff to explore these themes and use curious questioning to broaden the discussion and consider potential ethical issues such as confidentiality.
	EPs could reflect upon how they work with parents and how they might model a relational 'way of being', involving some self-challenge.	Being relational through attunement and strong interpersonal skills is an area of strength within the educational psychology profession (Atfield et al., 2023). Key stakeholders such as parents and school staff may be more comfortable in a space when we demonstrate that we have listened to and value their input. EPs often engage in self-reflection and consider their positioning in meetings. Self-challenge might involve considering their own identity (for example through the lens of intersectionality or Social Graces (Burnham, 2012)) and how this might impact on how they relate to parents and what initial assumptions/ judgments they may make.
	They could use psychological skills and knowledge to support a sense of safety within the meeting space. For example, drawing on	There is an understanding that often the meetings occurring between educational psychologists, school staff and parents can be emotive, so co-creating a space where it is safe for different perspectives to be shared and contained may be

	Rogerian approaches to working with others, positioning others as having value and being agentic, and communicating with unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1967).	important for later collaboration. For example, having opportunities to explore staff perspectives and challenge assumptions that might be made by both staff and the EPs prior to meeting with families.
	EPs could consider where meetings are held and where parents may feel most comfortable and empowered.	When parents are met at home or in a neutral space it can feel more comfortable for them, and they may feel an increased sense of confidence to share their perspectives.
Understanding support available within the community	EPs could use skills as a critical friend to facilitate empathic attunement and reflection with community members about their lived experiences of community.	When school staff do not live in a community it may be more difficult for them to empathise and understand families and their experiences, they may perceive communities differently than they view themselves. Educational psychologists could work with school staff to explore alternative perspectives of the community if this is something they wish to develop. For example, they might adapt approaches such as Circle of Adults to hypothetically reposition staff as community members.
	EPs might create space in meetings for parental knowledge and take steps to give this equal weight to professional knowledge.	Often educational psychologists are expected to 'lead' or facilitate meetings, meaning they are in a good position to emphasise and explore parental perspectives and create the space for their views to be valued (Atfield et al., 2023).
	EPs might support the use of asset mapping and develop a greater understanding of local organisations and services that support within the community.	Develop resources within the service that describe what is available more widely within the community, not just council services, but for example charitable organisations. Schools can have an awareness of some of what is available, but depending on their relationships with parents and whether they live in that community they may not be as clear on this. This would likely require bringing together a range of stakeholders (including community members) to begin dialogue in which

		schools and EPs are receiving information rather than giving it.
Parental sense of belonging	EPs could take intentional steps to reduce power imbalances (thinking about positioning).	This means thinking about language used and physical positioning that might make parents/ staff feel uncomfortable. There may be power differentials between staff and parents, however as psychologists we are often perceived as experts, which may impact on positioning of others.
	EPs could facilitate school staff reflection on their own sense of the school being a part of the wider community.	This could encourage alternative perspectives and understanding around what school staff are engaging in to facilitate parental sense of belonging and empowerment. If school staff see the school as separate from the community, developing their relationship with parents may be more challenging.
	EPs could initiate dialogue (through planning meetings or others spaces where their work is negotiated) in school around parent-parent relationships and how staff promote a sense of belonging for parents.	Parental sense of belonging within the school and the wider community is important and the school may be an important space for this to happen. This topic may not however be prioritised in school, but may be important in parental interest in school activities and partnership.

3.4.4 Acting

It is hoped this will be an ongoing point of reflection within the EPS and that EPs will further consider our role within communities. There are pressures on schools that do not necessarily fit with a non-school-centred approach to school-community relationships and as seen in the narrative of this project, can make it challenging for staff to prioritise this work even if it is something they are passionate about. It is argued that AR is an ongoing practice and that projects are resting rather than complete (Zuber-Skerritt, 2015). With this in mind, the project will provisionally rest here for the purpose of submission. I plan to review with my co-researcher. However, I have an awareness that they may not have the capacity within the coming months.

3.5 Learning from the Challenges

Action research was designed with change and knowledge generation in mind. The project described here has led to changes in my practice. In the initial stages, change was also observed in the practice of the co-researcher, for example, in the language used about the local community and initial linking with two local organisations to work with pupils in school. Alongside these changes in practice, we also began to better understand school-community partnerships and the factors underpinning their development. In this section, I will explore key learning points from the AR project, given the challenges faced in the process and explore their implications for educational psychologists.

Through an iterative and cyclical approach, we explored several aspects of the school's existing connection with the community and where practice could be developed. Through the AR process, we learned that the school staff's current understanding of the community was limited, and that parent engagement was also low. This was suggestive of poor relationships between the school community and the local community, which presented a challenge for the project as key stakeholders had limited participation. There was a shift in focus from school-community relationships to parent-school relationships, with a growing understanding that parent engagement was a crucial bridge to school-community partnership. The parent interview gave one perspective of life within the local community and how parents might experience and perceive their relationship with the school. From this, it was evident that important work could be done to develop relationships.

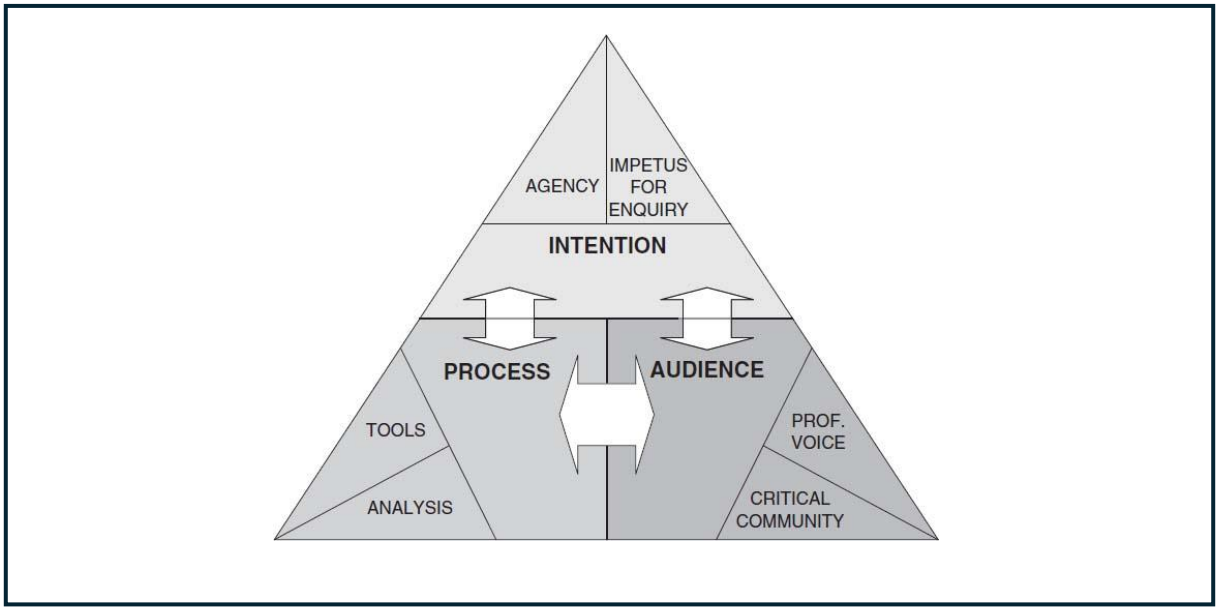
3.5.1 Complex systems

In the rational and context of this project, it was highlighted that children and young people do not develop in isolation, but within several interconnecting systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In this project, the intention was to focus on the individual systems of school and community and their interactions. As the project advanced, we began to consider that our perspective on the school-community relationship was oversimplified. Lemke and Sabelli (2008) present an argument for understanding education as a complex system in which dynamics within, between and around the educational system influence and maintain it. These complexities make education challenging to research, define and adapt, perhaps contributing to

the debate around the purpose of education (Apple, 2017). In this project, focusing solely on the relationship between two systems limited the consideration of the broader context of macrosystemic influence on education, such as culture, politics, and family perspectives (Malone, 2020).

