Engaging with Parents in Decision Making Processes: a three phase study illuminating teachers' viewpoints and parents' perceptions to explore a school's approach

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ABSTRACT

Empirical evidence shows that parental engagement improves children's learning, social competence and physical health from preschool years through childhood and adolescence and into adulthood. Yet reasons as to what can motivate, or hinder parents to become involved are complex. Research suggests that parental engagement is maximised when parents are actively engaged in decision making (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Irvine, 2005; DCSF, 2009; Ranson, 2011). The aims of the current study were: 1) to illuminate the practice of an individual school regarding how they view engaging with parents in decision making; and 2) to explore the activities that the school employs in engaging with parents and to investigate which of these activities the parents view to be important, positive and worthwhile.

Q-methodology was used for the first phase of this study and sought to identify and describe the school staff members' views of the about the concept of engaging with parents of children described with special educational needs in decision making. Two distinctive viewpoints were revealed: 1) parents as partners and 2) respecting and valuing parents. The second phase of the study employed a focus group to identify the activities the school employs. Finally a survey was used in the third phase to explore which of these activities were rated as most positive and worthwhile by parents. Interestingly the findings from the focus group and the survey corresponded to factors related to the psychological need for competence, autonomy and relatedness in relation to parents' intrinsic motivation to engage with the school. Proposals are made in relation to implications for the practice of schools as well as suggestions for further research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1   Introduction

The initial inspiration for this research came from the publication of The Lamb Inquiry (DCSF, 2009) which brought the voice of parents, children and young people to the forefront of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system. The Lamb Inquiry concluded that the SEN system works best when the schools, local authorities and parents operate in true partnership with each other. The author, working as an Educational Psychologist for a large rural and urban local authority in the English Midlands, became curious about the question of what 'schools and local authorities working in true partnership with parents' looks like in practice. A starting point for this investigation was how this notion is viewed. The author's previous experience of using Q-methodology had indicated the appropriateness of this methodology to explore viewpoints.

Initially the study had intended to focus on identifying and describing the viewpoints of parents' whose children had a statement of educational needs. It was deemed that these parents would have had at least some contact with the local authority during the process of the statutory assessment when decisions about the child's statement of special educational needs were made. However difficulties were encountered with recruiting a large enough sample. Therefore the focus of the study became an in-depth exploration of an individual school's approach to engaging with parents in their decision making processes. The school chosen was a Primary Special School where all children have a statement of Special Educational Needs and therefore all parents had at least some experience of dealing with the SEN system. The process of an in-depth exploration of the school's approach led to an illumination of the school staff's views on engaging parents. The second part of the study elucidated which features of the school's system the parents valued as enabling them to engage with the school in decision making processes.

2   Review of the Literature

Why should schools invest in increasing and improving their engagement with parents in decision making processes?

Children are educated by their whole environment...the school has a specialist function, but the central place belongs to the family. (Grant, 1989 p.126)

The significance of parental engagement in their child's learning is widely recognised. Peters et al's (2008) survey conducted on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families found that two in three parents said they would like to be more involved in their child's school life. There is an increasing acknowledgement of the importance of the role that parents play; a position that is reiterated in both the research report commissioned by the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (Harris & Goodall, 2007) and a review of best practice in parental engagement commissioned by the Department for Education (Goodall et al, 2011):

> parental involvement has an important effect on children's achievement even after all other factors (such as social class, maternal education and poverty) have been factored out (Harris & Goodall, 2007 p24)...When schools, families and community work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer and like school more (Harris & Goodall, p7).

National Government policy and practice reflects this view with the publication of numerous studies and papers on how to promote parental engagement in learning and education - for example, the Lamb Inquiry (DCSF, 2009), Every Parent Matters (DfES, 2007) and The Impact of Parental Involvement on Children's Education (DCSF, 2008) to name but a few. This drive for increased parental engagement in schools is embedded within the public policy of Public Value Theory (Coats & Passmore, 2008) which has shifted the focus on parents from being not just consumers of public services but to users of services who hold a stakeholder interest. In relation to schools, Public Value Theory has led

schools to take into account the views and interests of their stakeholders by engaging with parents and promoting greater levels of parent participation (Coats & Passmore, 2008).

A question is posed at the beginning of this chapter – "why should schools invest in increasing and improving their engagement with parents in decision making processes?" In order to answer this question this literature review will draw on material from the following sources:

- The political and historical context for increasing public participation in education

- A definition of what is meant by parental engagement

- Psychological factors mediating parental engagement

- Approaches to engaging parents with reference to barriers to engagement

- Approaches to engaging parents in decision making processes

2.1   Increasing Public Participation

We're all influenced by each other. I can't be human in isolation. I am because you are. If there were no You, there couldn't be Me. (Archbishop Desmond Tutu, 1999 p.34)

2.1.1   The political commitment for increasing public participation

In the 30 year period from 1980 to 2010 over forty Education Acts were passed as well as hundreds of accompanying circulars, regulations and statutory instruments (Tomlinson, 2001; Gillard, 2011). This period is typified as a period during which the government in the UK moved towards promoting a post-welfare state society dominated by private enterprise and competitive markets. Schools were increasingly subjected to market forces whilst funding, teaching and curriculum transferred from the control of local authorities to central government. The Education Act 2011 takes a further step towards schools'

autonomy and independence from local authority control by taking forward the legislative proposals in the Schools White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010) for schools in England to become Academies. Academies are publicly funded independent local schools that provide a free education. As stated in 'The Importance of Teaching':

> ...there is great scope for us to extend autonomy and freedom for schools in England. It is our ambition that Academy status should be the norm for all state schools, with schools enjoying direct funding and full independence from central and local bureaucracy (p.52)

The drive for increasing private enterprise and competitive markets sits within, amongst other things, the political ideology of Public Value Theory (Coats & Passmore, 2008; Horner et al, 2008). Public Value Theory asserts a focus on citizenship and the role of public services (such as schools) to co-create public value. The aim of Public Value Theory is to create in the public sector the parallel desire of the shareholder interest in the private sector. Public Value Theory argues that:

> public services are distinctive because they are characterised by claims of rights by citizens to services that have been authorised and funded through some democratic process (Coats & Passmore, 2008 p4).

In other words, the citizens, or service users, have a stakeholder interest in the public service. It is designed to get managers of public services to focus on what is most valuable in the service they run by taking into account the views and interests of their stakeholders. This approach can be argued to have led to public managers seeking to engage with service users and promoting greater levels of public participation raising issues of empowerment, social capital, community capacity building and public participation (Horner et al, 2008). Subsequently these issues became increasingly prominent in public policy development (Bishop et al, 2009) thus encouraging, 'a variety of methods for engaging the public and promoting greater levels of participation in public life' (Coats & Passmore, 2008 p15).

The manifestation of Public Value Theory within the public sector of schools is the involvement of parents in their child's education. Parents are viewed as the users, or stakeholders, of this public service and this viewpoint is reflected in government policy. The Education Act (1986) created over 350,000 volunteer citizens in England and Wales to engage in the reformed school governing bodies. These were constituted on the principle of partnerships between parents, the local community, teachers and support staff as groups with 'stakeholder' interest in the school. This developed further with the Education Reform Act (1988), which granted school governing bodies the responsibility for the strategic direction of the school as well as delegated powers for budgets and staff (Ranson, 2011). These powers allowed a school to more easily respond to the needs and demands of its service users – the community - rather than follow the dictation of local authorities. As argued by Ranson (2011) it also allowed schools to begin to respond to the issues of empowerment, social capital, community capacity building and public participation.

2.1.2 The historical context for parental involvement in education

Both nationally and internationally there appears to be recognition of the importance of parental involvement in schools. One of the outcomes of the 'No Child Left Behind Act' (2002) in the United States of America was a requirement for all schools in the USA to have a parent involvement policy (Epstein et al. 2011). In Australia the 'Queensland Child Care Strategic Plan (1999) urged that closer attention be paid to consumer (i.e. parent) needs and expectations echoing the themes of 'working together' and 'empowering families' that were contained in the 'Stronger Families and Communities Strategy' (2000) (Irvine, 2005). Whilst in Canada, a study undertaken by Pence and Goleman (1987) depicted parents as 'silent partners' in early childhood education; concluding that, 'to better understand early childhood education, these silent partners must be heard' (p.117).

In England and Wales, the 1997 White Paper, 'Excellence in Schools' set out a government strategy for securing parental involvement by providing parents with information, giving parents a voice and encouraging parental partnerships with schools. In addition to this a large body of evidence was emerging showing a causal link between parental involvement in their children's learning and the child's subsequent achievement (Desforges, 2003; Peters et al, 2008; Harris & Goodall, 2007). The Green Paper 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003a) laid out ideas and proposals on issues related to children's health and security including parenting, fostering, young people's activities and youth justice. One proposal was the creation of a Parenting Fund of £25 million over three years to improve parenting and family support through a range of services (including schools) to engage with parents to support their child's development (DfES, 2003b). 'Every Child Matters' recognised the benefits of parental involvement in a child's education and acknowledged the crucial role that parents play in influencing the aspirations and achievements of their children:

> Research suggests that parenting appears to be the most important factor associated with educational attainment at age 10, which in turn is strongly associated with achievement later in life. Parental involvement in education seems to be a more important influence than poverty, school environment and the influence of peers. (DfES, 2003a, p. 23)

There is some evidence to argue that schools have been successful in improving parental engagement to support their child's education and development. A survey conducted by Peters et al (2008) on behalf of the Department for Children, Schools and Families found that there was an increasing trend for parents to feel very involved in their child's school life (29% of parents felt very involved in 2001, 38% in 2004 and 51% in 2007). There was also a change in the viewpoints of parents perceiving a child's education as the school's responsibility to mainly or wholly their responsibility (20% in 2001, 19% in 2004 and 28% in 2007).

Yet the Children's Plan (DCSF, 2007) recognised that some children and young people, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds, were still underachieving and thus argue that one way of improving achievement is to more fully involve parents in their children's learning. The importance of engaging parents and carers in supporting young people in their education was also recognised in the Ofsted report (2008), the Schools White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010) and the Field Review on Poverty and Life Chances (Field, 2010). These reports and documents reflected a growing ideological viewpoint that the object of learning was no longer perceived as the child in the classroom of a school detached from the community but a perception of a more inclusive learning community which embraces family and the neighbourhood (Ranson, 2011). Alan Johnson (as Education Secretary) summarised this position in the green paper 'Every Parent Matters' (2007) when he stated:

> we want to empower parents to influence and shape public services
> such as schools, health and children's services, as part of our public
> service reforms (p.1)

2.1.3 Criticism of public participation

Although public participation in decisions that affect them is becoming increasingly the norm (Bishop et al, 2009) it is important to acknowledge some of the criticisms of public participation. Some challenge the possibility of reaching a consensus across groups with diverse and often conflicting priorities. This is due to tensions between seeking to represent diverse views and simultaneously reaching agreement over complex and/or controversial issues (Coats & Passmore, 2008):

> Within a culture of rampant privatisation and marketisation, middle
> class strategies of social reproduction…increasingly focus exclusively
> on the individualistic pursuit of self-interest to the exclusion of any
> notion of the greater social good (p.35)

In other words, the concerns of those who participate are often narrow and aimed primarily at gaining advantage for themselves.

Another criticism is the increased cost that the process of public participation incurs (Coats & Passmore, 2008). The processes required to involve and engage with the public have a tendency to add to the time the process takes causing costs to be higher. In addition, the personnel involved need to have the capacity and ability to interpret the information that emerges which also causes costs to be higher.

A further criticism is the rejection of the idea that it is possible to create a truly inclusive, un-coerced forum because engaging with 'hard to reach' groups is notoriously difficult (Bishop et al, 2009). These are difficult challenges that pose a significant risk to the success of public participation. As Coats & Passmore state without providing an answer to these criticisms:

> No matter how effective the engagement process itself, public organisations are vulnerable to criticism that public engagement is at best ineffective, and at worst a veil to conceal the underlying motives of the organisation (p.22)

However, although difficult they are perhaps not insurmountable challenges. By undertaking a detailed consideration of the engagement process this review will reflect upon what parent engagement looks like and how schools can successfully engage parents by overcoming the criticisms and barriers to engagement.

2.2 Engaging with parents

Parents are usually the best judges of what children need. They understand their children better than anyone else, and have important insights into what children want. (DfES, 2007 p.7)

2.2.1 Definition of engagement

The terms 'involvement', 'engagement' and 'participation' are often used interchangeably. However there are differences between them and so it is important to clarify what is meant and understood by these terms. This is

especially important when considering the impact of parental involvement on achievement and attainment. Although, currently, there is a consensus that parental involvement does make a positive difference to pupil's achievement early studies in this field had actually produced a mixed set of findings and conclusions. A reason for this is partly because the studies used different definitions of the term parental 'involvement' (Harris & Goodall, 2007).

The term parental involvement seems to refer to any activity that a parent takes part in, or gets involved with, that is related to their child's education. Epstein et al's (2011) typology usefully categorises 'involvement' into six types which demonstrate the range and variability of parents' work in relation to school:

Type 1: 'Parenting' - creating and sustaining a supportive and caring home environment that supports children's learning. This can take many forms including, 'the provision of a secure and stable environment, intellectual stimulation, parent-child discussion, good models of constructive social and educational values; and high aspirations relating to personal fulfilment and good citizenship' (Harris & Goodall, 2007 p.22).

Type 2: 'Communicating' – establishing two-way communication channels from school to home about school programmes and student progress. This includes school reports, home-school books and newsletters.

Type 3: 'Volunteering' – recruiting parental help in the school classroom and attending events including volunteer readers in the classroom, being involved with a homework club or the 'Parent Teacher Association'.

Type 4: 'Learning at home' – providing information and ideas to families to enable parent involvement in learning activities at home. This is often in the form of homework but some schools also send home booklets with ideas of different curriculum-related activities that parents can do at home with their children.

Type 5: 'Decision making' – having parents as advocates for their children acting as representatives on school committees. Most commonly this refers to parent governors but also includes school-parent councils or parent forums.

Type 6: 'Collaborating with the community' – identifying and integrating community resources and services to enhance school programmes. This can take the form of assemblies led by a community leader (such as a local vicar or minister) or visitors in the classroom (such as the fire or police services).

In order to distinguish 'engagement' from 'involvement' it is useful to consider the term parental 'engagement' as incorporating school or home-based activities that have been shown to have impact on pupil achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2007). For example, although parents working in schools can be a valuable asset to the school, research has not shown that parents working in schools make any tangible contribution to the academic attainment of individual students (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Therefore this activity falls under parental 'involvement' rather than parental 'engagement'. In relation to Epstein's typology above Types 4 ('Learning at Home') and 5 ('Decision Making') encapsulate parental engagement.

Irvine (2005) offers a useful definition of 'Participation' in her paper delivered to the 'International Conference on Engaging Communities' in Brisbane, Australia. Irvine (2005) postulated that 'parent participation' refers to a partnership approach to educational provision and parents taking an increasing role in decision making. In relation to Epstein's typology, Type 5 ('decision making') encompasses parental participation.

The focus of this study is on parental engagement. The term parental engagement should be understood to refer to activities that fall under the types of 'learning at home' and 'decision making'. These activities include parents helping children with their homework and the school providing additional information and/or ideas to families to enable parent involvement in learning activities at home. Other activities include parent governors, parent forums/councils and parent surveys or focus groups.

2.2.2 The hierarchy of parents' role conception

Research has shown that there are critical differences between parents in their level of motivation for engagement (Irvine 2005; Reay, 2005). Irvine concluded that some parents are motivated on an individualistic level (benefits to own child) whilst others are motivated on a more collective level (benefits to own child as well as other children and families).

Irvine's study identified four different categories of how the role of parental involvement is constituted amongst parents. These categories form a hierarchy that signifies expanding conceptions of the role of parents and increasing levels of parent participation in policy matters and decision making. The hierarchy goes from Category A being the narrowest conception to Category D being the broadest and most participatory conception. Table 2-1 summarises Irvine's categories. Some of the structural elements are repeated over the categories and these are identified in *italics*.

Category Label		Referential element (what role is conceived as)	Structural elements (how role is conceived)
A	**No role conception**	The role of parents is seen as: No role shaping policy	• Select and use service • No role in shaping public policy • Good for other parents (service users) to have their say • Question whether parents having a say would make any difference – question whether government listens to parents
B	**Raising concerns conception**	The role of parents is seen as being informed about policy that affects their child and family, raising concerns and/or	• Focus on policy that affects their child and family • Receive information – be informed • Be consulted – given opportunity to

			• have a say
		seeking a change to current or proposed policy.	• See what is being proposed and respond if unhappy (i.e. perceive problems, disagree or want to change something)
			• Parents can support informed policy (e.g. if don't want a service, save public money)
			• Want to be heard – views acknowledged
			• Receive feedback
			• *Question whether parents having their say will make any difference to policy decisions*
C	**Having some conception**	The role of parents is seen as being informed and having *some* say in policy matters that directly affect their child and family.	• *Focus on policy that affects their child and family*
			• *Receive information – be informed*
			• *Be consulted – given opportunity to have a say*
			• Have a say on policy matters likely to affect their child and family, if they wish (including raising concerns, positive feedback, ideas for improvement)
			• Participate in a democratic process
			• *Parents can support informed policy (e.g. relevant services, save public money)*
			• *Want to be heard – input acknowledged, views taken on board*
			• *Receive feedback*
			• *Some question whether parents can influence public policy*
D	**Participating in**	The role of parents is	• *Focus on policy that affects their child*

policy decision making conception	seen as participating in policy decision making, in particular where this is likely to affect their child and family	*and family* – although may share views on other matters of professional or personal interest (i.e. outside own family framework)
		• *Receive information – be informed*
		• Seek information and look for ways to be involved
		• Participate in policy decision making
		• Exercise their democratic right to participate in decision making affecting their child and family
		• *Expect feedback on outcomes*

Table 2-1: Adaptation of Irvine's (2005) table showing Categories of description denoting role of parents in shaping Early Childhood Education and Care public policy in Australia

As can be seen there are many factors mediating parents' motivation to become involved and engaged with their child's school. Reay (2005) asserts that there are two broad sets of relationships with parents that schools have to manage - the assertive, demanding parents on the one hand and the seemingly passive disengaged parents on the other. On which side a parent falls depends not only on their current life context and their past history and experience of schooling (Reay, 2005; Irvine, 2005) but also on their levels of motivation. The next section examines the myriad of factors that mediate parental engagement including motivation and the significance of social systems and life context such as socio-economic status.

2.3 Factors mediating parental engagement

Parents have the strongest influence on children...they're the first people children observe closely and they're also the first ones who try to teach children and shape their behaviour. (Parke & Clarke-Stewart, 2011 p.341)

The reasons as to what can motivate, or hinder, a parent to become engaged are complex. Several psychological theories offer a contribution towards understanding to elucidate why parents become motivated to engage and how they perceive their role. These include Self-Determination Theory, Social Comparison Theory, Role Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory. Although there are some overlaps between the theories they all offer a distinctive perspective upon this complex social issue. These theories are brought together under a model proposed by Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) which is useful in elucidating the decisions parents make in relation to the question, "Should I, will I, could I become engaged in my child's education? (p.7)"

2.3.1 Motivation

The term motivation is used to describe the reasons *why* a person does something. In other words why a person finds energy, direction and persistence to initiate, guide and maintain goal-orientated behaviours (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Motivation is frequently described as being intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation refers to a person doing an activity, 'for the inherent satisfaction of the activity itself' (Ryan & Deci, 2000 p. 71) whilst extrinsic motivation refers to doing an activity in order to attain some separable outcome such as rewards, social recognition or praise. The importance of distinguishing between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is well-documented (Deci & Ryan, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000). People who are intrinsically motivated, it is argued, have more excitement, interest, and confidence which results in increased performance, persistence, creativity, vitality, self-esteem and general well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Self-Determination Theory is a theory of motivation concerned with an individual's intrinsic motivation towards a particular task or activity. Self-Determination Theory posits that an individual will engage in the task for the inherent sense of satisfaction, enjoyment and challenge they gain from it (Deci & Ryan, 2012). Ryan and Deci propose that through consideration of psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness it is possible to gain an understanding of an individual's intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The concept of competence refers to the individual's perceived ability to produce outcomes and influence the environment. The concept of autonomy refers to the individual's perception that behaviours are consistent with his or her true sense of self. The concept of relatedness involves the need to feel belongingness and connectedness to others (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Within Self-Determination Theory is the sub-theory of cognitive evaluation theory which focuses on factors that explain variability in intrinsic motivation. Ryan & Deci (2000) postulate that intrinsic motivation can be enhanced when a person's feelings of competence are improved through social-contextual events (for example feedback, communication and rewards) and accompanied by a sense of autonomy, security and relatedness. As Ryan & Deci (2000) explain:

> Choice, acknowledgement of feelings and opportunities for self-direction were found to enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a greater feeling of autonomy (p.70)…yet the primary reason people initially perform such actions is because the behaviours are prompted, modelled or valued by significant others to whom they feel (or want to feel) attached or related (p73).

Social contexts that are supportive of autonomy thus allowing the person to feel competent, related and autonomous will create commitment, effort and high quality performance. However excessive control, non-optimal challenge and a lack of connectedness will create amotivation, a lack of initiative and participation (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

2.3.2 Sense of autonomy and role construction

In understanding how to engender a sense of autonomy, Role Theory (Biddle, 1986) offers an insight about parents' constructs of the parental role. It provides some elucidation as to the origins of, and influences on, parents' beliefs about what they should do in relation to their children's education; as well as the impact this has on their attitude to parental engagement. Understanding how parents construct their role is important because it establishes a fundamental range of activities that parents construe as important, necessary and permissible in their actions as a parent (Levitski, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Role Theory posits that individuals behave in ways that are different and predictable dependant on their social identity and the situation (Biddle, 1986; Levitski, 2009). Early proponents of Role Theory include George Herbert Mead, Ralph Linton, Georg Simmel and Jacob Moreno who are all associated with the five established perspectives of Role Theory; namely Symbolic Interactional, Functional, Structural, Organisational and Cognitive. The fundamental concepts underlying Role Theory are:

- Role - patterned and characteristic social behaviours

- Social Position - the identity each individual has within the group/situation

- Expectation – the expectations for behaviour that are understood by all

Role Theory assumes that the role definition process is generated through expectations which are learned through experience and interaction between individuals and their groups over time. It also assumes that individuals are aware of the expectations they hold. When there is consensus and conformity then role stability occurs. Role stability denotes when group expectations match individual's expectations. The opposite state is role conflict which occurs when there is dissonance between expectations (Biddle, 1986). In general, higher role stability leads to a more productive group and higher role conflict or ambiguity leads to more dissatisfaction, higher levels of stress, poor

participation, lower commitment and, ultimately, lower productivity (Green et al, 2007).

Role Theory suggests that the parent of a young child encompasses various roles: provider, protector, care-taker, authority, teacher, socialisation facilitator and recreation provider (Levitski, 2009). The groups that parents belong to (i.e. the family, the child's school, the workplace etc.) will all hold expectations about appropriate parental role behaviours (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Levitski, 2009). When the groups' expectations are similar then the parents are likely to experience clarity about their role and social position leading to increased role stability and an increased sense of autonomy. Yet conflicts (for example, between the workplace's expectations for working hours and the school's expectation for parent's availability to attend Parents' Evening appointments) are likely to lead to parents experiencing stress and dissatisfaction potentially resulting in lower commitment and engagement.

2.3.3 Sense of competence and self-efficacy

A parent's sense of efficacy is a useful construct to consider when deliberating how to foster a parents' sense of competency. Understanding a parent's sense of efficacy is important because it appears to correlate to a parent's perseverance in activities and it predicates an assumption that their engagement will positively influence their child's learning and school performance (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

Self-efficacy is a termed coined by Albert Bandura as a concept central to his Social-Cognitive Theory. Self-efficacy is, 'the belief in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations' (Bandura, 1995, p.2). In other words self-efficacy is a person's belief about their ability to succeed in a particular situation. Although not the sole determinant of action, Bandura posits that perceived self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in determining motivation and action (Bandura, 1997).

An individual's self-efficacy beliefs and sense of competence determine the challenges they decide to undertake, the amount of effort they are willing to provide and the extent of their persistence and perseverance. Individuals with low self-efficacy have a tendency to avoid situations, lessen their participation or stop trying altogether (Bandura, 1997). Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) have related this to parent efficacy as being defined by three variables:

- Parents' beliefs that they can influence their child's developmental and educational outcomes

- Parents' views of their competence and effectiveness in influencing their child's learning

- Parents' beliefs that they can influence the school through school governance.

Accordingly, parents hold a belief that parental engagement will make a positive difference for their child and they have a stronger sense of competence in their ability to overcome challenges and successfully deal with emerging problems. This leads to increased perseverance from parents to engage with their child's learning and a tendency, 'to develop and implement proactive strategies designed to help their children succeed in school' (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997 p.27). Conversely, lower parent efficacy leads to relatively passive behaviours in responding to parental engagement as parents seek to avoid confronting their own perceived inadequacies (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). As Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) summarise:

> Parents with a stronger sense of efficacy for helping their children
> succeed in school will be those most likely to decide involvement will
> yield positive outcomes for their children (p.26-27).

2.3.4 Sense of relatedness, group processes and parents' perceptions of invitations, opportunities and demands for engagement

Although there are many intrinsically motivated goal-orientated behaviours that people perform in isolation, Ryan & Deci (2000) posit that, generally, proximal relational supports are necessary for intrinsic motivation. In relation to parental

engagement, this is the consideration as to whether parents feel connected or related to the school and their child with sufficient security. In other words, do parents perceive that the child and school want them to be involved?

Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) posit that the general invitations, opportunities and demands presented, by schools in particular, are potentially very influential in parental engagement. Epstein's study (2001) found that when schools included parents in a variety of meaningful ways then communication and trust among parents and school staff was increased. Epstein postulates that a proactive climate of invitations and opportunities in school influences parents' feelings of being needed and wanted and parents' knowledge about their child's schoolwork.

It is also important to consider how the invitations and demands placed by the child influences parents' sense of relatedness and subsequently parents' decisions to engage. Developmental Psychology stresses the importance of the reciprocal relationship between a parent and a child during the child's early development of language, attachment and cognition (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2012). Yet this reciprocal relationship continues into childhood and beyond:

> Child characteristics often influence varied dimensions of the child's environment, including parents' behaviour (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997 p.29).

Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) suggest that variables that appear to influence parents' decisions about engagement include the chronological age of the child as well as their developmental stage; the child's overall level of school performance; the quality of the parent-child relationship; and the child's individual characteristics (such as personality, learning style and preferences).

It is possible to look to Social Comparison Theory for an explanation as to why it may be important for parents to perceive that their child and school want them to be involved. Social Comparison Theory (well-known within the literature of

group processes) was initially proposed by Leon Festinger in 1954 and is centred on the belief that individuals compare their opinions and abilities to others. It is through the process of comparing the self with others that the pressures of uniformity (Stainton-Rogers, 2007) within groups emerge.

Social Comparison Theory posits that people's propensity to want social approval, and to dislike social censure, are major factors in engendering conformity within groups (Stainton-Rogers, 2007). This leads to group 'norms' which provide a frame of reference for social comparison which thus guides behaviour[1]. Group norms differ between different groups and which reference group is most influential on the behaviour of the individual depends on which group the individual has the stronger sense of relatedness to.

In relation to parental engagement, the reference groups for parental engagement are usually taken to mean family, the community and their child's school (Green et al, 2007). Research suggests that the multiple invitations, opportunities and requests presented by children and their schools results in the welcoming and proactive demand they create for parents' involvement (Ice & Hoover-Dempsey 2010), thus influencing the sense of relatedness the parent feels towards the school. This influence may be particularly important if a parents' role construction or sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school does not encourage involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010)

2.3.5   A theoretical model of the parental engagement process

As discussed above, reasons as to what can motivate parents to become involved, and to what extent they engage, are complex. So far consideration has been given to parents' intrinsic motivation (competence, autonomy and

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[1] This is the same as the construct of 'expectations' in Role Theory – see section 2.3.2 for further discussion.

relatedness), their individual constructs (perception of role, self-efficacy and perception of invitations) and the influence of group conformity. These elements may help to describe a parent's position in relation to their motivation to become engaged in their child's learning. However, it is also apposite to be aware of the significance of the proximal and distal social systems that work to limit or enhance parental engagement. For example, parents' familial and employment circumstances or the historical context of school-family relations (which is often related to political, economic and social events) may have an influence.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Green et al. 2007) offer a model of the parental involvement process (see Figure 2-1) which brings together the elements of intrinsic motivation, parents' individual constructs and the influence of group conformity. It focuses on four psychological constructs that they posit influence parents' fundamental engagement stance:

- Parent's construction of their role in the child's life

- Parent's sense of efficacy for helping their child to succeed in school

- The general invitations, demands and opportunities for parental involvement presented by the child and the child's school.

- Parent's perceived life context

These constructs are grouped under three areas of motivation for involvement – 'Parents' Motivational Beliefs', 'Parents' Perceptions of Invitations for Involvement from Others' and 'Parents' Perceived Life Context'.

Parents' Involvement						
Home Involvement				School Involvement		
			↑			
Parents' Motivational Beliefs		Parents' Perceptions of Invitations for Involvement from Others			Parents' Perceived Life Context	
Parental role construction	Parental self-efficacy	General school invitations	Specific teacher invitations	Specific child invitations	Skills and knowledge	Time and energy
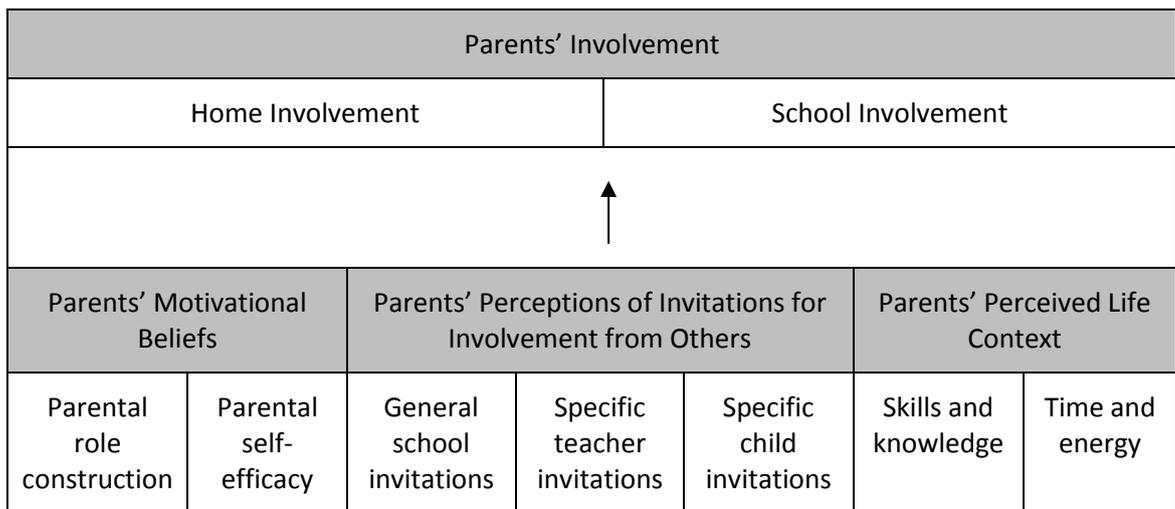
Figure 2-1: The first level of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's revised theoretical model of the parental involvement process

'Parents' Motivational Beliefs' includes 'parental role construction' (that is, parents' beliefs about what they should do in relation to their children's education) and 'parental self-efficacy' (that is, belief that he or she can act in ways that will produce desired outcomes). 'Parents' Perceptions of Invitations for Involvement from Others' incorporates 'general school invitations' (qualities of the school environment that enhance parental involvement, such as structure, climate and management practices); 'specific teacher invitations' and 'specific student invitations'. 'Parents' Perceptions of Life Context Variables' includes 'skills and knowledge for involvement' (shaping their ideas about the kinds of activities they might undertake), and 'time and energy for involvement' (particularly in relation to other responsibilities or constraints).

2.3.6   Other factors mediating parental engagement

Although this model is useful in capturing several psychological constructs about what motivates parents' involvement there are other factors that have also been found to have an impact that it does not account for; for example, parents' own educational experience. Feinstein & Sabates (2006) found an association between the duration of the mother's full time education and her attitudes and behaviours. They found that mothers who stay in full time education beyond the minimum school leaving age were more likely to

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demonstrate positive educational attitudes and behaviours, such as reading to their children. By their own admittance it is not possible to say whether this is a causal-link due to a number of other related underlying factors (such as changes to pedagogy, curricula, assessment, student motivations and the education system) that were not controlled for in the study. Nonetheless, the parents' own educational experience is seen to be a major factor influencing their involvement in their children's schooling (Harris & Goodall, 2007) particularly their effectiveness in dealing with teachers (Reay, 2005). Reay postulates that positive experiences in their own education translate into self-confidence and a sense of entitlement in relation to parental involvement.

Other major mediating factors are parental socio-economic status (SES); gender (mothers are far more likely to be involved than fathers) (Harris & Goodall 2007; Reay 2005); family status (single family status appears to disrupt the capacity for parental engagement) (Grolnick et al, 1997); social class; poverty; health; and ethnicity (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Reay (2005) is critical of discourse in which gender; race and social class notions of parenting are not acknowledged consequently rendering inequalities which exist between parents invisible and leading to an assumption that all parents share an identical experience of involvement in their children's schooling.

2.4   How to engage parents

How can we narrow the gap in educational achievement without parents being part of the process? Ninety per cent of all caring is done by the parents and carers. It goes the whole way through everything (Dyson et al. 2010 p.16)

The above section explores the multifarious reasons as to what can motivate, or hinder, a parent to become engaged from a theoretical perspective. To help understand how to engage parents it is pertinent to address the issues perceived as barriers to engagement. In order to overcome these barriers Grolnick et al (1997) suggest a multilevel approach where institutional, individual and contextual factors are all taken into account.

2.4.1 Barriers to engagement

There are several variables that have been argued to potentially act as a barrier to parents engaging with their child's education. These variables fall into the areas of institutional, individual and contextual factors (Grolnick et al, 1997). It is not realistic to expect schools to alter individual and contextual factors (e.g. income, education, ethnicity, family status etc.) but by being aware that these factors exist schools can mediate some of the barriers to engagement. Furthermore, schools may influence parental construct variables (that is, what parents think and do) which are subject to influence and alteration (Green et al, 2007). In addition, the teacher's approach, attitude and practice towards parental engagement also have a bearing on parents' behaviour (Grolnick et al, 1997).

Some of the main variables within contextual factors include work commitments (Peters et al, 2008); family status (Grolnick et al, 1997); social class and cultural background (Crozier & Reay, 2005; Mackenzie, 2009; Peters et al, 2008). As mentioned above, it is important for schools to be aware of prevailing contextual factors because:

> parents who are extremely stressed or whose values and attitudes clash with those of the teacher may not receive the teacher's messages even if he or she is attempting to involve them (Grolnick et al, 1997 p. 547)

With relation to work commitments and family status, where parents find it difficult to be available during the working hours of the day, it is suggested that considering targeting other types of engagement that do not require day-time availability may be useful in increasing parental engagement with their child's education (Grolnick et al, 1997).

With regard to social class and cultural background, issues rooted in social class, ethnicity and race can create barriers between the school and parental engagement. As Crozier & Reay (2005) explain,

> Where children's class and cultural background bears little resemblance to that of their teacher's then connections between home and school may be minimal and tenuous (p.26)

This view is supported by Reay (2005) who postulates that middle class mothers tend to be far more adept at getting their viewpoint across in conversations with teachers and are able to display certainty; self-assurance and an ability to counter oppose viewpoints. Yet working class mothers tended to be, 'much more apologetic and far more likely to disqualify and, at times, contradict themselves when talking to teachers' (Reay, 2005 p. 29). Reay (2005) suggests that by targeting parental confidence in their educational knowledge and information about school then parents will feel more empowered to intervene and engage in their children's education. This is despite social class and cultural contextual variables.

An important variable that falls within the individual factors is the quality of the relationship between the parent and child. Grolnick et al's (1997) study identified that where parents perceive their child as being difficult then they tend to withdraw from such interactions. For example, if the child is perceived as being uncooperative in completing homework then it is postulated that the parent will withdraw from this activity with the child. They suggest that in order to reinstate parental engagement then as well as providing parents with strategies to help them work with their child it is also pertinent to consider parents' ideas about children's learning and their perceptions of their role.

2.4.2 The practices of the school

As mentioned above school practices affect parents' behaviour. The report by Harris & Goodall (2007) for the Department for Children, Schools and Families concluded that:

Schools that enable parents to engage in learning consistently reinforce the fact that 'parents matter' by developing a two way relationship with parents based on mutual trust, respect and a commitment to improving learning outcomes (p. 5).

It is possible to judge the reasoning behind this statement through a consideration of the opposing condition. That is the condition when the conversations between teacher and parent are of a more traditional mode in that it is one of direction, instruction, guidance and persuasion (Mackenzie, 2009). By bearing in mind people's propensity to dislike social censure and the influence of the psychological need for relatedness on parental motivation then it is possible to discern that, 'where one participant exerts a greater degree of control and influence over the directions and content of the talk than the other' (Crozier & Reay, 2005 p.113) then the minority voice becomes disaffected, disengaged and disempowered (Mackenzie, 2009).

There is a sociological critique regarding the power balance implicit within the two-way relationship between schools and parents and the 'meaningfulness' of schools' advances to parents. Vincent & Tomlinson (1997) posit that the concept of partnerships between school and parents is used to justify mechanisms, such as home-school contracts, as a means of controlling parents' behaviour. They go on to say that although parents are welcomed into the school it is for the purpose of understanding why the school exercises control in the manner that they do:

Examination of the uses of 'partnership' by education professionals reveals an implicit marginalising and controlling of parents, aspects of the relationship which are masked by warm references to consensus and congeniality…Parents are audience, volunteers, supporters-from-a-distance; the roles are passive and narrowly defined. (p.366)

Embedded in this critique is a lack of trust between school and parents. Dunsmuir et al (2004) explored the role of trust between parents and teachers as an element of successful parent-teacher partnerships and highlighted the importance of communication in this relationship. However there are barriers to

developing successful communication channels between parents and teachers. Firstly, teachers' contributions tend to dominate in interactions with parents:

> Teachers have, by virtue of their location within an institution and their professional knowledge, a built-in command over the relationship (Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997 p366)

In addition increased communication can lead to disagreements and misunderstandings and it is avoidance of conflict and professional defensiveness that leads to teachers shunning communication with parents (Dunsmuir et al, 2004). Therefore careful consideration of the ways that teachers and parents construct and experience their relationship with each other is required (Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997).

In order for communication channels to be successful information exchanges need to be open and two-way (Dunsmuir et al 2004) and it is the responsibility of the professional for facilitation of this (Taylor & Gulliford, 2011). Mackenzie (2009) postulates that teachers need to not only be aware of the language they use but also of their body language. Two-way partnership requires trust (Dunsmuir et al, 2004), shared responsibility and accountability (Hartas, 2008) and this is developed through mutual humility and hope (Mackenzie, 2009). Humility in the sense that, 'without an acceptance that there is something to learn in every new situation then our minds are closed to new information' (pxii); and hope brings the possibility that change can take place.

2.5   Engaging parents in decision making processes

2.5.1   Decision making processes

Decision making occurs when either something needs to change or when something is attempted for the first time (Doya & Shadlen, 2012). It can be regarded as a problem solving activity in that the decision making process results in the selection of a course of action among several alternative scenarios (Schacter et al, 2011). Decision making is described as a process that can either be rational or irrational and will be based on either explicit or tacit assumptions (Schacter et al, 2011).

A model encapsulating the stages of decision making was developed by B. Aubrey Fisher in 1994 (Fisher, 1994). Fisher's Interact System Model comprises of four stages:

1) Orientation stage – members meet and start to get to know each other.

2) Conflict stage – disagreements and disputes occur once members have become familiar with each other.

3) Emergence stage – unanimity begins to emerge as opinions and tacit assumptions are resolved

4) Reinforcement stage – members make a decision

Group norms (as discussed in chapter 2.5.1) are an influential factor in the quality of decision making processes (Fisher, 1994). The making of a decision requires collaboration between the members of a group yet when group members become more familiar with each other there is a tendency to argue and create more of a dispute to agree upon one decision. Fisher (1994) argues that this process leads to a more successful decision however there can be situations when some members may not want to argue further due to an avoidance of social censure (Stainton-Rogers, 2007).

An individual's mood and emotions can also have an impact on decision making. Bower (1981) coined the term 'state-dependent remembering' to explain the phenomenon of the influence of mood working as a retrieval cue to memories/materials which in turn impacts on the decisions that are made. He postulated that happy feelings make positive materials come to mind and the same is true of negative feelings. A study by Lerner & Keltner (2000) proposed a model of emotion-specific influences on judgement and choice hypothesising that, 'fearful people made pessimistic judgements of future events whereas angry people made optimistic judgements' (p.473). Loewenstein and Lerner (2003) classified emotions during decision making into two types: anticipated emotions and immediate emotions. Anticipated emotions are not experienced directly but instead are the expectations (or anticipation) of how the person will

feel once the impact of the decision has been experienced (Loewenstein and Lerner, 2003). Immediate emotions are those experienced during the decision making process and are influenced by the environment or the individual disposition of the person (Loewenstein and Lerner, 2003). As Raghunathan & Tuan Pham (1999, p.60) state, 'emotions have distinct influences on decision making processes'.

2.5.2 Engaging parents in decision making processes

Engaging parents is often challenging and problematical for schools. The Lamb Inquiry (DCSF, 2009) was commissioned to explore how parental confidence in the Special Educational Needs system could be improved and also how to break down the barriers between the school and parental engagement. One of the conclusions of the report was that a stronger partnership between schools and parents was needed. The Inquiry found there was a profound impact on children's progress when schools had effective engagement with parents. One of the foci of the recommendations of the Lamb Inquiry was to develop a stronger voice for parents especially in projects that engaged parents at a more strategic level. Examples include projects developing local provision, reviewing the transition through early years provision into school and also decision making (such as parents being part of the panel that advises the local authority on whether or not to proceed with a statutory assessment of a child's special educational needs).

Other research also suggests that parental engagement is maximised when parents are actively engaged in decision making (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Irvine, 2005). The 'Spectrum of Public Participation' is helpful in understanding the different levels that parents can be involved in decision making. The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), founded in 1990 to respond to the rising global interest in public participation, coined the phrase 'Spectrum of Public Participation' (see Table 2-2) to summarise the different levels that the public can be involved in the decision making process.

The spectrum ranges from *informing the public* which has a minimum level of public impact to *empowering the public* where the final decision making is in the hands of the public. The higher the level of public impact the more meaningful is the engagement in promoting sustainable decisions.

	Increasing Level of Public Impact				
	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspiration are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public
Promise to the public	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternative developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
Example techniques	Fact sheets Web sites Open houses	Public comment Focus groups Surveys Public meetings	Workshops Deliberative polling	Citizen advisory committees Consensus-building Participatory decision-making	Citizen juries Ballots Delegated decision

Table 2-2: The IAP2 Spectrum on Public Participation

The studies examining successful parental engagement have engaged parents at the levels of 'Consultation', 'Involvement' or 'Collaboration' (see Harris & Goodall, 2007; Goodall et al, 2011). At these levels the purpose of decision making can be about the individual child (such as decisions made in a Special Educational Needs review meeting) as well as whole school issues (such as whether the school requires an undercover playground area). Examples of how parents can be engaged for whole school issues include parent forums, surveys and questionnaires, meetings and workshops, being a member of the governing body.

However there are several barriers to engaging parents in decision making processes, not least that parents can feel disempowered and marginalised with the perception that decisions have already been made with little scope for influencing them (Bell,1999). This power differential (as discussed in chapter 2.4.2) is a major factor on parental engagement in decision making and it is argued it is the responsibility of the professional to be cognisance of this and take action accordingly (Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997; Dunsmuir et al, 2004; Taylor & Gulliford, 2011). Thus how professionals (namely school staff) perceive the issue of parental engagement is a major influence in the decision making process.

2.6   Conclusion

It takes a whole village to raise a child. (African Proverb)

In summary research indicates that schools who work in isolation from parents struggle to improve children's achievement. Yet teachers who endeavour to gain the support of parents, carers and the home find that this support is indispensable for helping children to not only achieve but to also sustain their achievement (Ranson, 2011). The more engaged parents are in the education of their child then the more likely their child is to succeed (Desforges, 2003). In addition, schools which include parents in a variety of meaningful ways and

work to actively embrace racial, religious and ethnic and language differences, increase communication and trust between school and parents (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997); Desforges (2003)).

It is important to recognise that parental engagement is not the same as parental involvement because engagement implies that parents are an essential part of the learning process (Harris & Goodall, 2007). However, parents have differing perceptions of their role. Some parents perceive they have no role in their child's education; others perceive their role at the level of raising concerns; whilst other parents perceive their role at the level of participating in policy making (Irvine, 2005). The level at which a school is able to engage with a parent is dependent on many factors including parents' motivations; socio-economic status and gender; as well as overcoming several other barriers to engagement.

A key factor in mediating parental engagement is understanding which level of the hierarchy of role conception parents are motivated to be at. The reasons as to what can motivate or hinder a parent to become engaged are complex. Not only is it apposite to be aware of the significance of the proximal and distal social systems that work to limit or enhance parental engagement but consideration should also be given to factors related to parents' intrinsic motivation. Research indicates that people who are more intrinsically motivated have more excitement, interest and confidence resulting in increased performance and persistence with a task (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Factors related to intrinsic motivation include the psychological concepts of competence, autonomy and relatedness.

Accordingly there are many potential barriers to parental engagement. A multilevel approach encompassing institutional, individual and contextual factors which incorporates teacher approach, attitude and practice can begin to counteract many of these barriers. In addition focusing on enabling and

encouraging parents to be engaged with decision making processes (that is to work with parents at the stage of collaboration and empowerment from the Spectrum of Public Participation) also helps to promote and develop more meaningful parental engagement.

Therefore it is not so much a question of, *why should* schools invest in increasing and improving their engagement with parents, but *how can* schools increase and improve their engagement with parents. As Harris & Goodall conclude:

> Schools need to place parental engagement at the centre rather than the periphery of all that they do. Parental engagement in children's learning makes a difference – it is the most powerful school improvement lever that we have (2007 p.70)

3   Aims of the Study and Research Questions

This chapter clarifies the aims and defines the research questions adopted in this study.

3.1   Aims of Study

In recent years there has been a growing interest in how public bodies engage with the community. There have been several studies looking at how schools and other public bodies such as healthcare trusts (Carlisle, 2010) and social care services (Kemp et al, 2009) are developing their partnerships with the community. Behind this growing interest have been drivers from national Government that have influenced local authority policy and practice. For example, since 2010, the local authority where the school used in this study is based has employed an officer with a dedicated role for increasing parental participation. In addition some schools within this local authority have established parent forums as a means of increasing their engagement with parents.

There are three phases to this study. The first phase of the study identifies an array of viewpoints of the school staff about the concept of engaging with parents in decision making. The second phase explores the school staff's views in more detail by identifying the activities the school employs for engaging with parents in decision making processes. The third phase ascertains which of these activities the parents of the school view as being important, positive and worthwhile.

3.2   What is new and different about this current study?

Over the decades there have been numerous studies looking at the topic of parental engagement in their children's learning, including studies investigating whether parents want to be engaged (for example, Irvine, 2005); whether

teachers want parents to be engaged (for example, Izzo et al, 1999); potential barriers to engagement (for example Grolnick et al, 1997); and how to promote and develop parental engagement (for example Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The common theme running through all of these studies is the focus on parental engagement in learning-based activities; for example, helping with homework.

Research evidence suggests that parental engagement is maximised when parents are actively engaged in decision making (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Irvine, 2005; DCSF, 2009; Ranson, 2011) however there have not yet been any studies published focusing on understanding *why* parents become involved in decision making processes and *how* that is enabled to happen. The focus of this study is on understanding an individual school's approach to engaging with parents in their decision making processes. By reviewing the school's current practice a detailed and nuanced knowledge of the features of their system for engaging parents in decision making will be acquired. In addition to the school's voice, parents' perceptions of this system will also be sought. This is to determine which features of the school's system for engaging with them in decision making processes are rated as most positive and worthwhile by parents.