In an education context, there are several systemic influences beyond the control of the school or the professionals working closely with its staff (Choi, 2016). The political landscape is one; neoliberal ideologies promoting performativity and market growth have arguably led to significant educational changes in England (Hastings, 2019). These ideologies of performativity appear disruptive to working creatively and collaboratively to support pupil outcomes (Apple, 2017). This was the experience within this project. The co-researcher and I attempted to cross boundaries to develop relationships and work creatively in instigating change within the school system; however, externally imposed processes inadvertently shut down the inquiry in the school context. This can be understood using Baumfield et al's (2012) concept of intention within the practice of action research (see Figure 3.6). They suggest that agency enables practitioners to enact their intentions. In the context of this project, we assumed we were agentic in our endeavour; however, it was clear that the direction of the inquiry was easily affected by external influences. Recognising this has led me to consider the future importance of openly discussing the impact of these systems in the initial stages and planning how the change process can remain sustainable, considering external influences. Therefore, next time this could represent a discrete stage in the contracting process.

Figure 3.5 Baumfield et al's (2012) Visualisation of Dynamics in Action Research



3.5.2 Working with Parents

Parent and family involvement was considered from cycle three and deemed to be a critical area for the focus school's ongoing development; this development is considered in section 3.3.5 . Malone (2020) argues for school-family-community partnerships to account for interactions between systems. Here, I expand on these ideas to suggest that parent-staff relationships operate as a bridge to school-community partnerships. Coming to this understanding challenged our assumption that school staff simply moving outside of the school boundary would lead to a relationship with the community. Although a community-centred approach rather than a school-centred approach is privileged in the literature (Rodela & Bertrand, 2018), there is perhaps further thinking to be engaged in around how this could be most useful in any particular local school context. For example, the parent interviewed shared that the local pub provided a community space in the absence of alternatives. This suggests the need for creative engagement in this community and that, more broadly, expectations should be adapted to account for context. A first step could be a community asset mapping activity, as suggested by the EPs. Asset mapping is a participatory approach to understanding community strengths (Scott et al., 2020). It supports the development of localised knowledge enabling professionals to adapt practice in ways that best service the communities in which they work (González et al., 2005).

In the reviewing phase, we considered actions that could facilitate the connection between parents and school staff within the context of educational psychology involvement (see Table 3.6). There was recognition that as insider/outsiders, EPs have a unique and holistic overview of group dynamics, can encourage reflection on possible barriers to engagement, and create safe meeting spaces where both parental and school perspectives can be considered. In the context of traded EP services, this could be enacted during consultation, where EPs could play a part in positioning parents as having expertise (Byington & Whitby, 2011) and challenging deficit perspectives about the local community (Wilding & Griffey, 2015). Although this is not new to EP practice, this thesis recognises the importance of these small steps in developing school-parent relationships, which are necessary to support school-community partnerships.

3.5.4 Working with staff

A key reflection from this process is the need for work to be engaged in across the school to develop a partnership culture. Changes in school culture might be led or supported by the SLT, but wider staff buy in appears important. This echoes Durrant et al. (2012), who argue that school staff, due to barriers such as time constraints or living outside the school community can have reduced local knowledge. Reflecting on the partnership model highlighted earlier (3.1), one could suggest that working with the wider staff team may involve some aspects considered important for school-community partnership. For example, school-based partnership goals could be constructed with staff outside SLT to support engagement (mutuality and

authenticity) and staff efficacy in working with outside partners could be developed through training or professional supervision (partnership culture and resources).

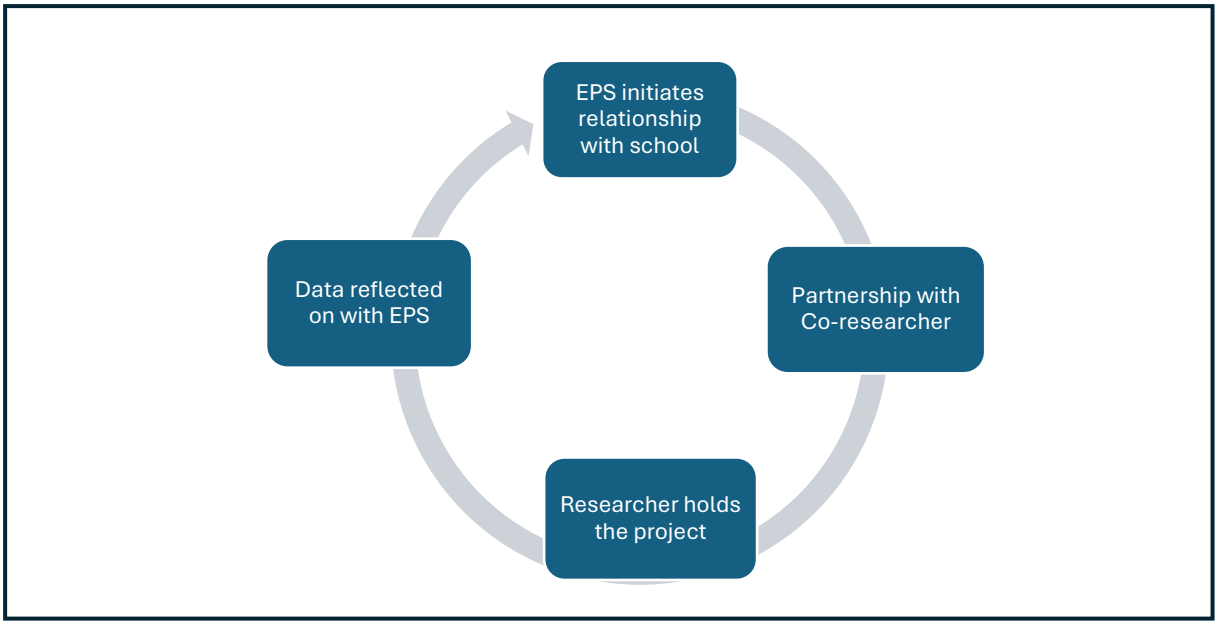
Teacher agency is described by Wallen and Tormey (2019) as relational and contextual, suggesting that when relationships with parents are positive, staff are more likely to initiate collaborative work and partnership. When individuals have a sense of agency, they are increasingly open to other perspectives; therefore, it may be necessary for professionals working in schools, such as EPs, to consider how they work with staff to develop their sense of agency around working with families and communities. This may link to Edwards et al's (2010) construct of 'relational agency', which they describe as the capacity to work with others to support responses to complex problems. Experiencing 'relational agency' will likely support school staff collaborating with parents and community partners to achieve mutual goals. EPs might work with staff through supervision to increase agency and efficacy; supervision can create a safe space for reflection and dialogue (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019). Although learning from this project has highlighted that having a sense of agency in our intentions does not necessarily lead to successful implementation, I wonder whether a sense of agency remains important in supporting responses to challenge.

González et al. (2005) suggest that developing a localised understanding of strength supports professionals to adapt practice to best fit the communities in which they work. Professionals such as EPs might consider how they make space for parental knowledge in meetings and what assumptions are made about parental levels of expertise (Tveit, 2009). Through these reflections, EPs may recognise their prioritisation of some systems over others, for example, focussing discussion on school and family over community. The parent interview highlighted their local knowledge, and an understanding of community strengths not necessarily perceived by those living out of area. There is evidence that strengths-based approaches to community engagement have more chance of being effective and sustainable (Mills et al., 2023). It will, however, be important for professionals to consider how this can be perceived as authentic, such as engaging outside the school to reduce power imbalances and increase positive perceptions of involvement (Gil & Johnson, 2021; Rodela & Bertrand, 2018). In the context of the EP role, this could be engaging in community-focused project work or meeting parents in spaces where they feel more comfortable.

3.5.5 A changing audience

Throughout this project, there has been a focus on including the voices of key stakeholders and ensuring wider considerations of key themes. Exploring individual ideas in the context of others facilitates learning and possibly to creative ways of working (Liberali & Shimoura, 2018). In response to project challenges, I opened the inquiry to the EPS; this flexibility was possible through the AR process, allowing alternative and unexpected paths to be taken (Willatt et al., 2024). The EPS had been the initial project instigators and continued to have connections with the school. Therefore, I believed the data and learnings from the project so far could be reflected to the team. Returning the project to the EPS appeared to take the research full circle meaning there were multiple voices in the dialogue and several sites of potential change (see Figure 3.7). Sagor (2011) highlights that including multiple minds benefits the process as it allows the representation of diverse knowledge, experiences, and skills. Although caution is perhaps needed here as the EPs were all members of the same team and all completed postgraduate study in Educational Psychology at Newcastle university, meaning that although there were multiple voices their knowledge, experiences and skills may not be as diverse as possible. Using Baumfield et al's (2012) model (see Figure 3.6), opening the inquiry served to change the audience and increase relevance to EPs, but perhaps limits the short-term usefulness for the school. The hope is that the ideas and reflections made in the World Café may lead the EPs to develop their practice in working with parents and the wider community. There is a further challenge here, as at the outset, the co-researcher and I needed to hold joint ownership of the endeavour; the lack then of joint ownership challenged the philosophical assumptions of the project (see **Error! R eference source not found.**). However, returning to the EPS ensured that the interview data incited further thinking and reflection, maintaining the belief that dialogue leads to new meanings.

Figure 3.6 Cycle of Inquirers



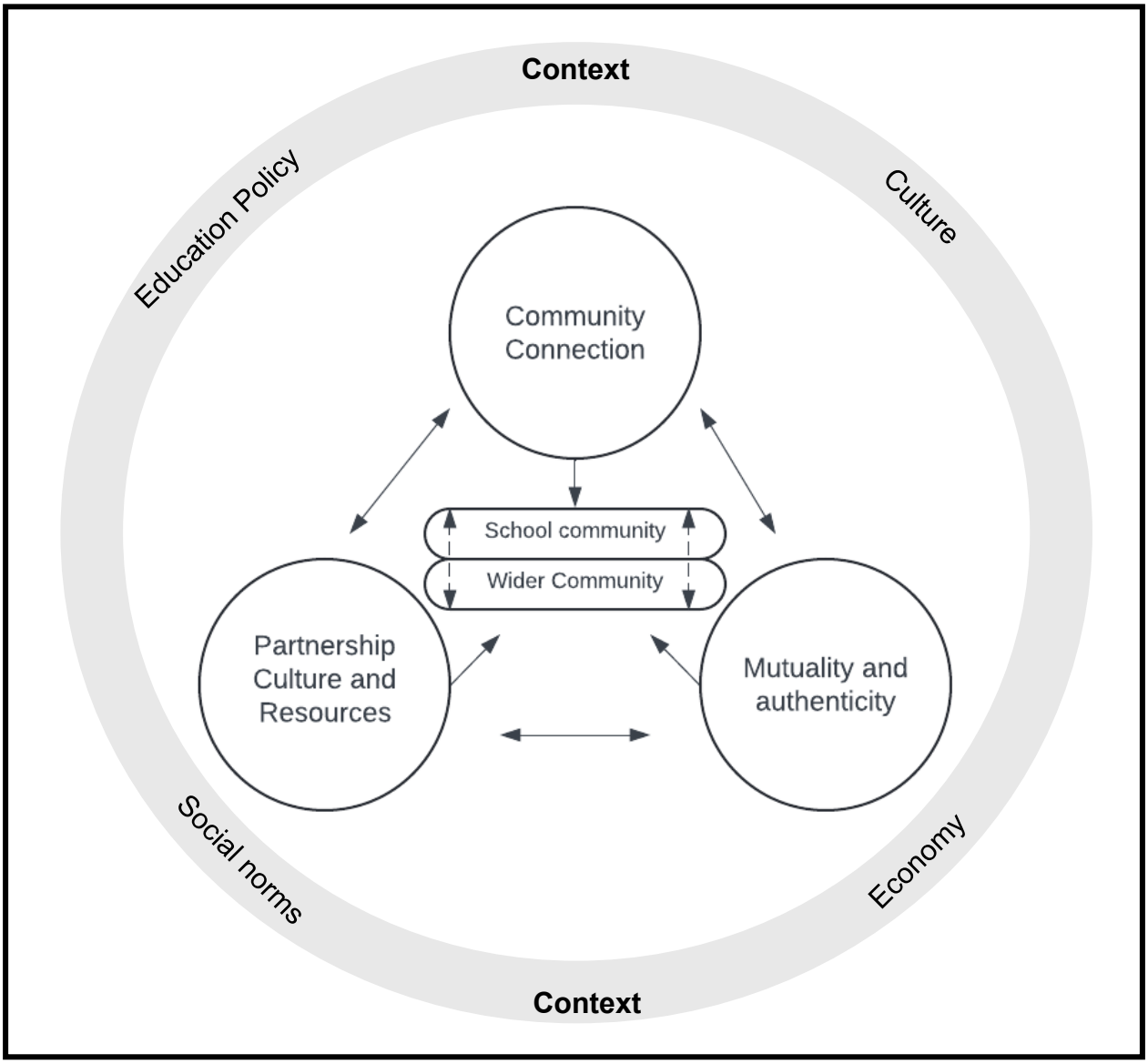
3.5.6 Reviewing the school-community partnership model

In the introduction to this thesis, I considered a model indicating the important factors in developing school-community partnerships (Figure 3.8). These initial concepts were explored in some depth in section 3.1.3 of this chapter and framed the thinking behind the empirical project. During the process, my co-researcher and I saw school-community partnerships as important. However, external pressures within the wider political system hindered our intentions. Therefore, reflecting on the model after attempting to enact a partnership in practice, I believe there is a need for an additional aspect which could support its use as a consultatory tool.