A second observation made about past studies is the choice of methodology. The majority of studies use quantitative methodologies, predominantly surveys or questionnaires with various rating scales. For example, one of the questionnaires used by Grolnick et al. (1997) was the Parent-School Interaction Questionnaire (Child report, Parent report and Teacher report) (Grolnick et al 1997) which measures the children/parent/teacher's perception of parents' level of involvement at school on a scale from 1 (never) to 4 (many times). Izzo et al. (1999) and Ice & Hoover-Dempsey (2010) also adopted similar methods of data collection and analysis. However there are also some studies that adopted a qualitative approach to research. An example of this is Irvine (2005) who

adopted a phenomenographic research approach using semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection.

The first part of this study aims to explore how the school staff view the idea of engaging with parents in decision making processes. The reason for focusing on the school staff's viewpoints follows on from the discussion regarding the responsibility that the professionals (namely the school staff) have in establishing, developing and maintaining the relationship which facilitates parents' motivation to engage (see chapters 2.3 and 2.5.2). Therefore, it is important to understand how the school staff view the concept of parental engagement as the first step in exploring the school's approach to engaging parents in decision making processes.

A viewpoint is an individual's position, opinion or point of view (Oxford English Dictionary, 2012) and as such is a first-person perspective of an object. As Watts (2011, p.40) explains:

> A viewpoint does not exist within a person, but only in their current outlook or positioning relative to some aspect of their immediate environment (a circumstance perhaps, an event or some other object of enquiry)…it is an empirically observable, inherently meaningful and interpretable relationship (between subject and object) that emerges naturally during the conduct of our everyday lives.

Q-methodology facilitates the scientific study of people's first-person perspective (Watts, 2011). The procedure of Q methodology is designed so that a multitude of viewpoints can emerge (Watts & Stenner, 2005) although there are generally usually between two and four factors (Watts, 2011). Thus the process of factor analysis identifies the predominant shared viewpoints on the issue; each factor, 'identifying a distinct class of viewpoint that is shared by a number of the study participants' (Watts, 2011, p.44).

In addition the process of factor analysis in Q-studies does not reduce the data to general statements merging comments and remarks from several

participants, as other approaches (such as semi-structured interviews and questionnaires) do. The outcome of reducing the data in this way is that the individual's viewpoint cannot be wholly represented. Q-methodology provides the researcher with a patterned nuance of viewpoints by illuminating the way in which viewpoints are structured. Watts (2011, p.45) postulates:

> Q methodology (is) the only method capable of studying and comparing the viewpoints of everyday people mathematically, holistically and objectively.

Therefore, to establish the school staff's viewpoints on parental engagement in decision making Q-methodology will be utilised. Q-methodology helps to explore the meaning and importance that the school staff give to this construct.

Although the viewpoints ascertained from a Q-method study can be extremely useful and informative by themselves there are very few studies that have applied the insights gained to a further study; that is Q-methodology has rarely been used in a mixed-methods design. However there are some exceptions including studies that have used the results from a Q-methodology study to classify participants into specific groups which all shared similar views for evaluation of programme effectiveness (Ramlo & Newman, 2011) and university courses (Ramlo et al. 2008). Bradley (2007) used the five viewpoints from the Q-study as the basis for a content analysis of university prospectuses in order to consider how well university promotional material engages with the different views.

This study will apply the outcome of a Q-study in further parts of the study with the aim of not only improving the validity of the results; but also to further explore the school's approach to engaging parents in decision making processes. This will form the second and third phases of the study. Following the Q-study a focus group will further explore and clarify the school's system and practice for engaging with parents in decision making processes by identifying specific activities within this system. The focus group also provides an opportunity for member checking the viewpoints that emerge from the Q-

sort. The advantage for using a focus group is that the method allows for ideas to emerge from the group and it facilitates the discovery of a range of ideas that people have about something (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

The results from the focus group (that is, the list of activities obtained) will form the basis for the third part of the study. The aim of this final part of the study is to find out which activities the parents view to be important, positive and worthwhile in engaging with them in decision making processes. Unlike the Q-study which sought to identify multiple dominant shared viewpoints, this part of the study seeks to produce an aggregate viewpoint. Therefore a survey, which explains or understands a phenomenon but doesn't seek to explore it (Robson, 2002) was completed with parents on what they view as being the important, positive and worthwhile activities in engaging them in decision making processes.

3.3 Research Questions

In order to address the aims of the study the following research questions were developed:

1) How does the school staff view the idea of engaging with parents in decision making processes?'

2) What are the activities that the school employs in engaging with parents in the process of decision making?

3) What do the parents see as the important features in relation to the school's system engaging with them in decision making processes?

4   Research Methodology

This chapter presents a discussion of the approach to psychological research adopted in this study as well as an account of the research methods used in the course of all three phases of this study.

4.1 Approaches to psychological research

The purpose of research is to 'understand' and to gain 'knowledge'. Within the discipline of psychology the purpose of research is to understand the role of individuals' cognitive functions and social behaviours; sometimes exploring any underlying physiological and neurobiological processes.

There are many methods adopted in research yet the 'gold standard' is held to be the 'experimental design' (Robson, 2002). The experimental design reduces the phenomena being explored to numerical values in order to complete a statistical analysis of the data (Smith, 2008). This approach is theory-driven (Robson, 2002) in that the aim of the research is to verify or falsify a theory and is often employed in the search to identify cause-effect relationships (Willig, 2001). The design of these studies is 'fixed' in that the variables to be included and the exact procedure to be followed are specified in advance (Robson, 2002).

The two main ideological principles that underpin experimental design are Realism and Positivism. The intellectual tradition of Realism espoused in the thinking of Locke, Hume and the logical empiricists of the 20th century (Gergen, 1985) contends that, 'knowledge copies (or should ideally copy) the contours of the world' (Gergen, 1985, p.269) and thus it is possible for knowledge to map the world-as-it-is (Raskin, 2012). Realists assert that our understanding and

knowledge of the world is external (or to use the term adopted by Gergen – exogenic) to the individual.

Positivism is based on the assumption that there is a linear relationship between, 'the world (objects, events, phenomena) and our perception, and understanding, of it' (Willig 2001 p.3). As Creswell (2009) explains it is a deterministic philosophy in which research aims to, 'identify and assess the causes that influence outcomes…(and)...it is also reductionistic in that the intent is to reduce the ideas into a small, discrete set of ideas to test, such as the variables that comprise hypotheses and research questions' (p.7).

However in opposition to the view that researchers can establish direct contact with the world-as-it-is are the Constructionists who view knowledge and understanding, 'not as a reflection or map of the world but as an artefact of communal interchange' (Gergen, 1985, p.266). Constructionists contend that knowledge is not external to the individual but instead depends on processes innate to the individual. In this way knowledge is viewed as being internal or 'endogenic' (Gergen, 1985) rather than external or 'exogenic'. They argue that the world cannot be simply reduced to numbers and that relationships between the world and our perception of it is not linear. For example, Gergen (1985) discusses the concept of Emotions as not being 'objects' to be studied but rather terms that acquire their meaning from their context of usage. In addition categories and concepts, such as that of childhood, are culturally and historically specific (Burr, 2007). Thus,

> the objective criteria for identifying such 'behaviours', 'events' or
> 'entities' are shown to be either highly circumscribed by culture,
> history or social context or altogether nonexistent (Gergen, 1985,
> p.267)

There are several Constructionist theories. For example, Personal Construct Psychology and Radical Constructivism posit understanding and constructions as being of an individual's own making (Raskin, 2012); that is the individual's

internal cognitive structure and organisation of knowledge as a means of interpreting and organising the world (Ackermann, 2001). In contrast, Social Constructionism emphasises meaning as a human construction and view knowledge, 'not as something that a person has or doesn't have, but as something that people do together' (Burr, 2007 p.9). That is, constructs are not created individually but through interpersonal interactions. Once these social constructions are created they take on a life and influence of their own in that they both shape how individuals construe themselves but are simultaneously shaped as they are used in new and ever-changing ways (Raskin, 2012).

A fundamental precept of Social Constructionism is the critical role that language plays in determining the way we think and perceive the world. Because it is through talking together that the world gets constructed, language is perceived as a form of social action (Gergen, 1985; Burr, 2007). The use of language is not simply a means of expression but is performative as well as action-orientated. In other words, talking has 'specific functions and achieves purposes for us in our interactions with each other' (Burr, 2007 p.58). Thus social constructionist research methods commonly, but not exclusively, focus on the analysis of language. One such method is Q-methodology which as a research tool is, 'capable of identifying the currently predominant *social viewpoints* and knowledge structures relative to a chosen subject matter (thus allowing) the constructionist to understand and explicate the main *discourses* at work (Watts & Stenner, 2012 p.42 (italics in original text)).

Social Constructionism is often associated with flexible exploratory designs and purposes that may validly use quantitative as well as qualitative methods in their research (Burr, 2007). Burr (2007) acknowledges that research that can be called Social Constructionist can:

> vary in the kinds of materials they typically analyse and the conceptual
> tools they use to perform their analysis (p.176) (because) it is not
> empirical methods that are incompatible with social constructionism

but the universalistic truth claims that usually accompany them (p. 150)

Thus it is valid for a mixed methods approach to be used in Social Constructionist research; in particular when the aim of the research is to explore different levels of the same phenomenon (Todd et al, 2004).

4.2   The design of the study

This study explores the phenomenon of a school's system for engaging parents in decision making. The first phase of the study aims to illuminate the practice of the school by exploring the school staff's perceptions about the concept of engaging with parents in decision making. This exploration will be at a macro-level of understanding (that is, how does the school view the idea of engaging with parents in decision making processes). The second phase uses the viewpoints to illuminate understanding at a more micro-level by identifying the activities the school employs to engage parents in decision making. Finally the third phase ascertains which of these activities parents view as being important, positive and worthwhile.

This three phase study exploring how a school's system for engaging parents in decision making is viewed by school staff and parents will use a mixed methods design. The different methods used for the different purposes is summarised in Table 4.1 below.

Phase	Research Question	Focus	Purpose	Method
1	How does the school view the idea of engaging with parents in decision making processes?	School staff	Generate viewpoints of how the school views the idea of engaging with parents in decision making	Q-methodology
2	What are the activities that the school employs in engaging with parents in the process of decision making?	School staff	Explore meaning of viewpoints and identify a list of activities that the school employs to engage with parents in decision making	Focus Group
3	What do the parents see as the important features in relation to the school's system engaging with them in decision making processes?	Parents	Understand the value attached to the features of the school's system for engaging parents in decision making	Survey

Table 4-1: The different research methods used to address the different levels of exploration in this study

5 Phase 1 – Generating the school staff's viewpoints

5.1 Q-methodology

Q-methodology was originally developed by British physicist and psychologist William Stephenson in 1935. In its most basic form Q-methodology can be understood as an innovative adaptation of Spearman's traditional method of factor analysis (which in the realms of Q-methodology is referred to as 'R-methodology') (McKeown & Thomas, 1988; Watts & Stenner, 2012). While Spearman gave people tests and factor analysed the test scores, Stephenson asked people to express their views on issues (through a process known as a Q-sort) and applied factor analysis to the responses. The outcome of Stephenson's Q-technique factor analysis is Q-methodological factors (or common viewpoints) on a chosen issue (Cross, 2005; McKeown & Thomas, 1988). For the social constructionist the attraction is not simply a description of the viewpoints (that is a description of attitudes or opinions) but a picture of the competing social constructions pertaining to an issue:

> The method allows them (Constructionists) to identify the key bodies
> of knowledge relative to a particular subject matter and to render
> those knowledge structures empirically observable (Watts & Stenner,
> 2012 p.44)

5.1.1 R-methodology versus Q-methodology

Q-methodology utilises Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The goal of EFA is to identify factors based on the data (Field, 2009). There is no requirement to have any specific hypotheses about how many factors will emerge or what items or variables these factors will comprise[2]. The objective of Exploratory Factor Analysis is to reveal patterns of association between all the variables in a given data matrix (Watts & Stenner, 2012); and thus can be described as a technique for data reduction in that it allows the variables to be correlated in a meaningful fashion. As Watts & Stenner (2012) explain:

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[2] In contrast, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) evaluates hypotheses and requires the researcher to hypothesize the number of factors, whether these factors are correlated and which items load onto which factors (Field, 2009).

The main aim...is to account for the many manifest associations
captured in the correlation matrix through the identification of a greatly
reduced number of underlying explanatory or latent variables (p.10).

In Spearman's factor analysis (R-methodology) the variables are the tests used
to measure the participants. Table 5-1 represents a standard data matrix used
in Spearman's 'R-methodology' factor analytic method. The analysis focuses on
the columns of the matrix and hence this method is known as 'by-variable'
factor analysis.

	Variables		
Participants	Test 1	Test 2	Test 3
a	ax1	ax2	ax3
b	bx1	bx2	bx3
C	cx1	cx2	cx3

**Table 5-1: Data matrix for Spearman's 'R-methodology' factor analysis
(adapted from Watts & Stenner, 2012)**

A critique of 'R-methodology' made by Stephenson was his observation that by-
variable factor analysis could not reflect the differing personal characteristics or
perspectives of specific individuals. However, by inverting the data matrix the
analytical attention is shifted from the columns of the data matrix to the rows.
Thus the participants become the variables and the traits, tests, abilities etc. are
regarded as the sample or population (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Hence, this is
known as 'by-person' factor analysis.

However, because factor analysis requires the scores in the data matrix to be
standardised in order for the correlations to be meaningful each row of the data

matrix, '*must* employ an identical measuring unit throughout for the Q technique factor analysis to become a viable possibility' (Watts & Stenner, p13 (italics in original)). Therefore it is not possible to simply invert the data matrix into a by-person factor analysis because in most R-methodological data matrices there are different units of measurements in each column. Consequently Stephenson also inverted the process of measuring data so that instead of a *sample of individuals* being subjected to measurement using a variety of different tests; a *sample of tests* (known as a Q-set[3]) are subjected to measurement (that is, rank ordering) by a collection of individuals. This process is known as Q-sorting (Stainton-Rogers, 1995).

Watts & Stenner (2012) neatly summarise how Q-methodological factor analysis can be applied to a data matrix in the following statement:

> A Q-methodological factor analysis can be applied to a (Q-data matrix) as a means of reducing it to a smaller number of factors, but now the factor analysis is looking for groups of *persons* who have rank ordered the heterogeneous stimulus items in a very similar fashion. This co variation of their respective item rankings is then taken as a sign that the Q sorts of these otherwise disparate individuals might be better understood as alternative manifestations of a single latent factor. It follows that each revealed factor in Q-methodology will potentially identify a group of persons who share a similar perspective, viewpoint or attitude about a particular topic (Watts & Stenner, p.18)

5.1.2 Q-methodology for the study of human subjectivity

The study of human subjectivity is the essence of Q-methodology studies. Subjectivity refers to an individual's current personal perspective, viewpoint or attitude about a particular topic. In relation to Q-methodology, subjectivity is a behaviour or activity relative to its impact upon the immediate environment (Watts & Stenner, 2012). In a Q-methodology study the immediate environment

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[3] These usually take the form of written statements but some Q-methodological studies have used different mediums such as pictures (for example, Robinson et al. (2008) and objects (see for example, Gustafson et al. (2006)).

is the Q-sort where participants are presented with a set of stimulus items which they rank order. As Watts & Stenner (2012) explain:

> *Expressing subjectivity* simply describes an activity in which the Q sorter performs a series of operations on a series of items. This process is described as subjective only insofar as it is *me* (and not you) engaging in the activity and only because the operations must inevitably be conducted from *my* (and not your) first-person viewpoint (p.26)

Also central to the design of Q-methodology studies is the notion that subjectivity is always self-referent. Namely subjectivity is anchored in the person's 'internal' frame of reference and can be observed anytime an individual remarks 'It seems to me...' or 'In my opinion...' (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). The completion of a Q sort requires the participant to decide what is meaningful and significant from their perspective (Coogan & Herrington, 2011). The Q sort identifies what Stephenson called 'psychological significance' - items with a high or positive psychological significance to an individual would be ranked higher than those items with a lower or more negative psychological significance (Watts & Stenner, 2012). However, self-reference also takes into account the view that not only do the items in a completed Q-sort relate to the individual but more precisely they relate to the individual's *current* viewpoint. As Watts & Stenner explain:

> ...the same set of items might be felt and hence show up very differently to another person or to the same person at another time. In doing so, it automatically directs attention toward the self for whom they show up and promotes a focus on self-reference (p.31)

5.1.3 Q-methodology and the logic of abduction

Another fundamental aspect of Q-methodology is that it is integrally related to the logic of abduction through its use of factor analysis. Traditionally, models of science stem from deductive or inductive approaches. Deduction is top-down logic in that it begins with a formal theory and hypothesis which is then tested

through an experiment. The results either verify or falsify the hypothesis. Induction is bottom-up logic in that the development of laws and theories are accomplished through the careful accumulation of observations over a series of experiments.

However Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914) suggested that research can also pursue an explanation or new insight into a phenomenon (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Whereas induction seeks to describe a phenomenon, abduction is a logic for discovery and theory generation (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The researcher works with the data using techniques of analysis (such as factor analysis in Q-methodology or sorting and coding in Grounded Theory) producing a phenomena. The researcher then seeks to develop a theory or hypotheses to explain the phenomena (Bradley, 2007). This theory or hypotheses can then be used as a basis for further research and empirical testing. Thus, abductive methods typically begin with curiosity and exploration about an issue before moving to explanation.

In relation to Q-methodology, abduction begins with the detection of a 'surprisingly empirical fact (namely) the manifest statistical associations between the gathered Q sorts' (Watts & Stenner, 2012 p.40) that are produced through the process of exploratory factor analysis. This is extended to the process of factor interpretation where the, 'surprising empirical fact is provided by the unique pattern or configuration of items in each factor array' (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.40). Therefore, it is within the logic of abduction that Q-methodology can be understood:

> Data is collected (the Q–sorts completed by participants); the
> data is analysed (by use of factor analysis); to produce
> phenomena – the mathematical factors. An explanation (theory)
> of what is going on is developed – the written descriptions of
> the factor viewpoints – and the findings are appraised in terms
> of how well they seem to fit the phenomena (Bradley, 2007
> p.85).

5.1.4 Rationale for Q-methodology and the present study

It is the principles of Social Constructionism that underpin the approach adopted in this study. The notion that, 'human experience, including perception, is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically' and how we make sense of our experiences is a manifestation of these elements (Willig, 2000 p7). Through gaining understanding of a person's point of view, or 'subjectivity', the goal of this research is to elicit the meanings and constructions that individuals have about the world, namely 'engagement with parents in decision making processes'.

Since it is not the aim of this study to verify or falsify a hypothesis traditional quantitative methodologies are not appropriate as a choice of methodology for this current study. Other qualitative data collection methods that could be adopted include questionnaires, interviews or focus groups. However a critique of these methods is the problem of saliency - people tend to remember what is important to them at the time of enquiry. This study is looking at gaining a detailed understanding of a system and then clarifying what is important to the school and parents about this system – not what people can *remember* about the system.

Another critique of other qualitative methods is that the questions used are devised by the researcher. This is a threat to the validity of qualitative research as without the necessary reflexive precautions to reduce this then the findings could be argued to only relate to the participant's perspective on the researcher's questions and not necessarily on the topic being investigated. A final critique is the social desirability effect. In other words, participants are aware that they are under investigation and may consequently modify their responses as a result.

As mentioned above the goal of this study is to elicit a person's point of view or 'subjectivity' on the topic of 'engagement with parents in decision making

processes'. The discussion presented in the preceding parts of this chapter set out the rationale for how Q-methodology 'provides researchers with a systematic and rigorous quantitative means for examining human subjectivity' (McKeown & Thomas, 1988 p.5).

The process of Q-sorting and subsequent factor analysis allows participants' views to be explored and represented in all their complexity. The consequent viewpoints are structured to provide the researcher with a patterned nature of viewpoints which capture all the nuances of the subject. Many other approaches (e.g. semi-structured interviews or questionnaires) reduce the data to general statements which lose the nuanced voices as a result. The 'voice' of all participants is a central tenet of Q-methodology. The process of individual Q-sorts precludes the risk of dominant voices (a risk associated with focus groups) which subsequently overshadows the minority voices:

> 'voice' very often means that those with the sharpest elbows or the loudest voices are able to reshape services to their needs...and that the voice of the poor is all too frequently heard only as a whisper (Coates & Passmore, 2008 p12)

This is one of the principles of Public Value Theory (see 'Review of the Literature'). Public Value Theory seeks for more than a tool used just for market research (i.e. identifying public demands and then 'giving people what they want') but is grounded in the idea that service effectiveness is best defined by responsiveness to refined public preferences (Coates & Passmore, 2008). Q-methodology could be argued to provide refined public preferences within the viewpoints that are produced.

Other advantages to the method adopted with Q-methodology include the ability to keep the researcher's influence on the data to a minimum. This is achieved not only through the use of pilot studies and member checking but also in the nature of using a concourse on the topic of enquiry. Stainton-Rogers (1995) suggest that the start of a Q-study begins with a careful and methodical review of the things people write and say about the topic of enquiry. This produces a

detailed and thorough concourse on the topic from which the Q-set is derived. Consequently the research question cannot be restricted to be 'in the *school staff's opinion* what is a good system of engaging with parents' - as would be the case in a semi-structured interview. Instead the research question explores 'from these statements which are taken from a concourse on what a good system for engaging with parents should be – what do you view a good system for engaging with parents to look like?'

5.2   Procedure of the Q-method

This section provides an account of the procedures undertaken in this present study in relation to devising the Q-set, the selection of participants, data collection and data analysis. In addition consideration will be given to ethical issues pertaining to this study as well as issues of reliability and validity.

5.2.1   Devising the Q-set

Concourse of statements and structuring the Q-set

Concerns about representativeness in a Q-methodology study are related to the representativeness of the Q-set (Bradley, 2007). It is important that all the key issues pertaining to the topic of enquiry appear in the Q-set. The Q-set, 'must be tailored to the requirements of the investigation and to the demands of the research questions it is seeking to answer' (Watts & Stenner, 2012 p.57). Therefore the development of the Q set requires assiduous care and attention.

The Q-set for this study consisted of 35 statements for the participants to map his or her viewpoints on the subject of 'engaging with parents in decision making processes' though the completion of a sorting activity called a Q-sort. The Q-set was selected from an original list of 93 statements drawn from the concourse of ideas and opinions on the topic of public engagement. As Stainton-Rogers (1995) suggests that the initial pool of statements is approximately three times the size of the aimed for set size, the aim had been a

concourse list of 105 statements. However a point of saturation was deemed to have been reached at 93 statements.

The statements were taken from natural sources of oral or written communication. The advantage of using a 'naturalistic' Q-sample is that the statements are more likely to reflect the opinions of the person performing the Q-sort (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Sources for the statements included academic journals (for example, Ice & Hoover-Dempsey, 2010; Irvine, 2005; and Green et al. 2007), government publications (for example, Goodall et al. 2011; Harris & Goodall, 2007; and DfES, 2007) and published literature on engagement with parents (for example, Crozier & Reay, 2005; and Chadwick, 2004).

In order to collect a broad range of opinions then, in addition to using published sources, two semi-structured interviews were carried out with parents. The local authority's Parent Partnership Service was contacted to request if they could recruit two parents whom they felt had had recent experience in engaging with the local authority over decisions relating to their child's special educational needs. The transcripts of the semi-structured interviews were analysed for themes and issues pertaining to the topic area and these were incorporated into the concourse. Appendix A shows the consent form and interviewed structure used.

Stainton-Rogers (1995) suggests that once the concourse of statements has been collected then the next stage is to sift, order and condense to yield a 'representative pool of propositions' – the Q-set. He argues that to ensure the representativeness of the propositions the Q-set should be balanced; appropriate and applicable to the issue; be intelligible and simple; and comprehensive. This process of condensation from the concourse to the smaller Q-set is usually undertaken by the researcher/s. However to help ensure that, 'the language and ideas put forward are those of the public

discourse on the topic, not just the pre-conceived views of the researcher' (Bradley, 2007 p.269) a series of steps for reducing the larger number of statements down to the Q-set was used in this study. The steps undertaken were:

Step 1 – the author individually reads and re-reads the concourse of statements.

Step 2 – Initial sorting and emerging categories were recorded and an initial Q-set comprising of 41 statements was created. This pilot Q–set aimed to represent all the key issues around 'engaging with parents in decision making' and to phrase them in an appropriate way.

Step 3 – The pilot Q-set was used in a pilot study with two parents. The parents were known to the author through casework relating to their children's special educational needs. They were asked to comment on whether the statements were appropriate and applicable to the issue; intelligible and simple; and comprehensive.

Step 4 –In the light of this pilot study the author compiled the final Q-set (see Appendix B).

5.2.2 Completing the Q-sort (data collection)

Brown (2006) describes Q-sorting as requiring:

> '...a person to rank-order a set of stimuli according to an explicit rule
> (condition of instruction), usually from agree (+5) to disagree (-5), with
> scale scores provided to assist the participant in thinking about the
> task' (p.7)

Stainton-Rogers (1995) recommend using a fixed quasi-normal distribution as being more user-friendly whilst retaining the same statistical rigour as full sequential ranking (that is 1 to N ranking). The distribution pattern chosen was 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 5, 4, 3, 2 which provided rating values of -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, +1, +2, +3, +4. (Appendix C shows the Q-sorting grid) The recording sheet also included space on the back to record other information about the participant including role within the school, what involvement they have had with engaging

with parents in decision making processes and any other comments they have about the statements or the topic of enquiry. To maintain confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants a numerical coding system for labelling the Q-sorts was used (for example. 1-01).

The Q-sorts were completed in groups over several sessions according to the availability of the participants. At each session the participants were guided through the activity by the author following a series of steps:

1) Read through each statement in turn. As each statement is read, sort into three piles – 'agree' 'neutral or those that you are not sure about' 'disagree'.

2) Beginning with 'most agree', participants are asked to select the two statements that they most agree are conducive with 'engagement with parents in decision making processes; or the statements that they regard as the most important. These statements are placed in the far left column (+4). The specific order within this column does not matter.

3) Repeat this step for least important and place these statements on the right.

4) Go back to the 'agree' side and ask participants to select the next three statements that they most agree with.

5) Repeat this step for the next three statements that participants most disagree with.

6) Continue with this pattern until all statements have been placed on the distribution grid – remembering that participants can switch the statements around at any point until they are happy that the statements are mapped appropriately to their viewpoint.

7) Once all the statements have been placed on the matrix, record the completed Q-sort on a recording sheet which reproduces the Q-sort distribution.

8) Invite the participants to write any further comments on the back of the recording sheet (or write verbatim the participant's comments if they prefer)

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5.2.3 Selection of Participants

Stainton-Rogers (1995) emphasizes that a crucial and distinctive characteristic of Q-Methodology is the principle of 'finite diversity' - 'that whenever and wherever persons are applied to a sample of elements the principle of limited independent variability holds' (p.180). Yet even though large numbers of participants are not required (a general rule of thumb is between 40 – 60 individuals (Watts & Stenner, 2005) the constitution of the participant group must be considered.

There are two methods of sampling used in Q-methodology – 'Opportunistic sampling' and 'Strategic sampling'. Arguments have been put forward contending the appropriateness of opportunistic sampling in a Q-methodology study (Stainton-Rogers, 1995) but Watts & Stenner (2012) observe that because Q-methodology is an inversion of more traditional R-methodological studies (see discussion in 'Q-methodology' section earlier in Chapter 4) then the participants are no longer the study *sample* (that is now the Q-set) but rather they have become a *variable*. Therefore, 'this observation suggests the pressing need to select a participant group, or P-set, with relative care and consideration' (p.70). 'Strategic sampling' occurs when a variety of locations for the completion of the Q-sets are specifically chosen by the researcher because they best represent the demographic groups most pertinent to the aims of the study (Stainton-Rogers, 1995; Watts & Stenner, 2005).

The literature review sets out the historical and political background to the topic 'schools engaging parents in decision making procedures' as well as a discussion of the factors mediating parental engagement. Within this chapter reference was made to the Lamb Inquiry (DCSF, 2009) which was commissioned to explore how parental confidence in the Special Educational Needs system could be improved. It concluded there was a profound impact on children's progress when schools had effective engagement with parents and one of the foci of the recommendations of the Lamb Inquiry was to develop a stronger voice for parents especially in projects that engaged parents at a more

strategic level. In the light of the findings from the Lamb Inquiry and also the author's own professional experience as Educational Psychologist it was decided this study would focus on parents of children who have Special Educational Needs. Consequently the sampling frame became the adults who work in a Primary Special School who have contact with parents. The local authority that the author worked for at the time of this study had six schools that provided specialist provision within the Primary sector. As this was a large urban and rural local authority there were two provisions for the Special Educational Needs (SEN) categories of:

- significant, severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties;

- complex sensory, physical and medical needs, and severe learning difficulties;

- significant behavioural, social and emotional difficulties.

One provision served the south of the county and one provision to serve the north of the county.

To have a viewpoint on something then experience of the issue is required. To negate the possibility of school staff having a lack of experience of engaging with parents in decision making then a school that has been recognised to engage well with parents was deemed necessary. Previous to the time of the study the author had been the Educational Psychologist linked to one of the Primary Special Schools which had a good reputation for engaging with parents. The school's Ofsted Inspection (2011) highlighted the school's commitment to engaging with parents:

'Parents and carers are fully and sensitively involved in setting their children's individual education plan targets, which guide them in enhancing their children's learning' (P.7)

'The link with parents and carers is excellent. Parents' and carers' views are heard and acted upon and communication through the home-school books is excellent' (p.8)

Of the adults who worked in this Special Primary School and had contact with parents 48 accepted the invitation to complete the Q-sort. Table 5-2 shows the number of participants and their roles held within the school.

Role within school	N
School Business Manager	1
Head teacher	1
Assistant Head teacher	1
Administrator	3
Family Liaison Teacher	1
School nurse	1
Music therapist/teacher	1
School governor	5
Nursery nurse	5
Classroom assistant/learning support assistant	19
Teacher	10
TOTAL	**48**

Table 5-2: Number of participants and their role within the school

5.2.4 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are an intrinsic part of the research process and it is vital that every piece of research has from the very start considered the ethical aspects of the study. Psychological research should realise mutual respect and trust between investigators and participants and at all stages of the research the

participants' rights and dignity should be respected (BPS, 2010). Brinkmann & Kvale (2008) recommend that these issues should be addressed at each stage of the research process from the initial formulation through to the publication of the research. Informed voluntary consent is at the heart of research ethics (McNamee & Bridges, 2002; BPS 2010). In addition to informed voluntary consent are issues pertaining to deception, debriefing, confidentiality and protection from physical and psychological harm (Field & Hole, 2008; BPS, 2010). As Aldridge & Levine (2001) summarise, 'the core of research ethics is due respect for the integrity of people participating in our research' (p.22). Several steps were taken to address ethical issues pertaining to the Q-sort:

- A letter was given to the adults working in school prior to the study taking place with details about the purpose of the activity and the procedure to be employed (informed consent)

- The letter clearly informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and also provided assurance about confidentiality (sensitivity and confidentiality) See Appendix D

- Several opportunities for participants to ask questions and raise queries were given (informed consent)

- Possible consequences of any study with respect to any possible harm as well as expected benefits from participating in the study should be addressed. One possible negative consequence is the concern that through the activity of examining what is 'good engagement with parents in decision making', the participants might question their own skills and practice and/or feel as if they are being judged. To address this, participants were given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study being to explore the *viewpoints* of the participants and that it was not being used as a *tool* to measure 'good engagement with parents' (sensitivity).

- Careful selection of language used (sensitivity)

- A numerical coding system on the recording sheet was used and it was ensured that no identifying factors were written down on the recording sheet (confidentiality)

- Prior to the completed Q-sort being recorded the participants were asked if they were happy with their Q-sort and whether they were happy for it to be recorded and used in the study (informed consent)

- Agreement was sought with the head teacher regarding the ways in which a summary of the findings would be made available to participants, 'so that informed consent comes to fruition as informed outcome' (Aldridge & Levine, 2001 p.22) (informed consent)

5.2.5 Reliability and Validity

There is a view held within the Q-methodology domain that reliability and validity are not issues relevant to Q-methodology studies (Watts & Stenner, 2012) because these are issues that are central concepts to R-methodology:

> An R-methodological scale or instrument is said to be valid if it can successfully measure what it claims to be measuring (Watts & Stenner, 2012 p.51).

Because Q-methodology seeks an individual's point of view repeated measures (that is a participant repeatedly completing the Q-sort) does not prove the reliability of the method but only the participant's viewpoint. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 5.1.2 (Q-methodology for the study of human subjectivity) Q-methodology studies seek an individual's *current* personal viewpoint. Within this assertion is an acknowledgement that an individual's personal viewpoint alters with time and environment and hence it is not possible, or desirable, to repeat measures[4].

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[4] Unless of course it is the aim of the study to explore how participant's viewpoints alter over time or in different environments.

However there are methods used for checking the reliability and validity of results (including triangulation of different data, member checking, use of an external auditor) which can easily be utilised into a Q-methodology study. In relation to this study member checking activities were carried out at two crucial points of the study:

- Pilot study in the development of the Q-set

- Debriefing session following the completion of the initial interpretation of the factors.

Studies evolving from the epistemology of social constructionism admit that the studies cannot be generalised outside of the sample as any other individual will bring a whole new set of beliefs, attitudes, experiences etc. which will necessarily affect their perception of the phenomena. It is acknowledged that this study has taken place within a single school in a local authority in the English Midlands. It is also acknowledged that this study cannot be generalised temporally; in other words there will only be 'here and now' viewpoints which may not be constant over time.

However, Elliot et al (1999) propose a set of guidelines pertaining to reducing threats to external validity of a study which are pertinent to this current study. These guidelines include the appropriateness of the study design (i.e. 'fit for purpose'); owning one's perspective (i.e. answering questions of personal and epistemological reflexivity); situating the sample (i.e. size of sample, background and history of participants); ethics procedure (i.e. how informed consent was obtained and confidentiality issues); credibility checks (i.e. member checking), auditability (i.e. the reasoning process of the researcher in relation to making decisions, identifying categories and the development of themes etc.). These guidelines facilitate a process of reflexivity and the explicitness of the guidelines makes possible the replication of the study by another researcher. In all of these aspects the use of the above principles has been adopted

throughout this study and therefore provides this research with analytical credibility.

5.2.6 Procedures for Data Analysis

Q-methodology analyses participants' whole Q-sorts using factor analysis to detect shared perspectives and identify distinct 'points of view' within the overall sample. Factor analysis is employed as a means of reducing and simplifying the data. Q-methodology employs a by-person correlation and factor procedure by use of factor extraction, rotation and estimation. A Freeware statistical software designed specifically for Q-method studies (PQMethod version 2.11 (Schmolck, 2002) was used to complete the analysis of the data (that is the completed Q-sorts).

The data were subjected to Centroid analysis followed by Varimax rotation. Centroid analysis identifies patterns of similarity between the Q-sort configurations thus extracting centroids, or factors, which are Q-sort configurations with common or shared meaning (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Centroid analysis is the oldest of the factor techniques (McKeown & Thomas, 1988) and is generally acknowledged as the preferred method of factor extraction in Q studies (Watt & Stenner, 2005).

Once the centroids, or factors, have been extracted then a process of calculating to what degree the variables[5] load onto these factors is completed (Field, 2009). This process is called factor rotation and it, 'involves the physical movement or rotation of the factors, and their viewpoints, about a central axis point' (Watts & Stenner, 2012 p. 122). There are several methods of factor rotation (for example, varimax, quartimax and equamax) however PQMethod offers two methods, by-hand rotation or the automatic varimax procedure. By-

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[5] As discussed in chapter 5.1.1 the variables in a Q-method study are the participants and thus are by-person factors.

hand rotation involves the researcher rotating the factors manually and ultimately deciding where each factor should be positioned. This method of rotation tends to be adopted when the researcher has some a priori theory or hypothesis; or due to the researcher's own substantive knowledge and/or observations of the Q-sort data (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The advantages of by-hand rotation is that is can more accurately reflect the reality of a particular situation specifically if the researcher is taking an openly deductive approach to analysis and there is an evident interest in marginalised or minority viewpoints (Watts & Stenner, 2012). However this method is criticised for being subjective and unreliable in that, 'does it really reflect the reality of that particular situation, or might it simply reflect the researcher's own understanding of the situation?' (Watts & Stenner, 2012 p.123).

The second method offered by PQMethod is the automatic varimax procedure where the factors are positioned according to statistical criteria and so that they account for the maximum amount of study variance (Field, 2009; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Venables et al (2009, p.1094) summarise the advantages of varimax rotation:

- It maximises the variance explained
- Prioritises the influence of the participant group on the factor structure
- Attempts to load a small number of cases highly onto each factor thereby enhancing the interpretability of the results

In addition it is seen as objective and reliable and may be a preferable choice when using an inductive analytic strategy (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

PQMethod 2.11 converts the rating score (that is -4, -3, etc. through to +3, +4) to z-scores which state the position of each score in relation to the mean in standard deviation units (Kranzler, 2003). PQMethod uses an algorithm to identify Q-sorts which load significantly ($p > 0.05$) on one factor only (known as a 'Defining Sort'). The defining sorts are flagged by PQMethod 2.11 with an X. To demonstrate the information that is produced by PQMethod, Figure 5-1 shows

an extract taken from an illustrative factor matrix that was produced by PQMethod. The Q-sorts are listed down the left hand side and the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 listed across the top are the factors. As can be seen Q-sort 1-01 significantly loads on factor 3 with a weighting of 0.659; Q-sort 2-02 significantly loads on factor 4 with a weighting of 0.4519; whilst Q-sort 3-03 does not significantly load on any factor and therefore is not a defining sort in this factor matrix solution.

```
          Factors


QSORT             1          2          3          4          5


 1  01         0.1909    -0.0039    0.6591X    0.1378     0.1334

 2  02         0.1556     0.2814    0.1497     0.4519X    0.2385

 3  03         0.2857     0.3790    0.2361     0.1366     0.4407
```

Figure 5-1: Excerpt from a 5-factor matrix solution with X indicating a defining sort

The Factor Solution

It is important to note that no factor extracted by PQMethod will exactly represent any of the participants' views but what is produced is an idealised or prototypical Q-sort or viewpoint. By looking at a participant's loading on a factor it is possible to ascertain the degree to which each participant correlates with the factor. Table 5-3 shows the unrotated factor matrix with the eigenvalues for each factor (the eigenvalue being the sum of the loadings on a factor).

Table 5-3: The unrotated factor matrix produced from a centroid analysis

Factors

SORTS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 01	0.817	-0.2936	0.0972	0.1630	0.0597	-0.0008	0.1849
2 02	0.6785	-0.0560	0.1067	0.3207	0.0632	0.4128	0.1411
3 03	0.7382	0.0917	-0.1833	0.1090	0.0220	-0.1266	-0.1372
4 04	0.6977	0.1847	-0.0862	0.3242	0.0721	0.0490	0.1063
5 05	0.8194	-0.2689	-0.0615	0.1190	0.0402	-0.1277	-0.0984
6 06	0.5103	0.0699	0.2959	0.2318	0.0786	0.3895	0.2721
7 07	0.6376	0.1264	0.1921	-0.0544	0.0274	0.4148	-0.2602
8 08	0.8460	0.1590	0.1072	0.2187	0.0465	-0.1258	-0.0515
9 09	0.6658	-0.0480	0.0558	0.0885	0.0095	0.1043	0.2964
10 10	0.7537	0.0173	0.0393	0.0991	0.0090	-0.2180	0.0745
11 11	0.5108	0.0053	-0.3097	-0.1894	0.0432	-0.1120	0.2368
12 12	0.6703	0.1283	0.1616	-0.2155	0.0362	0.0014	0.1036
13 13	0.5234	0.4007	-0.3466	-0.2243	0.1327	-0.0624	0.0048
14 14	0.8153	-0.0993	0.0001	0.1969	0.0265	0.1625	-0.2128
15 15	0.7910	-0.1927	0.0512	-0.2938	0.0464	0.0316	0.0262
16 16	0.7334	0.1380	-0.1294	0.0278	0.0136	0.0818	0.0624
17 17	0.6395	-0.2787	-0.0019	0.0743	0.0371	0.0156	-0.1012
18 18	0.7122	0.3893	-0.1320	0.2427	0.1058	0.0178	-0.1046
19 19	0.8030	-0.0658	0.0813	0.2065	0.0311	-0.2794	0.0989
20 20	0.8006	-0.3527	-0.0848	-0.0989	0.0552	0.1255	-0.2669
21 21	0.6076	0.3339	-0.1593	0.0508	0.0589	0.1189	0.1016
22 22	0.6993	-0.2802	-0.2419	-0.0071	0.0521	-0.1779	0.1636
23 23	0.2742	0.2299	0.4289	-0.1760	0.1255	-0.0050	-0.2863
24 24	0.7623	-0.0205	0.0059	-0.1030	0.0018	-0.1454	0.2214
25 25	0.8124	-0.0370	-0.0268	0.2301	0.0298	-0.2542	0.0432
26 26	0.7164	0.0269	-0.3378	0.2976	0.0897	0.0813	0.1027
27 27	0.7618	0.0104	-0.0854	-0.0463	0.0007	-0.1690	-0.0691
28 28	0.7950	0.1789	0.0542	0.1962	0.0395	-0.1092	-0.0952
29 29	0.6181	0.3482	0.0709	-0.1265	0.0607	0.0934	-0.1662
30 30	0.6235	0.3771	-0.0681	-0.1865	0.0728	-0.0316	-0.0006
31 31	0.7975	-0.0033	-0.1285	-0.0540	0.0036	0.1377	0.1878
32 32	0.7479	0.2813	-0.1754	-0.2903	0.0722	-0.0959	0.2225
33 33	0.6632	-0.0540	0.3340	-0.1310	0.0615	0.1103	0.2798
34 33	0.7149	0.1248	0.0380	-0.2243	0.0234	-0.1878	0.0185
35 35	0.8392	-0.1936	0.0127	0.0322	0.0174	-0.1359	-0.2361
36 36	0.7454	0.1984	0.2956	-0.2331	0.0803	-0.0404	0.1646
37 37	0.6194	-0.4659	0.0710	-0.2147	0.1125	0.0130	-0.1254
38 38	0.7316	0.3415	0.0634	0.1039	0.0628	0.0841	-0.1305
39 39	0.7421	-0.2579	-0.0660	-0.2585	0.0493	0.2395	0.0499
40 40	0.7826	-0.1292	0.2469	-0.2475	0.0588	-0.0615	0.0062

41 41	0.7415	-0.0887	0.0214	-0.0532	0.0035	-0.2746	-0.1706
42 42	0.5990	0.0562	0.1985	-0.1556	0.0290	0.0895	0.1423
43 43	0.6562	-0.0912	-0.2974	-0.1229	0.0366	0.0197	-0.3080
44 44	0.7563	-0.4154	-0.2179	0.0091	0.0901	0.0108	-0.0670
45 45	0.7309	-0.0211	-0.0520	-0.0979	0.0012	0.0949	-0.2009
46 46	0.7359	0.1056	0.0385	0.1773	0.0254	-0.1647	-0.3212
47 47	0.6724	-0.3113	0.2737	0.1559	0.0972	-0.1316	0.0443
48 48	0.7654	-0.3056	-0.2089	0.0596	0.0565	0.1689	0.0922
Eigenvalues 24.4237	2.3800	1.5224	1.5413	0.1683	1.2664	1.3569
% expl.Var. 51	5	3	3	0	3	3

There are three criteria recommended to be used in Q-method studies when deciding how many factors to retain (Watts & Stenner, 2012). One method is Cattell's scree test in which a graph is plotted of the eigenvalue (Y-axis) against the factor with which it is associated (X-axis) (Field, 2009). The number of factors to retain is indicated by the point of inflexion of the curve, or in other words at which point the line changes slope (Watts & Stenner, 2012). It is the factors to the left of the point of inflexion which are retained (Field, 2009).

However, although scree plots are useful it is recommended that factor selection is not based on this criterion alone (Field, 2009; Watts & Stenner, 2012). It is recommended that Kaiser's criterion of retaining all factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 should also be considered alongside the scree test (Field, 2009; Watts & Stenner, 2012). Kaiser's criterion is based on the idea that the eigenvalues represent the amount of variation explained by a factor and that an eigenvalue of 1 represents a substantial amount of variation (Field, 2009). By using both methods of factor retention the researcher is more able to attest that the final set of factors account for as much of the variability as possible (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

A third retention criterion used is that at least 2 Q-sorts load significantly and uniquely on each factor (Watts & Stenner, 2005). The reasoning for this is that any less than 2 significant loadings is an individual viewpoint and not a shared perspective. A principal aim of the outcome from the data analysis is to

represent the viewpoints of as many of the participants as possible so that marginal or minority viewpoints are not lost in the factor extraction process.

Ultimately in Q-method studies an element of interpretative judgement is required in how many factors are chosen for the rotated solution based on what is judged to be the most appropriate and theoretically informative (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Thus, even if one of the factors had just 2 significant loadings and could be postulated to be a minority viewpoint, it is argued that it should be included because it was deemed appropriate and theoretically informative. Yet Brown (1980) warns against extracting too many factors which can be meaningless or spurious. In contrast to Watts & Stenner (2005), Bradley (2007) suggests exploring several rotated factor solutions to determine which factor solution allows most participants to have their views represented – that is which solution has the most number of significant loadings even though this may reduce the number of factors in the solution.

5.2.7 Member checking the results of the Q-sort

Following the analysis of the results, the participants were invited back to attend a debriefing session. The aim was to not only address ethical considerations but to also allow for an opportunity for member checking which thus reduces threats to the validity of this study (Robson, 2002). Participants were given a document detailing how the data was analysed and the results of the analysis (see Appendix E). Participants were invited to ask any questions as the document was read aloud. Then each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire reflecting on the viewpoint that their sort had loaded significantly onto[6]. The questionnaire asked the following questions:

---

[6] Due to the numerical coding system it was possible to relate each completed Q-sort to the individual participant.

- On a scale of 0-10 (with 0 being 'I don't agree at all' to 10 being 'I agree completely') how far do you agree with the interpretation of the factors?
- Which points do you most agree with?
- Which points do you most disagree with?
- Do you think the title adequately summarises the viewpoint? If not, do you have any other suggestions?
- Any other comments about the interpretation of this factor?

6   Results

This chapter presents the results from the factor analysis undertaken using the steps described in the 'procedures for data analysis' section.