Through this process, I have a greater appreciation for the influence of context, not just the context of individual schools but the macrosystemic influences on thinking and practice. That is not to say that partnership working is impossible. However, important reflections may be required at the outset to understand how the macrosystem may impact the local school-specific context and any developing school-community partnership processes. The contexts specifically highlighted here are interpretation and enactment of educational policy, social norms, culture and economy. I have elected to highlight interpretation and enactment over conception and intent as the ways that policies come to have a real-world impact appear to be through the interpretation and subsequent implementation outside of those developing the policy in the first instance (Hay, 2024).

In conducting this project I have recognised the need to build in smaller steps in order to ensure sustainability in the face of external challenge. By (2005) suggests that incremental change allows for a greater level of responsiveness to external factors. In the case of school-community partnerships, incremental change might involve a school audit of current relationships/ in-school understandings of partnership, choosing an overall goal, and then a first step. There should be an understanding that regular evaluation and reflection on priorities will support continued progress in the light of changing circumstances (Smith, 2011). In this instance, an outlook of smaller step change may have reduced the perceived pressure on the co-researcher and made their continued involvement feel more viable. Further, the model could support an open dialogue about the potential importance of sharing engagement in this type of working at times of professional scrutiny. The model may be a suitable vehicle for these discussions where professionals such as EPs may have a role in facilitating school-community partnerships.

Figure 3.7 Visual model of factors involved in developing school-community partnerships.



3.6 Conclusions

In this research paper, I have endeavoured to authentically document an AR project exploring the initial stages of school-community partnership development. This project aimed to contribute to research regarding how schools might develop positive relationships with their communities and how this could be facilitated by outside professionals such as EPs in the context of a local authority primary school in the England. The cyclical nature of AR allowed the co-researcher and I to explore several avenues of thought and build our understanding of their local context. This culminated in a focus on parental experiences of the school and the relationship between the school and the local community to support positive changes in practice.

As outlined throughout, several challenges were faced which impacted this project. This required adaptation and flexibility, which highlighted key learnings. One such

learning is that education research is complex and messy, in part because it is influenced by multiple wider systems that are in themselves complex. Recognition of this is significant for practice, in that one should not fear challenge and uncertainty as it can inspire new ways of thinking and alternative directions. In changing the direction of the project, I engaged in a multivoiced inquiry, broadening the scope of the research and perhaps increasing its relevance to other professionals. For schools and EPs working with schools interested in developing school-community partnerships, it will be important to reflect on the inclusion of multiple voices and the first steps that might be taken for their school context. Facilitating the inclusion of other perspectives is most likely to support desired outcomes; where voices still need to be included, sustainable long-term change may be limited.

Chapter 4 A Reflective Synthesis

This chapter will explore key reflections on the research process. I will begin by critically considering my approach to action research and how this has informed my worldview. I will then explore the messiness of the process and consider how engaging in this project has influenced my practice.

4.1 Adaptability and pragmatism in action research

Action research in practice requires flexibility and adaptation (Altrichter et al., 2002). At the beginning of this project, and as reflected in Chapter 2, my epistemological position was one of constructionism, which in this context is creating shared meaning through dialogue. Throughout this project, I have come to understand my positioning will remain in a state of flux, that my underpinning values and principles will perhaps be more stable but that their application can be flexible. When collaborating in the real-world, it is important to consider, acknowledge, and even change based on alternative perspectives (Gube & Lajoie, 2020). This seems to fit with the pragmatist ontology; Morgan (2014) highlights that pragmatism involves a process of inquiry that creates a constant back-and-forth movement between beliefs and actions, meaning there is space in dialogue for contrasting perspectives. In this chapter, I would like to reflect on these ideas further and offer warrant for decisions made with this in mind.

4.1.1 Co-creating order in chaos: reflecting on research in the real world

Several authors have highlighted the messiness of action research (AR) (Baumfield et al., 2012; Perry, 2006). I feel I held a naivety about this messiness at the outset. I perceived that although messy, there would be some predictability in the process. Uncertainty is inherent in action research, which allows the researcher to be open to new ideas and alternative perspectives. In this methodology, it is critical for the researcher to be flexible; imposing my initial assumption of predictability could have led to an imbalance of power and limited the co-researcher's collaborative role. It was integral, therefore, to challenge my assumption and engage flexibly and critically with my research partner. Challenging this assumption helped me to position myself as a co-researcher and engage collaboratively. The 'messiness' has been challenging; the, at times, hard-to-contact co-researcher and later externally enforced circumstances leading the co-researcher to leave the project have required significant reflection and change. This uncertainty reflects the real-world context surrounding EPs, where external changes require continual adaptation.

In prior research experiences, I espoused a positivist position with little consideration of other epistemological perspectives. The positivist position implies that knowledge can be known through quantitative research (Chirkov & Anderson, 2018). Those who engage in this way tend to utilise objective technical procedures to increase rigour and reduce bias (Rolfe, 2006). This position, however, does not necessarily account for the messiness of the real world. A constructionist epistemology accounts for the interactions and relationships between others and encourages consideration of cultural, historical, and social contexts when thinking about the nature of reality

(Galbin, 2014). Taking this position supported my continual reflection and reflexivity. This ontological positioning means that the data were driven by dialogue between the co-researcher, myself and others who engaged in this research as the inquiry opened at two points (a parent and the educational psychology team) (McNiff, 2014). The purpose of this process was to engage openly with other perspectives in the 'space between' (Wegerif, 2021). Applying this in practice challenges an expert stance, a stance that educational psychologists often reject, preferring to view others (parents and school staff) as experts by experience (BPS, 2017).

4.1.2 Research for practice: development as a Practitioner Psychologist

Throughout this project there have been points of significant reflection, not just as a researcher but around my practice as a future EP. Specifically I have become more understanding of the difficulties schools face due to current practice around the marketisation of education (Eyles et al., 2017). The values advocated by neoliberalism and austerity have significantly impacted how creative and flexible school staff are able to be (Keddie, 2015). This can be seen clearly in the narrative of this project, where an external decision led to the early end of the collaborative partnership. Previously I had been naïve to the potential constraints on staff working to their values or prioritise what they deem important in their position of expertise.

As a TEP, I understand that working to your core values is important for motivation and self-efficacy (Barni et al., 2019). Perhaps previously I have taken a position of judgment and not empathised enough with the positioning of the SLT, which could make adaptive and reflexive practice challenging. It has also been important for me to reflect that, as with this project, in my journey as a TEP, I need to work flexibly with others and acknowledge when there is space for creativity and transformation and where a sense of psychological safety is more important (Sanner & Bunderson, 2015). EPs spend time in dialogue with school staff, parents, and other professionals, requiring skills such as adaptability, empathy, and curiosity to explore challenging situations safely for others. Therefore, in practice I am working harder to meet people where they are.