6.1   Q-Sort

The PQMethod 2.11 statistical software was used as a means of completing a by-person correlation and factor procedure. A total of 48 Q-sorts were entered into the programme. To decide how many factors to retain, initially a scree plot was completed (shown in Figure 6-1).
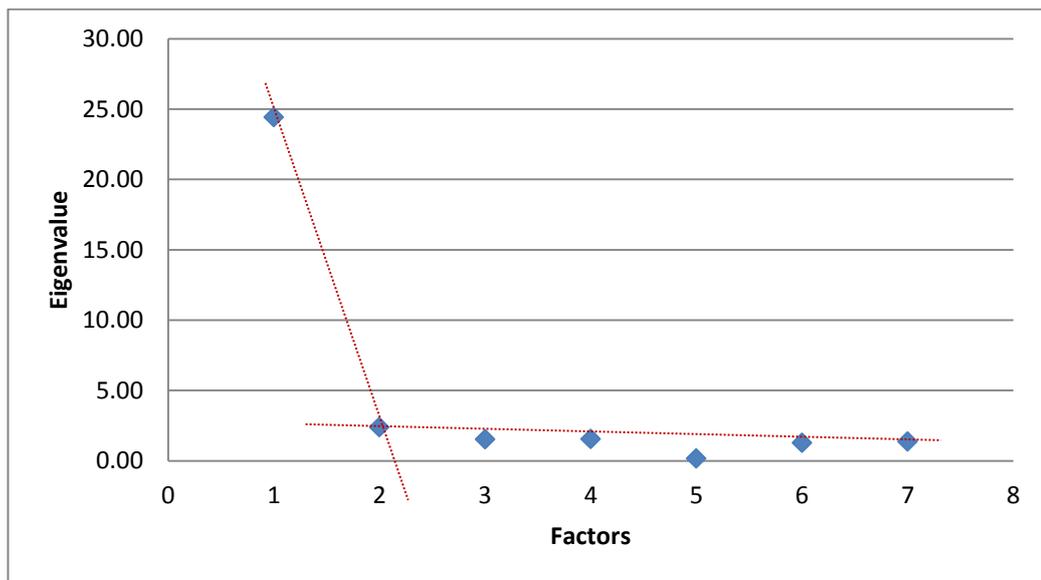
Figure 6-1: Scree test for the study data showing seven factors extracted using centroid analysis

The point of inflexion occurred at the second factor which suggests that only one factor is retained. However the Scree test did not reveal how many of the participants' viewpoints were represented in this one factor. Yet, because a Q-study factor solution should provide a representation of as many of the participants' viewpoints as possible it was deemed apposite to also apply Kaiser's criterion where factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1 are retained in

the factor solution. Table 6-1 shows the eigenvalue and amount of variance for each factor. In contrast to the Scree test, Kaiser's criterion suggested that 6 factors should be retained.

Factor	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Eigenvalues	24.4237	2.3800	1.5224	1.5412	0.1683	1.2664	1.3569
Variance (%)	50.88	4.96	3.17	3.21	0.35	2.64	2.83

Table 6-1: The eigenvalues for each factor produced from a centroid analysis

Subsequently, varimax rotation was used. Different varimax rotated solutions were computed with a factor solution of 6, 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1. The number of defining sorts (that is, the number of Q-sorts that load significantly on a given factor) was identified using automatic flagging. A significant factor loading at the 0.01 level can be calculated using the following equation (Brown, 1980, p.222-223):

Significant factor loading = 2.58 x (1÷√no. of items in Q set)

= 2.58 x (1÷√48)

= 2.58 x (1÷ 6.9282)

=2.58 x 0.1443

=0.3723 (rounded up to ±0.38)

Thus any Q-sort with a single rotated factor loading in excess of 0.38 might therefore be said to be, 'closely approximate, exemplify or define the viewpoint of a particular factor (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p.130). Table 6-2 shows the number of defining sorts for the different varimax rotated solutions.

Factor Solution	6-factors	5-factors	4-factors	3-factors	2-factors	1-factor
No. of defining sorts	22	29	29	33	48	32

Table 6-2: The number of defining sorts in each factor solution calculated using varimax rotation

Both Bradley (2007) and Watts & Stenner (2012) argue for including as many of the participants in the factor solution. This not only allows all participants' viewpoints to be included in the final factor solution but also increased the reliability and reduces the amount of error the solutions contains:

> The reliability of your factor solution, will most likely reduce and the amount of error the solutions contain will increase as the number of defining Q-sorts drops (Watts & Stenner, 2012 p.131)

Therefore, as a 2-factor solution includes all of the participants' viewpoints it was considered to be the most appropriate and theoretically acceptable.

6.1.1 Factor arrays

Table 6-1 shows the rotated factor matrix of a 2-factor solution. The left-hand column lists the participants (1-001 etc.) and the next two columns represent the factors. The defining sorts are indicated with an X.

Table 6-3: The rotated factor matrix of a 2-factor solution with X indicating a defining sort

Factors

QSORT	1	2
1 01	0.8008X	0.3354
2 02	0.5381X	0.4171
3 03	0.4824	0.5663X
4 04	0.3897	0.6075X
5 05	0.7858X	0.3553

6 06	0.3290	0.3962X
7 07	0.3848	0.5239X
8 08	0.5164	0.6887X
9 09	0.5234X	0.4144
10 10	0.5440X	0.5219
11 11	0.3731X	0.3489
12 12	0.4076	0.5474X
13 13	0.1153	0.6490X
14 14	0.6683X	0.4776
15 15	0.7134X	0.3922
16 16	0.4475	0.5972X
17 17	0.6598X	0.2265
18 18	0.2622	0.7681X
19 19	0.6365X	0.4939
20 20	0.8286X	0.2808
21 21	0.2225	0.6566X
22 22	0.7049X	0.2658
23 23	0.0468	0.3547X
24 24	0.5760X	0.4998
25 25	0.6241X	0.5215
26 26	0.5101X	0.5038
27 27	0.5547X	0.5222
28 28	0.4654	0.6689X
29 29	0.2206	0.6743X
30 30	0.2050	0.6992X
31 31	0.5903X	0.5363
32 32	0.3614	0.7126X
33 33	0.5255X	0.4081
34 33	0.4428	0.5749X
35 35	0.7496X	0.4241
36 36	0.4155	0.6498X
37 37	0.7714X	0.0749
38 38	0.3088	0.7460X
39 39	0.7214X	0.3111
40 40	0.6644X	0.4334
41 41	0.6066X	0.4355
42 42	0.4037	0.4460X
43 43	0.5455X	0.3760
44 44	0.8383X	0.2046
45 45	0.5532X	0.4781
46 46	0.4713	0.5749X
47 47	0.7061X	0.2246
48 48	0.7708X	0.2917
Variance (%)	31	25

PQMethod also produced 'factor arrays' which describe factor by factor what participants in concurrence with that viewpoint think about the issue of 'engaging with parents in decision making processes'. These tables also show the Q-sort rank value for each statement.

Table 6-3 shows the factor arrays for Factor 1.

Table 6-4 shows the factor arrays for Factor 2.

Table 6-4: Factor arrays for Factor 1

No.	Statement	Z score	Q-sort value
17	I believe that parents being involved in decision making processes should be the norm and be part of the culture.	1.499	4
3	I believe there should be a good level of 2-way communication which finds out about and builds on parents' knowledge and understanding.	1.285	4
1	Schools engaging with parents should be an opportunity for learning and reflection to improve service delivery and practice.	1.278	3
11	I believe the purpose of engagement is to work in partnership with parent to solve problems together, drawing in on each other's expertise.	1.202	3
21	It is important that parents should never be patronised and should be given the same professional respect and courtesy as any other professional	1.186	3
34	It is important that parents have someone who is easily accessible who can guide and reassure them through the process.	0.980	2
18	The school should empower parents and help them feel valued.	0.976	2
23	It is important that parents are not being made to feel that they are just a parent in a room full of professionals.	0.805	2
5	It is important that things are said in an understandable way and adapted to different audiences.	0.791	2
2	A good system of engagement has established a shared expectation of what is going to happen and the timescale for it happening.	0.652	1
6	Parents should be informed as to what is going on by being given balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem and what opportunities or solutions there are.	0.613	1
20	It is important that parents are not made to feel they are being a nuisance for phoning up and asking questions.	0.499	1
24	A good system of involving parents in decision making takes into account social and ethical issues	0.492	1
4	It is important to have lots of opportunities where parents are given information	0.472	1

	and are also being asked their opinion.		
7	There should be enough time given to parents to process and understand the information required.	0.434	0
35	I believe that the school needs to acknowledge parents' needs (i.e. transport and/or childcare issues) when expecting parents to engage with them.	0.344	0
25	It is my view that the knowledge and experiences that parents have is a valuable quality in the school's decision making process.	0.327	0
26	It is my view that parents can make a very valuable contribution to the school's decision making processes because they are looking at how to help children through a whole lifetime.	0.295	0
19	It is important that everyone has a clear understanding of everyone's roles, skills and attributes.	0.088	0
15	I think parents like being given the time to say their opinions and being asked questions.	0.054	0
29	Parents need to be aware of the system (i.e. the procedures, the time things take and the meaning of jargon used) if they want to be involved with the school's decision making.	0.015	0
31	It is my view that parents' opinions should be valued and acted upon.	-0.108	-1
32	It is important that training is provided to parents so that they are better able to understand the systems and processes of the school.	-0.220	-1
12	I believe that engaging with parents is an information gathering exercise designed to improve the quality of service delivery.	-0.322	-1
33	It is important to have written information which someone can talk through with parents first.	-0.363	-1
22	Parents' opinions should carry the same weight as everyone else.	-0.501	-1
9	I believe that parents should not only be involved in the decision making processes but also in the delivery of training because of the experience they have.	-0.609	-2
30	I believe it is important to recognise and reward parental engagement.	-0.678	-2
10	I believe that successful involvement of parents in decision making should be celebrated with prizes.	-1.316	-2
16	It is not possible to have agreement between parents and school because it is very difficult to represent diverse views whilst also trying to reach decisions about complex or controversial issues.	-1.561	-2
14	I believe that if parents are part of the school's decision making then the school will **not** be able to deliver services objectively.	-1.602	-3
28	I believe that parents should not be part of the school's decision making processes because it is always the same sort of pushy parents and there is no voice for the marginalised.	-1.644	-3
8	I believe the final decision making should be in the hands of the parents and the school should implement what the parents decide.	-1.778	-3

13	In my opinion parents should not be part of the school's decision making process because it may add to the time that the process may take.	-1.790	-4
27	It is my opinion that parents cannot make a valuable contribution to the school's decision making processes because they are emotionally attached to their children.	-1.796	-4

Table 6-5: Factor arrays for Factor 2

No.	Statement	Z score	Q-sort value
20	It is important that parents are not made to feel they are being a nuisance for phoning up and asking questions.	1.348	4
31	It is my view that parents' opinions should be valued and acted upon.	1.277	4
3	I believe there should be a good level of 2-way communication which finds out about and builds on parents' knowledge and understanding	1.236	3
4	It is important to have lots of opportunities where parents are given information and are also being asked their opinion.	1.025	3
12	I believe that engaging with parents is an information gathering exercise designed to improve the quality of service delivery.	1.009	3
5	It is important that things are said in an understandable way and adapted to different audiences.	0.917	2
26	It is my view that parents can make a very valuable contribution to the school's decision making processes because they are looking at how to help children through a whole lifetime.	0.890	2
25	It is my view that the knowledge and experiences that parents have is a valuable quality in the school's decision making process.	0.880	2
11	I believe the purpose of engagement is to work in partnership with parents to solve problems together, drawing in on each other's expertise.	0.862	2
15	I think parents like being given the time to say their opinions and being asked questions.	0.645	1
6	Parents should be informed as to what is going on by being given balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem and what opportunities or solutions there are.	0.622	1
23	It is important that parents are not being made to feel that they are just a parent in a room full of professionals.	0.527	1
19	It is important that everyone has a clear understanding of everyone's roles, skills and attributes.	0.519	1
34	It is important that parents have someone who is easily accessible who can guide and reassure them through the process.	0.506	1

1	Schools engaging with parents should be an opportunity for learning and reflection to improve service delivery and practice.	0.500	0
7	There should be enough time given to parents to process and understand the information required.	0.339	0
21	It is important that parents should never be patronised and should be given the same professional respect and courtesy as any other professional.	0.309	0
32	It is important that training is provided to parents so that they are better able to understand the systems and processes of the school.	0.209	0
33	It is important to have written information which someone can talk through with parents first.	0.148	0
24	A good system of involving parents in decision making takes into account social and ethical issues.	0.147	0
18	The school should empower parents and help them feel valued.	0.068	0
2	A good system of engagement has established a shared expectation of what is going to happen and the timescale for it happening.	-0.042	-1
35	I believe that the school needs to acknowledge parents' needs (i.e. transport and/or childcare issues) when expecting parents to engage with them.	-0.103	-1
22	Parents' opinions should carry the same weight as everyone else.	-0.182	-1
29	Parents need to be aware of the system (i.e. the procedures, the time things take and the meaning of jargon used) if they want to be involved with the school's decision making.	-0.188	-1
17	I believe that parents being involved in decision making processes should be the norm and be part of the culture.	-0.389	-1
30	I believe it is important to recognise and reward parental engagement.	-0.452	-2
9	I believe that parents should not only be involved in the decision making processes but also in the delivery of training because of the experience they have.	-0.904	-2
10	I believe that successful involvement of parents in decision making should be celebrated with awards and prizes.	-1.098	-2
16	It is not possible to have agreement between parents and school because it is very difficult to represent diverse views whilst also trying to reach decisions about complex or controversial issues.	-1.690	-2
8	I believe the final decision making should be in the hands of the parents and the school should implement what the parents decide.	-1.711	-3
14	I believe that if parents are part of the school's decision making then the school will **not** be able to deliver services objectively.	-1.758	-3
27	It is my opinion that parents cannot make a valuable contribution to the school's decision making processes because they are emotionally attached to their children.	-1.771	-3
28	I believe that parents should not be part of the school's decision making processes because it's always the same sort of pushy parents and there is no voice for the marginalised.	-1.869	-4

13	In my opinion parents should not be part of the school's decision making process because it may add to the time that the process may take.	-1.909	-4

6.1.2 Descending array of differences between factors

The descending array of differences between factors offers a comparison of the differences between each of the factors. PQMethod 2.11 calculates the differences based on z-scores and tabulates this data from those statements that were not agreed upon to those that were least agreed upon.

Table 6-5 shows the descending array of differences between Factor 1 and Factor 2.

Table 6-6: The descending array of differences between Factor 1 and Factor 2

No	Statement	Factor 1 (Z score)	Factor 2 (Z score)	Difference
17	I believe that parents being involved in decision making processes should be the norm and be part of the culture.	1.499	-0.389	1.888
18	The school should empower parents and help them feel valued.	0.976	0.068	0.907
21	It is important that parents should never be patronised and should be given the same professional respect and courtesy as any other professional	1.186	0.309	0.877
1	Schools engaging with parents should be an opportunity for learning and reflection to improve service delivery and practice.	1.278	0.500	0.778
2	A good system of engagement has established a shared expectation of what is going to happen and the timescale for it happening.	0.652	-0.042	0.694
34	It is important that parents have someone who is easily accessible who can guide and reassure them through the process.	0.980	0.506	0.474
35	I believe that the school needs to acknowledge parents' needs (i.e. transport and/or childcare issues) when expecting parents to engage with them.	0.344	-0.103	0.447

24	A good system of involving parents in decision making takes into account social and ethical issues	0.492	0.147	0.344
11	I believe the purpose of engagement is to work in partnership with parent to solve problems together, drawing in on each other's expertise.	1.202	0.862	0.340
9	I believe that parents should not only be involved in the decision making processes but also in the delivery of training because of the experience they have.	-0.609	-0.904	0.295
23	It is important that parents are not being made to feel that they are just a parent in a room full of professionals.	0.805	0.527	0.278
28	I believe that parents should not be part of the school's decision making processes because it is always the same sort of pushy parents and there is no voice for the marginalised.	-1.644	-1.869	0.225
29	Parents need to be aware of the system (i.e. the procedures, the time things take and the meaning of jargon used) if they want to be involved with the school's decision making.	0.015	-0.188	0.203
14	I believe that if parents are part of the school's decision making then the school will **not** be able to deliver services objectively.	-1.602	-1.758	0.155
16	It is not possible to have agreement between parents and school because it is very difficult to represent diverse views whilst also trying to reach decisions about complex or controversial issues.	-1.561	-1.690	0.129
13	In my opinion parents should not be part of the school's decision making process because it may add to the time that the process may take.	-1.790	-1.909	0.119
7	There should be enough time given to parents to process and understand the information required.	0.434	0.339	0.094
3	I believe there should be a good level of 2-way communication which finds out about and builds on parents' knowledge and understanding.	1.285	1.236	0.048
6	Parents should be informed as to what is going on by being given balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem and what opportunities or solutions there are.	0.613	0.622	-0.010
27	It is my opinion that parents cannot make a valuable contribution to the school's decision making processes because they are emotionally attached to their children.	-1.796	-1.771	-0.025

8	I believe the final decision making should be in the hands of the parents and the school should implement what the parents decide.	-1.778	-1.711	-0.067
5	It is important that things are said in an understandable way and adapted to different audiences.	0.791	0.917	-0.127
10	I believe that successful involvement of parents in decision making should be celebrated with prizes.	-1.316	-1.098	-0.219
30	I believe it is important to recognise and reward parental engagement.	-0.678	-0.452	-0.226
22	Parents' opinions should carry the same weight as everyone else.	-0.501	-0.182	-0.318
19	It is important that everyone has a clear understanding of everyone's roles, skills and attributes.	0.088	0.519	-0.431
32	It is important that training is provided to parents so that they are better able to understand the systems and processes of the school.	-0.220	0.290	-0.510
33	It is important to have written information which someone can talk through with parents first.	-0.363	0.148	-0.511
25	It is my view that the knowledge and experiences that parents have is a valuable quality in the school's decision making process.	0.327	0.880	-0.552
4	It is important to have lots of opportunities where parents are given information and are also being asked their opinion.	0.472	1.025	-0.553
15	I think parents like being given the time to say their opinions and being asked questions.	0.054	0.645	-0.590
26	It is my view that parents can make a very valuable contribution to the school's decision making processes because they are looking at how to help children through a whole lifetime.	0.295	0.890	-0.595
20	It is important that parents are not made to feel they are being a nuisance for phoning up and asking questions.	0.499	1.348	-0.849
12	I believe that engaging with parents is an information gathering exercise designed to improve the quality of service delivery.	-0.322	1.009	-1.331
31	It is my view that parents' opinions should be valued and acted upon.	-0.108	1.277	-1.385

6.1.3   Distinguishing statements and consensus statements

PQMethod 2.11 also produces the distinguishing statements for each factor and consensus statements. Distinguishing statements are, 'those statements upon which that viewpoint has a significantly different outlook from the other viewpoints' (Bradley (2007) p.156). PQMethod achieves this by comparing the z-scores for each Q-sort to determine those statements that are placed in significantly different locations in the opinion continuum for any two factors (McKeown & Thomas, 1988).

Table 6-6 shows the distinguishing statements between the two factors.

Table 6-7: Distinguishing statements between the two factors

(P<0.05; Asterisk (*) indicates significance at P<0.01)

No	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2	
		Rank	Z score	Rank	Z score
17	I believe that parents being involved in decision making processes should be the norm and be part of the culture.	4	1.50*	-1	-0.39
1	Schools engaging with parents should be an opportunity for learning and reflection to improve service delivery and practice.	3	1.28*	0	0.50
11	I believe the purpose of engagement is to work in partnership with parents to solve problems together, drawing in on each other's expertise.	3	1.20	2	0.86
21	It is important that parents should never be patronised and be given then same professional respect and courtesy as any other professional.	3	1.20	2	0.86
34	It is important that parents have someone who is easily accessible who can guide and reassure them through the process.	2	0.98*	1	0.51
18	The school should empower parents and help them to feel valued.	2	0.98*	0	0.07
2	A good system of engagement has established a shared expectation of what is going to happen and the timescale for it happening.	1	0.65*	-1	-0.04

20	It is important that parents are not made to feel they are being a nuisance for phoning up and asking questions.	1	0.50*	4	1.35
24	A good system of involving parents in decision making takes into account social and ethical issues.	1	0.49	0	0.15
4	It is important to have lots of opportunities where parents are given information and are also being asked their opinion.	1	0.47*	3	1.03
35	I believe that the school needs to acknowledge parents' needs (i.e. transport and/or childcare issues) when expecting parents to engage with them.	1	0.34*	-1	-0.10
25	It is my view that the knowledge and experiences that parents have is a valuable quality in the school's decision making process.	0	0.33*	2	0.88
26	It is my view that parents can make a very valuable contribution to the school's decision making processes because they are looking at how to help children through a whole lifetime.	0	0.29*	2	0.89
19	It is important that everyone has a clear understanding of everyone's roles, skills and attributes.	0	0.09*	1	0.52
15	I think parents like being given the time to say their opinions and being asked questions.	0	0.05*	1	0.64
31	It is my view that parents' opinions should be valued and acted upon.	-1	-0.11*	4	1.28
32	It is important that training is provided to parents so that they are better able to understand the systems and processes of the school.	-1	-0.22*	0	0.29
12	I believe that engaging with parents is an information gathering exercise designed to improve the quality of service delivery.	-1	-0.32*	3	1.01
33	It is important to have written information which someone can talk through with parents first.	-1	-0.36*	0	0.15
22	Parents' opinions should carry the same weight as everyone else.	-1	-0.50	-1	-0.18
9	I believe that parents should not only be involved in the decision making processes but also in the delivery of training because of the experience they have.	-2	-0.61	-2	-0.90

Likewise consensus statements are those that do not distinguish between any pair of factors and thus are those statements upon which one viewpoint has a significantly similar outlook to the other viewpoints.

Table 6-7 shows the consensus statements.

Table 6-8: Consensus statements (those statements that do not distinguish between factors)

(P<0.05; Asterisk (*) indicates significance at P<0.01)

No	Statement	Factor 1		Factor 2	
		Rank	Z Score	Rank	Z score
3*	I believe there should be a good level of 2-way communication which finds out about and builds on parents' knowledge and understanding	4	1.28	3	1.24
5*	It is important that things are said in an understandable way and adapted to different audiences	2	0.79	2	0.92
6*	Parents should be informed as to what is going on by being given balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem and what opportunities or solutions there are.	1	0.61	1	0.62
7*	There should be enough time given to parents to process and understand the information required.	0	0.43	0	0.34
8*	I believe the final decision making should be in the hands of the parents and the school should implement what the parents decide.	-3	-1.78	-3	-1.71
9	I believe that parents should not only be involved in the decision making processes but also in the delivery of training because of the experience they have.	-2	-0.61	-2	-0.90
10*	I believe that successful involvement of parents in decision making should be celebrated with awards and prizes.	-2	-1.31	-2	-1.10
11	I believe the purpose of engagement is to work in partnership with parents to solve problems together, drawing in on each other's	3	1.20	2	0.86

	expertise.				
13*	In my opinion parents should not be part of the school's decision making processes because it may add to the time that the process may take.	-4	-1.79	-4	-1.91
14*	I believe that if parents are part of the school's decision making then the school will **not** be able to deliver services objectively.	-3	-1.60	-3	-1.76
16*	It is not possible to have agreement between parents and school because it is very difficult to represent diverse views whilst also trying to reach decisions about complex or controversial issues.	-2	-1.56	-2	-1.69
22	Parents' opinions should carry the same weight as everyone else.	-1	-0.50	-1	-0.18
23*	It is important that parents are not being made to feel that they are just a parent in a room full of professionals.	2	0.81	1	0.53
24	A good system of involving parents in decision making takes into account social and ethical issues.	1	0.49	0	0.15
27*	It is my opinion that parents cannot make a valuable contribution to the school's decision making processes because they are emotionally attached to their children.	-4	-1.80	-3	-1.77
28*	I believe that parents should not be part of the school's decision making processes because it's always the same sort of pushy parents and there is no voice for the marginalised.	-3	-1.64	-4	-1.87
29*	Parents need to be aware of the system (i.e. the procedures, the time things take and the meaning of jargon used) if they want to be involved with the school's decision making.	0	0.02	-1	-0.19
30*	I believe it is important to recognise and reward parental engagement.	-2	-0.68	-2	-0.45

6.2 Interpretation of the Factors

After considering the mathematical aspects of the data, the findings are considered in terms of their meaning. This process takes the two factors and a description is written which produces a viewpoint about how the school engages with parents in decision making. As a two-factor solution was identified there

are two viewpoints about how the school should engage with parents in decision making. In addition to a description of each viewpoint it is also possible to discuss what is statistically unique about each of the factors (that is the 'distinguishing features') and also which statements both factors viewed similarly (that is the 'consensus statements').

Watts & Stenner (2012) propose that whilst viewpoints should be written in a narrative style the inclusion of the statement numbers and rankings is advantageous to support the interpretative claims being made. It is also pertinent to be mindful that even when a statement has a ranking of -1 it does not preclude that the participant disagreed with the statement but that they ranked other statements as being more agreeable (or important) to them than this one. Watts & Stenner (2012) also advocate the inclusion of participants' comments because, 'the look and feel of a factor interpretation can be further enhanced through the inclusion of pertinent qualitative comments made by significantly loading participants during data collection' (p.162).

6.2.1 Viewpoint 1 – Parents as Partners

Those that subscribe to this viewpoint believe that parents being involved in decision making processes should definitely be the norm and be part of the culture of the school (17: +4). It is important that there is a good level of 2-way communication (3: +4) and that parents are given the same professional respect and courtesy as any other professional (21: +3). Parents should not be made to feel that they are just a parent in a room full of professionals (23: +2). Although it is important that parents are valued and communicated with in a professional way it is also important to ensure parents' feelings are taken into account. "It is the hard to reach parents that are the ones they most want to engage with and support and encourage."

They view schools engaging with parents as an opportunity for learning and reflection (1:+3) where the school and parents work in partnership to solve

problems together, drawing on each other's expertise (11: +3). Although, "parents need to be aware what system restraints there are...it is not always possible to fulfil every request made by parents but their opinions should still always be valued." It is felt that the best scenario is that the school and parents work together to promote the best interests of the child.

It is also important that things are said in an understandable way (5: +2) and that there is a shared expectation of what is going to happen and the timescale for it happening (2: +1).It is more important that information given to parents should be balanced and objective...to assist them in understanding the problem and what opportunities or solutions there are (6: +1) rather than training being provided to parents so that they are better able to understand the systems and processes of the school if they want to be involved with the school's decision making (29: 0; 32:-1). There should be lots of opportunities where parents are given information and are also being asked their opinion (4: +1) and enough time should be given to parents to process and understand the information (7: 0). This information does not always need to be written down as long as there is someone who can talk it through with them first (33: -1) and it is also important that parents are not made to feel they are being a nuisance for phoning up and asking questions (20: 1).

In order to work in partnership with parents it is also important that 'social and ethical issues' are taken into consideration (24; 1). Parents' needs are also important to consider, for example sometimes, "parents do not always want to acknowledge areas where they lack knowledge and understanding." Other parents may have learning difficulties themselves and may not be able to fully understand how to help their children through a whole lifetime thus extra help is required to help them fully understand the difficulties their children may face later in life. "Some activities aim to increase parental confidence so the parents feel more able to be involved in decision making."

Even though there is strong disagreement with the idea that parents cannot make a valuable contribution because they are emotionally attached to their children (27: -4) there is also a view that parents will always have a biased viewpoint which should be considered when information sharing. This viewpoint does not agree with the idea that parents will prevent the school from being able to deliver services objectively (14: -3) nor do they believe that parents being involved will add to the time that the process may take (13: -4).

They oppose the idea that it is not possible to have agreement between parents and school because it is very difficult to represent diverse views whilst also trying to reach decisions about complex and controversial issues (16: -2). Instead there is more concurrence with the idea that the knowledge and experiences that parents have is a valuable quality (25: 0) and that parents can make a very valuable contribution because they are looking at how to help children through a whole lifetime (26: 0). Although there is disagreement that parents' opinions carry the same weight as everyone else (12: -1) hence the final decision making should not be in the hand of the parents and the school should not implement what the parents decide (31: -1; 8: -3).

Overall, there is a strong sense of enabling parents to work in partnership with the school by helping to empower parents and help them feel valued (18: +2). Yet this does not entail recognising and rewarding parental engagement (30: -2) with prizes (10: -2). To help empower parents there should be someone who is easily accessible who can guide and reassure them (34: +2). However this person does not necessarily need to be just one person because any member of the team can and should be able to provide reassurance to parents.

6.2.2 Viewpoint 2 – Respecting and Valuing Parents

There is a fundamental notion in this viewpoint that parents should be valued (31: +4) and they should not be made to feel they are being a nuisance for

phoning up and asking questions (20: +4). Since parents are looking at how to help children through a whole lifetime (26: +2) the knowledge and experiences that parents have are attributes which enables parents to make a very valuable contribution (25:+2). They do not agree that only pushy parents become involved and there is no voice for the marginalised (28: -4) as even though "some parents are easier to encourage than others all parents provide valuable insights."

Communication with parents is a defining characteristic of this viewpoint. Although the purpose of engagement is regarded to be principally an information gathering exercise (12: +3) this should not diminish the contribution that parents make. It is important there is a good level of 2-way communication (3: +3), with lots of opportunities where parents are given information (4: +3). It is also important to ensure that things are said in an understandable way and adapted to different audiences (5: +2) Although not felt to be very important there is some agreement that parents should be given enough time to process and understand the information (7: 0) and that there is someone who parents can talk through any written information (33: 0) who is easily accessible who can guide and reassure them through the process (34: +1).

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There is some agreement that social and ethical issues (24: 0) need to be taken into account. Also training should be provided to parents so that they are better able to understand the systems and processes of the school (32: 0) because it is important to ensure that everyone has a clear understanding of everyone's roles, skills and attributes (19: +1).

There is a rejection of the idea that parents cannot make a valuable contribution because they are emotionally attached to their children (27: -3) nor do they feel that parents will prevent the school from delivering services objectively (14: -3). They also do not believe that parents being involved will add to the time that the process may take (13: -4).

It is viewed as important that parents are not being made to feel that they are just a parent in a room full of professionals (23: 1) and that parents should not be intimidated or overpowered. There is also some importance to ensuring that parents are not patronised (21: 0) and the school should empower parents and help them feel valued (18: 0). However there is disagreement with the idea of recognising and rewarding parental engagement (30: -2) with prizes (10: -2). Instead, for those that subscribe to this viewpoint, it is important to work in partnership with parents to solve problems together, drawing on each other's expertise (11: +2) by allowing time for parents to say their opinions and to ask questions (15: +1) and providing parents with balanced and objective information (6: +1).

There is a strong respect for the contribution that parents make to decision making process yet it is not felt to be very important to have parents being involved in decision making processes as the norm and part of the culture (17: -1). The view that parents' opinion carries the same weight as everyone else is not of great consequence (22: -1) and there is strong disagreement with the idea that the final decision making should be in the hands of the parents and the school should implement what the parents decides (8: -3). Even though, "parents have a role there must be respect for the professionalism of teachers and staff too. A balance needs to be found between families and education staff but most importantly at the heart of it must be the child."

6.2.3 Distinguishing and consensus statements

<u>Distinguishing features between the factors</u>

There is considerable difference between the two factors regarding the purpose of parents being involved in decision making. Factor 1 believes that parents being involved in decision making processes should be the norm and be part of the school's culture. Factor 1 views this as very important (17: +4) whereas factor 2 rated this as less important (17: -1) instead believing that engaging with

parents is an information gathering exercise designed to improve the quality of service delivery (12: factor 1 = -1; factor 2 = +3).

Although factor 2 feels much more strongly than factor 1 about the importance of parents' opinions being valued and acted upon (31: factor 1 = -1; factor 2 = +4) and that parents are not made to feel they are being a nuisance for phoning up and asking questions (20: factor 1 = +1; factor 2 = +4), factor 1 rated the importance of parents never being patronised and given the same professional respect and courtesy as any other professional higher than factor 2 (21: factor 1 = +3; factor 2 = 0).

There is also dissent between the goals in engaging with parents. Factor 1 views the engagement with parents as an opportunity for learning and reflection on service delivery (1: +3) and practice whereas Factor 2 views engagement with parents as an opportunity where parents are being given information (4: +2). However factor 2 values more highly the knowledge and experience that parents have (25: factor 1= 0; factor 2 = +2) and the contribution they make because they are looking at how to help children through a whole lifetime (26: factor 1 = 0; factor 2 - +2).

Consensus statements

Although these are two distinct viewpoints there are several areas of agreement between the two factors. The most notable being both factors feel strongly that it is important to have a good level of 2-way communication (3: factor 1 = +4; factor 2 = +3). They both agree that a system for engaging with parents should have things said in an understandable way and adapted to different audience (5: +2), parents should be given balanced and objective information (6: +1) and that there should be enough time given to parents to process and understand the information required (7: 0). They both reject the idea that it is not possible to have agreement between parents and school because it is very difficult to

represent diverse views whist also trying to reach decisions about complex or controversial issues (16: -2).

In addition neither factor agrees with the idea that parents being part of the school's decision making processes may add to the time that the process takes (13: -4), nor do they feel that parents being part of the process will prevent the school from delivering services objectively (14: -3). They also strongly disagree that the final decision making should be in the hands of the parents and the school should implement what the parents decide (8: -3). Finally both factors also disagree that parents should be rewarded for being involved with the school's decision making processes (30: -3) with awards and prizes (10: -3).

6.3   Member checking activity

Out of the 48 participants who completed the Q-sort, 35 participants accepted the invitation to attend a debriefing session. Table 6-8 shows the results for the question - on a scale of 0-10 (with 0 being 'I don't agree at all' to 10 being 'I agree completely') how far do you agree with the interpretation of the factors?

How far do you agree with the interpretation of the factors? (with 0 being 'I don't agree at all' to 10 being 'I agree completely')											
	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
Factor 1 (n=21)	10 (47.6%)	4 (19.1%)	5 (23.8%)	2 (9.5%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Factor 2 (n=14)	5 (35.7%)	3 (21.5%)	5 (35.7%)	1 (7.1%)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 6-9: Summary of results for the question - on a scale of 0-10 (with 0 being 'I don't agree at all' to 10 being 'I agree completely') how far do you agree with the interpretation of the factors?

Appendix F shows the collated comments provided on the questionnaires used in the member checking activity. Some of these comments have been incorporated into the viewpoints, as judged appropriate by the author. Although 16 (76.2%) respondents agreed that the title ('Working in Partnership') adequately summarises the viewpoint for Factor 1 a comment was made about the title - "I don't think it makes clear who is working in partnership so perhaps 'Parents and schools together' or 'parents as partners". Therefore the proposal of 'Parents as Partners' was deemed to be apposite to the viewpoint and was subsequently adopted as the title for Viewpoint 1. Likewise, even though 10 (71.4%) respondents agreed the title adequately summarised the viewpoint for Factor 2, the title for Factor 2 ('Valuing Knowledge and Experience') was also modified to incorporate a comment – "if truly valuing". Therefore the title of 'Respecting and Valuing Parents' was adopted for Factor 2.

7 Phase 2 - Using the viewpoints

As mentioned before, the aim of the first phase of the study was to illuminate the practice of the school by exploring the school staff's perceptions about the concept of engaging with parents in decision making. The Q-sort produced two core viewpoints of how the school views the idea of engaging with parents in decision making.

In the light of these findings, the research study then moved on to explore the features of the school's system for engaging with parents. That is, what it is the school actually does to engage parents. To explore the features of each viewpoint and to subsequently identify a comprehensive list of activities that the school employs, the method of focus groups was utilised.

The final part of the study focused on ascertaining parents' views. Using the list of activities identified in the focus group, a survey was completed with parents to explore what they viewed as important features in relation to the school's system to engaging with them in decision making processes. This not only added in the voice of parents into this study but also provided an opportunity to triangulate the findings from the focus group.

7.1 Focus Group Methodology

A focus group is essentially a group interview, or open-ended discussion, on a specific topic (Robson, 2002). Focus groups can be used for a variety of purposes including suggesting ideas, clarifying potential options, reacting to ideas or recommending a course of action, or to plan and evaluate (Krueger & Casey, 2009):

> The purpose of conducting a focus group is to listen and gather information. It is a way to better understand how people feel or think about an issue, product or service. Focus groups are used to gather opinions. (p.2)

Focus groups are used widely with market research yet were developed by social scientists investigating new ways of conducting interviews during the Second World War. Robert Merton is attributed to have held one of the first focus group interviews in his study exploring morale in the U.S. military. He observed that when people were with others like themselves they appeared to feel more safe and comfortable and consequently revealed sensitive information about themselves (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

There are several areas of criticism for focus groups: participants tend to intellectualise; focus groups do not tap into emotions; participants may make up answers; focus groups produce trivial results; dominant individuals can influence results and conflict bias can occur in the results; and the results are not reliable (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Robson, 2002). In response to these criticisms Krueger & Casey (2009) argue that the role of the facilitator is critical for a focus group to accomplish its purpose. In addition they advocate researchers using a variety of research methods because the problems associated with focus groups are, 'minimised when researchers use multiple strategies of inquiry' (Krueger & Casey, 2009 p.13).

Krueger & Casey (2009) suggest several reasons for when a focus group is appropriate which correlate with the purpose for this part of the study:

- the researcher is looking for a range of ideas or feelings that people have about something

- the researcher want ideas to emerge from the group

- the researcher needs information to design a further study

- the researcher needs information to help shed light on data already collected

This part of the study was interested in ascertaining what school staff view as important in enabling them to engage parents in the process of decision making. The foci of the discussion were the viewpoints created from the Q-sort

and the results of the focus group were in turn used to inform the parents'
survey.

7.1.1 Procedure of the focus group

A focus group study often utilises three or four focus groups but sometimes
more until theoretical saturation (that is the point where no new insights are
being gained) is reached (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The number advocated in
focus groups is between 5 and 10 participants (Krueger & Casey, 2009).
However, here 34 participants expressed a wish to take part, yet the school
would only allow for one focus group meeting due to time constraints. It was
decided to hold the focus group with 34 participants, but in order to
accommodate the higher numbers participants were placed in groups of 3-5.
Each group was asked to discuss each question and then feedback their
discussion. Ground rules were discussed and agreed at the beginning of the
session to help ensure that all participants felt comfortable, respected and free
to give their opinion without the fear of being judged.

A list consisting of 11 features that the school staff felt was important when
engaging with parents in decision making was given to each participant (see
Appendix G). To compile this list all the statements that describe or refer to an
activity that the school could employ when engaging with parents were
identified. For example, statement 5 ('It is important that things are said in an
understandable way and adapted to different audiences') describes an activity
or action of the school's system whereas statement 17 ('I believe that parents
being involved in decision making processes should be the norm and be part of
the culture') describes an opinion or attitude. From this list of activities there
were 10 statements (2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 15, 20, 21, 23, 34) that were rated as being
important (that is rated at 0 or above) by either of the factors. The author
decided to spilt statement 6 as it was felt to be quite verbose. Thus a list of 11
features were identified as being the most important when engaging with
parents in decision making.

These features were grouped into the three areas of 'Communication Channels', 'Time Span' and 'Attitude to Parents'. For each feature the same question was asked:

- When the school is... (for example, saying things in an understandable way and adapting language to different audiences)...and you are doing this very well, what does it look like?
- What else does it look like? (repeated until saturation was reached).

The answers given were written onto an A3 flipchart. The purpose in raising this question was to allow staff to describe current practices in supporting parental decision making.

7.1.2 Ethical Issues

The ethical issues for the focus group follow the same themes as the ethical issues for the Q-sort. Issues of informed consent, confidentiality and sensitivity were considered and addressed at each stage of the focus group:

- A letter was given to the participants prior to the focus group taking part with details about the purpose of the activity and the procedure to be employed (informed consent)
- The letter clearly informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and also provided assurance about confidentiality (sensitivity and confidentiality)
- Not recording any identifying factors of the participants (confidentiality)
- Opportunities for participants to ask questions and raise queries was given at the beginning and the end of the focus group (informed consent)
- Careful selection of language used and being sensitive to group dynamics (sensitivity)
- Recording participants' comments verbatim (informed consent)
- At the end of the survey the participants were asked if they were happy with the comments recorded (informed consent)

- Agreement was sought with the head teacher regarding the ways in which a summary of the findings would be made available to participants (informed consent)

7.1.3 Reliability and Validity

Within focus group study designs steps that are advocated to ensure the results are trustworthy and accurate include: pilot-testing the questions; listening to the participants when designing the study to understand the conditions needed for free and open sharing; using a team of facilitators chosen because of their training, experiences, background and sensitivity; and asking participants to verify the summary of comments at the end of the focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2009). There was only one question used in this focus group which was tested with the school's head teacher prior to the focus group being carried out. The focus group was completed in place of the school's weekly staff meeting and the conditions of the group were pre-determined by the usual conditions of the staff meeting. Once a point of saturation was felt to have been reached for each feature then the list was read out again for the group to verify but there was no need to provide a summary as participants' comments were written down verbatim.

However it is acknowledged that the number of participants (N=34) in the focus group was much higher than the number advocated (5-10). In addition it was not possible to have a team of facilitators and the author was the only facilitator. It is recognised that these will have had an impact on the validity of the results. To help reduce this threat to the validity the author was able to utilise her skills as an experienced facilitator to ensure the purpose of the group was accomplished; that is to identify the activities and actions that the school staff employ to engage parents in decision making. This included being reflective, active listening, summarising and checking out; and being sensitive to group dynamics.

7.2 Results of the Focus Group

The comments gathered from the focus group produced a detailed list of the features of the school's system in engaging with parents in decision making processes. Although the list consists of 95 features there were several repetitions as some features were drawn from all three areas of 'Communication Channels', 'Time Span' and 'Attitude to Parents'. Appendix H shows the list of features gathered from the focus group.

Examination of this list revealed that some of these are features describing actions that the school performs to help create a conducive climate within which parents feel that they can, and are welcome to, engage with the school (for example, 'answering phone calls, listening to what parents have to say and following up on things' or 'repeatedly inviting parents to phone up and ask questions reassuring them they are not a nuisance for phoning'). Other features describe activities that actually make engagement with decision making happen (for example, 'giving parents the option to change paperwork' or 'offering alternative solutions to a problem').

8 Phase 3 – The Parents' Survey

The findings of the study so far are about the school staff's viewpoint of what is in their system for engaging with parents in decision making. This final part of the study focuses on parents' perceptions.

As discussed in section 4.1, it is valid for a mixed method design to be used in social constructionist research (Burr, 2007) especially when the aim of the research is to explore different levels of the same phenomenon (Todd et al, 2004). Therefore the use of surveys, a non-experimental fixed design method, was chosen as an appropriate tool to elicit an understanding of how parents value the features identified in the focus group of the school's system for engaging in decision making.

8.1 Survey Methodology

8.1.1 Non-experimental Fixed Design – Cross sectional study methodology

Fixed design studies fall into two categories: non-experimental fixed design studies where the phenomena being studied are observed without being deliberately manipulated or changed by the researcher; and experimental studies where one variable is manipulated to see its effect on another (Robson, 2002). The commonality between them is that fixed designs are theory driven. The decision of whether to choose an experimental or non-experimental fixed design should be driven by the research question. The research question is rooted in the underlying theory and used to identify the variables and possible relationships to be studied. The advantage of using a non-experimental fixed design is that the researcher is less likely to disturb or disrupt the phenomena that they are interested in (Robson, 2002).

Cross-sectional (sometimes known as correlational) studies are commonly used for descriptive purposes. They are appropriate when the researcher is interested in explaining or understanding a phenomenon but they do not lend

themselves to exploratory research (Robson, 2002). Cross-sectional studies tend to focus on relationships between and among variables in a single group at a single point in time (or over a relatively short period of time).

This part of the study is interested in understanding which features (from the list compiled in the focus group) parents value and view as being most important in being able to help them engage in decision making processes. The focus is on which of the features parents view as being essential to helping them engage in decision making processes; which features parents view as being nice if it happens but not essential to helping engage them in decision making processes; and finally which features are not necessary.

8.1.2 Data collection method - surveys

Cross sectional studies often tend to use surveys as a method of data collection (Robson, 2002). Surveys are a common occurrence in modern everyday life. On high streets across the country market researchers approach shoppers to ask them their views about a product or service available to them; at roadsides traffic surveys take place; and in the home householders can be presented with requests to take part in surveys via the telephone or the internet (for example, request for feedback after purchasing a product from a website). Although often understood to be a modern phenomenon surveys can be dated back to 1801 when the first British Census began (Alridge & Levine, 2001). The information gathered from surveys (the variables) fall into three areas – 'attributes', 'behaviour' and 'opinions, beliefs, preferences and attitudes' (Aldridge & Levine, 2001). Often surveys will ask for information from each of these areas.

The three main types of survey design are 'cross-classificatory' (or 'cross-sectional'), 'longitudinal and panel studies' and 'hierarchical'. The cross-classificatory design is viewed as the simplest survey design with a single stage of data collection and analysis focused on the comparison of aggregate groups of cases which are characterised by different values on key variables.

Longitudinal studies have repeated data collection stages over time. Hierarchical surveys aim, "to trace the influence of the collectivity" (Aldridge & Levine, 2001 p.31) on its participants often requiring the use of complicated multilevel statistics models (Aldridge & Levine, 2001).

The methods of gathering data in a survey include face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, observation/diaries and self-completion questionnaires (either on the spot or via post, email or interactive web pages). All methods have pros and cons but often it is down to the practical considerations that limit which option is most viable in a survey study:

> If a large sample is required, or if respondents are geographically scattered, face-to-face interviews are normally impossible because they consume too much time and money. If we need to ask a lot of questions, and if the format is complex, with multiple question skips, then a self-completion questionnaire is unsuitable unless it can be distributed electronically. The more questions there are, the more a face-to-face interview becomes appropriate. If we need to ask a lot of open questions, face-to-face interviews are to be preferred. (Aldridge & Levine, 2001 p.58)

Textbooks on social surveys offer responses to the various critiquing of social surveys (for example Marsh, 1982; Aldridge & Levine, 2001). One critique argues that surveys are not scientific because variables are not properly controlled for and no causal inferences can be drawn from survey research (Aldridge & Levine, 2001). However within social survey research there is an acknowledgement that many of the variables are complex because, "society is complex" (Aldridge & Levine, 2001 p.14). Researchers do not seek to control all the variables because to do so would manipulate or change the variable.

A second critique argues that no causal inferences can be drawn from surveys. However Marsh (1982) postulates that causation is not the same thing as unique determination (the notion that each effect has one and only one cause) and that in the real world the possibility of multiple causation has to be

conceded. For interested readers, Marsh goes on to explain how a survey can provide evidence for different causal models used in surveys but because the survey in this study does not seek to find any causal inferences this discussion is not included here.

A third critique censures surveys for aiming to be 'scientific' by, "treating society and culture as no more than the sum of the individual within it" (Aldridge & Levine, 2001 p.12). Yet the aim of surveys is not to present individual's viewpoints. Unlike Q-methodology, surveys do seek to reduce the data to produce aggregate viewpoints (50% think this, 75% are that etc).

Choosing any method for research should be because it is appropriate and fit for purpose in relation to the research question and underlying theory. Surveys have been described as a useful, valid and reliable method of research when they are well designed and use a multi-method approach (Aldridge & Levine, 2001). They are one of the few methods that can give a voice to the general public and because they can be completed away from the researcher the effects of interviewer bias are reduced (Marsh, 1982; Aldridge & Levine, 2001).

8.1.3 Procedure of the survey

The survey used for the purpose of this study was simple in its design. However the design was appropriate for the research question - to understand which features (from the list compiled in the focus group) parents value as being able to help them engage in decision making processes. Therefore the purpose of this survey was not to test a theoretical hypothesis or even to apply and explore theoretical concepts but to simply 'describe' a phenomenon. There were three variables used:

- *essential* to helping them engage in decision making processes

- *nice if it happens but not essential* to helping engage them in decision making processes

- *not necessary* to helping engage them in decision making processes

The method chosen for data collection was the self-completed questionnaire. The reasons for this include minimal cost involved in terms of finance (reproducing questionnaires) and time; there is no interviewer bias or other interviewer effects and it reduces the social desirability effect because the researcher is not present. However, to reach as many parents as possible as well as increasing response rates several means of completing the self-completed questionnaires were utilised – postal (via children's book bags), interactive (via an internet web page), at the school (at a prearranged time when the researcher would be available if required but not necessarily present during the completion of the questionnaire) and face-to-face with the researcher. Although completing the questionnaire with the researcher in a face-to-face situation did increase the risk of the social desirability effect it was deemed an appropriate option to offer for those participants with literacy difficulties. The different options were explained to participants and it was left to their choice as to which was their preferred means for completing the questionnaire.

There are three main types of questions used in surveys. These are open-ended questions, ranking questions and direct questions on salience (Aldridge & Levine, 2001). The use of direct questions on salience was adopted for this survey because it asks each participant to, 'indicate for each item how important it is to them. This approach is blunt but can be effective' (Aldridge & Levine, 2001 p.96). In addition a final open-ended question was utilised to invite participants to expand on or explain their previous responses. The design of this question was deliberately a leading question - what features have been missed out? If asked 'are there any other comments' then participants may just answer 'no' however by suggesting that there are missed out features then participants are more likely to engage with the question and think about what other features there could be. The other advantage of including a final open-ended question was that it introduced variety, assessed the salience of the features to the

participant, showed a humanistic approach and acknowledged that researchers are not omniscient (Aldridge & Levine, 2001).

8.1.4 Selection of participants

To use the terminology of social survey research the 'target population' (that is the entire group that the researcher is interested in; also sometimes referred to as the 'sampling frame') are the parents of children who were on roll at the school on 1st January 2012 (N=114). The survey sample was drawn from the target population using the simple random sampling (SRS) method. The list of parents were numbered from 1 to 114 in advance and selection was made using the RANDBETWEEN function (=RANDBETWEEN(1,114)) in the Microsoft Excel program. A total of 52 parents were selected to allow a sample frame of 50 with 2 additional cases for the pilot survey.

It is worth noting that although this was a relatively small target population it was decided that it was pertinent that the use of a sample survey was appropriate. For the reasons relating to the issue of 'hard to reach' parents who avoided contact being made (see 'Review of the Literature') and also to allow for participants' right to not take part or withdraw from the study it was acknowledged that a 100% response rate was not viable. If all of the target population had been invited to take part and a 100% response rate was not achieved then the results could be subject to responder bias.

8.1.5 Ethical Issues

The ethical issues for the survey follow the same themes as the ethical issues for the Q-sort and the focus group. Issues of informed consent, confidentiality and sensitivity were considered and addressed at each stage of the survey. However several additional steps pertaining to the method of surveys were undertaken in this part of the study. Steps taken to addressing ethical issues (taken from Aldridge & Levine, 2001) include:

- providing a name of the head teacher of the school as a responsible person whom they can contact if they want to verify the survey and wearing an identity badge (informed consent)

- being as open as possible about the purpose of the research and the potential audiences for the findings by providing a letter to participants as well as clarifying any questions or queries at the time of recruitment (informed consent)

- the letter also clearly informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and also provided assurance about confidentiality (sensitivity and confidentiality)

- not recording any identifying factors on the questionnaire (confidentiality)

- the different options for completing the survey were explained to participants and it was left to their choice as to which was their preferred means for completing the questionnaire (sensitivity)

- The possible consequences of the study were addressed with the participants. One possible negative consequence is the concern that through the activity of examining what is 'good engagement with parents in decision making' the participants might question their own practice of engaging with the school and/or feel as if they are being judged. To address this, participants were given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study being to explore the *viewpoints* of the participants and that it was not being used as a *tool* to measure the school's performance in engaging with parents (sensitivity)

- Careful selection of language was used (sensitivity)

- Agreement was sought with the head teacher regarding the ways in which a summary of the findings would be made available to participants (informed consent)

8.1.6 Reliability and Validity

As mentioned previously the aim of this study was not to generalise beyond the context of the school but to look in detail at the topic of enquiry. However, Elliot et al (1999) proposed set of guidelines (detailed in chapter 5.2.5 'Reliability and Validity') were adopted throughout this study and therefore provides this research with analytical credibility. A pilot test was carried out to check the validity of the survey.

8.1.7 Completing the surveys (data collection)

An initial pilot study was carried out with the first two participants on the list of randomly selected samples. Cards were used upon which were written a feature and the participant was asked to sort the cards into piles.

1) First, participants were asked to sort the features into those they feel help to create the climate for engagement and those they view as actually enabling parental engagement in decision making to happen. This was included because parents first need to feel they can engage with the school before they can engage in decision making processes.

2) Using the features that had been identified as enabling it to happen, participants were asked to sort these features into three options: - 'essential', 'nice if it happens', and 'not necessary'. This would then help to ascertain which features they felt are the most important and which features they feel are not so important.

3) Finally participants were asked what features had been missed out.

At each stage of the process the participant was asked for their feedback regarding the process of the survey. Appendix I shows the initial draft of the questionnaire.

An outcome of the pilot study was to abandon the use of cards and the sorting process because it was reported that it was too repetitive and became tedious. The questionnaire was redesigned to be completed as a paper-based activity

which also allowed for more flexibility in the completion of the data collection as it more easily enabled the survey to be self-completed. It was also decided that the first sorting activity would not be included in the survey because it made the whole activity over an hour long resulting in a real threat to the co-operation of parents to complete the survey. In addition, although it would have yielded interesting results this part of the survey was not intrinsic to answering the research question. Feedback was also elicited about the language of the features and several edits were made to the features. One change was to condense the list of features from 95 to 57 which addressed an issue of repetitiveness in some of the features.

A second pilot study was completed. This was a self-completed survey via the internet using an online survey website. A telephone interview was conducted following the completion of the survey to assess the practicality and validity of the revised draft. The only amendment following the second pilot study was to include questions to elicit some basic background information (participant's relationship to child and how long child has attended the school). Appendix J shows the final survey questionnaire used in the main data collection activity.

The main data collection activity was completed within the 3 week period between 27th February and 16th March 2012. Table 7-1 summarises the participants' chosen method for completing the survey.

Postal (via children's book bags)	Interactive (via online web page)	At school (researcher available but not necessarily present)	Face to face (at participant's home)	TOTAL (n)
3	16	13	4	36

Table 8-1: Breakdown of the participants' chosen method for completing the survey

8.1.8 Procedures for the analysis of surveys

Once completed the paper-based surveys were entered onto the online web page as a means of collating all the data together. The accumulated survey data was then exported to Microsoft Excel for analysis.

As this was a purely descriptive survey and was not trying to confirm a hypothesis nor trying to draw comparisons between participants, then it was deemed that a descriptive analysis would be adequate (Robson, 2002). Frequency counts and statistical summary measures were completed and presented in the graphs and charts shown in the 'Results of the Parents' Survey' below.

8.2 Results of the Parents' survey

This section presents the results from the exploratory analysis undertaken as described above. From a target population of 114 a total of 52 were chosen at random. The first two were used for the pilot studies. Of the remaining 50 children (45% of the school's population) two of these children were siblings thus a list of 49 parents with children at the school made up the survey sample. A total of 36 surveys (73% response rate) were completed and entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The reasons for the non-responses were not being able to make contact with participants on the survey sample list (n=3), participants unwilling to take part (n=8) and non-return (n=1).

Table 8-2 shows the sample characteristics of the participants.

Characteristic	Category	Frequency count (%)
Relationship with child	Mother	28 (77.8)
	Father	8 (22.2)
Child's attendance at school	< 1 year	7 (19.4)
	1-2 years	8 (22.2)
	2-3 years	2 (5.6)
	3-4 years	6 (16.8)
	4-5 years	3 (8.3)
	5-6 years	3 (8.3)
	> 6 years	7 (19.4)

Table 8-2: The sample characteristics of the participants (n=36)

Using Microsoft Excel the frequency count for how often a participant ranked a feature as being 'Essential', 'Nice but not essential' or 'Not necessary' was calculated. The tables also show the percentage of how many participants ranked each statements as being 'Essential', 'Nice but not essential' or 'Not necessary'. These tables are presented in Appendix K:

Table 11-1 shows the features that are ranked as being 'Essential' by participants, presented in order of highest to lowest frequency count.

Table 11-2 shows the features that are ranked as being 'Nice but not essential' by participants, presented in order of highest to lowest frequency count.

Table 11-3 shows the features that are ranked as being 'Not necessary' by participants presented in order of highest to lowest frequency count.

Below are the results of the analysis. Table 7-3 shows the frequency count and percentage of the variables for each feature, presented in order of highest frequency count to lowest frequency count across the variables. The top five

features that were rated as most essential to parents are summarised below in Table 7-4. The top two features rated as 'not necessary' are summarised in Table 7-5 and the top two features rated as 'nice but not essential' as summarised in table 7-6.

Table 8-3: The frequency count and percentage of the variables for each feature, presented in order of highest frequency count to lowest frequency count across the variables

Key:	Highest %	2nd Highest %	Lowest %

No	Statement	frequency count	%	frequency count	%	frequency count	%
		Essential		Nice but not essential		Not necessary	
1	Always keeping in touch with parents	35	97.2%	1	2.8%	0	0.0%
25	Giving parents details of what is going to happen and when in the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP)	34	94.4%	2	5.6%	0	0.0%
50	Answering phone calls, listening to what parents have to say and follow up on things	34	94.4%	2	5.6%	0	0.0%
53	Not being judgmental - seeing the child as an individual	34	94.4%	2	5.6%	0	0.0%
11	Giving parents time to ask questions/give opinions in 'Parents' Evenings'	33	91.7%	3	8.3%	0	0.0%
12	In 'Review Meetings' ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions	33	91.7%	3	8.3%	0	0.0%
4	Listening to what parents have to say and working together to find solution	32	88.9%	4	11.1%	0	0.0%
48	Speaking to parents as equals by talking 'to' them and not 'down' to them	32	88.9%	4	11.1%	0	0.0%
49	If busy, arranging a mutually convenient time to talk further	32	88.9%	4	11.1%	0	0.0%
16	Giving parents plenty of warning of events/meetings	31	86.1%	5	13.9%	0	0.0%
35	Giving parents 'all' information from 'all' professionals	31	86.1%	5	13.9%	0	0.0%
7	Using 'home-school books' to send home reminders of dates and times	29	80.6%	7	19.4%	0	0.0%
28	Speaking to parents if they have difficulty reading	29	80.6%	7	19.4%	0	0.0%
30	Having a good relationship with parents by taking an interest in them, saying hello and showing an interest in what they have to say	29	80.6%	7	19.4%	0	0.0%
18	Sending out reports/advices before Review Meetings	28	77.8%	8	22.2%	0	0.0%
39	Give facts not opinions and balance the positives with the negatives	27	75.0%	9	25.0%	0	0.0%
21	Having individual, informal chats with parents	26	72.2%	10	27.8%	0	0.0%
38	Offer alternative solutions to a problem	26	72.2%	10	27.8%	0	0.0%
27	Having an individual approach, i.e. using the parents preferred method of communication and also judging which parents would like more information and which would like less	25	69.4%	11	30.6%	0	0.0%
44	Help parents to think of a solution - ask 'helpful' questions ('have you thought of...')	25	69.4%	11	30.6%	0	0.0%
29	Giving appropriate signposting to agencies and professionals when necessary	24	66.7%	12	33.3%	0	0.0%
15	Having Parent Governors	24	66.7%	11	30.6%	1	2.8%
9	Sending a 'text alert' to remind of date and time of events/meetings	23	63.9%	12	33.3%	1	2.8%

33	Having a family liaison worker who parents can go to talk to	23	63.9%	12	33.3%	1	2.8%
36	Using interpreters (sign as well as lingual)	23	63.9%	12	33.3%	1	2.8%
20	Giving parents the option to change the paperwork in Review Meetings	22	61.1%	14	38.9%	0	0.0%
32	Asking parents first which days and times suit them best for meetings	22	61.1%	14	38.9%	0	0.0%
46	Reminding parents that they are the 'expert' of their child	22	61.1%	11	30.6%	3	8.3%
2	Having FRIENDS of ███████ School	21	58.3%	15	41.7%	0	0.0%
31	Using reply slips on letters	21	58.3%	14	38.9%	1	2.8%
10	Sending 'letters' to parents to remind them of date and time of events/meetings	21	58.3%	13	36.1%	2	5.6%
26	Trying to avoid using jargon	21	58.3%	13	36.1%	2	5.6%
24	School and parents setting the agenda of the meeting together	21	58.3%	12	33.3%	3	8.3%
22	Putting upcoming dates for events in 'school' newsletters	20	55.6%	15	41.7%	1	2.8%
23	Putting upcoming dates for events in 'class' newsletters	20	55.6%	15	41.7%	1	2.8%
51	Repeatedly inviting parents to phone up and ask questions reassuring them they are not a nuisance for phoning	20	55.6%	15	41.6%	1	2.8%
19	Having upcoming dates and other information on the school website	18	50.0%	17	47.2%	1	2.8%
41	Watch language used - you 'could' rather than you 'should'	18	50.0%	15	41.6%	3	8.3%
6	Sending reminders of dates and times using 'phone calls' home	17	47.2%	13	36.1%	6	16.7%
52	Building up parents self esteem	15	41.6%	14	38.9%	7	19.4%
40	Give reminders of dates and times using transport escorts	15	41.2%	11	30.6%	10	27.8%
5	Making home visits	4	11.1%	29	80.6%	3	8.3%
13	Having coffee mornings	2	5.6%	29	80.6%	5	13.9%
37	Putting information on television screen in reception	8	22.2%	26	72.2%	2	5.6%
17	Using parent questionnaires	12	33.3%	24	66.7%	0	0.0%
3	Putting up banners and posters	10	27.8%	21	58.3%	5	13.9%
14	Inviting parents into assemblies	14	38.9%	19	52.8%	3	8.3%
42	In meetings, all sit on chairs that are the same height	8	22.2%	19	52.8%	9	25.0%
45	Parents talking to other parents (the parent sharing room)	17	47.2%	18	50.0%	1	2.8%
43	Be a sounding board for parents	16	44.4%	18	50.0%	2	5.6%
8	Sending 'emails' to parents to remind them of date and time of events/meetings	14	38.9%	18	50.0%	4	11.1%
34	Using recording devices for children to send messages home	11	30.6%	18	50.0%	7	19.4%
47	Praising parents	14	38.9%	16	44.4%	6	16.6%

Table 8-4 The top five features of the school's system for engaging with parents in decision making processes rated as most essential to parents

Ranking	Feature	Frequency count
First	Always keeping in touch with parents	Essential – 97.2% Nice but not essential – 2.8%
Joint second	Giving parents details of what is going to happen and when in Individual Education Plans	Essential – 94.4% Nice but not essential – 5.6%
Joint second	Answering phone calls, listening to what parents have to say and follow up on things	
Joint second	Not being judgemental, seeing the child as an individual	
Joint fifth	Giving parents time to ask questions/give opinions in 'Parents' Evenings'	Essential – 91.7% Nice but not essential – 8.3%
Joint fifth	In 'Review Meetings' ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions	
Joint seventh	Listening to what parents have to say and working together to find a solution	Essential – 88.9% Nice but not essential – 11.1%
Joint seventh	Speaking to parents as equals by talking 'to' them and not 'down' to them	
Joint	If busy arrange a mutually	

seventh	convenient time to talk further	
Joint ninth	Giving parents plenty of warning of events/meetings	Essential – 86.1% Nice but not essential – 13.9%
Joint ninth	Give parents 'all' information from 'all' professionals	

Ranking	Feature	Frequency count
First	Give reminders of dates and times using transport escorts	Not necessary – 27.8% Essential – 41.2% Nice but not essential – 30.6%
Second	In meetings all sit on chairs that are the same height (25% = Not necessary; 52.8% = nice but not essential; 22.2% = Essential).	Not necessary – 25% Nice but not essential – 52.8% Essential – 22.2%

Table 8-5: The top two features of the school's system for engaging with parents in decision making processes rated as not necessary to parents.

Ranking	Feature	Frequency count
Joint first	Making home visits	Nice but not essential – 80.6%
Joint first	Having coffee mornings	Essential – 11.1%
		Not necessary – 8.3%

Table 8-6: The top two features of the school's system for engaging with parents in decision making processes rated as nice but not essential by parents.

9   Discussion

This research was conducted in three phases. This first phase generated two viewpoints on the idea of engaging parents in decision making processes. The second phase used these viewpoints to explore what the school views to be important features in their system of engaging with parents in the process of decision making. In the light of these findings it was possible, in the third phase of the study, to survey the parents to identify what features they view as important in relation to the school's approach to engaging with them in decision making processes. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings of the phases of the study, as well as a critical review of method.

9.1   Discussion of the findings from Phase 1: the Q-sort

A theme that runs through both of the factors is the idea that school and parents should be working together to promote the best interests of the child. However a distinction between the factors is the role that school and parents should have in achieving this. Factor 1 places a much higher emphasis on working in true partnership with each other by drawing on each other's expertise to solve problems. They also value engaging with parents in decision making as an opportunity for learning and reflection. However, even though factor 2 does view working together to solve problems as important, they regard engaging with parents as principally an information gathering exercise and that the final decision making is made by the school. It is interesting to observe that even amongst a single school there can be such a distinct difference in the principles of engaging with parents in decision making. Conversely it is also important to note that across both factors is the underlying principle that the most important aspect is to act in the best interest of the child.

Two other themes that run through both of the factors is the impact of teacher practices and the need to be cognisant of the parents' psychological needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness (that is the concept of intrinsic motivation as discussed in the literature review (see chapter 2.3)).

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Mackenzie's (2009) view that a trusting and respectful two-way relationship is developed when teachers are aware of not only the language they use but also their body language was discussed in section 2.4.2 and linked closely with Dunsmuir et al (2004) who posit that a two-way partnership requires trust, shared responsibility and accountability. Both factors suggested that it is important to develop a good level of two-way communication and to make every effort to ensure that the language used with parents is expressed in an understandable way. This view appears to corroborate with Taylor & Gulliford (2011)'s belief that it is the responsibility of the professional for facilitation of this.

Another reflection in relation to parents' intrinsic motivation is that Factor 1 conveys the importance of deliberating on parents' needs and appreciating that parents do not always want to acknowledge areas where they lack knowledge and understanding. This relates to parents' perceived self-efficacy (see chapter 2.3.3) which plays a pivotal role in determining the activities parents will engage with, the amount of effort they are willing to provide and the extent of their perseverance and persistence. Factor 1 states that activities aimed to increase parental confidence will help improve a parent's self-efficacy so that the parents feel more able to be involved in decision making.

The concept of relatedness is evident in both factors through a strong agreement that parents are given the same respect and courtesy as any professional and are not made to feel that they are just a parent in a room full of professionals. This links to the issue of parents' perceptions of invitations, opportunities and demands for engagement (see chapter 2.3.4) and whether parents perceive that the school wants them to be involved. As Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) and Epstein (2001) posit a proactive climate of invitations and opportunities in school influences parents' feelings of being needed and wanted (that is their sense of relatedness to the school) and thus are potentially very influential in parental engagement.

A substantial difference between the two factors is in the stance about the purpose of engaging with parents. Factor 1 views engagement with parents as an opportunity for learning and reflection on service delivery and practice. In relation to the Spectrum on Public Participation (see chapter 2.4.3) this corresponds to the 'Collaborative' level of public impact in that the goal is to partner with parents in each aspect of the decision making process looking for advice and innovation in formulating solutions. It also resonates with Mackenzie's (2009) views on developing a trusting and respectful two-way relationship through mutual humility in the sense that there is an acceptance that there is something to learn in every new situation. However Factor 2 views engagement with parents as an opportunity where parents are given information which parallels the 'Inform' level of public impact in that the intention is to provide parents with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and opportunities and/or solutions.

It is interesting to note that neither factor coincide with some of the criticisms of public participation (see chapter 2.1.3). Both factors disagreed with the idea that there should not be parental engagement because it adds time to the process. This corresponds to the argument highlighted by Coats & Passmore (2008) that the additional time required to engage with the public cause costs to be higher. In addition both factors also disagree with the notion that parents being part of the process will prevent the school from delivering services objectively.

9.2 Discussion of the findings from Phase 2: the focus group

This section focuses on the second phase of the study and the research question:

- What are the activities that the school employs in engaging with parents in the process of decision making?

The purpose of the second phase of this study was to explore the viewpoints produced in the Q-study to illuminate understanding of the social phenomenon

of engaging with parents in decision making at a more micro-level. Review of the data indicates that the school values many actions to help develop a trusting and respectful two-way relationship with parents, as advocated by Mackenzie (2009) (for example, 'listening and working together', 'say hello and take an interest in their child', 'talk <u>to</u> them and not <u>down</u> to them' and 'being interested in what they have to say'). The school also appears to value actions taken to ensure that parents are engaged in a meaningful way (Epstein, 2001) (for example, 'giving parents the option to change paperwork' and 'ask them their opinion').

In addition there are also many features that relate to developing the parents' feelings of competence (for example, 'tell them they are the experts of their children', 'language used – you <u>could</u> rather than you <u>should</u>' and 'using parents preferred methods of communication') and parents' feelings of autonomy (for example, 'offer alternative solutions to problems', 'balance positives with not so positive' and 'in minutes use language that parents have used').

It is also interesting to note that there are many actions valued by the school which directly relate to the concept of developing a parents' sense of relatedness to the school. That is, developing the parents' perception that the school wants them to be involved (for example, 'answering and listening', 'arranging an appropriate time to chat', 'repeated invitations' and 'repeatedly saying they are welcome anytime').

9.3   Discussion of the findings from Phase 3: the parents' survey

This section focuses on the third phase of the study and the research question:

- What do the parents see as the important features in relation to the school's system engaging with them in decision making processes?

Within the participants of the survey there is a fairly even spread of length of the children's attendance at school which is an indicator of the length of time the parents' have known and had a relationship with the school. Some parents have known the school for a number of years and it could therefore be assumed there have been numerous opportunities for the school to engage with them in decision making. Other parents have only known the school for a relatively short period of time (less than one year) and may still be at the stage of initial contact and building up a rapport and relationship with the school. Therefore it is fair to say that there is a good representation of parents' experiences in engaging with the school. This is pertinent because, as highlighted in the literature review, the quality of the rapport and relationship between parents and school is a crucial aspect to enabling parents to feel able to engage in decision making processes (see chapters 2.3.4 and 2.4.2).

Due to the fact that this school was chosen for its recognised good practice it is perhaps unsurprising that parents rated the majority of features as being essential and there was no feature that participants rated strongly as being not necessary. What is interesting, however, is the spread of opinion across the variables (i.e. 'Essential', 'Nice but not essential' and 'Not necessary').

Tables 7-3 to 7-7 (see chapter 7.4) highlight the features of the school's system that parents most value as well as those features that they feel are not necessary. Although 'building up parents' self-esteem' is not viewed as necessary to 19.4% of participants, 41.6% of participants do view this feature as essential (see Table 7-3). Therefore this is a feature that the school should take consideration of. Interestingly, 'praising parents' had a similar spread of opinion across the variables (38.9% = essential; 44.4% = nice but not essential; 16.6% = not necessary).

In addition, there are a couple of interesting observations that are worthy of note. Firstly, time is an issue which the participants appear to feel strongly

about as several of the features rated as being essential pertained to this issue (for example, 'in Review Meetings ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions' and 'giving parents time to ask questions/give opinions in Parents' Evenings'). It is also interesting that there is a fairly even spread of opinion on the feature 'give reminders of dates and times using transport escorts' (27.8%, 41.2% and 30.6%). One explanation could be whether parents use transport escorts or not. Unfortunately this survey was not able to determine this. From the additional comments that parents made in the survey it appears that parents who volunteer at the school do like to be made to feel like they are being helpful and not just taken for granted.

Finally, whilst the features 'making home visits' and 'having coffee mornings' were not viewed as being essential by parents in helping them to engage in decision making, the school may consider the value of this practice in relation to creating a conducive climate within which parents feel that they can, and are welcome to, engage with the school. Therefore the school should not necessarily abandon this practice because these features have other important purposes in relation to the wider issue of engagement with parents.

The survey also asked if there were any features that had been missed out. Only a few parents chose to answer this question (n=10). 6 parents stated the list seemed to have covered everything. 4 parents provided some additional steps that the school does that they felt were also important:

- Taking into account the child's opinions and feelings by helping parents to ascertain what these are and advocating for them where necessary.

- Staff taking good care not to show if they are in a hurry or under pressure, without fail they take care to give parents their time and attention.

- Having parents into classes to enable them to meet with the children and other parents.

- Having parent groups to discuss different issues.

- Appreciating the value of a conversation which can solve many issues and ensure no misunderstandings occur whilst making a decision together.

9.3.1   Linking the findings from Phases 2 and 3 back to the Literature Review

An observation is how the features that parents ranked highest can be interpreted as corresponding to factors related to parents' intrinsic motivation; that is the psychological need for competence, autonomy and relatedness as discussed in the literature review (see chapter 2.3). An interpretive summary of how these factors could be considered to correspond to the features is presented in Table 8-1.

Table 9-1: How the features that parents ranked highest in the areas of essential features, nice if it happens but not essential and features that are not necessary correspond to factors related to parents' intrinsic motivation

Psychological concept	Feature	Ranking
Relatedness	Always keeping in touch with parents	Essential
	Answering phone calls, listening to what parents have to say and follow up on things	Essential
	Not being judgement – seeing the child as an individual	Essential
	Listening to what parents have to say and working together to find a solution	Essential
	If busy arranging a mutually convenient time to talk further	Essential
	Giving parents plenty of warnings of events/meetings	Essential
	Making home visits	Nice it if happens but not essential
	Having coffee mornings	Nice if it happens but not essential
	Give reminders of dates and times using transport escorts	Not necessary

	In meetings all sit on chairs that are the same height	Not necessary
Perceptions of Invitations	Always keeping in touch with parents	Essential
	Answering phone calls, listening to what parents have to say and follow up on things	Essential
	In 'Review Meetings' ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions	Essential
	Giving parents plenty of warning of events/meetings	Essential
	Having coffee mornings	Nice if it happens but not essential
	Give reminders of dates and times using transport escorts	Not necessary
Competence	Giving parents details of what is going to happen and when in IEP	Essential
	In 'Review Meetings' ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions	Essential
	Giving parents plenty of warning of events/meetings	Essential
	Listening to what parents have to say and working together to find a solution	Essential
	Speaking to parents as equals by talking 'to' them and not 'down' to them	Essential
	Giving parents 'all' information from 'all' professionals	Essential
	In meetings all sit on chairs that are the same height	Not necessary
Self-efficacy	In meetings all sit on chairs that are the same height	Not necessary
	Building up parents' self esteem	Not necessary

The concept of relatedness corresponds to ten features; six features that are ranked as being essential features by parents, two features that are ranked as nice if it happens but not essential and two features that are ranked as being not necessary by parents. Therefore it can be postulated that having a sense of relatedness and a perception that the school wants them to be involved is a central factor for parents in developing their engagement in decision making processes.

This is closely linked with parents' perceptions of invitations, opportunities and demands for engagement which again it can be postulated is another key factor for parental engagement as five features that are ranked as being essential by parents correspond to this factor; one feature ranked as nice if it happens but not essential and only one feature that is ranked as not being necessary. This is in accord with Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler's (1997) claims that the general invitations, opportunities and demands presented by schools are potentially very influential in parental engagement.

An implication for the practice of schools is the importance of fostering parents' sense of relatedness by considering what opportunities and meaningful ways there are for parents to become engaged and how the school presents their invitations to parents. This relates to the findings from Epstein's study (2001) which found that when schools included parents in a variety of meaningful ways then communication and trust among parents and school staff was increased. Thus it is worthwhile for schools to invest in developing a two way relationship with parents that is based on mutual trust, respect and commitment; and noting Mackenzie's (2009) advice this is developed through an attitude of mutual humility and hope and awareness, on the part of the teacher, of their verbal and body language.

The concept of competence also corresponds to the majority of the features and because it corresponds to six features that are ranked as being essential by parents and just one feature ranked as not necessary, it can also be posited to be another key factor for parental engagement. What is interesting to observe is that these are features that enable parents to feel they have a role in decision making by giving them adequate notice of events, providing them with adequate information to make informed and meaningful decisions and giving them adequate time in meetings to voice their ideas and opinions. In the above sentence the term 'adequate' has been used three times but it is acknowledged that this is a subjective term in that what is adequate to one person may not be adequate to another.

The concept of self-efficacy (which is discussed in the literature review as a useful construct to consider when deliberating on how to foster parents' sense of competency (see chapter 2.3.3) does not appear to be a central factor for parents in this study because it only corresponds to features that parents ranked as being not necessary. Therefore either the participants in this study already had a strong belief in their ability to succeed in situations or they did not believe that self-efficacy plays a pivotal role in determining motivation and action. This study's scope was not to ascertain participants' level of self-efficacy.

Although the concept of autonomy was not identified as corresponding to any of the features identified in this study it should not be discounted as being irrelevant in understanding and fostering parents' motivation to engage. This study did not have the scope to explore these concepts explicitly with parents and therefore only tentative hypotheses and suggestions for practice are being made in this section with an acknowledgement that further study and research is required to explore these notions further.

Another pertinent link between the findings and the literature review is in relation to how school practices affect parents' behaviour (see section 2.4.2). One observation drawn is the absence of the use of home-school contracts. These are disparaged by Vincent & Tomlinson (1997) as a means of schools controlling parents' behaviour rather than developing a meaningful partnership with them. It is interesting to observe that within this school which has been recognised by OfSTED (2011) as having excellent links with parents and carers that home-school contracts are either not used, or at the very least, not valued by staff or parents.

Other observations drawn from the findings in relation to how school practices affect parents' behaviour link with the importance of developing a two-way partnership with parents based on mutual trust and respect. Elements of a two-

way partnership are observed to be present amongst the features that are ranked as being essential by parents. These elements include the language used by teachers; giving parents' adequate time; working together in true partnership; developing a trusting relationship; and developing mutual respect. An interpretive summary of how this corresponds to the features is presented in Table 8-2.

Elements of a two-way partnership	Feature
Language used	Trying to avoid using jargon
	Watching language used – you 'could' rather than you 'should'
	Speaking to parents as equals by talking 'to' them and not 'down' to them
Working together: giving parents adequate time	Giving parents time to ask questions/give opinions in 'Parents' Evenings'
	In 'Review Meetings' ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions
	Giving parents plenty of warning of events/meetings
	Asking parents first which days and times suit them best for meetings
Working together: true partnership	Listening to what parents say and working together to find a solution
	If busy, arranging a mutually convenient time to talk further
	School and parents setting the agenda of the meeting together
Developing a trusting relationship	Always keeping in touch with parents
	Having a good relationship with parents by taking an interest in them, saying hello and showing an interest in what they have to say
	Having individual, informal chats with parents
Developing mutual respect	Answering phone calls, listening to what parents have to say and follow up on things
	Reminding parents that they are the 'expert' of their child

Table 9-2: Elements of a two-way partnership that are observed to be present amongst the features ranked as being essential by parents.

The features which correspond to the language used by teachers' echoes Mackenzie's (2009) views on the influence that language has on disaffecting, disengaging and disempowering the minority voice. These features, which are ranked as essential by parents, show a wish by the school to engage and empower parents. This is also evident in the choice of language used with the

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features. As explained in section 7.1.3 participants' comments in the focus group were written down verbatim and these comments became the features used in the parental survey. The choice of language such as, 'mutually convenient time' and 'plenty of warning' and 'setting the agenda of the meeting together' highlight the school's desire to be respectful to parents' needs and to establish a two-way partnership.

The elements of giving parents adequate time and working in true partnership can be considered as elements in developing a sense of working together; and this is closely linked to the element of developing a trusting relationship. This links to Vincent & Tomlinson's (1997) view that the way parents and teachers construct and experience their relationship with each other requires careful consideration. The features highlighted here reveal that parents value the schools consideration in allowing them adequate time; in working together to find solutions; and in keeping in touch with parents and appreciating the importance of developing a more individual and personal (as well as a professional) relationship.

The final element of developing mutual respect highlights features that are indicative of the school's wish to show deference to parents' knowledge and experience. Through consideration of these features that are identified as being essential by parents, it can be postulated that developing a two-way relationship with parents based on mutual trust and respect underpins the school's approach to engaging parents in decision making processes.

9.4   Review of Method

9.4.1   Review of Q-Methodology

The Q–sorts give a comprehensive picture of how the school construes all 35 of the issues in the Q–set. Thus Q-methodology has provided a methodology to identify and describe the patterned nature of viewpoints capturing all the

nuances of the topic. In addition Q-methodology has provided a rich and textured picture of viewpoints.

An advantage of using a Q-sort rather than other qualitative methods was negating the risk of saliency. It is contended that the viewpoints identified reflect the school staff's view on the issue of engaging with parents in decision making rather than what they remembered about this issue at the time of data gathering (i.e. semi-structured interview). Another critique of semi-structured interviews is that the questions used are devised by the researcher and without the necessary reflexive precautions then the findings could be argued to only relate to the participant's perspective on the researcher's questions and not necessarily on the topic being investigated. Again, a Q-sort reduces the risk of this threat to the validity of the study. Another advantage is that because in the Q-sorting activity the participant engaged with the Q-sort and not the researcher, then this reduced any risk of incurring a social desirability effect.

The use of factor analysis in Q-methodology provided a transparent and credible way to simplify complex data and presented it in an understandable way. The 2-factor solution and the factor arrays were produced through the use of algorithms. The factor viewpoints are grounded in the factor analysis data. It is acknowledged that an element of interpretation is inevitable in the authoring of the viewpoints. However, scrutiny of the viewpoint descriptions presented in this study is possible by means of examination of the factor tables.

In order to gain an appreciation of whether Q-methodology has allowed a better understanding and engagement with the participants it was important to elicit feedback from the participants who completed the Q-sorting activity (see section 5.2.2). Although each participant was invited to comment on the procedure only 5 comments were given. One of the comments:

- "I found this quite difficult as several of the statements had very similar meanings"

relates to a difficulty encountered by several participants in that they did not agree with the norm distribution pattern (2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 5, 4, 3, 2) and found it problematical to assign a statement to each square. However each participant did eventually comply with the distribution pattern once the researcher had talked through the aims of the Q-sort with them. This would not have been possible if the Q-sort had been completed remotely or the size of the participant groups been too large to prevent the researcher being available to answer the questions and queries that arose during the completion of the Q-sort.

Part of the reasoning for using Q-methodology was with the goal to elicit the meanings and interpretations (human subjectivity) that individuals have from which an understanding of the participant's 'internal' frame of reference about the concept of 'good parental engagement' may emerge. A comment given by a participant shows how they were able to engage with the process and reflect on their understanding of the topic:

- "I found this very interesting to where I placed certain statements, and found some very difficult to place, especially the statements in regards to parental situations. Really made me think about my views" (participant 023)

The other comments:

- "I found this quite difficult as several of the statements had very similar meanings" (participant 015)

- "Some of the comments are difficult to interpret, e.g. 'the decision making process' – what is meant by this?" (participant 036)

- "I found it difficult to be reflective at the end of a demanding working day" (participant 024)

relate to the process about the Q-sorting procedure. These are acknowledged as criticisms to this study and will now be considered further.

The comment "I found this quite difficult as several of the statements had very similar meanings" was somewhat surprising as a thorough process had been undertaken to ensure that the statements were not only balanced; appropriate and applicable to the issue; intelligible and simple; and comprehensive (as advocated by Stainton-Rogers, 1995) but also non-repetitive. However this comment could be a reflection of the timing of the Q-sort activity as another participant acknowledged they "found it difficult to be reflective at the end of a demanding working day"; and thus the participant found it difficult to reflect adequately on the nuances between each statement. These comments came from the Q-sort activity which took place during a staff meeting at the end of the school day. This time was agreed with the head teacher of the school as a time when staff could be available without causing a disruption to their teaching practice. This is a time identified for staff training and development and therefore it was not thought to be unreasonable that the participants could be reflective on their practice of engaging with parents in decision making processes.

The final comment "some of the comments are difficult to interpret, e.g. 'the decision making process' – what is meant by this?" is acknowledged to have been an oversight by the researcher who assumed that the participants would already have had a clear understanding of the school's decision making processes. Although some explanation was provided as part of the introduction to the activity clearly this explanation was not adequate. Consequently the term 'decision making' was clearly clarified in the focus group activity and the parents' survey. However as this was a comment made by one participant and the researcher was present for all of the Q-sorting it is not perceived that this was a major issue in the Q-sort and will not have had a detrimental effect on the outcome of the Q-sorts.

9.4.2 Review of focus group methodology

The focus group is deemed to have been appropriate methodology because it fitted with the reasons given by Krueger & Casey (2009):

- The researcher was looking for a range of ideas that school staff had about the features of their system for engaging parents in decision making

- The researcher wanted the ideas to emerge from the group

- The researcher needed information to design a further study (namely, the parents survey)

- The researcher needed information to help shed light on the data already collected (namely the two viewpoints)

In addition, because a focus group is regarded as a way of being able to elicit the sought for information in a time efficient manner (Krueger & Casey, 2009) it was deemed expedient to adopt focus group methodology. That is a focus group was a more efficient use of time than, for example, conducting individual interviews with the participants would have been.

There was an acknowledged threat to the validity of the results of the focus group due to the large group size and there being only one facilitator present. However some measures were put into place to reduce this threat (see chapter 7.1.3).

9.4.3 Review of survey

The purpose of surveys is to study social perceptions on a phenomenon and to draw comparisons between participants (Aldridge & Levine, 2001). Surveys do not seek to identify an individual viewpoint but to produce aggregate viewpoints. Therefore the use of Q-methodology would not have been appropriate for this phase of the study which identifies a rich and textured picture of viewpoints. The survey generated a single summative viewpoint of the parents' perceptions of

how they valued the features of the school's system in engaging them in decision making processes.

As with focus groups, surveys are a time efficient way of collecting information from participants. Therefore as there was not enough time to collect individual interviews with parents it is deemed that the use of surveys was an appropriate method to adopt for this part of the study.

Another advantage to using surveys as a method of data collection is the flexibility offered to participants in the completion of the survey, for example, postal, interactive or face-to-face. An alternative method, such as semi-structured interviews or Q-sort could only have been completed face-to-face. It is contended that a reason for the high response rate was that participants could complete the survey in the manner that was most convenient to them.

10 Conclusions

This three phase study set out to answer three research questions:

1) How does the school view the idea of engaging with parents in decision making processes?

Q-methodology was used to explore the answer to this question. Two distinct viewpoints on the idea of engaging with parents in decision making processes were identified. Chapter 6.2 presents the viewpoints and Chapter 8.1 offers a discussion of the viewpoints identified.

2) What are the activities that the school employs in engaging with parents in the process of decision making?

A focus group was held to explore the answer to this question. The results from the focus group are presented in chapter 7.2 and a discussion is presented in chapter 8.2.

3) What do the parents see as the important features in relation to the school's system engaging with them in decision making processes?

A survey was used to ascertain what parents' value and the results are presented in chapter 7.4 with a discussion presented in chapter 8.2.

10.1 Generalisability of the findings

Due to the principle of finite diversity in Q-methodology the use of large sample sizes is not necessary. At the same time Q-methodology does not make claims to describe the distribution of the viewpoints to the broader population.

Q-methodology offers an advantage of keeping the researcher's influence on the data to a minimum through the use of pilot studies, member checking and also in the nature of using a concourse on the topic of enquiry. However, it is conceded that there is an element of interpretation on the factor arrays in producing the written viewpoints. Hence the original factor arrays have been included in the results section of this study for readers to challenge the viewpoints as well as being invited to refine them.

Therefore, in consideration of the generalisability of the findings from all three methods employed in this study it is warranted to claim that a local theory about what the schools' construction of what is a good system for engaging with parents in decision making has been produced; as well as a summative viewpoint of the parents' perceptions of how they valued the features of the school's system in engaging them in decision making processes. However it is not possible to extrapolate beyond:

- the extent to which the viewpoints described in this study apply to the wider population (for example, beyond adults who work at this individual Primary Special School and the parents of children who attend).

- the extent to which the viewpoints described in this study might be distributed across a larger population of similar individuals. That is, whether there is a dominant viewpoint.

- the extent to which the viewpoints can describe the distribution of views within the broader population. That is, Q-studies do not state, '56% of people have a factor 1 viewpoint, 10% a factor 2 viewpoint etc.'

- the extent to which the viewpoints are held temporally by the participants. That is, Q-studies identify and describe the participants' 'here and now' viewpoints which may not be constant over time.

By reflecting back on the aims of the methodology chosen as a research tool congruent with Social Constructionism (see chapter 4) it is possible to suggest that the use of Q-methodology in this study has identified a current predominant social viewpoint on engaging with parents in decision making and an understanding of the nuanced meanings and constructions that the participants hold about this issue has been gained.

10.2 Implications for practitioners

The two viewpoints identified from the Q-sort reveal activities that are regarded as being important in helping parents to engage. The viewpoints suggest that it is extremely important to have a good system for 2-way communication which

includes having plenty of opportunities for information sharing. In addition establishing a culture of mutual respect and also investing time in activities that increased parental confidence so that parents feel more able to become involved are also important. Finally, the viewpoints also suggest it is crucial to have someone who is available to talk to parents.

To consider the implications for practitioners in developing and promoting parental engagement in decision making it is also pertinent to consider school practices in relation to developing parents' intrinsic motivation as well as school practices to develop a two-way relationship based on mutual trust and respect.

As discussed in the literature review, the concepts of autonomy, relatedness and competence are important to a person's intrinsic motivation. Interestingly the concept of autonomy did not correspond to any of the features identified in this study as being important and worthwhile. However, because of the importance of a person's perception of autonomy in determining intrinsic motivation, practitioners should not discount the value of activities that help foster and develop autonomy based on the findings of this study alone.

The concepts of relatedness and competence did correspond to several of the features identified in this study as being important and worthwhile. The importance of fostering parents' sense of relatedness is exemplified in the opportunities and meaningful ways for parents to become engaged and also in how the school presents their invitations to parents. Examples of activities for developing relatedness include:

- Answering phone calls, listening to what parents have to say and follow up on things

- Listening to what parents have to say and working together to find a solution

- If busy finding a mutually convenient time to talk further

- Making home visits

- Having coffee mornings

Examples of activities related to parents' perceptions of invitations include:

- Always keeping in touch with parents

- In meetings ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions

- Giving parents plenty of warning of events/meetings

Examples of activities related to developing parents' sense of competence include:

- Speaking to parents as equals by talking 'to' them and not 'down' to them

- Giving parents 'all' information from 'all' professionals

- Giving parents details of what is going to happen and when

- In meetings ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions

An implication for the practice of schools could be to determine what is deemed to be 'adequate' in relation to notice given to meetings, the amount of information provided to parents and time given to parents in meetings.

With regard to school practices, an implication for practitioners could be to consider the value and worth of home-school contracts. Vincent & Tomlinson (1997) highlight this as a method for controlling parents rather than developing two-way relationships. It is suggested by the absence of this activity in the findings of this study that the participants do not value or find home-school contracts worthwhile. An implication for practitioners could be to ask what the use of home-school contracts adds to the two-way relationship with parents and whether there is any positive impact on developing parental engagement.

10.3 Further developments of the study

As mentioned in the 'Approaches to psychological research section' (see chapter 4.1) one of the principles adopted in this study was the logic of

abduction where the research typically begins with curiosity and exploration about an issue before moving to an explanation. This study has generated detailed viewpoints of how a school views engaging with parents in decision making. In addition this study has generated a detailed list of the features in their system for engaging with parents in decision making and identified which of these features parents value. As abductive approaches to research posit once the researcher has developed a theory or hypothesis (namely the factors or viewpoints in relation to Q-methodology) to explain the phenomena then this theory or hypothesis can be used a basis for further research and empirical testing. Suggestions for further research include:

- using a wider sample of schools which would enhance external validity of the factors explored in this present study

- undertaking further exploration of the viewpoints in consideration of the reasons behind the variant viewpoints

- repeating the Q-sort at a later date to establish how temporal the viewpoints are.

In relation to using the viewpoints in the parents' survey a further development could be to use a wider sample of schools which would validate the ranking of the features beyond the remit of this present study. Another development to this study could be to establish how the parents in the survey constructed this role in engaging with the school's decision making processes. As discussed in the literature review (see chapter 2.3.2) understanding how parents construct their role is important because it establishes a fundamental range of activities that parents construe as important, necessary and permissible in their actions as a parent (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). By examining how parents' role conceptions fit with the features of the school's system to engage parents it would be possible to highlight where there is potential consensus or conflict between parents and school.

It would also be interesting to explore further which features of the school's system enable parents to feel motivated to become engaged. A further study could explore the features in relation to how they are linked to the parents' feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness which are identified as innate psychological needs related to an individual's intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Although the literature review discusses the implications of parental engagement in their child's learning this study focused on parental engagement in decision making processes. Thus the activities identified in this study only relate to engaging parents in decision making processes and no conclusions can be drawn as to how these activities influence parental engagement in their child's learning. It would be interesting to see if asking the same questions but in relation to parental engagement in their child's learning would elicit a similar list of activities.

10.4 Final conclusion

The literature review presents evidence for how vitally important parental engagement is for helping children to succeed academically and to sustain their achievement. Meaningful parental engagement can be promoted and developed by focusing on enabling and encouraging parents to be engaged with decision making processes. This study has illuminated the practice of an individual school regarding how they engage with parents in decision making.

The two viewpoints produced from the Q-sort offered a macro-level exploration of how the school views engaging with parents in decision making processes. Although there are differences between the two viewpoints there were also several strong similarities. Both viewpoints placed parents at the heart of the process and strongly felt that it is of paramount importance that parents are respected and valued. That is, parents are viewed as partners in the process. Communication was revealed as a theme that ran through both factors that is

perceived as essential in developing a trusting and respectful two-way relationship.

The second part of the study aimed to explore further the school staff's viewpoints on parental engagement, that is it offered a micro-level exploration. The findings from the study indicate that it is important and worthwhile for schools to foster and develop parents' intrinsic motivation; in particular parents' sense of competency and relatedness. The focus group identified an impressive list of activities that the school employs in motivating parents to engage in decision making processes. The survey revealed which of these activities they most value and find worthwhile. This study reinforces the view that having a perception that the school wants them to be involved is a central and decisive factor for parental engagement. The findings from this study show that one of the ways this is manifested is in the invitations, opportunities and demands for engagements that the school presents to parents.

The findings also highlighted the value in schools investing in developing a two-way partnership with parents. This is developed through mutual trust, respect and commitment. The findings of the study also reinforce that it is important and worthwhile for schools to consider how they develop this relationship with parents. One area for schools to consider is how they acknowledge and address the power imbalance between teacher and parents; for example in how home-school contracts are devised and utilised.

The school used in this study already had a good reputation for engaging with parents. This study reinforces this reputation. These final words given by a parent of the school neatly summarise the shared trust, respect, humility and hope embedded in the parent-school relationship:

> I always feel genuinely welcome in school. There is a
> warmth and friendliness in everyone. It brings about a
> feeling that enables the smallest concern to be raised

without concern. This is very special and deeply appreciated.

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12 APPENDICES

Appendix A – the consent form and interview structure used in the semi-structured interviews with parents

<u>Recruitment Letter</u>

Recruitment letter (001)

My name is Mel Shirley and I work as an educational psychologist in ███████████. My role involves promoting the learning and development of children from 0-19 years of age by working with schools, other professionals (i.e. Speech and Language Therapists, Specialist Teachers and Community Paediatricians), parents; and of course children.

In 2009 the government published 'The Lamb Inquiry' which concluded that parental confidence in the SEN system could be improved with more parental engagement at a strategic level. This idea has recently been reinforced with the recent publication of the Green Paper 'Support and aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs and disability' which states that parents should, 'be able to participate in local decisions'.

This has led me to carry out a research project which links into the Doctorate course in Psychology that I am currently undertaking at the University of Nottingham. The focus of the study is to develop an understanding of how to engage parents who have children with Special Educational Needs with the decisions being made by the local authority. I am interested in finding out about how the local authority engages with parents as valued partners in the SEN process and also to examine what are parents' viewpoints about being engaged with the local authority's decision making.

I am looking for parents to interview who have children that have a statement of special educational needs. The interviews will take up to an hour and will be taped for the purposes of analysis afterwards. You are welcome to have a copy of the interview and transcript. Once I have finished the study you will be welcome to have a copy of my findings.

If you would like to participate, that's great! You do have the right to withdraw from the study at any point, even after the interview has taken place and all details will be kept strictly confidential.

You may have further questions or queries and I would be happy to answer them as best as I can. Please contact me ███████████████████ mshirley@northamptonshire.gov.uk ███████████
███████████

Melanie Shirley

I consent to taking part in this interview:

Signed: Print name: Date:

<u>Interview structure</u>

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. This interview will remain anonymous. For the purposes of analysis the interview will be taped recorded. If you wish, you are welcome to a copy of the transcript. Please can you read the recruitment letter and sign to consent to taking part in this study.