Further key learning I have taken from this research process is around effective engagement with supervision both in a research and professional regard. Through this process, I have not always acknowledged when things have been challenging and have seen others as expecting competence rather than offering support. Supervision is crucial to educational psychology practice; it is a space in which we can raise challenges and reflect on action (Carrington, 2004). As practitioners, we are ethically responsible for engaging fully in this process (BPS, 2017). Working so often with others and the challenges that have come as part of this process have encouraged me to be more open and vulnerable to develop my competence and work effectively in partnership.

Partnerships require work on both sides; this was clear in dialogue with my co-researcher and the parent I interviewed. For example, my co-researcher perceived parents and staff who had increased opportunities to work together as having better relationships. Where there was an opportunity to work together directly and acknowledge the challenges faced, holding the child at the centre, there appeared to

be greater space for a relationship to develop. Vulnerability as a professional has been challenging for me at times. To collaborate effectively and authentically, I had to challenge myself and perceive the value of complementary understandings (Wahlgren & Aarkrog, 2021). In my practice as a psychologist, it will be important to consider how I can be more open and authentic with parents; I perhaps assume and expect openness from them due to my role, but do they feel safe in this if I am closed?

4.2 Acquired research skills

In this section, I will reflect on the development of my thinking and practice in terms of specific research skills.

4.2.1 Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

Conducting a systematic literature review challenged my previous understanding of a literature review. It forced me to take an organised approach and demonstrated the importance of working step-by-step to address the review question. My approach to synthesis was different from my previous experience of positivist research as I conducted a meta-ethnography, which is a process down to interpretation. Meaning I had to make decisions as an independent researcher and offer warrant for my interpretations (Lee et al., 2015). Through the process of meta-ethnography, I was required to engage critically with the process, question decisions and explore the literature around the process in a more considered way due to the need for interpretation. Within my practice, this has enabled me to begin offering more critical questions; through hearing multiple accounts, I have engaged more with the ‘why’ questions when making process decisions. For example, ‘Why do I perceive this assessment method as appropriate?’ and having a clear warrant based on consultation with key stakeholders.

In some ways, the process of the SLR mirrored EP practice by incorporating multiple perspectives and requiring the triangulation of multiple sources. In the SLR process I practiced these skills to formulate a conceptual model of school-community partnerships. It is important to practice skills required for the real world, in contexts where there is unlikely to be a significant real-world impact if poor decisions are made and reflection is required. This is where creativity and competence can flourish (Rudolph et al., 2014). In practice, I have utilised these skills in formulation, where multiple perspectives are synthesised, and appropriate intervention or practice is considered.

4.2.2 Empirical Project

As previously alluded to, embarking on this empirical project has supported the development of my skills in adaptability, flexibility and sitting with uncertainty. I have reflected on previous research experiences in which I have engaged in processes with greater structure and perhaps clarity. Therefore, this research endeavour was a wholly new experience for me as an action researcher. I have grown more comfortable with AR's iterative processes and developed my skill in responding critically and thoughtfully to change in a professional context. I believe I have a greater appreciation for sitting in discomfort and using cognitive dissonance as a stepping stone for reflection and learning. This process has made me a better practitioner by developing my skill in managing uncertainty in practice and facilitating the containment of others (such as teachers, parents, and young people) in this space.

Throughout the project, I have kept a research journal and contact logs from interactions with the co-researcher. This has been an important space for me to reflect on potential power imbalances and how the co-researcher and I engaged with one another in the research space. When working with others it is critical to reflect on our own positioning and how we are positioning others. In the research process, I initially positioned the co-researcher as the individual with greater power due to their role as a headteacher. Through negotiation and reflection, we were able to acknowledge these imbalances and meet each other as co-researchers. In consultation, I have been aiming to work similarly, presenting myself as someone who has knowledge about psychology whilst valuing the knowledge and perspective of others, e.g. ‘You are an expert in your and your child’s lives and will have important thoughts around what works and what might not’. An idea relevant to this theme is that of intersectionality, which encourages reflection on our identities and how they work to privilege/ disadvantage us (Tefera et al., 2018). In my position as a white, educated, middle-class woman, I have a very different identity from most families with which I work; I need to reflect on this identity and understand how it could lead me to disadvantage others in the room unintentionally.

4.3 Final thoughts

This chapter has explored some final reflections on the process, which has been both challenging and thought-provoking. I cannot say I have always enjoyed it; however, this project has provided me with invaluable knowledge and a space for critical reflection on practice. If I were to conduct this research again there are changes I would make, however I am glad that I engaged in this way with the topic. It has been a privilege to work with my co-researcher and engage in research in a way that aligns with my values and worldview. It is hoped that this process has had a real-world impact and that the project has also contributed something to what is known about school-community partnerships and their development.

1920 Words

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Appendices

Appendix A Co-Researcher information sheet and consent form

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
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NE1 7RU, UK

Co researcher Information Sheet and Consent Form

Title of Project: A collaborative action research project focusing on the development of school community partnerships

Researchers: Emma Munro (Principal Researcher) and David Lumsdon (Supervisor)

Contact Email: e.r.munro2@newcastle.ac.uk

Thank you for your interest in joining me as a co-researcher on this project which is for the fulfilment of a Doctorate in Applied Psychology at Newcastle University.

In this project we will work together using a methodology called action research. This means that you would not be a participant, but a co-researcher; so we will work together to develop aims and goals. Although the overall theme of the project will remain school-community partnership, as a co-researcher who has highlighted this as an area for development in your primary school, we will tailor the steps and outcomes for your specific context. The aim being that any learnings will be relevant to practice in your school.

As co-researchers we will have regular meetings in which our plans will be shaped and where we will discuss learning from previous research activities. Action research follows cycles of action and reflection making it important that we come back together to think about where the project will go next.

This project will be a longer-term commitment, in that we will meet regularly (at least once per half term) and there will likely be actions requiring some work at each stage. As this type of project works cyclically there will be opportunities to change the direction of the project based on learning from previous action and subsequent dialogue.

As this project is part of my academic requirements it is hoped that we will have engaged in several cycles of reflection and action by January 2024, however this is with the awareness that as headteacher you have other priorities and responsibilities in school. Therefore, we can adapt to pressure points and work flexibly together to maintain a positive collaborative relationship.

Further, this is part of a doctoral research project for which there will be a written record of the work we do together, however no names will be used, and the school will remain unidentifiable outside of my research supervisors. After each meeting I will complete a contact log, which will include key reflections and action points from our discussion, however these will be anonymised prior to submission.

No individual names, school names, or localities will be used in the final report or in any other papers written about the project.

Please note that you can leave the project at any time and there will be no negative consequences of doing so for yourself or your school. Please contact me via my university email (e.r.munro2@newcastle.ac.uk).