1. Can you describe what your experiences have been in relation to engaging with the local authority?

2. Thinking about the process of identifying your child's special educational needs, what were your experiences of engagement with the local authority?

3. Can you describe what the level of engagement with the local authority has been since your child has received a statement of SEN?

4. Have there been any of times when you have been engaged with the local authority? For example, being a member of a forum or attending a conference/workshop?

5. What is your opinion of how the local authority engages with parents with children with SEN in their decision making processes?

6. What, in your opinion, would be the features of a system where parents are fully engaged with the local authority's decision making?

7. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about relation the parents with children with SEN being engaged in the local authority's decision making?

8. Are there any further questions you would like to ask me in relation to this study?

Thank you very much for taking part in this study.

Appendix B – the final Q-set

1. Schools engaging with parents should be an opportunity for learning and reflection to improve service delivery and practice.

2. A good system of engagement has established a shared expectation of what is going to happen and the timescale for it happening.

3. I believe there should be a good level of 2-way communication which finds out about and builds on parents' knowledge and understanding.

4. It is important to have lots of opportunities where parents are given information and are also being asked their opinion.

5. It is important that things are said in an understandable way and adapted to different audiences.

6. Parents should be informed as to what is going on by being giving balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem and what opportunities or solutions there are.

7. There should be enough time given to parents to process and understand the information required.

8. I believe the final decision making should be in the hands of the parents and the school should implement what the parents decide.

9. I believe that parents should not only be involved in the decision making processes but also in the delivery of training because of the experience they have.

10. I believe that successful involvement of parents in decision making should be celebrated with awards and prizes.

18. The school should empower parents and help them to feel valued.

19. It is important that everyone has a clear understanding of everyone's roles, skills and attributes.

20. It is important that parents are not made to feel they are being a nuisance for phoning up and asking questions.

21. It is important that parents should never be patronised and be given the same professional respect and courtesy as any other professional.

22. Parents' opinions should carry the same weight as everyone else.

23. It is important that parents are not being made to feel that they are just a parent in a room full of professionals.

24. A good system of involving parents in decision making takes into account social and ethical issues.

25. It is my view that the knowledge and experiences that parents have is a valuable quality in the school's decision making process.

26. It is my view that parents can make a very valuable contribution to the school's decision making processes because they are looking at how to help children through a whole lifetime.

27. It is my opinion that parents cannot make a valuable contribution to the school's decision making processes because they are emotionally attached to their children.

11. I believe the purpose of engagement is to work in partnership with parents to solve problems together, drawing in on each other's expertise.

12. I believe that engaging with parents is an information gathering exercise designed to improve the quality of service delivery.

13. In my opinion parents should not be part of the school's decision making process because it may add to the time that the process may take.

14. I believe that if parents are part of the school's decision making then the school will **not** be able to deliver services objectively.

15. I think parents like being given the time to say their opinions and being asked questions.

16. It is not possible to have agreement between parents and school because it is very difficult to represent diverse views whilst also trying to reach decision about complex or controversial issues.

17. I believe that parents being involved in decision making processes should be the norm and be part of the culture.

28. I believe parents should not be part of the school's decision making processes because it's always the same sort of pushy parents and there is no voice for the marginalised.

29. Parents need to be aware of the system (i.e. the procedures, the time things take and the meaning of jargon used) if they want to be involved with the school's decision making.

30. I believe it is important to recognise and reward parental engagement.

31. It is my view that parents' opinions should be valued and acted upon.

32. It is important that training is provided to parents so that they are better able to understand the systems and processes of the school.

33. It is important to have written information which someone can talk through with parents first.

34. It is important that parents have someone who is easily accessible who can guide and reassure them through the process.

35. I believe that the school needs to acknowledge parents' needs (i.e. transport and/or childcare issues) when expecting parents to engage with them.

Appendix C – the Q-sorting grid

Based on your experiences what would be the ideal features of a system for engaging parents in decision making processes?

+4	+3	+2	+1	0	-1	-2	-3	-4

features you most agree should be included   features you most disagree should be included
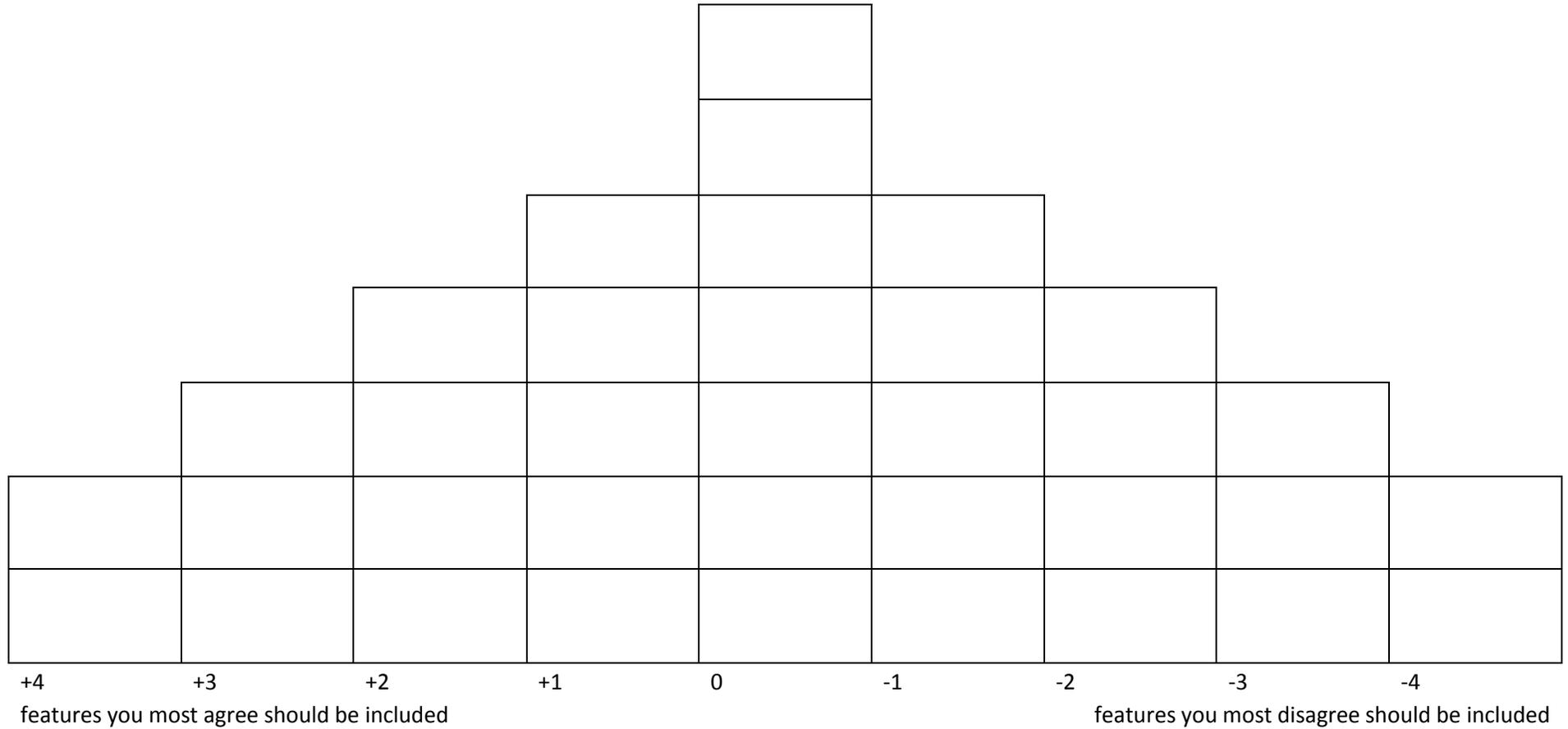
Appendix D – letter to participants of the Q-sort

Hello my name is Mel Shirley and I work in ███████████ **as an educational psychologist.**

- I am completing a study exploring a school's approach to engaging with parents in their decision making processes.

- The aim of this study is to provide knowledge and information to a school to help them sustain, develop and/or improve their system of engaging with parents in their decision making processes.

- The approach taken to achieve this is to look at the similarities and differences between what the school thinks/hopes they are doing and what is actually happening in practice.

I have put together an activity called a Q-sort. It's a sort-of game. I have collected 35 opinions from all different sources. These opinions offer different perspectives on what features an ideal system for engaging with parents should look like. This will provide me with information that will contribute towards building up an understanding of what the school thinks/hopes they are doing.

I would like to invite you to sort them for me from those you agree with to those you disagree with.
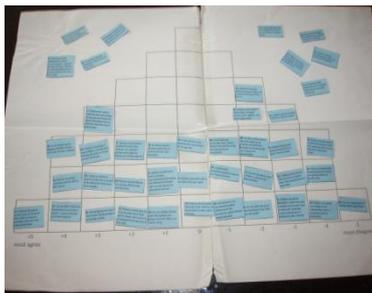
This photo shows a Q-sort being completed.

The activity takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. It's completely anonymous and confidential.

To ensure that I have a really good and thorough understanding of what the school thinks/hopes they are doing I shall be inviting some participants to take part in a focus group following the analysis of the Q-sort. The focus group will last for approximately half an hour.

Q-sort activity – the ideal features of a system for engaging parents in decision making processes

Please read the following carefully.

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the research at any time, without giving any reason.

2. I am aware of what my participation will involve.

3. I understand that there are no risks involved in the participation of this study.

4. All questions that I have about the research have been satisfactorily answered.

I agree to participate.

Participant's name (please print): _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date:_____

Would you be happy for me to contact you in the future to invite you to take part in the focus group? (please circle)

YES   /   NO

Q-sort no: _____

Appendix E – Information provided to participants and the questionnaire used in the member checking activity.

██████████ School – Engaging with parents in decision making

Last term staff and governors from ██████████ School completed a Q-sort as part of a study aiming to provide knowledge and information to the school to help them sustain, develop and/or improve their system of engaging with parents in their decision making processes. The Q-sort was designed to answer the first two research questions:

1) How does the school view the idea of engaging with parents in decision making processes?

2) What does the school view to be important features in a system of engaging with parents in the process of decision making?

Analysis of the data

The completed Q-sorts were analysed using PQmethod version 2.11. This is statistical software designed specifically for Q-method studies. It analyses participants' whole sorts using factor analysis to detect shared perspectives.

PQMethod 2.11 employs factor analysis as a means of reducing and simplifying the data. It converts the rating score (that is -4, -3, etc. through to +3, +4) to z-scores. The z-score states the position of each score in relation to the mean in standard deviation units. PQMethod then devises different Q-sorts (now known as factors) which statistically represent the shared perspectives of all the completed Q-sorts. In other words PQMethod creates completed Q-sorts that best represent the shared perspectives of all 48 completed Q-sorts.

It is important to note that no factor will exactly represent any of the participants' views but by looking at a participant's loading on a factor (i.e. the z-score) it is possible to find out which factor each participant most correlates with. For those that correlate significantly on one factor only PQMethod flags with an X. These are known as 'defining sorts'.

To demonstrate the information that is produced by PQMethod, Figure 1 shows an extract taken from a factor matrix that was produced by PQMethod. The Q-sorts are listed down the left hand side and the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 listed

across the top are the factors. As can be seen Q-sort 01 significantly loads on factor 3 with a weighting of 0.659; Q-sort 02 significantly loads on factor 4 with a weighting of 0.4519; whilst Q-sort 03 does not significantly load on any factor and therefore is not a defining sort in this factor matrix solution.

	Factors				
QSort	1	2	3	4	5
01	071909	-0.0039	0.659X	0.1378	0.1334
02	0.1556	0.2814	0.1497	0.4519X	0.2385
03	0.2857	0.3790	0.2361	0.4407	0.1366

Figure 1: Excerpt from a 5-factor matrix solution with an X indicating a defining sort

The next step was to then decide how many factors to use in the final analysis. A Q-study factor solution should provide a representation of as many of the participants' viewpoints as possible. Different solutions were computed looking for the factor solution that had the highest number of defining sorts. A 6-factor solution had 22 defining sorts (that is, 22 participants loaded significantly on one factor or another). A 5-factor solution had 29 defining sorts. A 4-factor solution also had 29 defining sorts. A 3-factor solution had 33 defining sorts but a 2-factor solution had 48 defining sorts. Thus a 2-factor solution was considered to be the most appropriate.

Interpretation of the factors

So having spent some time considering the mathematical aspects of the data, the findings can now be considered in terms of their meaning. This process takes the 2 factors and a description is written which produces a viewpoint about how the school should engage with parents in decision making. As a 2-factor solution was identified there are 2 viewpoints about how the school should engage with parents in decision making. In addition to a description of each viewpoint it is also possible to discuss what is statistically unique between the factors (known as 'distinguishing features') and also which statements both factors viewed similarly (known as 'consensus statements').

████████ School – Engaging with parents in decision making

Thank you for taking part in the Q-sort last term. I would now like to invite you to provide feedback on the initial findings. Once you have read through the viewpoint on which your Q-sort loaded significantly on please answer the following questions below.

You are welcome to ask any questions about the viewpoint or the procedure at any point during this activity.

Which factor are you providing feedback on: Factor 1 / 2   (please delete as appropriate)

1. On a scale of 0-10 (with 0 being 'I don't agree at all' to 10 being 'I agree completely') how far do you agree with the interpretation of the factors? Please circle.

     0   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

(disagree)   (agree)

2. Which points do you most agree with?

3. Which points do you most disagree with?

4. Do you think the title adequately summarises the viewpoint? If not, do you have any other suggestions?

5. Any other comments about the interpretation of this factor?

Appendix F – the collated comments provided on the questionnaires used in the member checking sections

FACTOR 1 n=21

	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
How far do you agree with the interpretation of the factors?	10 (47.6%)	4 (19.1%)	5 (23.8%)	2 (9.5%)							
Which points do you most agree with?	The first paragraph (2) / Parental involvement should be the norm (6) / parents should be given the same professional respect as any other professional (3) / parents should be asked their opinion and given information often / we draw on each other's expertise (3) / parents/school are partners (7) / time to process information (2) / Parents should not be made to feel that they are just parents (2) / important that there is a good level of 2-way communication (8) / knowledge and experiences that parents have is a valuable quality / there should be lots of opportunities where parents are given information / parents make a good contribution / someone who is accessible (4) / need to take into consideration ethical and social issues / things said in an understandable way (2) / school should empower parents & help them feel valued (3) / balanced and objective information/ parents are looking at helping children through a whole lifetime										
Which points do you most disagree with?	None (11) able to deliver services objectively (could do as their child will be their priority, not everyone equally) / the second paragraph / parents cannot make a valuable contribution as they are emotionally attached - parents will always have a biased viewpoint which should be considered when information sharing however parents will always be the person who knows their child best / I agree that parents need to have someone who is accessible but I read the statement as referring to one person as part of a team, any team member can provide reassurance / parents given the same professionals respect and courtesy as any other professional (depending on subject being discussed - assessment and curriculum different to behaviour) / Parents needs - transport etc.										
Do you think the title adequately summarises the viewpoint?	Yes (16) I think the title summaries the viewpoint very well / I don't think is makes clear <u>who</u> is working in partnership so perhaps 'Parents and schools together' or 'parents as partners'. No as title does not differ greatly from opinions in Factor 2 'Parents as professionals'										

Any other comments?	I did think that parents should not necessarily be able to have the final say about some matters concerning the child but the best scenario is that the school and parents work together to promote the best interests of the child. / It is interesting to see statistical data become alive! / It's important to value parents and communicate with them in a professional way. However its important to ensure emotion of parents is taken into account, th ensure the best for the child. / I think that it covers most points and is a good base to expand further development / I think it is a good summarisation of good practice that should happen. Found the middle of paragraph 2 suddenly jarring 'they reject' agree with the comment but had to double read that paragraph / I would like the term 'decision making' clarified - some decisions are very different to others / the partnership with parents within decision making is a very important factor to the welfare of their children - sometimes parents who have some learning difficulties may not be able to fully understand how to help their children through a whole lifetime and extra help would be needed to fully understand the difficulties their children may face later in life

FACTOR 2 n=14

	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
How far do you agree with the interpretation of the factors?	5 (35.7%)	3 (21.5%)	5 (35.7%)	1 (7.1%)							
Which points do you most agree with?	I agree with all of it / All except 1 / should be valued (3) / parents have to help their children through a whole lifetime (2) / parents should not be patronised (5) / good level of 2-way communication(6) / the knowledge and experiences that parents have is a valuable quality (5) / that parents are looking at helping child through a lifetime / things said in an understandable way / someone should be easily accessible to guide and reassure (2) / empowering parents and help them feel valued / shared expectation of what is going to happen and timescale / information should be balanced and objective / not just a parent in a room full of professionals (2) / important to engage with parents include solving problems together drawing on eaach other's expertise (2)										
Which points do you most disagree with?	none (8) the purpose of engagement is regarded to be principally 'information gathering exercise' because that appears not to value the parents interpretation of the information they are giving (3) / that parents opinions do not carry the same weight as everyone else (2) / parents given the same professional respect and courtesy / I agree with it all										
Do you think the title adequately summarises the viewpoint?	yes (10) if truly valuing / summarises it perfectly / it's fine										
Any other comments?	Some parents to not have the skill and knowledge and understanding / not sure about the word 'quality' is it more of a commodity? Source?? / No I agree with it all in particular the part of making a parent not just feel like a parent and involving but not intimidating then by 'professional talking in a room and overpowering' / very interesting										

Appendix G – the list of features identified by the school through the Q-sort as being the most important when engaging with parents in decision making

A list of 11 features were identified as being most important to the school staff for engaging with parents in decision making. These features can be grouped into three areas – Communication channels, Time span and Attitude to parents. Below is the detailed list of the features that ██████████School feel are most important when engaging with parents in decision making:

1. Communication channels
   - Good level of 2-way communication which finds out about and builds on parents' knowledge and understanding
   - Things should be said in an understandable way and adapted to different audiences
   - Parents should be given balanced and objective information
   - Parents should be given information to help them understand the problem and also what opportunities or solutions there are.

2. Time span
   - Shared expectation of what is going to happen and the timescale for it happening.
   - There should be enough time given to parents to process and understand the information required.
   - Adequate time should be given for parents to say their opinions and to ask questions.

3. Attitude to parents
   - Someone should be easily accessible who can guide and reassure parents through the process.
   - Parents are not being made to feel that they are just a parent in a room full of professionals.
   - Parents should never be patronised and should be given the same professional respect and courtesy as any other professional.
   - Not made to feel they are being a nuisance for phoning up and asking questions.

Appendix H – the list of features complied from the focus group activity

Communication Channels

	2-way communication which finds out about parents' knowledge and understanding
1	keeping in touch
2	FRIENDS of RGS
3	banners / posters
4	listening and working together
5	home visits
6	phone calls
7	home school books
8	parent's evening
9	coffee mornings
10	assemblies
11	parent governors
12	give warnings of events
13	review meetings
14	parental questionnaire
15	text alert
16	advices going out early
17	emails to parents
18	website
19	give parents option to change paperwork
20	informal chats
21	newsletters
22	setting the agenda together

	Things said in an understandable way
23	back up letters with phone call
24	try to avoid using jargon
25	using parents preferred methods of communication
26	verbal if have difficulty reading
27	ask them what they would like you to do
28	speak to them individually
29	judging who wants more info. Or who would like less
30	having a good relationship with parents
31	having family liaison worker

	parents given balanced and objective information
32	Using verbal/visual communication (recording messages)
33	give parents all information
34	talk it through with parents
35	using interpreters (sign as well as lingual)
36	asking others in school to check what is written (i.e. Newsletters)
37	offer alternative solutions to a problem
38	give facts not opinions
39	balance positives with not so positive
40	language used - you 'could' rather than you 'should'

		Information to help parents understand the problem/opportunities or solutions
	41	providing continuity for the child
	42	providing sounding board
	43	helping them to think of solutions - leading questions
	44	direct to other professionals
	45	talk to other parents (parent sharing room)

Time span

		Shared expectation of what is going to happen and when
	1	newsletters (school and class)
	2	giving them dates and times - sent out several times (texts, phone calls, letters, home-school books, escorts, verbal messages
	3	IEPs (detail)
	4	school calendar - website
	5	coffee mornings (ask parents first which dates are best)

		Enough time for parents to process and understand information required
	6	repeatedly lots of different ways
	7	educational advice sent out two weeks beforehand
	8	events - letters sent out 1 week, text 1 day
	9	referring/directing parents to others (i.e. FLW)
	10	screen in reception with information on
	11	reply slips

		Adequate time for parents to say their opinions / ask questions
	12	parents evening
	13	review meetings

Attitude to parents

		Someone easily accessible who can guide and reassure parents
	1	FLW - connected to the school but one step removed from the classroom
	2	confidential talks
	3	has the time
	4	listening and working together
	5	appropriate contacts for signposting
	6	pulls together meetings
	7	overall facilitator
	8	a 'named' person
	9	builds up relationship

		Not made to feel they are just a parent in a room full of professionals
	10	say hello, take an interest in them and their children
	11	tell them they are the expert of their children
	12	praise them
	13	talk to them, not down to them
	14	ask them their opinion
	15	building parents esteem
	16	sit at the same level

17	sharing ideas
18	finding out what their agenda is
19	don't use jargon

	Never patronised - given same respect and courtesy
20	speaking to them as equals
21	being interested in what they have to say
22	common goals
23	valuing knowledge of child and child's needs
24	not being judgemental - child as individual
25	in minutes use language that parents have used

	Not made to feel they are being a nuisance for phoning up and asking questions
26	answering and listening
27	arranging an appropriate time to chat (saying "I'd like to know more...")
28	follow up on things
29	verbally reassure them
30	repeated invitations
31	repeatedly saying they are welcome anytime
32	good office staff

Appendix I – the initial draft of the questionnaire to be used in the parental survey

The aim of this study is to explore how ███████ School involves parents in decision making.

Decision making includes:

- when something needs to change (such as when your child needs to move to a different class)
- or when you are planning to do something for the first time (such as when your child first begins swimming sessions or first goes out on a school trip).

The decisions that ███████ School involves parents in are about:

- an individual child (such as decisions made in a review meeting)
- or the whole school

Using the features that the school view as being important in involving parents in decision making please sort into the following groups:

Features that help you to feel welcome and to be involved with the school:-	Features that actually help you to be involved in decision making:-

Using the features that you put into the 'features that actually help you to be involved in decision making', please sort into one of the three groups:

Essential	Nice if it happens but not essential	Not necessary

Finally, what features have been missed out?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this activity.

Appendix J – the final parental survey questionnaire

1. Below are features that the school view as being important to involving parents in decision making -can you please consider which features you feel are essential, nice if it happens but not essential or not necessary - please can you choose one of the three responses for each feature listed.

	Essential	Nice if it happens but not essential	Not necessary
Always keeping in touch with parents	○	○	○
Having FRIENDS of ▊▊▊▊▊ School	○	○	○
Putting up banners and posters	○	○	○
Listening to what parents to say and working together to find solution	○	○	○
Making home visits	○	○	○
Sending reminders of dates and times using 'phone calls' home	○	○	○
Using 'home-school books' to send home reminders of dates and times	○	○	○
Sending 'emails' to parents to remind them of date and time of events/meetings	○	○	○
Sending a 'text alert' to remind of date and time of events/meetings	○	○	○
Sending 'letters' to parents to remind them of date and time of events/meetings	○	○	○
Giving parents time to ask questions/give opinions in 'Parents' Evenings'	○	○	○
In 'Review Meetings' ensure parents have time to ask	○	○	○

	Essential	Nice if it happens but not essential	Not necessary
questions/give opinions			
Having coffee mornings	O	O	O
Inviting parents into assemblies	O	O	O
Having Parent Governors	O	O	O

2. This is the second part of the list of features - again considering which features you feel are essential, nice if it happens but not essential or not necessary please can you choose one of the three responses for each feature listed.

	Essential	Nice if it happens but not essential	Not necessary
Giving parents plenty of warning of events/meetings	O	O	O
Using parent questionnaires	O	O	O
Sending out reports/advices before Review Meetings	O	O	O
Having upcoming dates and other information on the school website	O	O	O
Giving parents the option to change the paperwork in Review Meetings	O	O	O
Having individual, informal chats with parents	O	O	O
Putting upcoming dates for events in 'school' newsletters	O	O	O
Putting upcoming dates for events in 'class' newsletters	O	O	O

	Essential	Nice if it happens but not essential	Not necessary
School and parents setting the agenda of the meeting together	○	○	○
Giving parents details of what is going to happen and when in the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP)	○	○	○
Trying to avoid using jargon	○	○	○
Having an individual approach, i.e. using the parents preferred method of communication and also judging which parents would like more information and which would like less	○	○	○
Speaking to parents if they have difficulty reading	○	○	○
Giving appropriate signposting to agencies and professionals when necessary	○	○	○
Having a good relationship with parents by taking an interest in them, saying hello and showing an interest in what they have to say	○	○	○

3. This is the third part of the list of features - again considering which features you feel are essential, nice if it happens but not essential or not necessary please can you choose one of the three responses for each feature listed.

	Essential	Nice if it happens but not essential	Not necessary
Using reply slips on letters	○	○	○
Asking parents first which days and times suit them best for meetings	○	○	○

	Essential	Nice if it happens but not essential	Not necessary
Having a family liaison worker (Katy) who parents can go to talk to	○	○	○
Using recording devices for children to send messages home	○	○	○
Giving parents 'all' information from 'all' professionals	○	○	○
Using interpreters (sign as well as lingual)	○	○	○
Putting information on television screen in reception	○	○	○
Offer alternative solutions to a problem	○	○	○
Give facts not opinions and balance the positives with the negatives	○	○	○
Give reminders of dates and times using transport escorts	○	○	○
Watch language used - you 'could' rather than you 'should'	○	○	○
In meetings, all sit on chairs that are the same height	○	○	○
Be a sounding board for parents	○	○	○
Help parents to think of a solution - ask 'helpful' questions ('have you thought of...')	○	○	○

4. This is the final part of the list of features - again considering which features you feel are essential, nice if it happens but not essential or not necessary please can you choose one of the three responses for each feature listed.

	Essential	Nice if it happens but not essential	Not necessary
Parents talking to other parents (the parent sharing room)		○	○
Reminding parents that they are the 'expert' of their child	○	○	○
Praising parents	○	○	○
Speaking to parents as equals by talking 'to' them and not 'down' to them	○	○	○
If busy, arranging a mutually convenient time to talk further	○	○	○
Answering phone calls, listening to what have to say and follow up on things	○	○	○
Repeatedly inviting parents to phone up and ask questions reassuring them they are not a nuisance for phoning	○	○	○
Building up parents self esteem	○	○	○
Not being judgmental - seeing the child as an individual	○	○	○

5. Finally, what features have been missed out?

Appendix K – Tables 11-1 to 11-3 showing the raw data and initial analysis of the results from the parental survey

Table 11-1: The features that are ranked as being 'Essential' by participants, presented in order of highest to lowest frequency count.

Statement number	Statement	frequency count Essential	%
1	Always keeping in touch with parents	35	97.2%
25	Giving parents details of what is going to happen and when in the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP)	34	94.4%
50	Answering phone calls, listening to what have to say and follow up on things	34	94.4%
53	Not being judgmental - seeing the child as an individual	34	94.4%
11	Giving parents time to ask questions/give opinions in 'Parents' Evenings'	33	91.7%
12	In 'Review Meetings' ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions	33	91.7%
4	Listening to what parents to say and working together to find solution	32	88.9%
48	Speaking to parents as equals by talking 'to' them and not 'down' to them	32	88.9%
49	If busy, arranging a mutually convenient time to talk further	32	88.9%
16	Giving parents plenty of warning of events/meetings	31	86.1%
35	Giving parents 'all' information from 'all' professionals	31	86.1%
7	Using 'home-school books' to send home reminders of dates and times	29	80.6%
28	Speaking to parents if they have difficulty reading	29	80.6%
30	Having a good relationship with parents by taking an interest in them, saying hello and showing an interest in what they have to say	29	80.6%
18	Sending out reports/advices before Review Meetings	28	77.8%
39	Give facts not opinions and balance the positives with the negatives	27	75.0%
21	Having individual, informal chats with parents	26	72.2%
38	Offer alternative solutions to a problem	26	72.2%
27	Having an individual approach, i.e. using the parents preferred method of communication and also judging which parents would like more information and which would like less	25	69.4%
44	Help parents to think of a solution - ask 'helpful' questions ('have you thought of...')	25	69.4%
15	Having Parent Governors	24	66.7%
29	Giving appropriate signposting to agencies and professionals when necessary	24	66.7%
9	Sending a 'text alert' to remind of date and time of events/meetings	23	63.9%
33	Having a family liaison worker who parents can go to talk to	23	63.9%
36	Using interpreters (sign as well as lingual)	23	63.9%
20	Giving parents the option to change the paperwork in Review Meetings	22	61.1%
32	Asking parents first which days and times suit them best for meetings	22	61.1%
46	Reminding parents that they are the 'expert' of their child	22	61.1%
2	Having FRIENDS of ▇▇▇▇▇▇ School	21	58.3%
10	Sending 'letters' to parents to remind them of date and time of events/meetings	21	58.3%
24	School and parents setting the agenda of the meeting together	21	58.3%
26	Trying to avoid using jargon	21	58.3%
31	Using reply slips on letters	21	58.3%
22	Putting upcoming dates for events in 'school' newsletters	20	55.6%
23	Putting upcoming dates for events in 'class' newsletters	20	55.6%
51	Repeatedly inviting parents to phone up and ask questions reassuring them they are not a nuisance for phoning	20	55.6%
19	Having upcoming dates and other information on the school website	18	50.0%
41	Watch language used - you 'could' rather than you 'should'	18	50.0%

6	Sending reminders of dates and times using 'phone calls' home	17	47.2%
45	Parents talking to other parents (the parent sharing room)	17	47.2%
43	Be a sounding board for parents	16	44.4%
52	Building up parents self esteem	15	41.6%
40	Give reminders of dates and times using transport escorts	15	41.2%
8	Sending 'emails' to parents to remind them of date and time of events/meetings	14	38.9%
14	Inviting parents into assemblies	14	38.9%
47	Praising parents	14	38.9%
17	Using parent questionnaires	12	33.3%
34	Using recording devices for children to send messages home	11	30.6%
3	Putting up banners and posters	10	27.8%
37	Putting information on television screen in reception	8	22.2%
42	In meetings, all sit on chairs that are the same height	8	22.2%
5	Making home visits	4	11.1%
13	Having coffee mornings	2	5.6%

Table 11-2: The features that are ranked as being 'Nice but not essential' by participants, presented in order of highest to lowest frequency count.

		frequency count	%
Statement number	Statement	Nice but not essential	
5	Making home visits	29	80.6%
13	Having coffee mornings	29	80.6%
37	Putting information on television screen in reception	26	72.2%
17	Using parent questionnaires	24	66.7%
3	Putting up banners and posters	21	58.3%
14	Inviting parents into assemblies	19	52.8%
42	In meetings, all sit on chairs that are the same height	19	52.8%
8	Sending 'emails' to parents to remind them of date and time of events/meetings	18	50.0%
34	Using recording devices for children to send messages home	18	50.0%
43	Be a sounding board for parents	18	50.0%
45	Parents talking to other parents (the parent sharing room)	18	50.0%
19	Having upcoming dates and other information on the school website	17	47.2%
47	Praising parents	16	44.4%
2	Having FRIENDS of ▆▆▆▆▆▆ School	15	41.7%
22	Putting upcoming dates for events in 'school' newsletters	15	41.7%
23	Putting upcoming dates for events in 'class' newsletters	15	41.7%
41	Watch language used - you 'could' rather than you 'should'	15	41.6%
51	Repeatedly inviting parents to phone up and ask questions reassuring them they are not a nuisance for phoning	15	41.6%
20	Giving parents the option to change the paperwork in Review Meetings	14	38.9%
31	Using reply slips on letters	14	38.9%
32	Asking parents first which days and times suit them best for meetings	14	38.9%
52	Building up parents self esteem	14	38.9%
6	Sending reminders of dates and times using 'phone calls' home	13	36.1%
10	Sending 'letters' to parents to remind them of date and time of events/meetings	13	36.1%
26	Trying to avoid using jargon	13	36.1%
9	Sending a 'text alert' to remind of date and time of events/meetings	12	33.3%

		frequency count	%
24	School and parents setting the agenda of the meeting together	12	33.3%
29	Giving appropriate signposting to agencies and professionals when necessary	12	33.3%
33	Having a family liaison worker who parents can go to talk to	12	33.3%
36	Using interpreters (sign as well as lingual)	12	33.3%
15	Having Parent Governors	11	30.6%
27	Having an individual approach, i.e. using the parents preferred method of communication and also judging which parents would like more information and which would like less	11	30.6%
40	Give reminders of dates and times using transport escorts	11	30.6%
44	Help parents to think of a solution - ask 'helpful' questions ('have you thought of...')	11	30.6%
46	Reminding parents that they are the 'expert' of their child	11	30.6%
21	Having individual, informal chats with parents	10	27.8%
38	Offer alternative solutions to a problem	10	27.8%
39	Give facts not opinions and balance the positives with the negatives	9	25.0%
18	Sending out reports/advices before Review Meetings	8	22.2%
7	Using 'home-school books' to send home reminders of dates and times	7	19.4%
28	Speaking to parents if they have difficulty reading	7	19.4%
30	Having a good relationship with parents by taking an interest in them, saying hello and showing an interest in what they have to say	7	19.4%
16	Giving parents plenty of warning of events/meetings	5	13.9%
35	Giving parents 'all' information from 'all' professionals	5	13.9%
4	Listening to what parents to say and working together to find solution	4	11.1%
48	Speaking to parents as equals by talking 'to' them and not 'down' to them	4	11.1%
49	If busy, arranging a mutually convenient time to talk further	4	11.1%
11	Giving parents time to ask questions/give opinions in 'Parents' Evenings'	3	8.3%
12	In 'Review Meetings' ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions	3	8.3%
25	Giving parents details of what is going to happen and when in the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP)	2	5.6%
50	Answering phone calls, listening to what have to say and follow up on things	2	5.6%
53	Not being judgmental - seeing the child as an individual	2	5.6%
1	Always keeping in touch with parents	1	2.8%

Table 11-3: The features that are ranked as being 'Not necessary' by participants, presented in order of highest to lowest frequency count.

		frequency count	%
Statement number	Statement	Not necessary	
40	Give reminders of dates and times using transport escorts	10	27.8%
42	In meetings, all sit on chairs that are the same height	9	25.0%
34	Using recording devices for children to send messages home	7	19.4%
52	Building up parents self esteem	7	19.4%
6	Sending reminders of dates and times using 'phone calls' home	6	16.7%
47	Praising parents	6	16.6%
3	Putting up banners and posters	5	13.9%
13	Having coffee mornings	5	13.9%
8	Sending 'emails' to parents to remind them of date and time of events/meetings	4	11.1%
5	Making home visits	3	8.3%
14	Inviting parents into assemblies	3	8.3%
24	School and parents setting the agenda of the meeting together	3	8.3%

41	Watch language used - you 'could' rather than you 'should'	3	8.3%
46	Reminding parents that they are the 'expert' of their child	3	8.3%
10	Sending 'letters' to parents to remind them of date and time of events/meetings	2	5.6%
26	Trying to avoid using jargon	2	5.6%
37	Putting information on television screen in reception	2	5.6%
43	Be a sounding board for parents	2	5.6%
9	Sending a 'text alert' to remind of date and time of events/meetings	1	2.8%
15	Having Parent Governors	1	2.8%
19	Having upcoming dates and other information on the school website	1	2.8%
22	Putting upcoming dates for events in 'school' newsletters	1	2.8%
23	Putting upcoming dates for events in 'class' newsletters	1	2.8%
31	Using reply slips on letters	1	2.8%
33	Having a family liaison worker who parents can go to talk to	1	2.8%
36	Using interpreters (sign as well as lingual)	1	2.8%
45	Parents talking to other parents (the parent sharing room)	1	2.8%
51	Repeatedly inviting parents to phone up and ask questions reassuring them they are not a nuisance for phoning	1	2.8%
1	Always keeping in touch with parents	0	0.0%
2	Having FRIENDS of ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ School	0	0.0%
4	Listening to what parents to say and working together to find solution	0	0.0%
7	Using 'home-school books' to send home reminders of dates and times	0	0.0%
11	Giving parents time to ask questions/give opinions in 'Parents' Evenings'	0	0.0%
12	In 'Review Meetings' ensure parents have time to ask questions/give opinions	0	0.0%
16	Giving parents plenty of warning of events/meetings	0	0.0%
17	Using parent questionnaires	0	0.0%
18	Sending out reports/advices before Review Meetings	0	0.0%
20	Giving parents the option to change the paperwork in Review Meetings	0	0.0%
21	Having individual, informal chats with parents	0	0.0%
25	Giving parents details of what is going to happen and when in the child's Individual Education Plan (IEP)	0	0.0%
27	Having an individual approach, i.e. using the parents preferred method of communication and also judging which parents would like more information and which would like less	0	0.0%
28	Speaking to parents if they have difficulty reading	0	0.0%
29	Giving appropriate signposting to agencies and professionals when necessary	0	0.0%
30	Having a good relationship with parents by taking an interest in them, saying hello and showing an interest in what they have to say	0	0.0%
32	Asking parents first which days and times suit them best for meetings	0	0.0%
35	Giving parents 'all' information from 'all' professionals	0	0.0%
38	Offer alternative solutions to a problem	0	0.0%
39	Give facts not opinions and balance the positives with the negatives	0	0.0%
44	Help parents to think of a solution - ask 'helpful' questions ('have you thought of...')	0	0.0%
48	Speaking to parents as equals by talking 'to' them and not 'down' to them	0	0.0%
49	If busy, arranging a mutually convenient time to talk further	0	0.0%
50	Answering phone calls, listening to what have to say and follow up on things	0	0.0%
53	Not being judgmental - seeing the child as an individual	0	0.0%

Research Project employing qualitative methods:

How do parents make sense of their child's behaviour during times of heightened emotions?

ABSTRACT

This small scale study explores how parents make judgements when they are presented with confrontational behaviour from their child indicating that the child is feeling emotionally distressed. The original area of interest for study was how parents made sense of their child's behaviour during times of heightened emotions which evolved from an interest in the development of the brain and the role of the parent in facilitating brain development. Using data from four semi-structured interviews with parents of children who fall into one of three age group categories (2-3 years of age; 7-9 years of age; 11-14 years of age) analysis was completed using a grounded theory approach. The interpretative analysis proposes a grounded theory conceptual framework for how parents make judgements about their child's behaviour which emerged from the data. This framework encompasses the three higher order categories of:

- Factors influencing parents' judgement
- Factors being judged by parents
- Parents' reactions

The social psychological process of mental representations in social judgements is a useful framework for providing an explanation as to why some factors are more influential than others. Conclusions are drawn and possible further developments of the study including expanding the sample size for substantiation of findings as well as further exploration into the effect of the transience of time on judgements.

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Introduction

1.1 Background to the Research

This research has evolved from a curiosity in children's behaviour developed as part of the author's professional practice and experience as an educational psychologist but also from the experience of managing and handling the behaviour of the author's two young children.

1.2 Theoretical Sensitivity – personal and professional experience

The purpose of exploring the role of the author is to make explicit the author's contribution to the construction of meanings made throughout the research process. The author's professional background began as a Secondary School teacher teaching children aged from 11 years to 19 years of age. After four years the Masters Degree in Educational Psychology was completed and a career as an educational psychologist was launched. For the past 6 years the author has been working as a generic educational psychologist within a local authority supporting parents, schools and other agencies to promote child development and learning for all children aged 0-19 years of age.

During the course of the last 6 years the author has come across research and literature regarding the development of the brain; in particular the 'baby brain' and the 'adolescent brain'. As an applied psychologist working within the field of educational psychology it has been the functional development that accompanies the neural development that has been especially interesting; in particular the functional development that manifests itself in the outward display of behaviour.

The author's two children, currently 4 years and 18 months, have provided a unique opportunity to translate the theory of the baby brain into real life case study examples through observations of their behaviour. In addition there have

been numerous occasions of being a witness and a participant to conversations with other parents in relation to their children's behaviour. An observed common theme has been how to handle their child's behaviour whilst they are feeling very frustrated and angry.

These experiences demonstrate that the author has been both a first-hand witness and a third hand witness to the outward display of behaviour by children of all ages when they are feeling frustrated and angry. To further study this area, within the remit of employing qualitative methodologies, it was decided to focus on parental perceptions and how they construe their child's behaviour during times of heightened emotions.

The ensuing chapters will provide a review of relevant research literature which will be followed by a description of the research methodology and procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 will provide an interpretative analysis of the results. Chapter 5 will provide the second literature review relevant to the theoretical sensitivities that supported the data analysis. The final chapter will present the grounded theory that has emerged from the data and draw together conclusions made.

2 Review of the Literature

The literature review will draw on material on the following areas:

- The development of the brain during childhood
- The role of the parent

2.1 The development of the brain during childhood

At birth the brain contains hundreds of billions of nerve cells or neurons. Each neuron is separated from physical contact with every other neuron but they communicate to each other in a language that is part electrical and part

chemical building connections and organising themselves into systems. With experience neurons change their behaviour as they learn, remember, forget and at times they can malfunction causing disruptions in normal behaviour (Kolb & Whishaw, 1990). At first these systems are not very efficient but as the neurons respond to stimuli seen, heard, felt or tasted these systems 'prune' themselves into more efficient neural pathways. Throughout our lifespan the number of neurons will decline but it is organisation and efficiency of the neural connections that is important in determining performance (Healy, 1987).

The area of the brain where the experience of interactions and relationships appears to have the greatest effect is in the prefrontal cortex. This part of the brain links the cerebral cortex (often referred to as the 'thinking brain') and the orbitofrontal cortex that has been identified as a key area of the brain for social and emotional regulation (Healy, 1987) (also known as the 'social brain') (see figure 1). Effective functioning of the orbitofrontal cortex enables the ability to regulate impulses and desires, to exercise our will power and self-control as well as our capacity for empathy (Gerhardt, 2004).
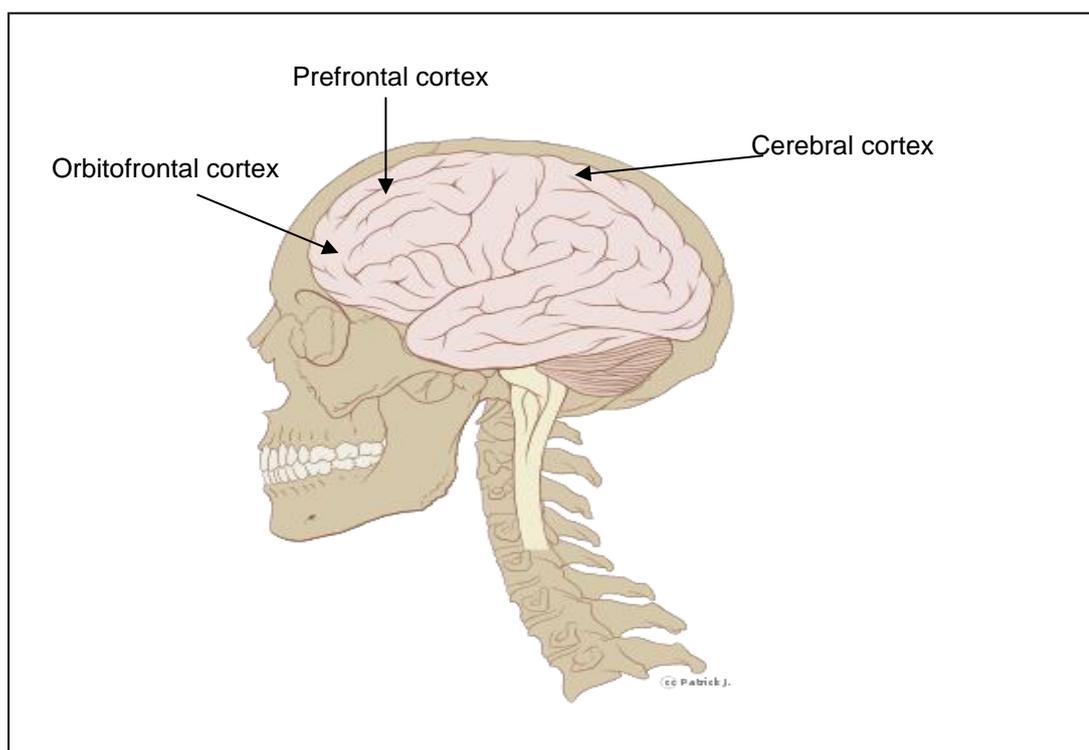
Figure 0-1: Diagram of the Human Brain showing the Orbitofrontal, Prefrontal and Cerebral Cortexes (adapted from Lynch 2006)

With recent improvements in brain imaging techniques (including anisotropy which can map how organised the axons are) neurologists are learning more and more about how the brain develops and changes over time. The first three years is a fundamental and critical time for the process of 'pruning' of the neural networks. The neural pathways in the prefrontal cortex linking the cerebral cortex and the orbitofrontal cortex have not yet matured in a baby's brain therefore, 'it is no good trying to 'discipline' a baby or expect a baby to control its behaviour, since the brain capacity to do so does not yet exist' (Gerhardt p.37); in other words the 'social brain' does not yet exist.

Adolescence is another time of rapid brain development. Adolescence is often defined as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood starting with the onset of puberty. During this time the prefrontal cortex undergoes a period of synaptic elimination (Blakemore, 2008) or 'pruning' of excess synapses. It is suggested that a consequence of this relatively late process of pruning is that it renders information processing less efficient and there is a decrease in prefrontal activity. Blakemore summarises empirical studies on cognitive development during adolescence which found evidence of a pubertal 'dip' in tasks that are associated with the ability to empathise and recognise emotions in others (key indicators when assessing a person's level of social skills) to support this theory. Thus suggesting that, as with the 'baby brain', during adolescence there is a neurological reason for the apparent decline in social skills or in other words a reason for why the 'social' brain does not appear to be functioning as efficiently as in early childhood years (approximately 5-10 years of age). These suggestions are made very tentatively in the literature as further investigations are needed to confirm whether there is a correlation between the structural and functional development of the social brain in adolescence. As Blakemore reports there could be other explanations for this 'dip' in performance including changes in hormones and changes in the social environment.

2.2 The role of the parent

Recent literature proposes that the relationship a child has with his/her parent is a critical factor in the effectiveness of the pruning process of neural pathways leading to maturity in the 'social brain'. It is widely acknowledged that parents are extremely important in the influence on the development of the brain (Porter 2002). Responsive parents who provide enough attention and sensitivity, adapting to the baby's needs appear to provide a positive nurturing environment to help the baby develop into an emotionally secure and settled child. Gerhardt (2004) suggests that the more positive the experience of the baby then the more effective will be the process of pruning leading to more organised and efficient neural connections.

Relationships and interactions with adults is a key factor during the critical periods of brain development (Healy, 1987; Gerhardt, 2004). As Gerhardt writes,

> …what seems to be most crucial for the baby is the extent
> to which the parents or caregiver is emotionally available
> and present for him, to notice his signals and to regulate
> his states…(p21)

Bowlby (2007) proposes that the amount of time and attention parents give to children has a direct correlation on the health, happiness and self-reliance of adolescents and young adults. In his 'Attachment Theory' the concept of attachment behaviour is understood as being the behaviour that results in a person attaining close proximity to another individual who is perceived as better able to cope with the world. For the person to know that this attachment figure is available and responsive imparts a strong and pervasive feeling of security and encourages the value and continuation of the relationship. Attachment Theory also proposes that the child's and parents' perceptions of their relationship are fundamental in the child's developing ability to regulate their own emotion in the face of untoward events (Hay, 2001).

2.3 Summary of Chapter 2

It was the author's professional and personal experiences (as discussed in Chapter 1) that led to an exploration of the research literature on the development of the brain during childhood. The correlation between the level of maturity in the structural development of the prefrontal cortex brain and the efficiency of the 'social brain' is an interesting and thought provoking observation. Especially as at the two periods of critical development, namely 0-3 years of age and adolescence, parents often report experiencing more challenging and troublesome behaviour from their children substantiated by the numerous parent manuals available and also the author's own observations (see Chapter 1).