Please read the following statements carefully. If you agree, please **tick the corresponding box** to confirm your agreement/consent:

- I understand that I am joining this project as a co-researcher, meaning it will involve more regular contact with Emma Munro ☐
- I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet for the research project, and I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
- I understand that joining this project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. ☐
- I understand that my data will be treated confidentially and any publication resulting from this work will report only data that does **not** identify me. ☐
- I understand that my data will be kept securely for no longer than 10 years. ☐
- I freely agree to join this collaborative action research project. ☐

Date:

If you have any complaints or concerns about this research, you can direct these to the Newcastle University Ethics committee: wendy.davison@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix B Contact Logs for meetings with Co-Researcher

Summary of contact

Date of contact: 6/23

Type of contact: Phone call

Attending: Headteacher and myself

Purpose of contact: Initial reach out to discuss the project.

Main discussion points:

- Headteacher interested in the project and passionate about developing relationships between the school and the community members.
- Likes the idea of working together rather than just me coming in as a researcher.

Actions decided:

- Have a meeting to begin the project and begin first steps on inquiry.

Personal reflections on contact (what struck me as salient, interesting, illuminating, or important):

- Enthusiasm of the headteacher suggests that this is going to be an interesting and useful project for her and her school community.

Questions to consider going forward:

- How might I ensure we are working together and remaining collaborative in context of potential power imbalance?
- How can we develop our relationship quickly and in a way that supports the aims of the research?

Summary of contact

Date of contact: 14/7/2023

Contact type: Face-to-face meeting (audio recorded)

Attending: Headteacher and researcher (co-researchers)

Purpose of contact: First meeting to plan first phase of project, identify goals and distribute initial actions.

Main discussion points:

- The community is situated in a deprived area, a lot of the children in school have some challenging experiences in their home contexts – school has a focus on trauma informed practice. These experiences may impact on how families engage with the school (sense of judgement?).

- VM feels it is important to make more connections with the community to build trust and relationships, so that families can see the school staff as a source of support rather than challenge and judgment.
- Discussion of the factors going forward that will be important to consider in development of relationships with the community: honesty, knowledge of the community, openness, and a non-judgmental stance.
- The ways school currently communicate with parents and wider community: through Facebook group, newsletters, parents evenings.
- The dream: safe, secure, proud and ambitious for the community.
- Important things: connecting families, parent voice, pupil voice.
- Important that we should be strength focussed and look at understanding what can be built on in the community. Developing practice through changing attitudes towards the community.
- We both felt that identifying goals of the working group with others rather than on our own would be the ideal, we wanted the process to be collaborative from all angles.

Actions decided:

- Research and feedback schools in the UK or organisations who have developed good links with their communities (EM)
- Distribute a short survey to staff and pupils to gain some views on what is available in the local community and who we could bring in to support the endeavour (VM).

Personal reflections on contact (what struck me as salient, interesting, illuminating, or important):

- We seem to be on the same page in terms of thoughts going forward and what we see as important about the project, however I wonder whether we have been too ambitious in our overall goal and whether this is achievable in the time scales.
- It is important to consider that there seems to be limited trust in the school by the community and that this will be an important area to consider and develop in order for the overall project to be meaningful.
- I noticed in the meeting how open and passionate VM was about the community and about engaging with them, this does not seem to be something she is taking lightly and wants to genuinely take this forward and build relationships with the wider community members in order to support outcomes for children and their families.

Questions to consider going forward:

- What has disrupted positive relationships between the school and the community, is it long standing?
- How can we ensure the voices sought are not included tokenistically?

Summary of contact

Date of contact: 26/9/2023

Type of contact: Face-to-face meeting

Attending: Headteacher and Researcher (Co-researchers)

Purpose of contact: To discuss the actions completed during the summer and consider how we might take these forwards, what questions do we still feel need answering?

Main discussion points:

- The staff and pupil surveys came back and there appeared to be very few local amenities being used by pupils e.g. community centre and churches were the main community spaces mentioned. Pupils shared that they thought the area was 'fun, caring, friendly', however they felt that to feel prouder of where they lived they would like it there to be more flowers and less trash. The pupils felt it would be helpful to be able to meet and explore problems/ solutions together. The staff weren't aware of many community groups/ spaces available, this may be due to staff living out of area, which possibly impacts on relationships with the community.
- We found out more information over the Summer about the West End Children's Community and discussed their set up. We wondered whether there would be a way to set up a meeting/ discussion with the key stakeholders in this group to discuss the barriers and what has worked well in this venture. We were aware that it had had success and was impacting positive change in the local area in which it was based. There was an opportunity to attend a networking event for this group in which we would possibly have the opportunity to find out a little bit more about setting it up and keeping it working.

Actions decided:

- We will attend the network meeting and gather some information about the set-up and maintenance. It will be myself and the deputy head as the head can't commit to a morning out of school.
- We have arranged a meeting to reflect on what comes out of this session.

Personal reflections on contact (what struck me as salient, interesting, illuminating, or important):

- I had some thoughts about whether the fact that not many staff were from or living in the local area had an impact on relationships with the local families. If people don't live in the area it is easier to have negative perspectives or see areas as 'bad'. Particularly if the local families are seen as a different class than the staff themselves?
- VM herself is aware of impact not living in the area might have on attitudes or views of the community as potentially helpless. It is very important that we don't use this research to emphasise this attitude and make those we involve uncomfortable or like we are judging them.

Questions to consider going forward:
What are staff attitudes general towards Y community?

Summary of contact

Date of contact: 17/10/24

Type of contact: Face-to-face meeting

Attending: Headteacher and researcher (co-researchers)

Purpose of contact: To reflect on the network meeting and consider how we might take forward the learning from this experience.

Main discussion points:

- At the meeting there were a range of organisations represented however there seemed not to be any members of the community to reflect on their experiences, we wondered how much involvement there had been from families and other members of the local community in develop some of the activities engaged in by the children's community. We reflected that there must have been some engagement in the beginning as in order to address challenges in the community they would need to know what these were. We feel that we needed to do more work around this as it really only been myself and VM involved in discussions so far.
- We also considered how this could be sustainable over time and how we might get buy in from other organisations and other local adults who could support some of the actions going forward.
- When we have identified the strengths and challenges in the community, we feel it is important to plan who we need to listen and who else we need on board e.g. local MPs/ council members.
- From some of the barriers raised at the WECC e.g. attendance and engagement from members of the community we felt it would be important to plan how we might develop relationships with local families etc. first so that they would be more likely to access or be involved in the group.

Actions decided:

- To conduct a focus group to hear about what life is like for the families of LB, how included they feel in the school community and what they feel would be important for development of the local community, particularly thinking about children and young people and what they can access locally.

Questions to consider going forward:

- How do we make this sustainable? Is it sustainable?
- After focus groups how do we use the parent voice to plan work going forward?

Appendix C: Staff survey information

Population data

Number of respondents	Female	Male	Lives locally	Involved in local community organisations
10	10	0	1	1

Community organisations identified

Princes Trust	Churches	Community Centre/garden	Library	Food bank	Youth group/ clubs
2	3	2	3	1	2

Staff reported using only the church, community garden and local library with students.

Local Priorities identified by school staff

Engagement	Unemployment	Out of school activities	Wellbeing	Learning opportunities
3	2	3	1	

Appendix D: Recruitment Letter

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
Newcastle University
King George VI Building
Queen Victoria Road
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 7RU, UK

Dear parent,

We are writing to ask if you would be interested in joining a meeting with other parents from Y community to talk about what is good about the community, what changes you might like to see and how the school could be more involved with local community members.