The author's area of curiosity evolved from an initial interest in the development of the brain, to the factors that impact on the brain's development. This then led this first literature review into the areas of the role of the parent. Bowlby's Attachment Theory offers insight into why not only is the relationship a child has with his/her parent so important but also why the child's and parents' perceptions of their relationship are fundamental in the child's developing ability to regulate their emotions (Hay, 2001). The author became curious about how parents perceived their relationship with their child especially during times when the efficiency of their child's 'social' brain was put to the test; namely when the child was experiencing heightened emotions. Yet the author found that there has been little published research in relation to parents' perceptions of their children's behaviour during times of heightened emotions. Thus, the focus of this study has evolved into a curiosity to explore parents' perceptions in relation to the outward display of behaviour by their child when they were experiencing heightened emotions; in other words when the child was feeling very angry / frustrated; or very happy / excited.

3   Research Methodology

This chapter presents an account of the research methods used in the course of this study covering the following areas:

- The aims of the study
- The design of the study
- Data collection
- Selection of participants
- Ethical issues
- Procedures for data analysis

3.1 Aims of the Study

A review of the research literature on the development of the brain during childhood had revealed a correlation between the level of maturity in the structural development of the prefrontal cortex brain and the efficiency of the 'social brain'. Attachment Theory offered insight into why the child's and parents' perceptions of their relationship are fundamental in the child's developing ability to regulate their emotions. Yet this review is limited because there has been little published research in relation to parents' perceptions of their children's behaviour during times of heightened emotions.

The aim of this study was to explore parents' perceptions in relation to the outward display of behaviour by their children when they were experiencing heightened emotions; in other words when they were feeling angry, frustrated or happy and excited.

3.2 Rationale for the chosen methodology

Fundamental to the approach adopted for this research is the notion that, 'human experience, including perception, is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically' and how we make sense of our experiences is a manifestation of

these elements (Willig, 2000 p7). Thus each individual is unique and will construct meanings about the world differently. The goal of this research is to elicit the meanings and interpretations that individuals have about the world from which an abstract interpretative understanding may emerge.

An inductive or hypothetico-deductive methodology designed to verify or falsify a hypothesis would not be appropriate for this particular research since there is no hypothesis for this study but an area of curiosity that invites further exploration. A qualitative approach offers flexibility and a means to gain insights into personal action and experience.

3.3 Design of the study

This section provides an account of the procedures undertaken in relation to the selection of participants, data collection and data analysis.

3.3.1 Data Collection

The aim of data collection was to obtain 'rich' and 'thick' descriptions of the participant's unique interpretations of their experiences focusing on relevant specific experiences within their lives. A popular method of data collection in research is semi-structured interviews which elicit an in-depth exploration by inviting the participant to describe and reflect upon their experiences.

A preliminary list of open-ended questions based on Charmaz's (2006) sample list of questions was compiled. A copy of the preliminary parents' interview schedule can be found in Appendix A. Core themes that were explored during the interviews were:

- Parents' perceptions of an angry/frustrated display of behaviour in relation to the antecedents and the consequences;

- Parents' perceptions of what understanding the child has in relation to this display of behaviour;

- Parents' perceptions of a very happy or excited display of behaviour in relation to the antecedents and the consequences; and

- Parents' perceptions of what understanding the child has in relation to this display of behaviour.

Each interview was transcribed and analysed prior to subsequent interviews being carried out thus facilitating the process of modifying the interview schedule allowing the research to evolve and develop. A total of 4 interviews were carried out.

3.3.2 Selection of Participants

Participants consisted of an opportunity sample of parents of children who lived in the south Leicestershire and East Northamptonshire area. Recruitment was achieved by word of mouth. Once a possible participant had been identified a recruitment letter was sent to them. A copy of the recruitment letter can be found in Appendix B.

The criteria for selection was that the participant was not known to the author prior to the research being carried out and they had a child which fell into one of three age groups:

- 2-3 years of age
- 7-9 years of age
- 11-14 years of age

It was not possible to sample the whole breadth of childhood within the logistical constraints of this study. These age groups were selected as they are the periods generally accepted in western society as the periods of 'toddler', 'young child' and 'early adolescence'. The goal of using these age groups was to

ensure that a sample of each childhood era was represented within the study sample.

A total of 4 interviews were carried out. All of the participants were mothers of children within one of the age bands. Although recruitment did not specify mothers it appears this was an outcome of using an opportunistic sample. However the over-representation of mothers on this study should not invalidate the findings in this study as, 'there is abundant evidence that almost every child habitually prefers one person, usually his mother-figure, to who to go when distressed' (Bowlby, 2001 p31) indicating that mothers will have the required experience in encountering their child's outward display of behaviour during times of heightened emotions.

3.3.3 Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are an intrinsic part of the research process. Brinkmann and Kvale (2008) recommend that these issues should be addressed at each stage of the research process from the initial formulation through the interviews to transcription and analysis and even publication of the research.

Issues relating to informed consent and confidentiality were addressed prior to conducting the research and also at the beginning of each interview. The recruitment letter which participants received before they volunteered to take part detailed the purpose of the interviews and the procedure to be employed for the interview. The letter also clearly informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and provided information about confidentiality. There was also a briefing session prior to the commencement of each interview to reiterate and clarify these issues.

The consequences of a qualitative study also needed to be addressed with respect to any possible harm as well as expected benefits from participating in

the study. One possible negative consequence of the interview arising from the complexities of researching private lives, in particular the concern with how lives and experiences are described conceptualised and analysed (Brinkmann & Kvale) is that parents might feel that their parenting skills are being judged. As mentioned above participants were given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study being to describe *the perceptions* of parents and not being a tool to measure the effectiveness of parents in handling and managing their child's behaviour. In addition participants were offered the opportunity to have copies of the interviews and transcripts to allow them to veto the inclusion of any part of the interview that they may be unhappy with. None of the participants requested a copy of the interview or the transcript.

The final ethical issue to be addressed is the role of the researcher as, 'critical for the quality of scientific knowledge and for the soundness of ethical decisions' (Brinkmann & Kvale p268). The important issue would be to maintain the independence of research as well as the scientific quality of the knowledge. Brinkmann & Kvale suggest the art of 'thick description' in the reporting of the research as an approach to learning ethical behaviour. The principles of 'thick description' namely:

- Contextualise
- Narrativize
- Focusing on the particular example, and
- Consulting the community of practice

have been incorporated into the approach adopted during the process of this research.

3.3.4 Reliability and Validity

Historically, criticism of the reliability and validity of qualitative research has demeaned its credibility. But it is misleading and flawed to judge the matter of the credibility of qualitative research against the same criteria as quantitative research. Qualitative methodologies are derived from different epistemological,

hermeneutic and ontological traditions that challenge the tradition positivist view of knowledge and research.

Many qualitative studies which evolved very closely from the epistemology of social constructionism admits that the studies cannot be generalised outside of the sample as any other individual will bring a whole new set of beliefs, attitudes, experiences etc which will necessarily affect their perception of the phenomena. Instead it is argued (Elliot et al, 1999; Law et al, 1998) that qualitative methodologies require their own set of guidelines which are pertinent to qualitative research methodologies. This includes the appropriateness of the study design (i.e. 'fit for purpose'); owning one's perspective (i.e. answering questions of personal and epistemological reflexivity); situating the sample (i.e. size of sample, background and history of participants); ethics procedure (i.e. how informed consent was obtained and confidentiality issues); credibility checks (i.e. member checking, triangulation etc), auditability (i.e. the reasoning process of the researcher in relation to making decisions, identifying categories and the development of themes etc). These guidelines facilitate a process of reflexivity and the explicitness of the guidelines makes possible the replication of the study by another researcher. In terms of the credibility checks there was no ratification of the coding or categorisation with another researcher. In all other aspects the use of the above principles provides this research with analytical credibility.

3.3.5 Procedures for Data Analysis

Grounded theory is an appropriate method of analysis for this study because it, 'is well suited to generating theory in complex social settings whilst retaining rigour and being open to critical inspection' (Miller, 1995 p.6). The following section provides an overview of this approach.

3.4 Grounded Theory

As an approach for analysing data, grounded theory was originally developed by Barney Glasner and Anselm Strauss in the 1960s as, 'a resolution of different epistemological positions and a solution to a broader problem about perceptions of status of qualitatively based knowledge in the social sciences' (Thomas & James, 2006 p767). Grounded theory bridges the traditional positivistic methods of using systematic techniques to study an external world (Charmaz, 2008) with interpretative elements held in its core belief that a grounded theory is relative to the perspective of the person producing it (Rennie, 2000).

Grounded theory begins with a topic of interest and open-ended research questions (Charmaz and Henwood, 2007) which are explored by the researcher using grounded theory procedures and techniques. The procedures of theoretical sampling, constant comparison of data to theoretical categories and the focus on theoretical development via saturation of categories are essential and unique to grounded theory (Hood, 2008). These provide a framework guiding the research process from the initial stage with large quantities of unstructured data through to the generation of descriptive codes followed by a process where the codes are condensed into a higher level of conceptual categorisation until finally a 'theory' emerges from the data (Charmaz, 2006).

3.4.1 Theoretical Sensitivity

Theoretical sensitivity is regarded as a prerequisite for coding and category building by acknowledging the accepted philosophy that the starting point of the construction of theoretical categories draws on existing knowledge (Kelle, 2008). Achieving a balance between the researcher's objectivity and sensitivity is acknowledged as a challenging task (Kelle; Charmaz, 2006) requiring an analytic temperament and analytic competence from the researcher (Holton, 2008). Sources of sensitivity include theoretical knowledge, professional experience and personal experience and, as Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue,

'it is by using what we bring to the data in a systematic and aware way that we become sensitive to meaning without **forcing** our explanations on data' (p47).

3.4.2 Memoing

Memo-writing is a crucial and pivotal element of data analysis because it prompts the researcher to analyse data and codes from the outset of the research process.

> Memos catch your thoughts, capture the comparisons and connections you make, and crystallize questions and directions for you to pursue. Through conversing with yourself while memo-writing, new ideas and insights arise during the act of writing. (Charmaz, 2006 p73)

Memos also foster theoretical sensitivity as they help the researcher gain analytical distance from the data and encourage the process of conceptualization (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

3.4.3 Coding

Coding is a core process in grounded theory methodology. Through coding the researcher defines what is happening in the data and is used as an analytical tool for handling masses of raw data and developing an emergent theory. Confusingly for the novice researcher there currently exist several names for the different stages of coding but for the purpose of this study the terms of Level I, II and III used by Miller (1995) have been adopted.

Initial analysis of the data involves line by line coding which is known as 'open coding' and which Miller describes as Level I coding. These codes tend to be descriptive labels of what is happening in the data or 'In Vivo' codes (participant's exact words) which help to preserve the participant's meanings of the views and actions (Charmaz, 2006). The second phase in coding is described as Level II coding (or 'focused coding'). This phase becomes more

focused by selecting the most significant and/or frequent Level I codes and involves making a decision about which codes make most analytic sense to categorise the data (Charmaz). The final phase, described by Miller (1995) as Level III coding and also known as 'categorisation', is characterised by the emergence of a conceptual framework or theoretical construct which pulls, 'the other categories together to form an explanatory whole (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 p146). Miller (1995) proposes that it is this detection and explication of a core variable, typically a Basic Social Psychological Process (BSPP) that is an ultimate goal in the writing of grounded theory.

3.4.4 Constant Comparative Analysis and Theoretical Sampling

The procedure of Constant Comparative Analysis guides the development of the research through the process of checking to see if the data supports and continues to support the emerging codes and categories (Holton, 2008). It stimulates thinking about the properties and dimensions of a category (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and also establishes the practice of alternating data collection with coding and memo-writing (Holton, 2008).

Theoretical sampling involves seeking further data samples in order to develop the emerging theory by challenging or elaborating the codes and categories until a point of saturation has been achieved. Charmaz (2006) describes the saturation as when, 'gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of core theoretical categories' (p113).

4 Interpretative Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the procedures undertaken in the analysis of the data and discuss the interpretations that have emerged. The grounded theory process was used as the methodological framework for carrying out this study.

A total of four participants were interviewed. To maintain confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants a coding system of M (the researcher) and P (participant) was used as well as the practice of using initials when reference was made to another person.

4.2 Coding

4.2.1 Level I (open coding) and Level II (focused coding)

In total 99 open codes were generated. Interview 1 produced 68 codes; interview 2 produced a further 19 new codes and interview 3 produced 12 new codes. At the end of the analysis of interview 3 it was decided that a saturation point had been reached as only 12 new codes had been yielded; especially in consideration of the time constraints of this study. Thus interview 4 was used as part of the process of theoretical sampling.

Fundamental to the process of conceptual and theoretical development within a grounded theory study are the processes of constant comparative analysis, involving the exploration of similarities and differences between codes, and memo writing. The memos produced during the coding process suggested an emerging theme about the dimensions or paradigms that parents use to make sense and classify their child's behaviour. These dimensions appeared to fall into main four higher order categories:

- Concepts relating to internal temperaments (of both parent and child);
- Concepts relating to external standards for behaviour;
- Concepts relating to possible causal factors for the heightened emotion; and
- Concepts relating to how parents react to the presenting behaviour from their child

The grouping of Level I codes into these four thematic groups allowed for more focused coding by condensing the data into more manageable portions.

4.2.2   Level III (categorisation)

Through the process of constantly comparing codes within each thematic group and also comparing the codes with the data a conceptual framework emerged about parents making 'judgements' about their child's behaviour and the 'judgement' that parents made impacted on what their reaction to their child's behaviour would be. The grouping of the focused codes into this framework facilitated the next stage of the analytical process of re-defining the thematic groups into distinct conceptual themes under key headings of 'Factors Influencing Judgement', 'Factors Being Judged' and 'Parents' Reactions'.

The following sections provided a descriptive summary of each of the conceptual themes and the categories that were generated. Finally the relationship between the conceptual themes is illustrated in a diagram showing the process of the judgements parents make when their child displays behaviour indicative of heightened emotions.

4.3   Factors Influencing Judgement

Five Level II codes were generated from this data including 'Quality of Relationship with Child', 'Knowledge', 'Experiences', Parents' Mood' and 'Ideals'. This data relates to the factors that influence the way that parents make sense of the behaviour that their child is displaying. Figure 4-1 shows a diagrammatic representation of these codes along with samples of Level I codes.

4.3.2   Quality of Relationship with Child

The codes within this category reflected the relationship that the parents felt they had with their child. Parents described the feelings they has towards their child. Examples from the transcripts include:

> you know I love her dearly but she wasn't a very nice child
> (Transcript 3)
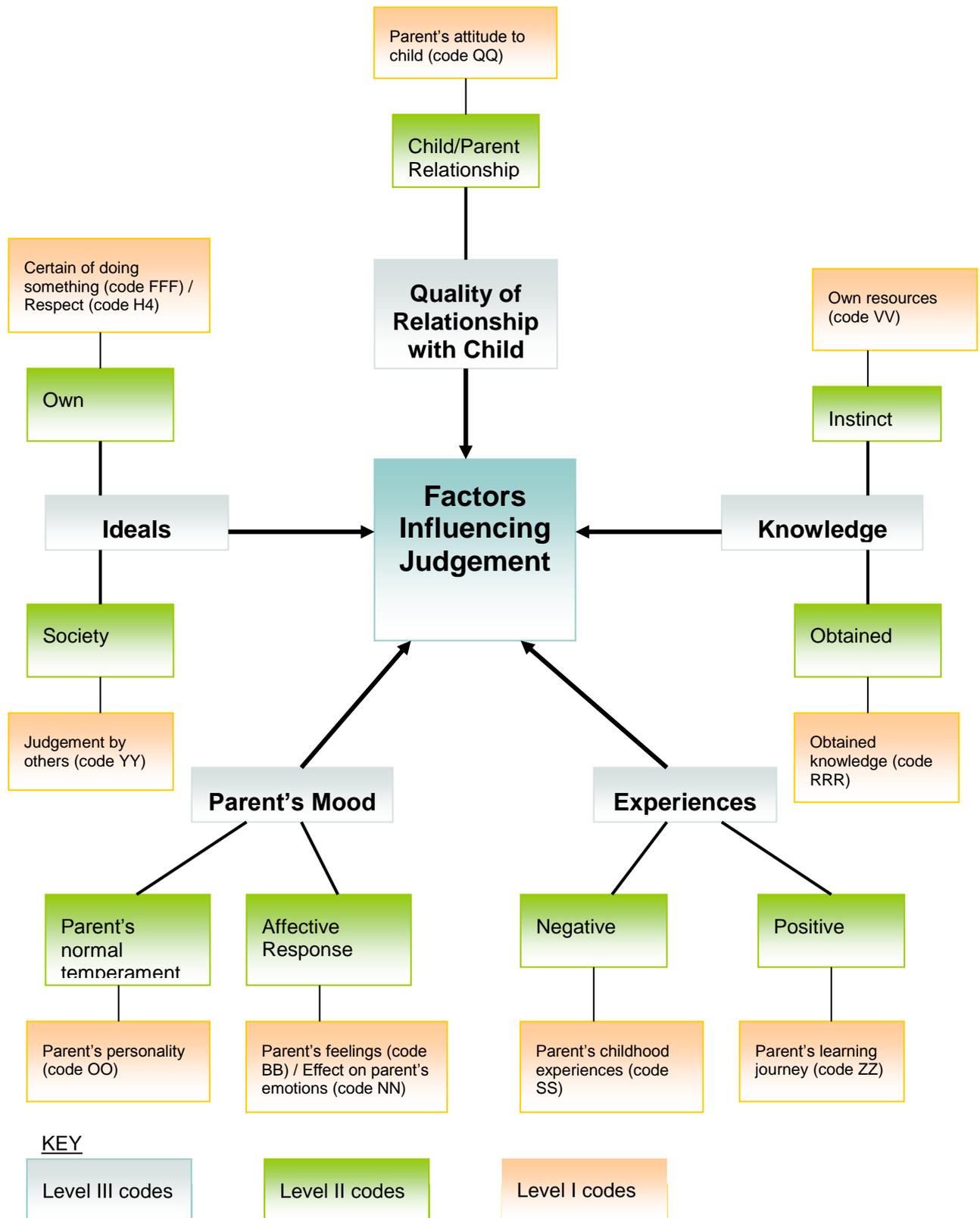
Figure 4-1: A diagram representing Level II & Level III codes for Factors Influencing Judgement with selected examples of Level I codes

Parents also discussed the type of relationship that they wanted to have with their child and the support that they aimed to provide:

> I just want to be there for her but I don't want to be her best friend I want to be her mum' (Transcript 3)

> we're very close there's a good attachment (Transcript 4)

4.3.3 Knowledge

The knowledge that parents drew on came from two sources, either knowledge they had obtained from friends, the television and books; or what all parents referred to as 'instinct'. Obtained knowledge came from sources such as:

> from books you know reading about how to deal with difference situations' (Transcript 1)

> I have learnt a lot from other people…from reading and from observing other people and seeing how they react with their children (Transcript 1)

In relation to 'Instinct' an interestingly common theme was that none of the parents had been explicitly aware of having instinct before the interview. All parents referred to having, 'a gut instinct that something's bothering them' (Transcript 3) and they described how they use this knowledge when dealing with the behaviour of their child:

> How did I learn how to handle it I don't know I just did…I don't know if it's instinct or whatever my motherly skills I don't know I just know' (Transcript 2)

> actually it's amazing how you adapt without realising it I would never have thought about it at all you know why I

was doing it was just a case that I found it easier
(Transcript 1)

4.3.4 Experiences

Another important factor that influences the judgements that parents make and is closely related to the category of 'Knowledge' is 'Experiences'. Parents discussed how they had learnt from previous encounters of highly emotional behaviour from their child:

> but what I've found is (Transcript 3)

> once I got through the barrier and explained it in a different way we did the homework together (Transcript 2)

> I've drawn on past experiences on when he's come back before from his Dad's I brace myself (Transcript 4)

They also discussed how knowledge obtained from their experience of being a child influences their attitude towards their own child's behaviour:

> you feel that you're reliving your childhood a bit…sometimes it make me feel anxious and you know uneasy at night (Transcript 3)

> I use to do the same to my own mum…it's not until you are a parent yourself you realise just how difficult it is (Transcript 2)

4.3.5 Parents' Mood

This category links together two themes related to 'mood', parents' personality and parents' feelings at the time of the encounter with their child. All parents discussed how the traits of their own personality influences the way they handle emotional encounters with their child:

> I'm not a confrontational person myself I don't tend to speak to her and just walk away from the situation (Transcript 1)

> I like to feel like I'm in control as well this is why we argue quite a lot because I think to myself I'm not being told what to do by a nine year old (Transcript 2)

> I can be quite short tempered (Transcript 4)

Parents also recognised that how their mood at the time also influences how

> sometimes it's subject to your own mood it's your coping mechanisms and whether you can walk away from it' (Transcript 3)

> I'm maybe feeling a bit emotionally raw because it's been a tough day I can't cope the same and I rise to the bait (Transcript 3)

4.3.6 Ideals

The category of Ideals relates to the ideals that parents have of how to bring up a child:

> I don't think there's any benefit of upsetting a two year old
>
> on purpose you know that's my opinion (Transcript 1)

> that's how I want to bring my child up (Transcript 1)

and the ideals parents have in relation to the approach they take in their parenting:

> they're a person in their own right and they are entitled to
>
> their opinion (Transcript 2)

Parents also discussed how they judged their parenting skills against their ideals:

> that's really upsetting you wonder where you are going
>
> wrong in your parenting skills (Transcript 1)

Another theme within Ideals were the ideals held by other people against which parents felt their skills and approach as a parent were judged:

> my mum seems to think she needs hardening up a bit I
>
> don't know if it's a generational thing (Transcript 1)

> the other mum said to me it's such a shame when a two
>
> year old can have a bigger personality than its parent
>
> (Transcript 1)

4.4 Factors Being Judged

This data set relates to what parents are making a judgement about. Seven Level II codes were generated from this data set including 'child's motivation', 'presenting behaviour', 'parents' priorities', 'fulfilling parental responsibilities', 'context', 'child's physiology' and 'child's stage of development'. A diagrammatic representation of these codes is illustrated in Figure 4.2.

4.4.2 Child's Motivation

Interestingly all the parents interviewed held a theory about the motivation behind their child's behaviour and what had caused the heightened emotions. The parents' theories fell into six thematic groups, the autonomy and agency of the child, to be antagonistic, desire for attention, desire to succeed, a sense of fairness and an initially hidden root cause.

Although the concepts of autonomy and agency are very similar there did emerge from the interviews a distinction between them. The examples below show how parents felt their child was usurping their independence and self-sufficiency as a person (i.e. their autonomy):

> some nights she wants to go to bed and some nights she doesn't (Transcript 1)

> she wants to go out on her own to the shop (Transcript 2)

Level III codes	Level II codes	Level I codes

FACTORS BEING JUDGED

Level III codes	Level II codes	Level I codes
Child's Motivation	autonomy and agency	Child's agency (code F) / Child's autonomy (Code MMM)
	to be antagonistic	Antagonistic behaviour by child (code VVV)
	desire for attention	Child's priority (code P) / Outcome (code V)
	desire to succeed	Feeling frustrated (code XXX)
	sense of fairness	Equality with peers (code SSS) / Relationship with Peers (codeE4)
	Hidden root causes	Unknown reasons (code NNN)
Presenting Behaviour	Level of distress	Parent's measure of emotion (code TTT)
	Child's normal temperament	Normal temperament (code A)
	Ability to control behaviour	Ability to control behaviour (code P4)
Parent's Priorities	Following a routine	Fine grain sequence (code L)
	Time schedules	Parent's priorities (code M) / Time schedule (code U4)
	Financial Commitments	Pressure felt by parents (code Q4)
Fulfilling Parental Responsibilities	Meeting basic needs	Ability to fulfil parental responsibility (code SS) / Doing the right thing (Code DDD)
	Keeping child safe	Protecting child (code CC)
	Teaching acceptable behaviour	Parent's strategies (code Y) / Teaching morals (Code CCC)
Context	Location	Location (code Q4)
	Having support	Joint or shared resources (code WW) / Joint responsibility (Code K)
		Presence of other people (code R4)
Child's Physiology	Possible hormone changes	Physiological changes (code C4)
	Feeling scared or anxious	Child's feelings (code BBB)
	Physiological triggers	Parent's theory about triggers (code YYY) / Physiological trigger (code S4)
Child's Stage of Development	Being aware	Child's stage of development (code ZZZ)

Figure 4-2: A diagram representing Level II & Level III codes for Factors Being Judged with selected examples of Level I codes

The following examples show how parents felt their child was making their own choices and decisions (i.e. agency)

> she decided she was going to lie down on the floor and sulk (Transcript 1)

> she didn't want to put her jeans on and thought that a way of avoiding this would be to lie on the floor (Transcript 1)

Or at least the child thinks they are making their own decisions:

> if I can get her to think it's her idea it works a lot better (Transcript 1)

> C likes to feel like she's in control (Transcript 2)

Linked to agency is the theme of antagonism as a cause for the encounter with their child. This was only discussed by the parents of the older child and seems to show a growing desire by the child to impose their will on the world. Excerpts from the transcripts include:

> she does want me to hear what she's doing because she obviously what a reaction…I've noticed with C that she gets really really angry she wants me to bite back at her (Transcript 2)

> She know she's overstepping the mark and she wants to draw a reaction, it feels like she wants me to get cross, it's almost like until I've got cross as well she's not satisfied (Transcript 3)

Gaining the attention of their parents was also discussed as a motivating factor for the heightened emotion:

> you know she wants you to go over and give her a cuddle and pick her up yeah I think it's a lot about attention (Transcript 1)

> she's fighting for attention sometimes and like I say I have got four and it is quite hard to give her individual time (Transcript 2)

Another theory held by parents regarding the underlying motivation behind their child's behaviour are feelings triggered due to a difficulty the child is experiencing at trying to succeed at something:

> she does have frustration when she wants to do something and it's not possible to do that at that time (Transcript 1)

> say she was doing something like homework and she just couldn't do it and she got really really like angry with herself (Transcript 2)

> she doesn't like to admit that she's wrong (Transcript 3)

Interestingly an underlying sense of fairness as a motivational factor was also only discussed by parents of the older children. This theme related to a sense of fairness in relation to being equal with their peers:

> I think she just wants to be like her friends all she wants to be is like her friends (Transcript 2)

or a sense of fairness in relation to the relationship the child has with their siblings:

she's competing the whole time she's always saying you

let J do this you let J do that (Transcript 2)

Finally parents also described hidden causes for the distress. This encapsulated either the reason for the emotional distress was hidden from the child

I really don't think he can see what it is he just knows that

he's upset (Transcript 4)

Or how even though the parents knew something was causing the heightened emotion the reason for this may not be immediately apparent:

you have a gut instinct that something's bothering them

and it may take days to come out (Transcript 3)

4.4.3   Presenting Behaviour

The second category within 'Factors Being Judged' is the behaviour that the child presents to their parent when they are experiencing heightened emotions. Within this category three themes emerged from the transcripts the parents perception of the level of distress being felt by their child, the child's normal temperament and the parents' perception of the child's ability to control their behaviour. Excerpts from the transcripts in relation to the level of distress include:

she had the biggest tantrum I had ever seen…she just flew

into this massive rage and went stomping upstairs

slammed the bedroom door (Transcript 2)

initially she just oh paddy she blows up her arms go up in

the air she stomps she's almost like a two year old having

a tantrum (Transcript 2)

she had the biggest tantrum I have ever seen and urgh she stood there and she just like ranting and raving (Transcript 3)

the red mist comes it is as if she's lost all sense of rationale you can't reason with her…she's almost like someone demented you know it sounds extreme but it is (Transcript 3)

Parents were able to compare this behaviour to their child's normal temperament:

I'd say that she's generally quite calm…I do think my daughter is relatively well behaved (Transcript 1)

She's always been a happy child (Transcript 2)

The third theme which emerged was the parents' perception of how well their child could control their emotion and behaviour:

I don't think she realises she's doing that but…she can't help it…she knows she's doing it but sometimes she can't stop it (Transcript 3)

He doesn't know how to express it (Transcript 4)

4.4.4 Parents' Priorities

An interesting category that emerged in relation to the factors that the parents judged was their priorities. Parents discussed how they felt it was important to prioritise following a routine or keep to a time schedule:

it's quite important I leave the house with H on time every morning because obviously I need to get to work myself and I need to get H into nursery (Transcript 1)

Parents also described pressures they experienced and which they felt a necessity to take into account when making judgements:

as an adult you've got things you have to do…making decisions about financial commitments that we've got there's going to be sacrifices to make (Transcript 1)

4.4.5 Fulfilling Parental Responsibilities

Linked to parents' priorities is the theme of Fulfilling Parental Responsibilities. All parents described how meeting their child's basic need was a priority which included keeping their child safe from perceived danger. Examples from the transcripts include:

you worry that you're going to be late, your child's not going to get any breakfast and I think that gives added sort of pressure to the situation (Transcript 1)

I'm probably quite protective of her as well so I try not to expose her to situations where she might get upset or distressed (Transcript 1)

I want her to be safe you've got to find that balance (Transcript 2)

In addition parents also discussed how they made judgements about whether they were instilling in their child acceptable behaviour. Examples include trying to, 'teach them what's acceptable' (Transcript 1) or modelling or demonstrating what the acceptable behaviour should be:

give H the space to calm down herself (Transcript 1)

I try to get him to realise what he's apologising for because
if he doesn't know it doesn't mean anything (Transcript 4)

4.4.6 Context

The context of the encounter was another important factor that parents judged. Parents described how the location and whether they had support as being important when making a judgement about how they would react to their child's behaviour. Examples from the transcript include:

when I pick her up from nursery…trying to deal with that is
difficult (Transcript 1)

the support of my husband…although my husband works
quite long hours at least I know he is home every night and
that's great I can manage (Transcript 1)

4.4.7 Child's Physiology

The sixth category in relation to factors that parents make a judgement about is the child's physiology including, in the case of the parents of older children, possible hormone changes:

it's part of her hormones changing…I've noticed a change
in the past say six months she's very how can I put it very
sensitive and I'm putting it down to hormones well I'm sure
it's hormones' (Transcript 2)

Parents also described how they made a judgement about any factors that would cause a physiological change in the child that could trigger more heightened emotions. For example, feeling scared:

> because she's scared and she doesn't understand (Transcript 1)

> the panic sets in which brings out a bit of aggression you know childish aggression and then she can't focus she can't listen because she's got herself worked up (Transcript 3)

Or feeling tired or hungry:

> if she was tired that would make the situation worse…if she was dehydrated not drank enough that would obviously make the situation worse (Transcript 2)

4.4.8 Child's Stage of Development

Finally, it emerged from the interviews that the parents' level of awareness of their child's stage of development had an impact on the judgements they made about their child's behaviour. Examples from the transcripts include:

> sometimes you lose the perspective of where they are at…I try and hold on to that and just keep it in perspective…she's getting to the stage where I can't hold her hand (Transcript 3)

> I tend to forget sometimes that she's a child you know I'm mouthing back at her sometimes and I think well she is only nine and nine year olds think totally different to what

us adults do and I think I am guilty of that sometimes
(Transcript 2)

4.5 Parents' Reactions

This data related to the behavioural decisions made by parents; in other words the reactions they made to the emotionally heightened behaviour they encountered in their child. Five Level II codes were generated from this data including 'Parents' Behaviour', 'Give Comfort / Encouragement', 'Distancing', 'Giving Consequences' and 'Guiding Child to Correct Behaviour'. Figure 4-3 shows a diagrammatic representation of these codes. Table 4-1 lists the Level I data with illustrating examples from the transcripts.

Table 4-1: A table showing Level I data for the reactions by parents to their children's behaviour with selected excerpts from transcripts

Parents' Behaviour	
Model desired behaviour	I apologised to him because I had also got angry (Transcript 4)
Listen to child	It's really listening (Transcript 3)
Staying calm	Stay calm around the child (Transcript 1)
Talk / explain / discuss	I've said to her I know something's bothering you and I appreciate that sometimes it's not easy to talk about it write it down write me a letter write me your points give them to me and…I'll talk you through with it (Transcript 3)
Give Comfort / Encouragement	
Comfort them	(give her) a hug (and say) you know I'll help you (Transcript 3)

Use encouraging words	I would always use sort of encouraging words and try and explain the situation (Transcript 1)
Offer rewards	I said oh that's really fantastic and gave her lots of praise and that seemed to obviously help (Transcript 2)
Distancing	
Walk away	I usually leave her to get on with her with it walk away and go and get myself dressed (Transcript 1)
Watch from a distance	We obviously keep an eye on her to make sure she's alright (Transcript 1)
Ignore	I ignore her that's right I ignore her and then she will calm down (Transcript 2)
Give child time to calm down	I find the best thing to do is to just say right I know what I'm talking about I'm going to leave you for five minutes have a think about it and when you are ready and when you have calmed down I'll come back in (Transcript 3)
Remove child from situation	It gets to the point where I have to send him to his room (Transcript 4)
Giving Consequences	
Shout back	I'm spieling off (Transcript 2)
Punish / loss of privileges	I find I take things away things she really likes (Transcript 2)
Guiding Child to Correct Behaviour	
Break down task	what I've started doing actually…I'll get her out of the room first and then as we are going out of the door I find it much easier to put her coat on at that point so whether that's breaking it down (Transcript 1)
Distraction	try to distract her maybe with her books that tends to

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	work quite well (Transcript 1)
Physically guide child	Try to encourage her to take her pyjamas of and to get dressed whether that's a bit by herself or with a bit of help from us (Transcript 1)
Give them a choice	I've said I'll ask you once and if you don't do it there will be consequences (Transcript 3)

| Level I codes | Level II codes | Level III codes |

Behavioural decisions made by parents

Parent's reaction	Parent's behaviour	Model desired behaviour
		Listen to child
		Staying calm
		Talk / explain/ discuss
	Give comfort / encouragement	Comfort them
		Use encouraging word
		Offer rewards
	Distancing	Walk away
		Watch from a distance
		Ignore
		Give child time to calm down
		Remove child from situation
	Giving consequences	Shout back
		Punish / loss of privileges
	Guiding child to correct behaviour	Break down task
		Distraction
		Physically guide child
		Give them a choice

Figure 4-3: A diagram representing Level II & Level III codes for the behavioural decisions made by parents with selected examples of Level I

4.6 Summary

Interpretative analysis of the data reveals three clear paradigms that are occurring during a parents encounter with their child during times of heightened emotions. There was little disparity between the parents in their perception of the influence these paradigms made to the judgements they were making although there were differences between the interviews about which factors had influenced them. These paradigms appear to be illustrating a process that parents undertake in relation to the judgements they make when trying to make sense of their child's behaviour. This process is illustrated in Figure 4.4. One theme that appeared to be emerging from the data was that of time but unfortunately due to the constraints of this study it was not possible to explore this further.

To provide clarity with regard to about parents' perceptions of the judgements they are making about their child's behaviour there is a need for some form of theoretical framework. The following chapter will review some of the theories which may usefully underpin this process
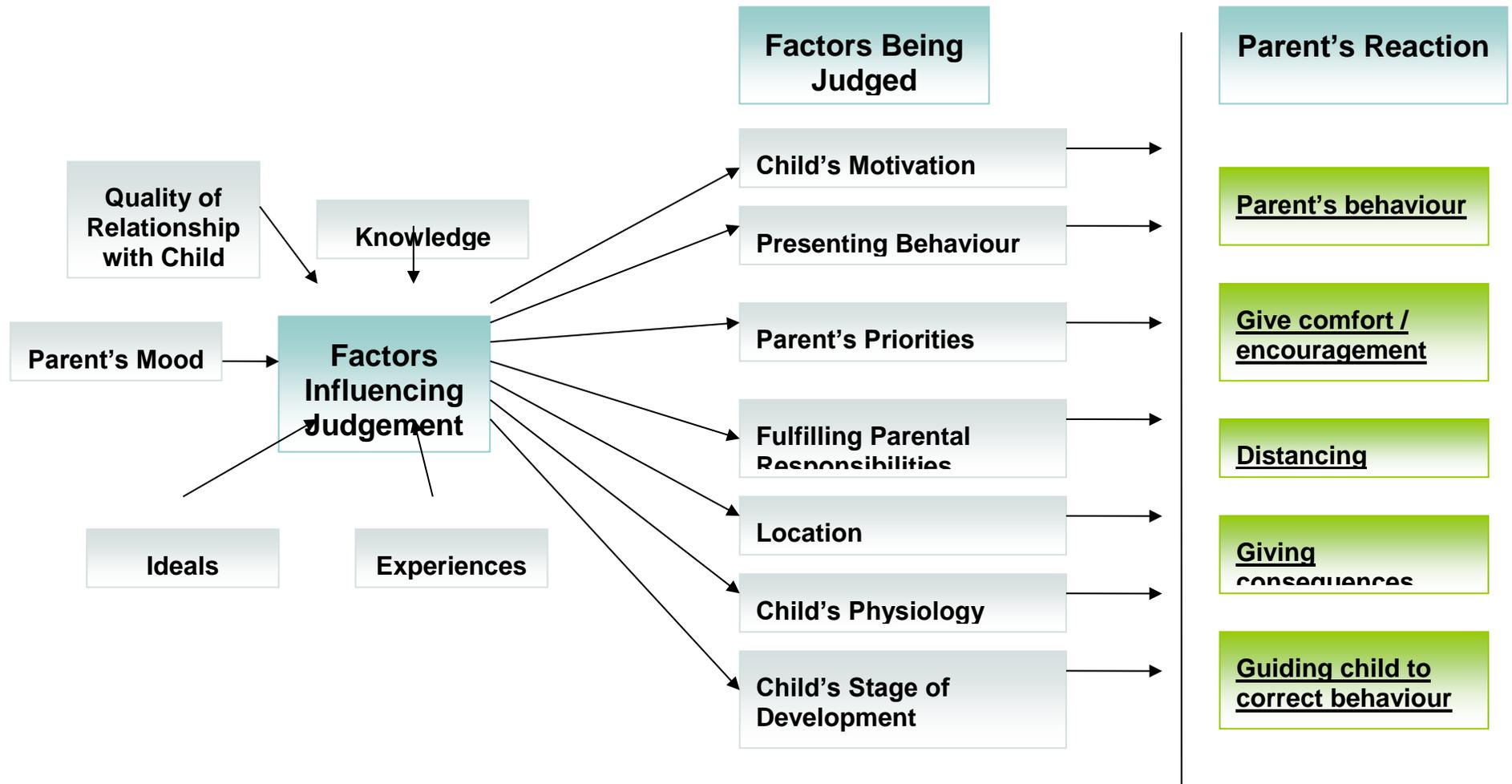
5   The Second Literature Review

5.1 Introduction

During the process of interpretative analysis an observation was made that when parents are dealing with their child's frustrations and anger they engage in an interaction with the child and when the parent decides to engage in this interaction they are already making judgements about their child's behaviour. As illustrated in the above chapter, the judgements that a parent makes are dependent on what factors are presented to the parent at the stage of initiation of the interaction. Illustrated are the possible factors that influence parents' judgement, possible factors that parents make a judgement on and possible reactions by parents. Inevitably these factors are variable and may change over time.

The social psychological process of mental representations in social judgements is a useful framework for providing an explanation as to why some factors are more influential than others. Forgas (1992) states the research in social judgement and decision-making is overwhelming but there is very little conceptual integration within the literature. With the aim of not becoming too entrenched in these numerous theories and models and to provide a degree of clarity through this second part of the literature review, this chapter will draw on just some of the major models or concepts taken from the theories of social cognitive psychology which are felt to best provide an insight and understanding to the process illustrated in Figure 4-4 expounding the conceptual framework presented in the Interpretative Analysis chapter. Figure 6-1 combines an illustration of the social psychological process of mental representations in social judgements and the three higher order categories from the conceptual framework which emerged from the data.
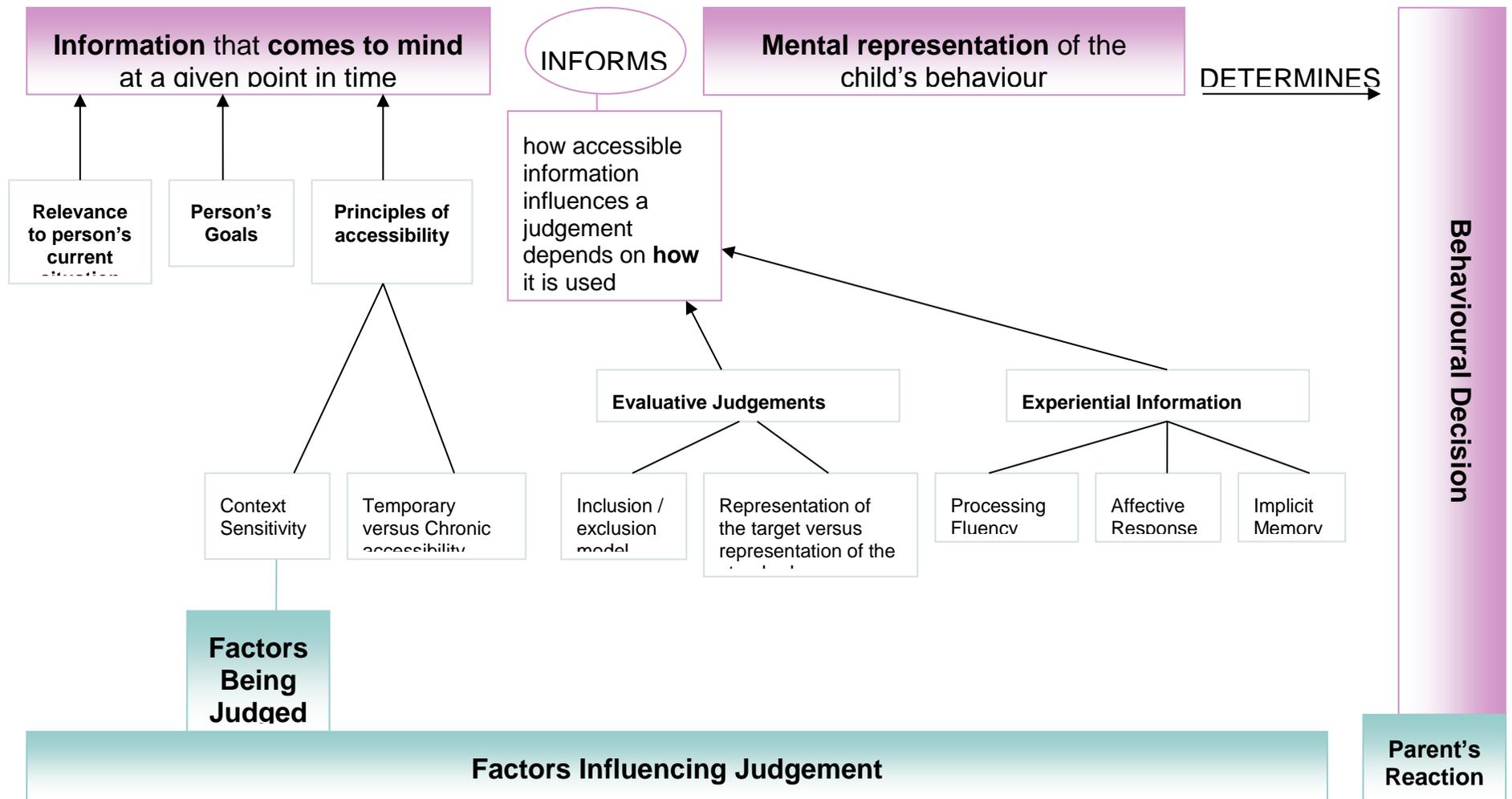
Table 5-1 A diagram illustrating the theoretical framework underpinned by social cognitive theories of the process made by parents when making judgements about their child's behaviour with reference made to the higher order categories that emerged from the interpretative analysis

The models and concepts that most usefully elucidate the process of mental representations in social judgements are discussed under the following sections:

- The Accessibility Principle
- Evaluative Judgement
- Experiential Information

5.2 The Accessibility Principle

In social cognition theory a core principle of how we make judgements is that judgements are based on not only the new information being presented at that time but also information retrieved from memory. The Accessibility Principle theorises that our mental constructs of the world are based on the information from memory that is most accessible at that point in time (Schwarz, 2009). Research has shown that when people are asked to make a judgement they rarely retrieve all possible relevant information from memory (Schwarz). Often the information that is most likely to come to mind is that which is most meaningfully related to the person's goals and current situation.

The Accessibility Principle also suggests other factors which influence the accessibility of information including the effect of 'temporary accessibility' and 'chronic accessibility'. As Schwarz explains, 'information was rendered *temporarily* accessible by a preceding task or by characteristics of the question asked' (p.124); for example, an earlier exposure to the news with a story of the same or similar topic. Information that is chronically accessible will come to mind independent of contextual influences; for example, persons who have gone through a divorce may always consider marital-status related information when making a judgement about their lives (Higgins, 1996).

In relation to the conceptual framework described in the Interpretative Analysis, the Accessibility Principle can provide a valuable insight to explain why some factors influencing parents' judgement are more accessible than others; that is the parents' goals, the relevance to their current situation and whether the information is temporarily or chronically accessible. For example, the parents' goal could be that their child has eaten breakfast, it is relevant to the current situation because they are going out soon; and on the news that morning there was an article about the importance of children eating a healthy breakfast (temporary accessibility).

However, there is another facet to the Accessibility Principle which is also useful in helping to explain the conceptual framework that has emerged from the data of this current study and that is context sensitivity. Schwarz (2009) discusses

> how the context influences which attributes of the general category come to mind and are used in forming a representation of the target. This context sensitivity of accessible knowledge facilitates meaningful interaction with the environment (p.124)

This relates to the higher order category of 'Factors Being Judged' in that the context influences which factors being judged come to mind and are used in forming a representation of the child's behaviour; thus this context sensitivity of accessible knowledge facilitates meaningful interaction with the child.

The accessibility of information is not, however, the whole story in explaining the mental representations or mental constructs made about the attributes being judged; in the case of this study, a child's behaviour. According to social cognitive theories *how* this information is used is also crucial in understanding how mental constructs are formed. The ideas underpinning the concepts of evaluative judgements and experiential information can usefully be drawn upon to explain how information is used in forming mental constructs or judgements of a child's behaviour.

5.3 Evaluative Judgements

Schwarz (2009) explains that evaluative judgements are based on features of the target; in the case of this study features of the child's behaviour. In order to do this parents require two mental representations, a representation of the target (i.e the child's behaviour) as well as a representation of a standard against which the target is evaluated. In relation to the interpretative analysis data of this study the standard against which the target is evaluated is shown in the category of 'Ideals' within the higher order category of 'Factors Influencing Judgement'. Eiser (1990) explains how with information where there is a level of agreement between the two representations then an assimilation effect would occur. That is, positive information resulting in a more positive standard of the target would result in a more positive judgement of the features of the target. If the information produces disparity between the two representations then a contrast effect occurs where positive information resulting in a more positive standard of the target results in a more *negative* judgement of the features of the target (Schwarz, 2009). Therefore how information is evaluated can have opposite effects depending on how it is used.

Schwarz & Bless's (2007) inclusion/exclusion model suggests there are three variables which influence how the information is used. The three variables are determined by the evaluator (i.e. the parent) tacitly asking themselves three questions:

- Why does it come to mind?
- Does it bear on the target?
- Is it conversationally appropriate to use this information?

The model assumes that these questions act as filters as to whether the information is included or excluded when forming a judgement.