Z (Headteacher at X Primary school) and myself are co-researchers on this project, which is going to be part of my Doctoral Thesis (for a Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology).

This is part of an ongoing action research project (something that can have an impact and promote changes that community members would like to see) looking at how X Primary school can be more involved with the wider community.

This will involve a meeting on 1st of February at **6.30PM** with myself (Emma), and possibly a member of the school team where yourself and other parents will have space to talk about experiences of Y community. This will be held at **Location**.

If you would like to talk about the project further, please contact me at: e.r.munro2@newcastle.ac.uk.

Date: 1st February 2024
Time: 6.30PM
Location:

Thank you for your time,
Emma Munro

Appendix E: Focus group Information Letter

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
Newcastle University
King George VI Building
Queen Victoria Road
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 7RU, UK

Information Sheet

X school would like to meet with a group of parents and carers whose children attend X school and live in Y community. We want to hear their views about Y community and how X school could work in partnership with community members.

Z (Headteacher at X school) and Emma Munro (Trainee Educational Psychologist) will be at this meeting to hear your views.

This meeting is for up to 12 parents/carers (If there are more than 12 who would like to share their views we will have more than one meeting). It will last around 1 hour and will take place at x time on x date in the local community centre.

We want to discuss your views on being part of Y community. We also want to hear your thoughts on how the school could work with the community to improve outcomes for children and young people.

During the meeting you will be asked questions such as:

- What is it like being a member of the Y community?
- What are the strengths of the community?
- Are there some changes you would like to see in the community?
- How could the school be more present in the community?

This meeting is part of a bigger project in school which is trying to work more closely with the local community.

For parent views to be included in this wider project we will audio record the meeting, what is said will then be typed up and used to write a report about the project.

No names will be used and no one outside of the group will know who said what. The audio recording and the typed notes will be stored on a secure server and will be deleted after ten years.

No individual names will be used in the final report or in any other papers written about the project.

You do not need to take part. If you do take part, you can choose to leave during the meeting. You can ask for your contribution to the meeting to be removed but can only do this until one week after the meeting has happened. You can do this by contacting Emma at: e.r.munro2@newcastle.ac.uk.

Appendix F: Consent Form

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences
Newcastle University
King George VI Building
Queen Victoria Road
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 7RU, UK

Consent Form

Title of Project: Understanding parent experiences of their local community and their relationship with local schools

Researchers: Emma Munro (Principal Researcher) and Wilma Barrow (Supervisor)

Contact Email: e.r.munro2@newcastle.ac.uk

Please read the following statements carefully. If you agree, please **tick the corresponding box** to confirm your agreement/consent:

- I confirm I have read and understand the information sheet for the research project and I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐
- I understand that joining this research project is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason. ☐
- I understand that my data will be treated confidentially and any publication resulting from this work will report only data that does **not** identify me. ☐
- I understand that my data will be kept securely for no longer than 10 years. ☐
- I freely agree to join this research project. ☐

Date:

If you have any complaints or concerns about this research, you can direct these to the Newcastle University Ethics committee: wendy.davison@ncl.ac.uk

Appendix G: Focus group/ Interview semi-structured schedule

1. **Living in the community**

    - What is it like to live in Y community, what is your experience of living here?

    - Are there things that would change about your experiences living in Y community?

    - What support is available within the community for you?

2. **Strengths and Barriers**

    - What are the strengths of the Y community? How have you seen these in action?

    - Are there any barriers present in the Y community?

3. **X Primary**

    - What are your views on X Primary school, how is it viewed more widely in the community?

    - Are there things that the staff at X primary could do to be more connected to the local community?

    - Are there some things you would like from a partnership/ connection between X primary school and the wider community?

Appendix H: Excerpt from Interview Transcript

(This transcript follows on from a brief introductory conversation, reading of participant information sheet and signing of consent form)

Speaker 1
So, starting with living in the community, I was wondering, would you be happy to sort of talk a little bit about what it's like living in Y community and kind of your experiences of living here?

00:00:21 Speaker 2
The area itself is quite nice. It has got decent space. The houses are all quite nice. My understanding is that there has been a fair bit of development, and you can see from the ages of the houses that it's all majority of the houses, especially to walk down the outside of the estate is all pretty new.

00:00:40 Speaker 2
Facility wise isn't great. You've got a few shops which are really good and they have got long hours which is really handy. But that's really kind of it. That's all you have apart from the pub and the social club, all of our other entertainment is all out of out of Y community

00:01:00 Speaker 2
Either if you're wanting something like cinemas or theatres then you're going into the city. Same as museums and art things. That's all in the city. Anything else like club wise? There isn't any Guides, Brownies, Scouts anything like that within Y community.

00:01:18 Speaker 1
That's quite surprising actually isn't it

00:01:20 Speaker 2
Yeah, there's nothing like that here. You've got a few community activities at the church, and they do, they do safe space and things like that from the church. So have got quite large opening hours. And there's also.

00:01:34 Speaker 2
An evangelical church at the other end of the street as well, which again has safe space. And they do. They do the can on the wall collections for their practitioners and things their, their practitioners. But other than that, there isn't actually.

00:01:53 Speaker 2
Anything else in the area? The community Centre doesn't have any facilities, the library has part time hours.

00:02:04 Speaker 2
So it's very, very limited. We used another centre in z community as the library because it's got full hours. So during the holidays and things we use that library for

hiring books and things which is really good and they have they have all sorts of sing and rhyme sessions on and stay and play Sessions and stuff, we're starting to get a little bit to the end of that now with him being sort of 3/4 away through primary, but son was a full Makaton user. He was nonverbal until he was five. So he was a full he was a full Makaton user, as was my eldest until he was about four.

00:02:48 Speaker 1
You wouldn't think that.

00:02:49 Speaker 2
Not now. You wouldn't know. No, we're still a little bit behind on his reading, which is why he's in so many reading groups at school we are, we're about 18 months academically behind where we would like to be for our reading, but it's because he didn't speak at all for the first five years. So, we're giving him some slack on that. But other than that (sing and rhyme/stay and play), there isn't actually anything else in the area for kids and you've got the park, which is joined onto here, but it's only, it's only as good as whoever is in the park with you, as it were, and we are lucky enough to live just across the road on the other side of the shop. So son can now go at the park on his own, but that's only been since the summer. Prior to that, he needed an adult to get him to and from the park, but last summer we let him start doing that. He's got his own phone now so we can WhatsApp him. Yeah, but other than that, there isn't anything else in the area at all for children, there's literally just to play a part. And there there's a the boys call it a MUGA, a multi-use like fenced off hard ground area. Yeah. So the boys can go and play in there, but everything else is at home. The boys, we provide bikes and skateboards and things like that. Unfortunately, there's no other Children actually live in our street.

00:04:18 Speaker 2
All of the children in our street are all my eldest and older, sort of in their teens. So that does cause a few issues on school holidays and things. And a lot of sons friends. Unless they literally live opposite the park, they're not allowed to the park on their own, because the park is, is only as nice as the people who are playing with it, and that can cause tensions when there's no adult supervision.