5.4 Experiential Information

Alongside evaluative judgements the experiential information also impacts on how accessible information is used by parents when making a mental

representation or judgement of their child's behaviour. Processing fluency is an important concept when considering how information is used. Information that is familiar is usually easier to process (known as high processing fluency) than information that is unfamiliar or novel (Higgins, 1996) Therefore information that has high processing fluency is more likely have an input into judgement making (Schwarz, 2009). Another consequence of information that is processed more fluently is that it is more likely to be accepted as true:

> The feeling of familiarity suggests that one has heard this
> before, so there is probably something in it (Schwarz p131)

Another important concept that contributes to the experiential information which effects how information is used when making a judgement is that of the impact of affect in people's processing preferences. Evidence suggests that people have a tendency to form judgements based on their feelings at that time (Forgas, 1992). Therefore, instead of using their mental representation of the target to inform the judgement, people can simplify the judgement process by using their affective response to the target by asking themselves, "How do I feel about this…?" (Schwarz, 2009). This is pertinent as parents' mood emerged as a theme within the higher order category of 'Factors Influencing Judgement'.

The final concept to be discussed which contributes to the experiential information is that of implicit memory. Implicit memory (sometimes referred to as unconscious memory or indirect memory) refers to a form of memory in which past experiences aid in the performance of a task without conscious awareness or even conscious recollection of these experiences (Rovee-Collier et al 2001). This relates to how parents make judgements about their child's behaviour as their past experiences, knowledge, ideals and relationship with their child (all within the higher order category of 'Factors Influencing Judgement') influence the judgement parents make without conscious awareness of these memories at that point in time. As Rovee-Collier et al explain:

An implicit memory simply pops into mind, uncontrollably and involuntarily...Its retrieval does not result from a time-consuming search process and requires no conscious capacity (p.11)

5.5 Summary

The concepts of 'the accessibility principle', 'the person's goals' and 'the relevance to the person's situation' influence what information comes to mind at that given point in time. Social cognitive theories also explain that how this information is used in judgement making is dependent on how accessible it is. Two social-cognitive concepts effecting how information is used are 'experiential information' and 'evaluative judgements'. Thus the information that comes to a parents mind at that given point in time informs the mental construct or judgement of their child's behaviour and this determines their behavioural decision.

6 Theoretical Integration: The Grounded Theory

This chapter presents a summary of the grounded theory emerging from data that reflects how parents make sense of their child's behaviour during times of heightened emotions. The grounded theory offers an explanatory framework which will account for the process that parents take when making a judgement about the behaviour of their child. This is followed by a discussion relating to reliability and validity as well as areas for further development of the study.

6.1 Grounded Theory

The conceptual framework, as presented in Figure 4-4 and discussed in the Interpretative Analysis chapter, shows possible factors influencing judgement, possible factors that are judged and possible reactions by parents. The theories of social cognition, in particular, mental representations in social judgement is useful in providing an explanation as to why some factors appear more influential at a particular point in time than others.

The research evidence suggests there are various factors that influence the judgement a parent makes when confronted with a display of behaviour from their child indicating heightened emotions. The categories of knowledge, experience, ideals, parents' mood and relationship with child impact on the way that parents process the information in order to make a judgement.

The second literature review focused on the social psychological process of mental representations in social judgement. The models and concepts within this process highlighted three factors that have a significant bearing on the information that comes to a parents mind at the time of the interaction or confrontation with their child. That is the relevance to person's current situation, the person's goals and Principles of Accessibility. An important concept of the Principles of Accessibility is the context of the information. The research evidence from this study indicates that the context influences which factors being judged are accessible, i.e. the child's motivation, the child's physiology or

the parents' priorities etc. Importantly, it is *how* this information is used that informs the mental representation of the child's behaviour which ultimately determines the behavioural decision made by parents.

The original area of interest was how parents make sense of their child's behaviour. From this study a possible explanation has emerged that through the process of forming a mental representation parents make a judgement about their child's behaviour. The social cognitive processing strategy adopted is that the information that comes to mind at the point in time when parents interact with their child informs the mental representation of the child's behaviour which determines the behavioural decision made by parents.

6.2 Further development of the study

Although interesting findings were made the scope of this study is limited due to the small sample size. Although a local theory has been generated about the processing strategy that parents adopt when making judgements about their child's behaviour during times of heightened emotions, the study needs to be expanded to include data from a larger sample of parents to provide further validation.

Following the analysis of the data a second literature review was undertaken focusing on a social psychological process of making social judgements. The research on this area is vast with little integration within the literature. A further study focusing on the judgements that parents make when their child is emotionally distressed rather than the broader original focus of how parents make sense of their children's behaviour during times of heightened emotions may generate data that can more easily navigate through this literature providing further elucidation and substantiation to the findings of this present study.

A theme which was present within the data and also implicit within the theoretical framework was that of the effect of time on judgements being made. Social cognitive theories determine by their nature that each time a judgement is made it will be different to the previous judgement because the factors influencing judgement can never be exactly the same. There also appears to be this theme running through the data about the importance of the transience of time, in other words that the judgements that parents made gradually changed over time. Further theoretical sampling would provide an opportunity to explore this concept further.

6.3 Conclusions

The completion of this present study has taken the researcher on a journey that has been illuminating, interesting and at times surprising. An initial interest in the development of brain guided an initial exploration of the research literature in this area. The importance of the child's relationship with their parents was clearly evident within the literature and this sparked a curiosity into how parents make sense of their child's behaviour. As the study progressed it was necessary to put to one side the theories and principles about the development of the brain as the findings led the researcher into a new field of research literature, that of the social psychological process of making social judgements. Further developments of this study are now apparent but the author would like to give the final words to one of the interviewees who sums up why the study of parents and their relationship with their children is ceaselessly fascinating:

> Parenting is an awesome responsibility it's the ultimate responsibility and we're all lucky and privileged we've got that responsibility (Transcript 2)

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Preliminary Parents' Interview Schedule

Section A – Initial open-ended questions

1. Can you recall a time when your child was feeling very frustrated and/or angry? Tell me about it.

2. Could you describe the events that led up to him/her feeling this way? What contributed to their feelings of frustration and/or anger?

3. What was the outcome of the behaviour? How was the situation resolved?

4. What were your actions, how were you involved?

5. Who else, if anyone, was involved? When was that? How were they involved?

Section B – Intermediate questions

1. What were your thoughts and feelings whilst your child was behaving this way?

2. What do you think your child's thoughts were?

3. Since then has there been any cause or opportunity to discuss what happened with your child? What was the outcome of this?

4. Tell me about how you learned to handle your child's behaviour when they are feeling frustrated and/or angry.

5. How, if at all, have your thoughts and feelings about your child's behaviour changed?

6. As you look back on your child's behaviour, are there any other events that stand out in your mind? Could you describe it?

7. Could you describe the most important lesson you learned through experiencing your child's behaviour whilst they felt frustrated and/or angry?

8. What helps you manage your child's behaviour whilst they are feeling frustrated and/or angry? What has been helpful?

Section C – Ending questions

1. What do you think are the most important ways to handle a child who is feeling frustrated and/or angry? How did you discover them?

2. Tell me about how your views and actions may have changed?

3. What advice would you give to another parent whose child is feeling very frustrated and/or angry?

4. Is there anything that you might not have thought about before that has occurred to you during this interview?

5. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand a child's behaviour when they are feeling frustrated/angry better?

Then substitute angry/frustrated for happy/excited.

Final question: Is there anything that you would like to ask me about in relation to this study?

Appendix B – Recruitment Letter

Hello

My name is Mel Shirley and I work as an educational psychologist in Northamptonshire. My role involves promoting the learning and development of children from 0-19 years of age by working with schools, other professionals (i.e. Speech and Language Therapists, Specialist Teachers and Community Paediatricians), parents; and of course children.

Since I became a parent 4 years ago I have become increasingly interested in children's behaviour when they have heightened emotions. In others words, how a child behaves when they are feeling very frustrated or angry. For a child who is aged 2-3 years it might be called a "toddler tantrum" or for a child who is aged 12-16 years some might call it a "teenage strop". But I am also interested in how children behave with positive heightened emotions, such as happy or excited.

This interest has led me to carry out a research project which links into the Doctorate course in Psychology that I am currently undertaking at the University of Nottingham. The focus of the study is the way that parents make sense of their child's behaviour during times of heightened emotions. I am interested in finding out how parents understand and perceive their child's behaviour or if it is at all possible to make sense of a child's behaviour!

I am looking for parents to interview who have children that fall into one of the following age bands:

2-3 years of age / 7-9 years of age / 11-14 years of age.

The interviews will take up to an hour and will be taped for the purposes of analysis afterwards. You are welcome to have a copy of the interview and transcript. Once I have finished the study you will be welcome to have a copy of my findings.

If you would like to participate, that's great! You do have the right to withdraw from the study at any point, even after the interview has taken place and all details will be kept strictly confidential.

You may have further questions or queries and I would be happy to answer them as best as I can. Please contact me either via email on _____or phone me on _____(mobile:_____).

Sincerest regards

Mel Shirley

Research Project employing quantitative methods:

A Q-methodology study of parents' constructions of 'good' parenting

ABSTRACT

This study used Q methodology to explore how parents construct the notion of 'good' parenting. The uniqueness of this study is two-fold. First is the focus on what parents perceive to be 'good' parenting and the second is the use of Q-methodology. Parenting is a complex process combining a consistent, stable and caring environment. Compelling evidence from the fields of child maltreatment and also neuropsychology emphasises the importance of 'good enough' parenting on children's development especially during the early formative years of a child's life. There is a strong political agenda that underpins both National Government policy and Local Authority practice in relation to helping parents strengthen their parenting skills. The literature review shows that even though the desire to be a parent may be instinctive the need for being taught the knowledge, understanding and practice to help develop skills in parenting is also important.

Q-methodology 'provides researchers with a systematic and rigorous quantitative means for examining human subjectivity' (McKeown & Thomas, 1988 p.5). Yet it retains a social-constructionist stance which underpins this study – each individual is unique and will construct meanings about the world differently. This study uses Q-methodology to examine how parents who access the Children Centres in Wellingborough view 'good' parenting. By-person factor analysis of the Q-sorts of 51 parents suggests they hold three main viewpoints on 'good' parenting:

1) Freedom to Grow
2) Teamwork
3) Demonstrative

Detailed discussion of these viewpoints is made. Conclusions are drawn on the use of Q-methodology and possible further developments of the study are made.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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1 Introduction

1.1 Theoretical Sensitivity and Reflexivity – personal and professional experience

Although it is unusual to find this section included in a quantitative research study it was deemed to be a useful addition due to the author's approach to research being grounded within a social-constructionist epistemology. Fundamental to this approach is the notion that, 'human experience, including perception, is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically' and how we make sense of our experiences is a manifestation of these elements (Willig, 2000 p7). Thus each individual is unique and will construct meanings about the world differently. The purpose of exploring the role of the author is to make explicit the author's contribution to the construction of meanings made throughout the research process.

This research has evolved from a curiosity in parenting developed primarily as part of the author's professional practice and experience as an educational psychologist; but also from the author's own experience of being a parent to two young children. The author has been both a first-hand witness and a third-hand witness to the experience of being a parent.

The ensuing chapters will provide a review of relevant research literature which will be followed by a description of the research methodology and procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter 5 will provide an interpretative description of the results. Chapter 6 will discuss the findings and any implications in the light of the issues raised in the literature review. The final chapter will draw together conclusions made.

2 Review of the Literature

The literature review will draw on material on the following areas:

- The political background
- The importance of 'good' parenting on children's development
- What is 'parenting'?
- The importance of the Early Years
- Parenting: 'instinct' versus 'taught'
- Existing research

2.1 The political background

> Parents are the most profoundly important people in the world for babies, children and younger children and remain hugely significant to children as they grow up. Good parenting is crucial for children's outcomes and can protect them against other disadvantages (DCSF, 2010 p.56).

The topic of 'good parenting' has never seemed to capture such interest in the arena of the media and politics than it does today. The Children Act (1989) outlined the principles of how children should be treated under the law. Subsequently a person's capability to parent successfully has been at the heart of many government policies and published papers and reports. A report published by the Department for Education and Skills (2003; p.10) states:

> The government is committed to ending child poverty, tackling social exclusion and promoting the welfare of all children so that they can thrive and fulfil their potential as citizens throughout their lives.

The publication of 'Every Child Matters' (DfES, 2003) brought new reforms requiring local authorities to bring together in one place services for children structured around five outcomes for children and young people:

- Being healthy (enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle)

- Staying safe (being protected from harm and neglect)

- Enjoying and achieving (getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood)

- Making a positive contribution (being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour)

- Economic well-being (not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving their full potential in life)

Outcomes following the publication of 'Every Child Matters' include the publication of 'The Children's Plan: building brighter futures' whose aim included to, 'strengthen support for all families during the formative years of their children's lives' (DCSF, 2007 p.3). In 2009 the government established a Parents' Panel consisting of 40 parents from a wide range of social backgrounds to advise the Government at the early stage of policy development. There are currently 3,500 Parent Support Advisors (PSAs) funded by Local Authorities (there are many more which are employed through individual schools) who, 'work with parents to help improve behaviour and attendance, overcome barriers to learning and increase the numbers of parents actively involved in their child's education' (DCSF, 2010 p.44). By the end of 2010 there will be 3,500 Children Centres open providing, 'a range of integrated services for children and families, including advice and information, family and parenting support, and access to health services and childcare'. (DCSF, 2010 p.42)

Underlying all of these strategies and policies is the aim to help mothers and fathers strengthen their parenting skills (DCSF, 2010). One outcome of the investment from the Government is for local authorities to have two parenting experts, who together with the National Academy for Parenting Practitioners, help to train those working with children and families and deliver evidence-based parenting programmes. Parenting programmes are structured

interventions to help support parents and improve parenting practices. Examples of parenting programmes include 'Parents Altogether Lending Support (PALS), the Solihull Approach Parenting Programme, the Quinn Parenting Programme and the Webster-Stratton Parenting Programme. These are all evidence-based parenting programmes in that research and evaluation has been undertaken to demonstrate their effectiveness (see Kane et al. (2007); Patterson et al (2004); Bateson et al (2008)).

The aim of all parenting programmes is to support parents and to change parenting practice (Kane et al, 2007) so that parents are enabled to become 'good' parents.

2.2 The importance of 'good' parenting on children's development

> Children have never been very good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them. They must, they have no other models. (James Baldwin 1924-87 cf. Buchanan & Hudson (2000) (p.17))

There are two reasons as to why there is currently so much interest in the impact of parenting on child development. The first are the conclusions drawn from studies looking at circumstances and underlying reasons behind child abuse and child cruelty. There is compelling evidence showing that parents who maltreated their own children were themselves maltreated as a child; although there is also a consensual acceptance that being maltreated as a child does not predetermine becoming a perpetrator themselves (McKinsey-Crittenden 2008). Through their vast clinical practice, both Robinson (2003) and McKinsey-Crittenden (2008) have drawn the conclusion that the capability that a mother and father have to be a good enough parent is highly influenced by the experiences that they had as a child.

Coinciding with this awareness are advances in neuroscience and neuropsychology which have revealed that actions by parents and other adults can have a fundamental effect on a child's developing brain. Relationships and interactions with adults is a key factor during the critical periods of brain development (Healy, 1987; Gerhardt, 2004). Longitudinal studies have shown that the quality of the parent-child relationship appears to directly impact on the child's emotional security, sense of self and even cognitive development (Sroufe et al 2005). As Sunderland (2006) writes:

> It is both awesome and sobering to discover that some common parenting techniques can have a direct effect on the wiring and long-term chemical balance in children's brains. (p.10)

2.3 What is 'parenting'?

> Parenting is an awesome responsibility it's the ultimate responsibility and we're all lucky and privileged we've got that responsibility (quote from a participant in a study completed by Shirley (2009))

It is obvious to say that a person becomes a parent when he/she has a baby. However 'having a baby' and 'becoming a parent' are essentially two different perspectives of a common event. 'Having a baby' is the end product of a pregnancy whereas, 'being a parent brings with it all the responsibility associated with the care and protection of a new, vulnerable human being who when born is at the threshold of his or her life. The experiences a child receives after birth are those that will help shape its future' (Robinson, 2003 p.50). Schonkoff & Philips (2000) describe the ability to parent as the adult's ability to interpret and adjust their behaviour and respond appropriately to their baby's bids for attention, moods and states, expressions of interest and efforts to communicate their needs.

An essential component to parenting is the love that parents give to their baby. Robinson (2003) describes 'love in action' as a dynamic and demanding process between parent and baby which requires the parent to be:

- Sensitive to the methods of communication
- Emotionally 'available' for the baby
- Able to spend time attending to the physical needs and providing additional stimulation through play and playful experiences
- Sensitive to the need for rest and quiet times, for safety and routine, for warmth – both physical and emotional (p.9)

Bowlby (2007) proposes that both the quality and quantity of time and attention parents give to children has a correlation on the health, happiness and self-reliance of adolescents and young adults. In his 'Attachment Theory' the concept of attachment behaviour is understood as being the behaviour that results in a person attaining close proximity to another individual who is perceived as better able to cope with the world. For the person to know that this attachment figure is available and responsive imparts a strong and pervasive feeling of security and encourages the value and continuation of the relationship.

So, parenting is indeed an awesome and overwhelming responsibility. Winnicott (1986) introduced the concept of 'good enough' parenting meaning that no parent had to be perfect and that an overall atmosphere of love and sensitivity towards a child would ensure the child's emotional and physical well-being. Thus, parents do what they think is right and there is no such thing as a 'perfect' parent.

Consequently, there is no 'one' definitive way to bring up a child. Layard & Dunn (2009) use Baumrind's model of parenting styles to demonstrate the different approaches and attitudes that parents adopt towards bringing up their children. Baumrind's model of parenting styles spans over the two dimensions of warmth

and control to elicit the four styles of 'disciplined', 'authoritative', 'neglectful' and 'permissive' (see Figure 2-1). Layard & Dunn discuss that the most effective in terms of children's outcomes and well-being is 'authoritative' where the parenting is loving and yet firm; where boundaries are explained in the context of a warm and loving relationship.
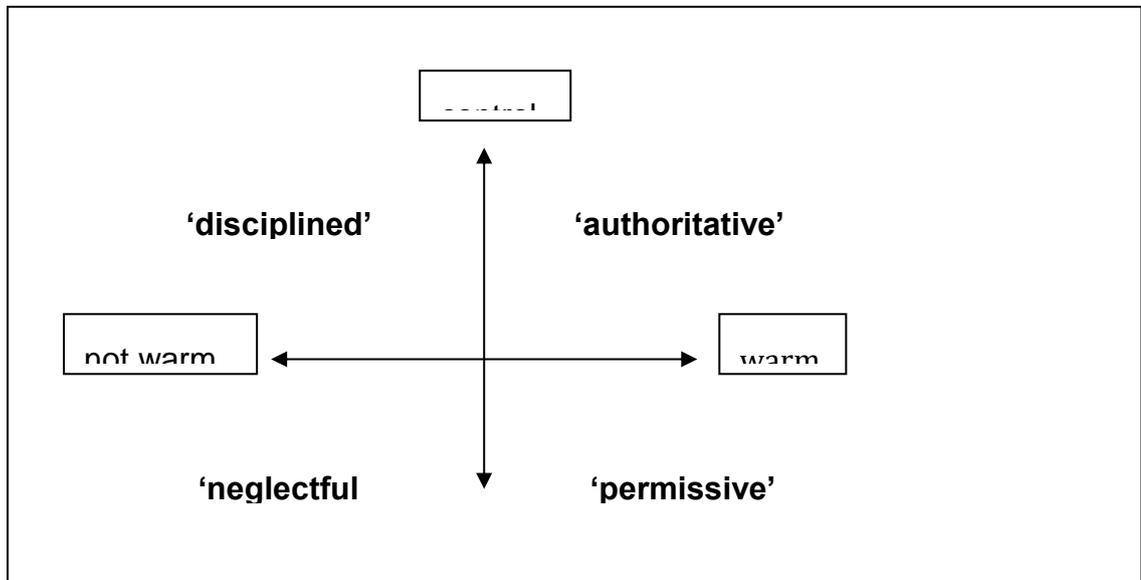
Figure 2-1: Baumrind's Model of Four Styles of Parenting

2.4 The importance of the Early Years

> One of the greatest gifts we are given at birth is
> potential (Robinson, 2003 p.46)

At birth the brain contains hundreds of billions of nerve cells or neurons. Each neuron is separated from physical contact with every other neuron but they communicate to each other in a language that is part electrical and part chemical building connections and organising themselves into systems (Kolb & Whishaw, 1990). At first these systems are not very efficient but as the neurons respond to stimuli seen, heard, felt or tasted these systems 'prune' themselves into more efficient neural pathways. Throughout our lifespan the number of neurons will decline but it is the organisation and efficiency of the neural connections that is important in determining performance (Healy, 1987).

There are two accepted periods of 'critical development' of the brain where the brain develops rapidly and undergoes this critical process of 'pruning'; namely the first three years and adolescence. However there is an argument that even within the first three years a child's behaviour becomes more difficult to change as time progresses. Parents with children in the formative early years have been at the heart of policies and papers published by the Government over the last 20 years (DCSF, 2007). The importance of these early formative years cannot be underestimated as it is then, ' that the emotional foundations for our being are laid down when the capacity for joy, curiosity, laughter, fun and exploration are at their potential peak' (Robinson, 2003 p.182).

2.5 Parenting: 'instinct' versus 'taught'

> Raising our children is the most important and complex task in our lives and yet as many have pointed out we receive little or no formal training for this role. Instead parents are assumed to inherently know what to do (McKinsey-Crittenden, 2008 p.4)

It is generally accepted that many humans will have an instinctive reaction of warmth and protectiveness towards a newborn child; the 'aaahhh' factor when a person looks at a baby or the instinctive turn of a head when a baby makes a noise. The physiological and psychological changes that a woman undergoes following conception, through the pregnancy and continues even after the birth, plays a significant role in developing a woman's desire to care for her child (Robinson, 2003).

Parents also bring their personal constructs of parenting and childhood. These constructs stem from their own parenting history and experience. Robinson (2003) discusses how even before the child is born a mother (and father) will instinctively be constructing the emotional scaffolding for the future relationship between herself (himself) and the baby. The emotional scaffold incorporates

their imaginings, hopes and fears about their baby as well as the approach and attitude they adopt towards their child.

Thus there is an argument that parenting is something that 'comes naturally' and our knowledge, understanding and practice develops from our parenting history and experience as well as hormones and 'instinct'. However the instinct to be a parent does not predicate a capability for parenting especially if a parent's history and experience is maladjusted. In these cases parents may need to be 'taught' or even 're-taught' parenting skills.

Parenting is a complex process combining a consistent, stable and caring environment (Robinson, 2003) and it is hard work both physically and psychologically. The competence that an adult has developed in their work role rarely prepares them for the unpredictability and non-stop demands of a new baby (Robinson, 2003). Whilst the desire to be a parent may be instinctive society should not fail to appreciate the need for being taught the knowledge, understanding and practice to help develop skills in parenting.

2.6 Existing research

A search of current literature and research studies on the topic of 'good parenting' and parenting programmes was undertaken using the electronic databases of PsycINFO (OVID) and Web of Science (ISI) as well as the University of Nottingham's Online catalogue. The search found numerous books and manuals for parents that provide a basic theoretical underpinning to child development and behaviour as well as practical strategies (for example, Sunderland (2006) and Murray & Andrews (2000)). The search also found a plethora of research on parents' perceptions of parenting programmes (for example, Law et al (2009); Patterson et al (2010) and Miller & Sambell (2002)). The conclusions drawn from these studies mainly reveals what aspects of the parenting programmes were found to be most useful and what changes have occurred in parenting practice as a result of attending the programme. There are also a few published research studies on the experiences and views of mothers on the challenges and difficulties of parenting (Bloomfield et al, 2005).

These studies provide mainly qualitative evidence from focus groups and interviews and some quantitative evidence from surveys and questionnaires.

The aim of all parenting programmes is to support parents and to change parenting practice (Kane et al, 2007) so that parents are enabled to become 'good' parents. Whilst there is much documented as to what constitutes good parenting this is based on the knowledge and viewpoints of professionals and known theories of child development (for example 'attachment theory'). A search of the literature has not found any research focusing on what parents perceive to be 'good' parenting.

2.7 Summary of Chapter 2

It was the author's professional and personal experiences (as discussed in Chapter 1) that led to an exploration of the research literature on parenting practices and the notion of what is 'good' parenting. There is a strong political agenda that underpins both National Government policy and Local Authority practice. Underlying Government strategies and policies is the aim to help mothers and fathers strengthen their parenting skills. There is compelling evidence from the fields of child maltreatment and also neuropsychology that emphasises the importance of 'good enough' parenting on children's development especially during the early formative years of a child's life. Yet parenting is an awesome and overwhelming responsibility and it is hard work both physically and psychologically. Parenting is a complex process combining a consistent, stable and caring environment. Whilst the desire to be a parent may be instinctive the need for being taught the knowledge, understanding and practice to help develop skills in parenting is also important.

There is much documented as to what constitutes good parenting that is based on the knowledge and viewpoints of professionals and known theories of child development (for example 'attachment theory'). An extensive review of existing research found a plethora of studies which provide mainly qualitative evidence

from focus groups and interviews and some quantitative evidence from surveys and questionnaires on the topic of what parents think about parenting programmes. However the author could not find any studies focusing on what parents perceive to be 'good' parents using Q-methodology.

3   Research Methodology

This chapter presents an account of the research methods used in the course of this study covering the following areas:

- The aims of the study and rationale for choosing Q-Methodology
- The design of the study and method used for data collection
- Selection of participants
- Ethical issues
- Reliability and Validity
- Procedures for data analysis

3.1 Aims of the Study

It has been discussed in the literature review of this study that even though there is much documented as to what professionals believe constitutes good parenting an extensive review of existing research failed to find any studies focusing on what parents perceive to be 'good' parents. Thus the aim of this study was to explore parents' constructions of what they perceive to be 'good' parenting using Q-methodology.

3.2 Rationale for the chosen methodology

> Whether a study's findings are useful or not depends
> crucially on design (Field and Hole, 2008 p.54).

If the design for the study is 'fit for purpose' then the study is more likely to produce results that are valid and reliable. Validity and reliability are discussed further on but this section focuses on the choice of research design undertaken.

3.2.1   Quantitative methods and epistemological considerations

There are many quantitative methods of research yet the 'gold standard' is still commonly held to be the true experimental design (Robson, 2002). The debate

as to what constitutes 'good experimental methodology' has overshadowed the development of scientific methodologies adopted by psychologists. This debate has focused on the merits and demerits of quantitative methods (namely the use of numerical values as the means of analysing data) or qualitative methods (the analysis of words known as 'rich data'). Yet just as important to an applied psychology research design is awareness and consideration of the epistemological stance or philosophical assumptions held by the researcher.

Many quantitative methods are based on the philosophical worldview of positivism which is based on the assumption that there is a linear relationship between, 'the world (objects, events, phenomena) and our perception, and understanding, of it' (Willig 2001 p.3). As Creswell (2009) explains it is a deterministic philosophy in which research aims to, 'identify and assess the causes that influence outcomes…it is also reductionistic in that the intent is to reduce the ideas into a small, discrete set of ideas to test, such as the variables that comprise hypotheses and research questions' (p.7). Generally the method of choice will either be an inductive or hypothetico-deductive methodology designed to verify (inductive) or falsify (hypothetico-deductive) a hypothesis. This paradigm of traditional empirical psychology is sometimes referred to as 'R-methodology' a term used to refer to the traditional use of correlational statistics including traditional factor analysis the 'R' referring to the frequent use of Spearman's Rho ('R') (Stainton-Rogers, 1995).

Crucial to any applied psychology research design is awareness and consideration of the epistemological stance or philosophical assumptions held by the researcher. As mentioned in the 'Introduction' section the notion that, 'human experience, including perception, is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically' and how we make sense of our experiences is a manifestation of these elements (Willig, 2000 p7) underpins the approach that has been adopted in this study. The goal of this research is to elicit the meanings and constructions that individuals have about the world, namely 'good parenting'.

Thus, the aim of this study is not to reduce ideas into small, discrete sets of ideas to test nor is it hoping to verify or falsify a hypothesis. Therefore, traditional quantitative methodologies are not 'fit for purpose' as a choice of methodology for this current study. However, Q-methodology 'provides researchers with a systematic and rigorous quantitative means for examining human subjectivity (McKeown & Thomas, 1988 p.5). The following sections will appraise the rationale as to why Q-methodology is an appropriate research methodology to adopt in this study.

3.2.2 Q-methodology for the study of human subjectivity

Q-methodology (originally developed by British physicist and psychologist William Stephenson in 1935) provides researchers with a systematic and rigorous method for the study of human subjectivity (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Subjectivity refers to an individual's personal point of view. The study of human subjectivity is central to all Q-methodology studies.

Also central to the design of Q-methodology studies is the axiom that subjectivity is always self-referent. That is a participant's perception of an experience is examined and an understanding is reached (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). The social-constructionist stance which underpins this present study asserts that each individual is unique and will construct meanings about the world differently. The goal of this research is to elicit the meanings and interpretations (human subjectivity) that individuals have from which an understanding of the participant's perceptions about the concept of 'good parenting' may emerge.

3.2.3 R-methodology versus Q-methodology

Q-methodology uses the technique of Q-sorting as a means of collating data. Yet Q-methodology is not a method for measuring and this is a crucially distinguishing factor from R-methodology. The aim of Q-methodology is to collect and explore the *variety* of accounts that people construct (Cross, 2005).

Q-methodology uses Q-sorting as a means of enabling the participant to construct viewpoints, perceptions and beliefs including those that expand the experience and knowledge of the researcher (Stainton-Rogers, 1995). In Q-methodology the 'sample' is not the participants as it would be in R-methodology. The sample in Q-methodology is the items that compile the Q-sort. The participants who complete the Q-sort are the equivalent to the experimental condition that would be found in R-methodology (Cross, 2005). In Q-methodology the focus is on the variety of accounts that people construct through the process of completing a Q-sort. In other words, the focus is not the 'constructors' but the 'constructions' (Stainton-Rogers, 1995).

3.2.4   Rationale for Q-methodology and the present study

Q-methodology fits within the ranks of quantitative methods because it produces numerical data and involves factor analysis. Yet it answers to many critiques of qualitative methodologies which have, 'a fundamental dissatisfaction with the "positivism" and "empiricism" of "conventional" psychology' (Stenner & Stainton-Rogers, 2004).

Stainton-Rogers (1995) suggest that the range of topics for study using Q-methodology is almost unlimited. However a natural limitation when studying human subjectivity is that the topic must be subjective in that it can be socially contested; argued about and debated. Q-methodology is a methodology of choice for researchers who are concerned with exploring attitudes and subjective opinion (Cross, 2005). Thus the topic of 'good' parenting which is fiercely contested; argued about and debated is appropriate for use with Q-methodology.

3.3   Design of the study

This section provides an account of the procedures undertaken in this present study in relation to devising the Q-sample, the selection of participants, data collection and data analysis. In addition consideration will be given to ethical issues pertaining to this study as well as issues of reliability and validity.

3.3.1 Devising the Q-sample

Concourse of statements and structuring the Q-sample

The Q-Sample consisted of 45 statements for the participants to map his or her viewpoints on the subject of 'good' parenting though the completion of a Q-sort. The Q-sample was selected from an original list of 125 statements drawn from the concourse of ideas and opinions on the topic of parenting. As Stainton-Rogers (1995) suggests that the initial pool of statements is approximately three times the size of the aimed for set size the aim had been a concourse list of 135 statements. However the author felt that a point of saturation had been reached at 125 statements.

The statements were taken from natural sources of oral or written communication. The advantage of using a 'naturalistic' Q-sample is that they are more likely to reflect the opinions of the person performing the Q-sort and the actual process of Q-sorting is expedited (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). Sources of the statements included academic journals, government publications, published literature on parenting (for example parenting manuals), newspaper articles and conversations.

Stainton-Rogers (1995) suggests that once the concourse of statements has been collected then the next stage is to sift, order and condense to yield a 'representative pool of propositions' – the Q sample. He argues that to ensure the representativeness of the propositions the Q-Sample should be balanced; appropriate and applicable to the issue; be intelligible and simple; and is comprehensive. This process of condensation from the concourse to the smaller Q sample is usually undertaken by the researcher/s. However to help ensure that, 'the language and ideas put forward are those of the public discourse on the topic, not just the pre-conceived views of the researcher' (Bradley, 2007 p.269) a series of steps for reducing the larger number of statements down to the Q-Sample was used in this present study. The aim was to incorporate a triangulation of member checking techniques. For the purposes of this study the groups pertaining to the member checking fell into two arenas,

the professional members (fellow doctorate students who are also employed as educational psychologists) and public members (parents known to the author who do not have a background in educational psychology). The steps undertaken were:

Step 1 – for the author to individually read through and peruse the concourse of statements.

Step 2 – a focus group comprising of 5 professional members (who have at least some knowledge and awareness of Q-methodology and are also employed as educational psychologists) were given the concourse of statements to sift, order and condense. Their initial sorting and emerging categories as well as their comments were noted down.

Step 3 – The information obtained from the focus group was used by the author to develop categories which encompassed all of the statements. A total of 30 categories emerged from this exercise (see Appendix A).

Step 4 – The author wrote the 'representative pool of propositions' which comprised of 43 statements. These statements were checked by another doctorate student who was experienced in completing a Q-methodology study and amendments made accordingly.

Step 5 – The amended list was checked by a second focus group comprising of 3 parents who, by self-report, had no previous knowledge of Q-methodology and have never been employed as educational psychologists. This group was asked to focus on whether the statements were balanced; appropriate and applicable to the issue; intelligible and simple; and comprehensive.

Step 6 –In the light of this member checking the author compiled the final Q-sample (See Appendix B).

3.3.2 Completing the Q-sort (data collection)

The technique of Q-sorting was utilised in order to allow participants to sort the 45 statements. Stainton-Rogers (1995) recommends using a fixed quasi-normal distribution as being more user-friendly whilst retaining the same statistical rigour as full ranking (that is 1 to N ranking). The distribution pattern chosen

was 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 1 which provided rating values of -5, -4, -3, -2, -1, 0, +1, +2, +3, +4, +5.

The participants were guided through the activity by the author following a series of steps:

9) Read through each statement in turn. As each statement is read, sort into three piles – 'agree' 'neutral or those that you are no sure about' 'disagree'.

10) A distribution marker board is used to help the participants map out the statements (see Appendix C). Beginning with 'most agree', participants are asked to select the three statements that they most agree are conducive with 'good' parenting; or the statements that they regard as the most important. The specific order within this marker does not matter.

11) Repeat this step for 'most disagree' or least important.

12) Go back to the 'agree' side and ask participants to select the next three statements that they most agree with.

13) Repeat this step for the next three statements that participants most disagree with.

14) Continue with this pattern until all statements have been placed on the distribution grid – remembering that participants can switch the statements around at any point until they are happy that the statements are mapped appropriately to their viewpoint.

15) Once all the statements have been placed on the matrix, record the completed Q-sort on a recording sheet which reproduces the Q-sort distribution.

This recording sheet also included space on the back to record other information about the participant including age, number and age of children etc. This further information would not enable the identification of an individual participant but would be used in understanding the wider context of any results found. In addition all participants were invited to record their thoughts and reflections on parenting and/or the activity they had just completed on the recording sheet. It was not the intention to closely analyse this data but to use it

to assist in the process of member checking the results and also to gain the participants' feedback on the Q-sorting activity.

It was intended that following the analysis of the results, the participants would be invited back to attend a debriefing session. The aim was to not only help to address the ethical considerations of this study (see below) but also allow for an opportunity for member checking which thus reduces threats to the validity of this study (Robson, 2003). Unfortunately the analysis of the results was not completed until after the Children Centres had closed for the school summer break. Although dates have been arranged for the author to hold debriefing sessions in October, the inclusion of member checking for the purposes of the writing up of this study was not possible in consideration of the time constraints of this study.

3.3.3 Selection of Participants

Stainton-Rogers (1995) emphasizes that a crucial and distinctive characteristic of Q-Methodology is the principle of 'finite diversity' - 'that whenever and wherever persons are applied to a sample of elements the principle of limited independent variability holds' (p.180). Yet even though large numbers of participants are not required (a general rule of thumb is between 50 – 60 individuals (Watts & Stenner, 2005)) the constitution of the participant group must be considered. There are two methods of sampling used in Q-methodology. 'Strategic sampling' occurs when a variety of locations for the completion of the Q-sets are specifically chosen by the researcher because they best represent the demographic groups most pertinent to the aims of the study. However, it is argued (Stainton-Rogers (1995); Watts & Stenner (2005)) that 'opportunistic sampling' can also be appropriate for Q-methodology especially when the function of the study is exploring viewpoints of a concept.

The aim of this present study was to explore the concept of 'good' parenting within a specific demographic of parents. Therefore the participant group must

be representative of parents. In order to narrow this group into a manageable size this study focused on the parents that are at the heart of government policies - parents with children in the early years (DCSF, 2007). As one outcome of this policy has been the establishment of Children Centres a strategic sample was sought which included the parents who accessed Children Centres within the area of Wellingborough in Northamptonshire. Wellingborough was chosen because it is the area where the author works as an educational psychologist.

Contact was made with the 4 Children Centres in Wellingborough by telephone and once verbal agreement was obtained an email was sent to confirm details along with an attached letter (Appendix D) and a poster (Appendix E) for the Children Centres to display as they deemed appropriate.

Some previous Q-methodology studies have used focus groups as a method of completing the Q-sort (for example, Bradley, 2007; Venables et al, 2009). However due to the practicalities of bringing together parents and providing childcare it was decided that the Q-sorting activity would be completed within the stay-and-play sessions. Therefore the Q-sorts were completed individually with each participant. This also helped to ensure that individual voices were not marginalised or lost within the focus group forum.

The Q-sorting activity took place in 8 stay-and-play sessions (2 sessions in each of the 4 Children Centres). The themes of the stay-and-play sessions were:

- Two 'everyday parenting' groups where a crèche was provided whilst parents met together
- A health visitors clinic
- A 'rattle and roll' group (for children under 18 months of age)
- Four stay-and-play sessions (for children up to the ages of 5 years)

Recruitment of the participants was completed by the author approaching parents attending the stay-and-play session and inviting them to take part in the study. A script (Appendix F) was used to assist this process.

A total of 53 Q-sorts were completed. However numerical mistakes were made during the recording of two of the participant's Q-sorts. Therefore the final number of Q-sorts that were viable for analysis was 51 (n=51).

All participants were invited to provide information that would allow a profile of the participants to be drawn up however some participants declined to provide this information. Table 3-1 summarises the profile of participants from the information provided.

3.3.4   Ethical Issues

It is vital that every piece of research has from the very start taken consideration to the ethical aspects of the study. Ethical issues are an intrinsic part of the research process. Brinkmann & Kvale (2008) recommend that these issues should be addressed at each stage of the research process from the initial formulation through to the publication of the research. Informed voluntary consent is at the heart of research ethics (McNamee & Bridges, 2002). In addition to informed voluntary consent are issues pertaining to deception, debriefing, confidentiality and protection from physical and psychological harm (Field & Hole, 2008).

Table 3-1: A table showing the sample characteristics of the participants (n=51)

Characteristic	Category	n (%)
Gender	Male	5
	Female	46
	Declined to answer	4
Age of participant	15-20	1
	21-25	10
	26-30	10
	31-35	13
	36-40	4
	41-45	5
	46-50	3
	Declined to answer	5
Ethnic background	White British	33
	British Muslim	1
	Afro-Caribbean	2
	Chinese	2
	Indian	2
	Declined to answer	6
Age of participant's children	<1 years	19
	1 years	9
	2 years	12
	3 years	9
	4 years	7
	5 years	6

	6-10 years	14
	11-20 years	9
	20+years	5
	Declined to answer	6
Marital status	Single	7
	Married	24
	Co-habiting	11
	Divorced	1
	Declined to answer	8
Work Status	Unemployed /Retired	21
	Part-time	14
	Full-time	5
	Declined to answer	11
Have attended a parenting course	Yes	17
	No	27
	Declined to answer	7

Issues relating to informed consent and confidentiality were addressed prior to conducting the research and also at the beginning of each Q-sort. A letter was sent to the Children Centres and a poster was made available to possible participants prior to the study taking place with details about the purpose of the activity and the procedure to be employed. The letter clearly informed participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and also provided assurance about confidentiality. There was also a briefing session with each participant prior to the commencement of each Q-sort to reiterate and clarify these issues.

Possible consequences of any study also need to be addressed with respect to any possible harm as well as expected benefits from participating in the study. One possible negative consequence is the concern that through the activity of examining what is 'good' parenting the parents might question their own parenting skills and/or feel as if they are being judged. To address this, participants will be given written and verbal information about the purpose of the study being to explore *the viewpoints* of parents and not being a tool to measure 'good' parenting. Prior to the completed Q-sort being recorded the participants were asked if they were happy with their Q-sort and whether they were happy for it to be recorded and used in the study. In addition participants will be offered the opportunity to attend a debriefing session at each children centre following the analysis of the results.

3.3.5 Reliability and Validity

There are various methods for checking the reliability and validity of the results including triangulation of different data, member checking, use of an external auditor and use of statistical techniques such as Cronbach's alpha (Field & Hole, 2008). In this study the use of a triangulation of member checking in the process of establishing the Q-set of 45 statements was utilised.

Threats to the external validity include history; construct effects (Robson, 2002); over use of special participant groups; and restricted numbers of participants (Field & Hole, 2008). It is acknowledged that this study has taken place within the town of Wellingborough and recruited parents who accessed one of the four Children Centres in Wellingborough.

Studies evolving from the epistemology of social constructionism admit that the studies cannot be generalised outside of the sample as any other individual will bring a whole new set of beliefs, attitudes, experiences etc which will necessarily affect their perception of the phenomena. However, Elliot et al (1999) and Law et al. (1998) propose a set of guidelines which are pertinent to qualitative research methodologies but also relevant to this current study. These guidelines include the appropriateness of the study design (i.e. 'fit for purpose'); owning one's perspective (i.e. answering questions of personal and epistemological reflexivity); situating the sample (i.e. size of sample, background and history of participants); ethics procedure (i.e. how informed consent was obtained and confidentiality issues); credibility checks (i.e. member checking, triangulation etc), auditability (i.e. the reasoning process of the researcher in relation to making decisions, identifying categories and the development of themes etc). These guidelines facilitate a process of reflexivity and the explicitness of the guidelines makes possible the replication of the study by another researcher. In all of these aspects the use of the above principles has been adopted throughout this study and therefore provides this research with analytical credibility.

3.3.6   Procedures for Data Analysis

Factor analysis

Data were analysed using PQmethod version 2.11 (Schmolck 2002). This is a Freeware statistical software designed specifically for Q-method studies. Q-methodology employs factor analysis as a means of reducing and simplifying the data. Q-methodology employs a by-person correlation and factor procedure by use of factor extraction, rotation and estimation. Q-methodology analyses

grouped participants' Q-sorts to indicate underlying shared perspectives. This differs from the standard factor analysis which groups item scales in terms of an underlying theoretical construct (Venables et al, 2009). Q-methodology produces distinct 'points of view' within the overall sample.

To maintain confidentiality and to protect the identity of the participants a numerical coding system for labelling the Q-sorts was used (for example. 1-001).

The data were subjected to Centroid analysis (QCENT) followed by Varimax rotation. Centroid analysis is the oldest of the factor techniques and is generally acknowledged as the preferred method of factor extraction in Q studies (Watt & Stenner, 2005). Venables et al (2009, p.1094) summarise the advantages of Varimax rotation:

- It maximises the variance explained
- Prioritises the influence of the participant group on the factor structure
- Attempts to load a small number of cases highly onto each factor thereby enhancing the interpretability of the results

PQMethod 2.11 converts the rating score (that is -5, -4, etc. through to +4, +5) to z-scores which state the position of each score in relation to the mean in standard deviation units (Kranzler, 2003). PQMethod uses an algorithm to identify Q-sorts which load significantly ($p > 0.05$) on one factor only (known as a 'Defining Sort'). It is important to note that no factor will exactly represent any of the participants' views but by looking at a participant's loading on a factor it is possible to ascertain the degree to which each participant correlates with the factor. The defining sorts are flagged by PQMethod 2.11 with an X. Figure 3-1 shows an extract taken from a factor matrix produced by PQMethod. The Q-sorts are listed down the left hand side and the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 listed across the top are the factors. As can be seen Q-sort 1-001 significantly loads on factor 3; Q-sort 2-002 significantly loads on factor 4; whilst Q-sort 3-003 does

not significantly load on any factor and therefore is not a defining sort in this factor matrix solution.

```
          Factors


 QSORT             1         2         3         4         5


  1 001         0.1909   -0.0039    0.6591X    0.1378    0.1334
  2 002         0.1556    0.2814    0.1497     0.4519X   0.2385
  3 003         0.2857    0.3790    0.2361     0.1366    0.4407
```

Figure 3-1: Excerpt from a factor matrix solution with an X indicating a defining sort

The Factor Solution

Each of the factors extracted by PQMethod represents an idealised or prototypical Q-sort or viewpoint. A Q-study factor solution should provide a representation of as many of the participants' viewpoints as possible. Initially, factors with an Eigenvalue greater than 1 were retained in the factor solution (the Eigenvalue being the sum of the loadings on a factor). The results suggested that 5 factors should be retained. Table 3-2 shows the unrotated factor matrix with the Eigenvalues for each factor.

Table 3-2: The unrotated factor matrix produced from a centroid analysis with Varimax rotation

	Factors 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
QSORTS							
1 001	0.5010	-0.3792	0.3022	0.1150	0.0400	0.0947	0.0069
2 002	0.5591	0.2280	0.0695	0.0246	-0.1054	0.0873	0.0124
3 003	0.6371	0.0447	-0.1447	0.0071	0.1738	0.1934	0.0371
4 004	0.4244	-0.2151	0.2026	0.0434	0.0983	0.0686	0.0077
5 005	0.2295	-0.4382	0.2557	0.1253	-0.2444	0.1843	0.0554
6 006	0.7302	0.2584	-0.0729	0.0288	-0.2353	-0.0624	0.0319
7 007	0.4791	0.1866	0.2904	0.0569	-0.3301	-0.1545	0.0706
8 008	0.3926	-0.1059	0.3062	0.0527	0.3382	-0.2400	0.0832
9 009	0.6642	-0.1946	0.2333	0.0463	-0.1942	0.1635	0.0387
10 0010	0.6318	-0.2045	-0.0968	0.0218	-0.1853	-0.1852	0.0339
11 0011	0.6739	-0.0408	-0.0994	0.0035	0.0496	0.2509	0.0384
12 0012	0.5880	-0.4227	-0.2889	0.1165	-0.2383	0.2363	0.0667
13 0013	0.7026	-0.2567	-0.2071	0.0459	0.1018	0.4195	0.1080
14 0014	0.6128	-0.1608	-0.2922	0.0446	-0.1224	-0.1643	0.0197
15 0015	0.5222	0.2379	0.1077	0.0303	0.2185	-0.2272	0.0451
16 0016	0.5851	0.4069	0.0994	0.0778	-0.0919	0.1201	0.0150
17 0017	0.5614	0.1245	0.0182	0.0064	-0.2432	-0.0663	0.0342
18 0018	0.5467	-0.1250	-0.3830	0.0659	-0.2636	-0.2900	0.0785
19 0019	0.6749	0.3613	0.1690	0.0719	-0.1038	0.1517	0.0214
20 0020	0.6828	0.2544	0.1037	0.0335	-0.4171	-0.0015	0.0977
21 0021	0.6203	-0.0870	0.0984	0.0098	-0.1401	0.0180	0.0120
22 0022	0.4572	0.0066	-0.3200	0.0391	-0.2060	-0.3359	0.0779
23 0023	0.7053	-0.2196	0.1614	0.0370	-0.0927	-0.2399	0.0305
24 0024	0.7132	0.1213	0.1201	0.0142	-0.0457	0.1154	0.0106
25 0025	0.5133	0.1952	0.2679	0.0523	0.0446	-0.2804	0.0359
26 0026	0.7365	-0.3263	-0.0163	0.0490	-0.0789	-0.1807	0.0173
27 0027	0.7607	0.0236	0.0754	0.0041	0.0448	-0.0269	0.0004
28 0028	0.4763	0.2946	0.2924	0.0807	0.2579	-0.1273	0.0379
29 0029	0.4301	0.5618	-0.1226	0.1465	0.1557	0.0231	0.0117
30 0030	0.7874	-0.1709	-0.2700	0.0413	-0.0252	-0.1290	0.0066
31 0031	0.4039	-0.1456	0.2243	0.0363	-0.1610	0.1114	0.0236
32 0032	0.6523	-0.3104	-0.1312	0.0497	-0.0675	0.2191	0.0322
33 0033	0.6019	0.2278	0.0792	0.0254	0.4068	0.2674	0.1305
34 0034	0.7350	-0.3622	-0.1966	0.0746	0.1795	-0.2072	0.0331
35 0035	0.6305	-0.3132	-0.0858	0.0469	0.0624	-0.1308	0.0076
36 0036	0.6326	0.1025	-0.0225	0.0037	0.2963	-0.1394	0.0503
37 0037	0.3441	0.4295	-0.1906	0.0931	0.4333	-0.1886	0.1123
38 0038	0.6990	-0.2428	-0.0275	0.0272	0.1829	0.1476	0.0296

```
39 0039        0.5396    0.3938   -0.1760    0.0774    0.2606    0.1676    0.0509
40 0040        0.6230    0.2545    0.1040    0.0335   -0.0358   -0.1938    0.0166
41 0041        0.6950    0.1073   -0.2419    0.0256   -0.0303    0.1113    0.0093
42 0042        0.7907    0.0827   -0.2368    0.0229   -0.1464   -0.0880    0.0148
43 0043        0.7067    0.0563   -0.1022    0.0038   -0.1573    0.3176    0.0746
44 0044        0.6950   -0.3544   -0.1488    0.0653    0.0982   -0.1726    0.0159
45 0045        0.6750   -0.0556   -0.1432    0.0080    0.0065   -0.0608    0.0007
46 0046        0.7443    0.0474   -0.0070    0.0007   -0.0960   -0.0067    0.0056
47 0047        0.8101   -0.1734   -0.0522    0.0147    0.1477    0.0070    0.0098
48 0048        0.4781    0.3769    0.0940    0.0665    0.2484    0.0502    0.0317
49 0049        0.5059    0.1000   -0.2826    0.0336   -0.2844    0.2355    0.0802
50 0050        0.5015   -0.1068    0.3328    0.0610    0.3104    0.1752    0.0673
51 0051        0.7449   -0.0588    0.3094    0.0500    0.2061   -0.0746    0.0212

Eigenvalues   19.4185    3.2183    1.9686    0.1606    2.0710    1.6510    0.1256
% expl.Var.       38         6         4         0         4         3         0
```

The second retention criteria used was that at least 2 Q-sorts load significantly and uniquely on each factor (Watt & Stenner, 2005). The reasoning for this is that any less than 2 significant loadings is an individual viewpoint and not a shared perspective. A principal aim of the outcome from the data analysis is to represent the viewpoints of as many of the participants as possible so that marginal or minority viewpoints are not lost in the factor extraction process. Table 3-3 shows the rotated factor matrix with an X indicating a defining sort.