00:04:48 Speaker 1
I was gonna say, do you find that it's like a safe place like you quite... Because it sounds like you’re comfortable for him to kind of go over there, on his own

00:04:54 Speaker 2
we're really lucky, I was very aware we do lots of we do strange behaviour not strangers. He's perfectly welcome to talk to strangers. It's a strange behaviour that we're mindful of, so if anybody offers him anything that's strange behaviour, cause you wouldn't offer somebody anything for nothing. Yeah. So that is strange behaviour. Anybody offering lifts to anybody when they don't actually know them, That strange behaviour. So he's really aware. He's really quite good with strange behaviours. He's got his own phone, so he'll phone me if there's any problems. He would phone me straight away. Yeah, I'd like to think you wouldn't get sucked into 'oh your mummy sent me', he would be smart, he would know 'She wouldn't' She wouldn't do that'. I would never send someone one. So, from that respect, it's OK. It's mainly peer on peer that we have the issue with. There is a high proportionate

number of children within the area who have got some form of complex need or SEN need, and that then causes the issue with the inability of sharing and communicating effectively. And if there's no grown-up present to sort of mediate that interaction, it can make things trickier.

00:06:04 Speaker 2
Yeah. Yeah. So, we do have I would suggest we have at least one incident a week. Peer on peer where the boys have been at the park or playing football or something. And there's an argument has then ensued, and without any rational thought it turns into a real screaming match and somebody comes home in. But that's kids.

00:06:55 Speaker 2
It's a nice area, and it is safe, but it there could be a lot more for the students, especially primary age to do.

00:07:04 Speaker 1
It surprises me that there isn't any Cubs or anything like that, but I suppose that kind of relies on parent volunteers, which you alluded to earlier.

00:07:13 Speaker 2
Yes, that's not really something. No, that's not something that's going to happen here. We the boys play for x, which is a rugby club just on the other side of the metro, which is it's actually classed as Newcastle because it's just on the other side of the Metro station. So we have a lot to do with the rugby club and we're there sort of more weekends and stuff. And they do, they do various bits and pieces for like family fun days and things like that. So we go there for the bulk of the entertainment or Football club is in Cramlington, which is about 20 minute drive from here. And again they do various bits and pieces so we link in with them quite a bit.

00:08:00 Speaker 1
Sounds like you're really having to sort of go out of your local community to be able to access things

00:08:05 Speaker 2
Yeah, yeah, nothing. There's nothing in Y community itself. We go obviously got the metro, but now that now that my eldest is an adult fair it's now just as cheap to take the car in the city as it is to get the metro into the city and for business. My eldest is neurodivergent and isn't always great in large crowds, so if we were going to go to the cinema, we'd go at the silver link because it's a little calmer than going into the city. And, but yeah, we, I mean, we're stretched. My husband plays for Ashington, so that's about half an hour drive away from here. I play for X team, which is about 20 minutes in the other direction.

00:08:52 Speaker 1
That's quite spread out. And so, I mean, it's sort of, it's that you've already sort of, I feel like alluded to some of the changes that you might like to see about your experiences of living in Y community, but what kind of things would you want to be different about the like experience of living here?

00:09:13 Speaker 2
I'd like, this is like, I'd like places like The Center to be used more. I mean, we use the lakeside quite a bit. We go we go swimming or try to go swimming at least once a fortnight. My eldest is at High School, which has a lot of links with Lakeside. They do all sorts of clubs there every evening sort of straight after school for upwards of an hour up to and including things like they have badminton clubs there. They have basketball clubs there. They do 5A aside. They're just about to start a whole programme of roller disco, which is all being funded for them. So, things like that would be great because then son goes to after school club, at primary but he only goes once a week. But that's kind of his only social time with his actual class peers, those who actually go.

00:10:09 Speaker 2
The rest of the time he's at other clubs outside of the area because there isn't anything here, something like brownies, guides or Cub Scouts would be a good thing for here, and even just an old-fashioned youth club would be something nice. You know where the kids could go and be with their own peers with minimal supervision, but still some supervision. Something where they can actually do something and accomplish something, even if it's like a scavenger hunt or you know actually go, even just a game of Air hockey, would be, you know, I mean, it would be something for them to actually do, again, since I started working at the pub on the odd night where, like on a Wednesday night when the pub was really quiet because I work there, we can go in and we can use the poolTablebecause it's separate to the bar. So, we, you know, we'll go and do that and it's just something a bit different, something to actually promote a bit of conversation and a bit of sort of family time. So, you know a youth club or something of that nature would be really helpful.

00:11:22 Speaker 1
I suppose in terms of like Connecting with the community and things, do you feel like not having as many things for children available has kind of impacted on being able to feel more of a part of things.

00:11:36 Speaker 2
I mean, I feel I feel part of the B community because I'm part of their rugby club, I have been for a huge chunk of time. We do loads of activities there. I know loads of the people in B community because of my connection with the club. I do the park runs at B community quite regularly and that then obviously builds a community. I do. I do more charity work in B community than I do here, because I'm there more often than I'm in the relevant groups and in the Facebook chat and things like that.

00:12:09 Speaker 1
Yeah, and know more people by the sounds of it as well, so you've got those connections.

00:12:12 Speaker 2
Yeah, yeah, yeah. I do the tin on the wall when they put the poster out as usually once a month. So I do the tin on the wall. And that's realistically the only bit other than the charity clothes. I use the clothes bin at school because they get they get the money for weighing in the clothes, so you know, I do that to help out the school, and obviously, we donate the uniform back to school at the end of each year.

00:12:50 Speaker 1
Are there any more like support of organisations kind of within? So you've mentioned the tin on the wall. Is there any other sort of places where people in Y community could go for support or, you know, access different.

00:13:04 Speaker 2
Not that I'm actually aware of. I know there's a safe space at the church through the winter. I know they've run. They run safe space and there's a surrounding area facebook group. And that's really quite popular. There's over 5000 members on that group, which I'm on as well. And you get you see lots and lots of posts on there for people asking for advice within the group from themselves. But there isn't any that I'm aware of. There's not. There's not, like a cab or a citizen's advice there isn't anything like that here. As I say, I'm obviously aware of, you know, this is a Council office, but I live literally around the corner and to my knowledge it's not actually used for anything. Yeah, it's kind of full council workers as opposed to a community type centre. Everything else it would. It's this one. Yeah, that that you get referred to.

00:14:05 Speaker 1
Cause it doesn't even feel quite official when you're coming in. It doesn't feel like a community owned space really does it.

00:14:10 Speaker 2
I think to be fair; this is may only be the third time I've ever been here. I did come when we first moved, I came to register at the library here because we've been living in V LA previously, so we needed new, different cards to hire books, but when I when I came to join the library and realised that it was part time hours we decided just to go at the White Swan because it wouldn't work within my time scales. I knew the time I've been here was because this was a was a cover vaccination centre or was it was used as a COVID vaccination centre and so I came. I came when they 1st were doing all the all the vaccinations, but that's literally that's, this will be the third visit in two years and I literally know I live literally around round the corner, yeah.

-End of excerpt-

Appendix I Visual representation of interview themes