Ultimately in Q-method studies an element of interpretative judgement is required in how many factors are chosen for the rotated solution based on what is judged to be the most appropriate and theoretically informative (Watt & Stenner, 2005). Thus, even though one of the factors in the 5 factor solution had just 2 significant loadings and could be postulated to be a minority viewpoint it is argued that it should be included because it was deemed appropriate and theoretically informative. Bradley (2007) suggests exploring several rotated factor solutions to determine which factor solution allows most participants to have their views represented – that is which solution has the most number of significant loadings.

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Different Varimax rotated solutions were computed with 5, 4 and 3 factors retained. A 5-factor solution had 38 defining sorts (that is, 38 participants loading significantly on one factor or another. A 4-factor solution had 47 defining sorts but on only 3 out of the 4 factors (that is; on factor 4 of a 4-factor solution there were no significant loadings). A 3-factor solution also gave high numbers of participants (47) loading significantly on one factor or another. All 3 factors had Eigenvalues greater than 1 (factor 1: 19.4185; factor 2: 3.2183; factor 3: 1.9686) and had at least 2 significant loadings in each sort (factor 1: 20 defining sorts; factor 2: 18 defining sorts; factor 3: 9 defining sorts). Thus a 3-factor solution was considered to be the most appropriate and theoretically informative.

Table 3-3: The rotated factor matrix of 5 factors with X indicating a defining sort

```
          Factors

QSORT            1          2          3          4          5

 1 001       0.1909    -0.0039     0.6591X    0.1378     0.1334
 2 002       0.1556     0.2814     0.1497     0.4519X    0.2385
 3 003       0.2857     0.3790     0.2361     0.1366     0.4407
 4 004       0.1489     0.0999     0.4745X    0.1023     0.1229
 5 005       0.0821    -0.3446     0.4830X    0.1606     0.1471
 6 006       0.4104     0.3058     0.0673     0.5848X    0.2388
 7 007       0.1639     0.1104     0.1930     0.6368X   -0.0704
 8 008       0.1655     0.3583     0.4901X    0.0231    -0.1942
 9 009       0.2458     0.0027     0.5258     0.4277     0.2858
10 0010      0.5893X    0.0387     0.2651     0.2933     0.1225
11 0011      0.2980     0.2509     0.3036     0.2137     0.4896
12 0012      0.5388    -0.1850     0.2976     0.1287     0.5443
13 0013      0.3557     0.1571     0.4103     0.0516     0.6924X
14 0014      0.6509X    0.1012     0.1304     0.1897     0.2093
15 0015      0.2311     0.5328X    0.1973     0.2446    -0.0618
16 0016      0.0736     0.4090     0.0933     0.5446X    0.2554
17 0017      0.3188     0.1492     0.1201     0.4862X    0.1431
18 0018      0.7371X    0.0266    -0.0246     0.2429     0.1274
19 0019      0.0857     0.4043     0.2027     0.5977X    0.2866
20 0020      0.2839     0.1572     0.1223     0.7477X    0.2110
21 0021      0.3240     0.1014     0.3522     0.3745     0.2002
22 0022      0.6232X    0.1100    -0.0922     0.2466     0.0269
23 0023      0.5108     0.1251     0.4870     0.3526    -0.0086
24 0024      0.2263     0.3135     0.3272     0.4517     0.2958
25 0025      0.2060     0.3936     0.2688     0.3981    -0.1701
26 0026      0.6294X    0.0786     0.4609     0.2430     0.1265
27 0027      0.3719     0.3523     0.3789     0.3564     0.2116
28 0028      0.0306     0.5631X    0.2895     0.2859    -0.0774
29 0029      0.0746     0.6287X   -0.1425     0.2977     0.1967
30 0030      0.7056X    0.2239     0.2560     0.2061     0.2867
31 0031      0.1142    -0.0454     0.3782X    0.3063     0.1514
32 0032      0.4320     0.0121     0.3960     0.1507     0.4777
33 0033      0.0126     0.6250X    0.3321     0.1262     0.3901
34 0034      0.7189X    0.2395     0.4334    -0.0128     0.1708
35 0035      0.5599X    0.1318     0.4053     0.0781     0.1534
36 0036      0.3525     0.5361X    0.2683     0.1323     0.1066
37 0037      0.1827     0.7309X   -0.1078    -0.0042     0.0221
```

38	0038	0.3799	0.2435	0.4970	0.0732	0.3812
39	0039	0.1312	0.6193X	0.0049	0.1792	0.3841
40	0040	0.2988	0.4074	0.1686	0.4670	0.0095
41	0041	0.4182	0.3160	0.1040	0.2955	0.4362
42	0042	0.5948	0.2886	0.1082	0.4146	0.3074
43	0043	0.2769	0.1780	0.2178	0.4098	0.5657
44	0044	0.6611X	0.1661	0.4235	0.0434	0.1674
45	0045	0.4946X	0.2536	0.2343	0.2292	0.2477
46	0046	0.4077	0.2647	0.2726	0.4243	0.2621
47	0047	0.5062	0.3224	0.4631	0.1738	0.3121
48	0048	0.0191	0.5846X	0.1375	0.2528	0.1520
49	0049	0.3111	0.0562	-0.0487	0.3603	0.5047X
50	0050	-0.0006	0.3272	0.6010X	0.0882	0.1779
51	0051	0.2700	0.4131	0.6065X	0.2895	0.0649
% expl.Var.		15	11	11	11	8

4.   Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the results from the factor analysis undertaken using the steps described in the 'procedures for data analysis' section. The PQMethod 2.11 statistical software was used as a means of completing a by-person correlation and factor procedure. A total of 51 Q-sorts were entered into the programme. Following criteria for retaining factors a 3-factor solution was deemed to be the most appropriate and theoretically informative as summarised in Table 4-1.

Table 4-1: Factor characteristics: participants grouped in each factor, Eigenvalues, % of variance explained; and number of distinguishing statements

Factor	Total *n* (participants)	Eigenvalue	Variance exp. (%)	No. Dist. Statements
1	20	19.4185	20	21
2	18	3.2183	17	20
3	9	1.9686	11	26

4.2 Factor arrays

Table 4-2 shows the rotated factor matrix of a 3-factor solution. The left-hand column lists the participants (1-001 etc.) and the next three columns represent the factors. The defining sorts are indicated with an X.

PQMethod also produces 'factor arrays' which describe factor by factor what participants in concurrence with that viewpoint think about the issue of 'good

parenting'. These tables also show the Q-sort rank value for each statement. Table 4-3 shows the factor arrays for factor 1.

Table 4-4 shows the factor arrays for factor 2.

Table 4-5 shows the factor arrays for factor 3.

Table 4-2: The rotated factor matrix of a 3-factor solution with X indicating a defining sort

```
            Factors

QSORT           1           2           3

 1 001        0.2652      0.0493      0.6429X
 2 002        0.2283      0.5268X     0.1993
 3 003        0.4901X     0.3999      0.1692
 4 004        0.2202      0.1172      0.4530X
 5 005        0.1433     -0.1679      0.5112X
 6 006        0.4219      0.6338X     0.1597
 7 007        0.0455      0.4775X     0.3444
 8 008        0.0895      0.1983      0.4602X
 9 009        0.3466      0.2827      0.5774X
10 0010       0.5489X     0.2084      0.3251
11 0011       0.5160X     0.3617      0.2619
12 0012       0.7307X    -0.0165      0.2716
13 0013       0.6876X     0.1945      0.3030
14 0014       0.6500X     0.2032      0.1513
15 0015       0.1754      0.5177X     0.2052
16 0016       0.1578      0.6869X     0.1450
17 0017       0.3030      0.4398X     0.2139
18 0018       0.6543X     0.1783      0.0362
19 0019       0.1865      0.7155X     0.2605
20 0020       0.2754      0.6273X     0.2691
21 0021       0.3674      0.3212      0.4047
22 0022       0.5051X     0.2362     -0.0245
23 0023       0.4304      0.2778      0.5562X
24 0024       0.3343      0.5437X     0.3611
25 0025       0.0793      0.5017X     0.3396
26 0026       0.6089X     0.1878      0.4931
27 0027       0.4315      0.4896      0.3988
28 0028       0.0016      0.5607X     0.2913
29 0029       0.1470      0.6829X    -0.1668
30 0030       0.7517X     0.3042      0.2541
31 0031       0.1663      0.1624      0.4250X
32 0032       0.6249X     0.1329      0.3617
33 0033       0.2495      0.5540X     0.2265
34 0034       0.7412X     0.1331      0.3780
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35 0035          0.5817X   0.1239    0.3863
36 0036          0.3842    0.4599X   0.2282
37 0037          0.1866    0.5174X  -0.1914
38 0038          0.5606X   0.2290    0.4262
39 0039          0.3164    0.6099X  -0.0718
40 0040          0.2366    0.5912X   0.2414
41 0041          0.5685X   0.4702    0.0941
42 0042          0.6361X   0.5095    0.1547
43 0043          0.5024    0.4572    0.2272
44 0044          0.6808X   0.1217    0.3906
45 0045          0.5515X   0.3445    0.2376
46 0046          0.4667    0.4865    0.3190
47 0047          0.6225X   0.3470    0.4256
48 0048          0.1036    0.5979X   0.1059
49 0049          0.4764X   0.3442   -0.0205
50 0050          0.1424    0.2673    0.5310X
51 0051          0.2969    0.4488    0.6038X
```

Table 4-3: Factor arrays for factor 1

No.	Statement	No.	Z-Scores	Q-sort value
38	Encourage child to believe their views are important	38	1.574	5
29	Children should be told regularly that they are loved	29	1.488	4
28	Child knows parent is always there for them, no matter what	28	1.370	4
18	Child needs space to be creative and develop own tastes	18	1.368	4
2	Children should be allowed to make their own mistakes	2	1.183	3
16	Children encouraged to be independent and experience life	16	1.173	3
27	Parents should spend quality time with their children	27	1.128	3
3	The parent-child relationship is about mutual respect	3	0.995	3
33	Take time to explain rules and decisions to child	33	0.874	2
30	Children know they can have a cuddle whenever they want	30	0.835	2
41	Parents behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way	41	0.811	2
23	Parents spend time with child and involved in interests	23	0.714	2
4	Children should learn right-wrong and to have good manners	4	0.710	2
19	Bring children up to understand the world we live in	19	0.707	1
20	Children learn responsibility	20	0.697	1
22	Parents should be a role model for their child	22	0.536	1
24	Praise, star charts and tangible rewards-good behaviour	24	0.523	1
40	Parents support child's learning at school and career	40	0.513	1
39	Good parents use consequences when boundaries are pushed	39	0.449	1
15	Take time to understand child's needs and emotions	15	0.329	0
42	Parents need 'me' time	42	0.320	0
32	Sometimes parents need to be cruel to be kind	32	0.316	0
45	Parenting is a family affair and parents support each other	45	0.176	0

37	Good parents establish routine and order	37	0.041	0
11	Parents should be accident aware and not put child at risk	11	0.011	0
9	Children should exercise for at least 7 hours per week	9	-0.167	0
12	Parents should give children a healthy diet	12	-0.187	-1
13	Parents should be calm, confident, patient and approachable	13	-0.219	-1
7	'Good enough' no such thing as a perfect parent	7	-0.268	-1
6	Parents should have their own support networks	6	-0.431	-1
25	Clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour	25	-0.447	-1
26	Give time out when child misbehaves	26	-0.523	-1
14	Good parents trust their instincts	14	-0.540	-2
31	Minor misbehaviours can be ignored	31	-0.675	-2
36	Parents should be organised and able to plan ahead	36	-0.678	-2
43	Parents should make their child happy	43	-0.686	-2
10	Good parents protect their children from the world	10	-1.326	-2
1	Parents should be able to discipline in what way they like	1	-1.359	-3
21	A good parents is their child's best friend	21	-1.359	-3
44	Parenting can be learnt from books and courses	44	-1.399	-3
17	Stay at home for their children and available whenever	17	-1.441	-3
5	Children should be left to cry when they are upset	5	-1.502	-4
35	Good parents are in control of their emotions	35	-1.536	-4
34	OK to smack or shout at a child when naughty	34	-1.944	-4
8	Parents should give child what they want	8	-2.153	-5

Table 4-4: Factor arrays for factor 2

No.	Statement	No.	Z-Scores	Q-sort value
27	Parents should spend quality time with their children	27	1.832	5
45	Parenting is a family affair and parents support each other	45	1.822	4
29	Children should be told regularly that they are loved	29	1.373	4
4	Children should learn right-wrong' and to have good manners	4	1.284	4
11	Parents should be accident aware and not put child at risk	11	1.184	3
37	Good parents establish routine and order	37	1.139	3
41	Parents behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way	41	1.102	3
23	Parents spend time with child and involved in interests	23	0.976	3
40	Parents support child's learning at school and career	40	0.974	2
18	Child needs space to be creative and develop own tastes	18	0.931	2
13	Parents should be calm, confident, patient and approachable	13	0.913	2
24	Praise, star charts and tangible rewards – good behaviour	24	0.752	2
15	Take time to understand child's needs and emotions	15	0.603	2
12	Parent should give children a healthy diet	12	0.380	1
38	Encourage child to believe their views are important	38	0.373	1
25	Clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour	25	0.369	1
28	Child knows parents is always there for them, no matter what	28	0.330	1
33	Take time to explain rules and decisions to child	33	0.307	1
16	Children encourages to be independent and experience life	16	0.203	1
21	A good parent is their child's best friend	21	0.182	0
35	Good parents are in control of their emotions	35	0.176	0
3	The parent-child relationship is about mutual respect	3	0.148	0
22	Parents should be a role model for their child	22	0.121	0
30	Children know they can have a cuddle whenever they want	30	0.033	0
9	Children should exercise for at least 7 hours per week	9	-0.032	0

39	Good parents use consequences when boundaries are pushed	39	-0.123	0
6	Parents should have their own support networks	6	-0.209	-1
26	Give time out when child misbehaves	26	-0.266	-1
20	Children should learn responsibility	20	-0.280	-1
19	Bring children up to understand the world we live in	19	-0.297	-1
14	Good parents trust their instincts	14	-0.371	-1
43	Parents should make their child happy	43	-0.376	-1
36	Parents should be organised and able to plan ahead	36	-0.466	-2
7	'Good enough' no such thing as perfect parent	7	-0.490	-2
42	Parents need 'me' time	42	-0.518	-2
10	Good parents protect their children from the world	10	-0.536	-2
2	Children should be allowed to make their own mistakes	2	-0.686	-2
1	Parents should be able to discipline in what way they like	1	-0.859	-3
31	Minor misbehaviours can be ignored	31	-1.100	-3
44	Parenting can be learnt from books and courses	44	-1.118	-3
32	Sometimes parents need to be cruel to be kind	32	-1.743	-3
5	Children should be left to cry when they are upset	5	-1.823	-4
17	Stay at home for their children and available whenever	17	-1.837	-4
8	Parents should give children what they want	8	-2.149	-4
34	OK to smack or shout at a child when naughty	34	-2.228	-5

Table 4-5: Factor arrays for factor 3

No.	Statement	No.	Z-Scores	Q-sort value
28	Child knows parent is always there for them, no matter what	28	2.157	5
30	Children know they can have a cuddle whenever they want	30	1.603	4
23	Parents spend time with child and involved in interests	23	1.462	4
29	Children should be told regularly that they are loved	29	1.323	4
18	Child needs space to be creative and develop own tastes	18	1.026	3
42	Parents need 'me' time	42	1.012	3
25	Clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour	25	0.995	3
15	Take time to understand child's needs and emotions	15	0.808	3
4	Children should learn right-wrong and to have good manners	4	0.805	2
41	Parents behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way	41	0.750	2
40	Parents support child's learning at school and career	40	0.696	2
26	Give time out when child misbehaves	26	0.689	2
11	Parents should be accident aware and not put child at risk	11	0.668	2
43	Parents should make their child happy	43	0.660	1
2	Children should be allowed to make their own mistakes	2	0.542	1
7	'Good enough' no such thing as perfect parent	7	0.516	1
3	The parent-child relationship is about mutual respect	3	0.479	1
27	Parents should spend quality time with their children	27	0.439	1
22	Parents should be a role model for their child	22	0.377	1
13	Parents should be calm, confident, patient and approachable	13	0.303	0
45	Parenting is a family affair and parents support each other	45	0.282	0
38	Encourage child to believe their views are important	38	0.262	0
19	Bring children up to understand the world we live in	19	0.153	0
1	Parents should be able to discipline in what way they like	1	0.122	0
14	Good parents trust their instincts	14	0.069	0

20	Children should learn responsibility	20	0.065	0
39	Good parents use consequences when boundaries are pushed	39	-0.072	-1
24	Praise, star charts and tangible rewards-good behaviour	24	-0.092	-1
16	Children encourages to be independent and experience life	16	-0.289	-1
33	Take time to explain rules and decisions to child	33	-0.407	-1
6	Parents should have their own support networks	6	-0.507	-1
21	A good parent is their child's best friend	21	-0.563	-1
10	Good parents protect their children from the world	10	-0.0684	-2
34	OK to smack or shout at a child when naughty	34	-0.703	-2
37	Good parents establish routine and order	37	-0.716	-2
32	Sometimes parents need to be cruel to be kind	32	-0.729	-2
31	Minor misbehaviours can be ignored	31	-0.977	-2
12	Parents should give children a healthy diet	12	-0.984	-3
9	Children should exercise for at least 7 hours per week	9	-1.123	-3
5	Children should be left to cry when they are upset	5	-1.259	-3
17	Stay at home for their children and available whenever	17	-1.589	-3
35	Good parents are in control of their emotions	35	-1.594	-4
36	Parents should be organised and able to plan ahead	36	-1.744	-4
8	Parents should give their children what they want	8	-2.023	-4
44	Parenting can be learnt from books and courses	44	-2.213	-5

4.3 Descending array of differences between factors

The descending array differences between factors shows a comparison of the differences between each of the pairs of factors. PQMethod 2.11 calculates the differences based on z-scores and tabulates this data from those statements that the pair of factors most agree with to those statements that the pair of factors most disagree with.

Table 4-6 shows the descending array of differences between factor 1 and factor 2.

Table 4-7 shows the descending array of differences between factor 1 and factor 3.

Table 4-8 shows the descending array of differences between factor 2 and factor 3.

Table 4-6: Descending array of differences between factor 1 and factor 2

No.	Statement	No.	Factor 1	Factor 2	Difference
32	Sometimes parents need to be cruel to be kind	32	0.316	-1.743	2.059
2	Children should be allowed to make their own mistakes	2	1.183	-0.686	1.868
38	Encourage child to believe their views are important	38	1.574	0.373	1.200
28	Child knows parent is there for them, no matter what	28	1.370	0.330	1.039
19	Bring children up to understand the world we live in	19	0.707	-0.297	1.004
20	Children learn responsibility	20	0.697	-0.280	0.977
16	Children encouraged to be independent and experience life	16	1.173	0.203	0.971
3	The parent-child relationship is about mutual respect	3	0.995	0.148	0.847
42	Parents need 'me' time	42	0.320	-0.518	0.838
30	Children know they can have a cuddle whenever they want	30	0.835	0.033	0.802
39	Good parents use consequences when boundaries are pushed	39	0.449	-0.123	0.572
33	Take time to explain rules and decisions to child	33	0.874	0.307	0.568
18	Child needs space to be creative and develop own tastes	18	1.368	0.931	0.437
31	Minor misbehaviours can be ignored	31	-0.675	-1.10	0.426
22	Parents should be a role model for their child	22	0.536	0.121	0.415
17	Stay at home for their children and available whenever	17	-1.441	-1.837	0.397
5	Children should be left to cry when they are upset	5	-1.502	-1.823	0.321
34	OK to smack or shout at a child when naughty	34	-1.944	-2.228	0.284
7	'Good enough' no such thing as perfect parent	7	-0.268	-0.490	0.222
29	Children should be told regularly that they are loved	29	1.488	1.373	0.115
8	Parents should give children what they want	8	-2.153	-2.149	-0.004
9	Children should exercise for at least 7 hours per week	9	-0.167	-0.032	-0.135
14	Good parents trust their instincts	14	-0.540	-0.371	-0.169
36	Parents should be organised and able to plan ahead	36	-0.678	-0.466	-0.212

6	Parents should have their own support networks	6	-0.431	-0.209	-0.222
24	Praise, star charts and tangible rewards – good behaviour	24	0.523	0.752	-0.229
26	Give time out when child misbehaves	26	-0.523	-0.266	-0.257
23	Parents spend time with child and involved with interests	23	0.714	0.976	-0.261
15	Take time to understand child's needs and emotions	15	0.329	0.603	-0.275
44	Parenting can be learnt from books and courses	44	-1.399	-1.118	-0.281
41	Parents behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way	41	0.811	1.102	-0.292
43	Parents should make their child happy	43	-0.686	-0.376	-0.309
40	Parents support child's learning at school and career	40	0.513	0.974	-0.461
1	Parents should be able to discipline in what way they like	1	-1.359	-0.859	-0.499
12	Parents should give children a healthy diet	12	-0.187	0.380	-0.567
4	Children should learn right-wrong and to have good manners	4	0.710	1.284	-0.574
27	Parents should spend quality time with their children	27	1.128	1.832	-0.704
10	Good parents protect their children from the world	10	-1.326	-0.536	-0.790
25	Clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour	25	-0.447	0.369	-0.816
37	Good parents establish routine and order	37	0.041	1.139	-1.098
13	Parents should be calm, confident, patient and approachable	13	-0.219	0.913	-1.132
11	Parents should be accident aware and not put child at risk	11	0.011	1.184	-1.173
21	A good parents is their child's best friend	21	-1.359	0.182	-1.541
45	Parenting is a family affair and parents support each other	45	0.176	1.822	-1.646
35	Good parents are in control of their emotions	35	-1.536	0.176	-1.712

Table 4-7: Descending array of differences between factor 1 and factor 3

No.	Statement	No.	Factor 1	Factor 3	Difference
16	Children encourages to be independent and experience life	16	1.173	-0.289	1.462
38	Encourage child to believe their views are important	38	1.574	0.262	1.311
33	Take time to explain rules and decisions to child	33	0.874	-0.407	1.281
36	Parents should be organised and able to plan ahead	36	-0.678	-1.744	1.066
32	Sometimes parents need to be cruel to be kind	32	0.316	-0.729	1.045
9	Children should exercise for at least 7 hours per week	9	-0.167	-1.123	0.956
44	Parenting can be learnt from books and courses	44	-1.399	-2.213	0.814
12	Parents should give children a healthy diet	12	-0.187	-0.984	0.797
37	Good parents establish routine and order	37	0.041	-0.716	0.757
27	Parents should spend quality time with their children	27	1.128	0.439	0.689
2	Children should be allowed to make their own mistakes	2	1.183	0.542	0.641
20	Children learn responsibility	20	0.697	0.065	0.632
24	Praise, star charts and tangible rewards – good behaviour	24	0.523	-0.092	0.615
19	Bring children up to understand the world we live in	19	0.707	0.153	0.554
39	Good parents use consequences when boundaries are pushed	39	0.449	-0.072	0.521
3	The parent-child relationship is about mutual respect	3	0.995	0.479	0.516
18	Child needs space to be creative and develop own tastes	18	1.368	1.026	0.342
31	Minor misbehaviours can be ignored	31	-0.675	-0.977	0.302
29	Children should be told regularly that they are loved	29	1.488	1.323	0.164
22	Parents should be a role model for their child	22	0.536	0.377	0.159
17	Stay at home for their children and available whenever	17	-1.441	-1.589	0.148
6	Parents should have their own support networks	6	0.431	-0.507	0.076
41	Parents behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way	41	0.811	0.750	0.060
35	Good parents are in control of their emotions	35	-1.536	-1.594	0.058

4	Children should learn right-wrong and to have good manners	4	0.710	0.805	-0.095
45	Parenting is a family affair and parents support each other	45	0.176	0.282	-0.106
8	Parents should give children what they want	8	-2.153	-2.023	-1.130
40	Parents support child's learning at school and career	40	0.513	0.696	-0.183
5	Children should be left to cry when they are upset	5	-1.502	-1.259	-0.243
15	Take time to understand child's needs and emotions	15	0.329	0.808	-0.479
13	Parents should be calm, confident, patient and approachable	13	-0.219	0.303	-0.523
14	Good parents trust their instincts	14	-0.540	0.069	-0.609
10	Good parents protect their children from the world	10	-1.326	-0.684	-0.643
11	Parents should be accident aware and not put child at risk	11	0.011	0.668	-0.657
42	Parents need 'me' time	42	0.320	1.012	-0.692
23	Parents spend time with child and involved with interests	23	0.714	1.462	-0.748
30	Children know they can have a cuddle whenever they want	30	0.835	1.603	-0.768
7	'Good enough' no such thing as perfect parent	7	-0.268	0.516	-0.784
28	Child knows parent is there for them, no matter what	28	1.370	2.157	-0.787
21	A good parents is their child's best friend	21	-1.359	-0.563	-0.796
26	Give time out when child misbehaves	26	-0.523	0.689	-1.213
34	OK to smack or shout at a child when naughty	34	-1.944	-0.703	-1.241
43	Parents should make their child happy	43	-0.686	0.660	-1.345
25	Clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour	25	-0.447	0.995	-1.442
1	Parents should be able to discipline in what way they like	1	-1.359	0.122	-1.48

No.	Statement	No.	Factor 2	Factor 3	Difference
37	Good parents establish routine and order	37	1.139	-0.716	1.855
35	Good parents are in control of their emotions	35	0.176	-1.594	1.770
45	Parenting is a family affair and parents support each other	45	1.822	0.282	1.541
27	Parents should spend quality time with their children	27	1.832	0.439	1.393
12	Parents should give children a healthy diet	12	0.380	-0.984	1.363
36	Parents should be organised and able to plan ahead	36	-0.466	-1.744	1.278
44	Parenting can be learnt from books and courses	44	-1.118	-2.213	1.095
9	Children should exercise for at least 7 hours per week	9	-0.032	-1.123	1.091
24	Praise, star charts and tangible rewards – good behaviour	24	0.752	-0.092	0.844
21	A good parents is their child's best friend	21	0.182	-0.563	0.745
33	Take time to explain rules and decisions to child	33	0.307	-0.407	0.713
13	Parents should be calm, confident, patient and approachable	13	0.913	0.303	0.610
11	Parents should be accident aware and not put child at risk	11	1.184	0.668	0.516
16	Children encouraged to be independent and experience life	16	0.203	-0.289	0.491
4	Children should learn right-wrong and to have good manners	4	1.284	0.805	0.479
41	Parents behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way	41	1.102	0.750	0.352
6	Parents should have their own support networks	6	-0.209	-0.507	0.298
40	Parents support child's learning at school and career	40	0.974	0.696	0.278
10	Good parents protect their children from the world	10	-0.536	-0.684	0.148
38	Encourage child to believe their views are important	38	0.373	0.262	0.111
29	Children should be told regularly that they are loved	29	1.373	1.323	0.050
39	Good parents use consequences when boundaries are pushed	39	-0.123	-0.072	-0.051

18	Child needs space to be creative and develop own tastes	18	0.931	1.026	-0.095
31	Minor misbehaviours can be ignored	31	-1.10	-0.977	-0.124
8	Parents should give children what they want	8	-2.149	-2.023	-0.126
15	Take time to understand child's needs and emotions	15	0.603	0.808	-0.205
17	Stay at home for their children and available whenever	17	-1.837	-1.589	-0.249
22	Parents should be a role model for their child	22	0.121	0.377	-0.256
3	The parent-child relationship is about mutual respect	3	0.148	-.479	-0.332
20	Children learn responsibility	20	-0.280	0.065	-0.345
14	Good parents trust their instincts	14	-0.371	0.069	-0.440
19	Bring children up to understand the world we live in	19	-0.297	0.153	-0.450
23	Parents spend time with child and involved with interests	23	0.976	1.462	-0.486
5	Children should be left to cry when they are upset	5	-1.823	-1.259	-0.564
25	Clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour	25	0.369	0.995	-0.626
26	Give time out when child misbehaves	26	-0.266	0.686	-0.956
1	Parents should be able to discipline in what way they like	1	-0.859	0.122	-0.981
7	'Good enough' no such thing as perfect parent	7	-0.490	0.516	-1.006
32	Sometimes parents need to be cruel to be kind	32	-1.743	-0.729	-1.014
43	Parents should make their child happy	43	-0.376	0.660	-1.036
2	Children should be allowed to make their own mistakes	2	-0.686	0.542	-1.227
34	OK to smack or shout at a child when naughty	34	-2.228	-0.703	-1.525
42	Parents need 'me' time	42	-0.518	1.012	-1.530
30	Children know they can have a cuddle whenever they want	30	0.033	1.603	-1.570
28	Child knows parent is there for them, no matter what	28	0.330	2.157	-1.826

4.4 Distinguishing statements and consensus statements

In addition PQMethod 2.11 also produces the distinguishing statements for each factor and consensus statements. PQMethod achieves this by comparing the z-scores for each Q-sort to determine those statements that are placed in significantly different locations in the opinion continuum for any two factors (McKeown & Thomas, 1988). As Bradley (2007, p.156) summarises, 'those statements upon which that viewpoint has a significantly different outlook from the other viewpoints'.

Table 4-9 shows the distinguishing statements for factor 1.

Table 4-10 shows the distinguishing statements for factor 2.

Table 4-11 shows the distinguishing statements for factor 3.

Likewise consensus statements are those that do not distinguish between any pair of factors and thus are those statements upon which that viewpoint has a significantly similar outlook to the other viewpoints.

Table 4-12 shows the consensus statements.

Table 4-9: The distinguishing statements for factor 1

(P<0.05; Asterisk (*) indicates significance at P<0.01)

No.	Statement	Factor 1 Rank	Factor 1 Z-Score	Factor 2 Rank	Factor 2 Z-Score	Factor 3 Rank	Factor 3 Z-Score
38	Encourage child to believe their views are important	5	1.57*	1	0.37	0	0.26
28	Child knows parent is always there for them, no matter what	4	1.37*	1	0.33	5	2.16
2	Children should be allowed to make their own mistakes	3	1.18*	-2	-0.69	1	0.54
16	Children encouraged to be independent and experience life	3	1.17*	1	0.20	-1	-0.29
27	Parents should spend quality time with their children	3	1.13*	5	1.83	1	0.44
3	The parent-child relationship is about mutual respect	3	1.00*	0	0.15	1	0.48
33	Take time to explain rules and decisions to child	2	0.87*	1	0.31	-1	-0.41
30	Children know they can have a cuddle whenever they want	2	0.84*	0	0.03	4	1.60
19	Bring children up to understand the world we live in	1	0.71*	-1	-0.30	0	0.15
20	Children should learn responsibility	1	0.70*	-1	-0.28	0	0.07
39	Good parents use consequences when boundaries are pushed	1	0.45*	0	-0.12	1	0.07
42	Parents need 'me' time	0	0.32*	-2	-0.52	3	1.01
32	Sometimes parents need to be cruel to be kind	0	0.32*	-3	-1.74	-2	-0.73
37	Good parents establish routine and order	0	0.04*	3	1.14	-2	-0.72
11	Parents should be accident aware and not put child at risk	0	0.01*	3	1.1.8	2	0.67

12	Parents should give children a healthy diet	-1	-0.19*	1	0.38	-3	-0.98
13	Parents should be calm, confident, patient and approachable	-1	-0.22*	2	0.91	0	0.30
25	Clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour	-1	-0.45*	1	0.37	3	1.00
10	Good parents protect their children from the world	-2	-1.33*	-2	-0.54	-2	-0.68
1	Parents should be able to discipline in what way they like	-3	-1.36*	-3	-0.86	0	0.12
21	A good parent is their child's best friend	-3	-1.36*	0	0.018	-1	-0.56

Table 4-10: The distinguishing statements for factor 2

(P<0.05; Asterisk (*) indicates significance at P<0.01)

No.	Statement	Factor 2 Rank	Factor 2 Z-Score	Factor 1 Rank	Factor 1 Z-Score	Factor 3 Rank	Factor 3 Z-Score
27	Parents should spend quality time with their children	5	1.83*	3	1.13	1	0.44
45	Parenting is a family affair and parents support each other	4	1.82*	0	0.018	0	0.028
4	Children should learn right-wrong and to have good manners	4	1.28	2	0.71	2	0.80
11	Parents should be accident aware and not put child at risk	3	1.18	0	0.01	2	0.67
37	Good parents establish routine and order	3	1.14*	0	0.04	-2	-0.72
13	Parents should be calm, confident, patient and approachable	2	0.91*	-1	-0.22	0	0.30
12	Parents should give children a healthy diet	1	0.38*	-1	-0.19	-3	-0.98
25	Clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour	1	0.37*	-1	-0.45	3	1.00
28	Child knows parent is always there for them, no matter what	1	0.33*	4	1.37	5	2.16
33	Take time to explain rules and decisions to child	1	0.31*	2	0.87	-1	-0.41
16	Children encourages to be independent and experience life	1	0.20	3	1.17	-1	-0.29
21	A good parent is their child's best friend	0	0.18*	-3	-1.36	-1	-0.56
35	Good parents are in control of their emotions	0	0.18*	-4	-1.54	-4	-1.59
30	Children know they can have a cuddle whenever they want	0	0.03*	2	0.84	4	1.60
19	Bring children up to understand the	-1	-0.30	1	0.71	0	0.15

	world we live in						
42	Parents need 'me' time	-2	-0.52*	0	0.32	3	1.01
2	Children should be allowed to make their own mistakes	-2	-0.69*	2	1.18	1	0.54
1	Parents should be able to discipline in what way they like	-3	-0.86*	-3	-1.36	0	0.012
32	Sometimes parents need to cruel to be kind	-3	-1.74*	0	0.32	-2	-0.73
5	Children should be left to cry when they are upset	-4	-1.82	-4	-1.50	-3	-1.26

Table 4-11: The distinguishing statements for factor 3

(P<0.05; Asterisk (*) indicates significance at P<0.01)

No.	Statement	Factor 3		Factor 1		Factor 2	
		Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score
28	Child knows parent is always there for them, no matter what	5	2.16*	4	1.37	1	0.33
30	Children know they can have a cuddle whenever they want	4	1.60*	2	0.84	0	0.03
23	Parents spend time with child and involved in interest	4	1.46	2	0.71	3	0.90
42	Parents need 'me' time	3	1.01*	0	0.32	-2	-0.52
25	Clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour	3	1.00*	-1	-0.45	1	0.37
26	Give time out when child misbehaves	2	0.69*	-1	-0.52	-1	-0.27
11	Parents should be accident aware and not put child at risk	2	0.67	0	0.01	3	1.18
43	Parents should make their child happy	1	0.66*	-2	-0.69	-1	-0.38
2	Children should be allowed to make their own mistakes	1	0.54*	3	1.18	-2	-0.69
7	'Good enough' no such thing as perfect parent	1	0.52*	-1	-0.27	-2	-0.49
27	Parents should spend quality time with their children	1	0.44*	3	1.13	5	1.83
13	Parents should be calm, confident, patient and approachable	0	0.30*	-1	-0.22	2	0.91
19	Bring children up to understand the world we live in	0	0.15	1	0.71	-1	-0.30
1	Parents should be able to discipline their child in what way they like	0	0.12*	-3	-1.36	-3	-0.86
14	Good parents trust their instincts	0	0.07	-2	-0.54	-1	-0.37
24	Praise, star charts and tangible rewards – good behaviour	-1	-0.09*	1	0.52	2	0.75

16	Children encouraged to be independent and experience life	-1	-0.29	3	1.17	1	0.20
33	Take time to explain rules and decisions to child	-1	-0.41*	2	0.87	1	0.31
21	A good parent is their child's best friend	-1	-0.56*	-3	-1.36	0	0.18
34	OK to smack or shout at a child when naughty	-2	-0.70*	-4	-1.94	-5	-2.23
37	Good parents establish routine and order	-2	-0.72*	0	0.04	3	1.14
32	Sometimes parents need to be cruel to be kind	-2	-0.73*	0	0.32	-3	-1.74
12	Parents should give children a healthy diet	-3	-0.98*	-1	-0.19	1	0.38
9	Children should exercise for at least 7 hours per week	-3	-1.12*	0	-0.17	0	-0.03
36	Parents should be organised and able to plan ahead	-4	-1.74*	-2	-0.68	-2	-0.47
44	Parenting can be learnt from books and courses	-5	-2.21*	-3	-1.40	-3	-1.12

Table 4-12: Consensus statements (those statements that do not distinguish between any pair of factors)

(All listed statements are non-significant at P<0.01; statements flagged with an asterisk (*) are also non-significant at P<0.05)

No.	Statement	Factor 2		Factor 1		Factor 3	
		Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score	Rank	Z-Score
6*	Parents should have their own support networks	-1	-0.43	-1	-0.21	-1	-0.51
8*	Parents should give children what they want	-5	-2.15	-4	-2.15	-4	-2.02
15	Take time to understand child's needs and emotions	0	0.33	2	0.60	3	0.81
17	Stay at home for their children and available whenever	-3	-1.44	-4	-1.84	-3	-1.59
22	Parents should be a role model for their child	1	0.54	0	0.012	1	0.38
29*	Children should be told regularly that they are loved	4	1.49	4	1.37	4	1.32
41*	Parents behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way	2	-0.81	3	1.10	2	0.75

5.   Interpretation of the Factors

The detailed and extensive data set out in the results section can now be used to describe the three viewpoints on 'good parenting'. This begins to consider the meaning behind the factor arrays (Table 4-3 through to Table 4-5). These descriptions also make reference to the descending array of differences between factors (Table 4-6 through to Table 4-8) and the distinguishing statements (Table 4-9 through to Table 4-11) which tells us which statements each viewpoint has a significantly different outlook to the other viewpoints. Finally consideration is made to the statements where there was consensus between the factors (Table 4-12).

By means of completing an exploratory factor analysis a three-factor solution was identified. These factors are now presented as viewpoints on what parents perceive to be 'good parenting':

- Viewpoint 1 – Freedom to Grow
- Viewpoint 2 - Teamwork
- Viewpoint 3 - Demonstrative

5.2 Viewpoint 1 – Freedom to Grow

The parents subscribing to this viewpoint 'encourage their children to believe their views are important and worthwhile' (+5). They believe that 'children should be told regularly that they are loved' (+4) and the 'parent will always be there for them, no matter what' (+4); although they do not believe that 'parents should stay at home for their child' (-3). These parents believe that children 'should have the space to be creative and have the freedom to develop their own tastes and personalities' (+4). This freedom and space also includes children being 'allowed to make their own mistakes and learn how to deal with upsetting social experiences' (+3). In other words they believe that 'children should be encouraged to be independent and to experience life for themselves' (+3).

There is a strong sense of meeting the emotional needs of children in this viewpoint. These parents also believe that 'parents should spend quality time with their children (for example, eating meals together, sitting and talking together)' (+3) as well as 'spending time with their children and being involved in their interests' (+2). They believe that the 'parent-child relationship is about mutual respect – parents should trust their children and also apologise when it was the parent that was in the wrong' (+3). 'Children should know that they can have a cuddle whenever they like' (+2) and 'parents should behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way' (+2).

In relation to discipline and behaviour management these parents believe that they should teach their child to 'behave appropriately by knowing the difference between right and wrong and to have good manners' (+2) and 'good parents take the time to explain their rules and decisions to their child' (+2).

It is the view of these parents that 'parents should be a role model for their child' (1). They see it as fairly important that children should 'understand the world we live in' (1) and that they 'should learn responsibility' (1) and they see the parents' role as being supportive of their 'child's learning at school' (1).

They see it as less important that 'parents need time to themselves, a bit of 'me time' (0) or that 'parenting is a family affair with good parents working together and supporting each other' (0).

These parents strongly reject the idea that 'parents should give their children what they want' (-5). They do not believe that it 'is OK for a parent to shout or smack their child when they have been naughty' (-4) nor do they think 'children should be left to cry when they are upset' (-4).

<u>Summary</u>

Overall these parents feel it is important to allow their children to have the freedom and space to grow. They also strongly subscribe to the belief that children's emotional needs are important and that a child should feel valued and loved by their parent.

5.3 Viewpoint 2 - Teamwork

This viewpoint is about spending 'quality time with their children' (+5) and telling children 'regularly that they are loved' (+4). They believe that 'parenting is a family affair and good parents work together and they support each other' (+4).

There is a sense of protecting their child as these parents believe it important for parents to 'be accident aware and not put their child at risk' (+3). There is also a strong sense of discipline as 'good parents establish routine and order for their children' (+3) and it is important that 'children should learn how to behave appropriately by knowing the difference between right and wrong and to have good manners' (+3). At the same time 'children should be given praise, star charts and tangible rewards for good behaviour' (+2).

The way parents behave is important to these parents who believe strongly that 'parents should behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way' (+3) and they 'should be calm, confident, patient and approachable' (+2). They also believe that 'parents should spend time with their children and be involved in their child's interests' (+3) taking 'time to understand their child's needs and emotions by taking the perspective of the child' (+2). It is a less important aspect of the parenting role to 'establish clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour' (+1) or to 'take time to explain their rules and decisions to their child' (+1).

There is also a sense of supporting the 'child's learning at school' (+2) by allowing their child to have 'the space to be creative and have the freedom to

develop their own tastes and personalities' (+2). These parents feel is it fairly important to 'encourage their child to believe that his/her views are important and worthwhile' (+1).

It is also of some importance to parents subscribing to this viewpoint that 'children know that they can have a cuddle whenever they like' (0) and 'children know that their parents are always there for them, no matter what' (1). Alongside this there is a milder feeling that 'parents should make their child happy' (-1).

These parents feel fairly ambiguous towards the parent-child relationship with regards to 'a good parent is their child's best friend' (0) and the parent-child relationship is one of 'mutual respect' (0).

It is not important to these parents to 'stay at home for their child so they are available whenever the child needs them' (-4) and they do not believe that 'sometimes parents have to be cruel to be kind' (-3).

Like Viewpoint 1 (Freedom to Grow) these parents strongly reject the idea that it 'is OK for a parent to shout or smack their child when they have been naughty' (-5) nor do they think 'children should be left to cry when they are upset' (-4). They also do not believe that 'parents should give their children what they want' (-4).

With regards to what distinguishes this viewpoint; this is the only viewpoint that believes 'parenting is a family affair and good parents work together and support each other' (+4). They also feel most strongly that parents 'should spend quality time with their children' (+5) yet 'establish routine and order for their children' (+3). This is the only viewpoint to not regard it as important that 'parents need time to themselves, a bit of 'me time' (-2) nor do they regard

children being 'allowed to make their own mistakes and to learn how to deal with upsetting social experiences' (-2) as important.

Summary

For this viewpoint a family is perceived to be a team as there is a strong sense of working together and mutually supporting each other. There is also a strong belief in the parent's role in disciplining and establishing routine and order for their children.

5.4 Viewpoint 3 - Demonstrative

A defining characteristic of this viewpoint is a strong belief that 'children know that their parents are always there for them, no matter what' (+5) and 'children are told regularly that they are loved' (+4). It is very important to these parents that 'children know they can have a cuddle whenever they want' (+4) and 'parents spend time with their children and be involved in their child's interests' (+4). These parents strongly disagreed with the statement that 'children should be left to cry when they are upset' (-3).

Alongside this is the belief that it is important that 'children learn how to behave appropriately by knowing the difference between right and wrong and to have good manners' (+3) and that 'parents establish clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour' (+3).

It is also important to these parents that 'children have the space to be creative and have the freedom to develop their own tastes and personalities' (+3). There is a sense of parents supporting their child, not only by 'supporting a child's learning at school' (+2) but also by taking 'the time to understand their child's needs and emotions' (+3) and by 'behaving in a loving, affectionate and kind way' (+2). It is mildly important to these parents that children are encouraged 'to

believe his/her views are important and worthwhile' (0) and that 'children should learn responsibility' (0).

In terms of 'being calm, confident, patient and approachable' (0) and being 'a role model for their child' (0) is not felt to be a strongly important aspect of the parenting character or role. It is not important to these parents to 'stay at home for their child so they are available whenever the child needs them' (-3) nor do they think that parents 'should give their children what they want' (-4).

Whilst there is a strong sense of meeting the emotional needs of their child, meeting the physical needs of the child is not viewed as important by these parents. For example, 'Giving a child a healthy diet' (-3) and children 'taking physical exercise for at least 7 hours a week' (-3).

This viewpoint strongly believes that parenting cannot 'be learnt from books and by going on courses' (-5). They do not view it as important for parents to be 'in control of their own emotions' (-4) or to be 'organised and able to plan ahead' (-4).

One of the interesting areas of difference with other viewpoints was how these parents felt about 'parents needing time to themselves, a bit of 'me time' (+3) and 'parents making their child happy' (+1). Theirs is the only viewpoint to rank these statements as important. Also they only disagree mildly with 'it is OK for a parent to smack or shout at their child when they have been naughty' (-2) while the other viewpoints disagree strongly (-5 and -4)

Summary:

Meeting the emotional needs of their child is very important to this viewpoint and being able to demonstrate their affection and love is strongly significant to their perspective of being a good parent. However, even though they feel it is

important to make their children happy (+1) these parents do not necessarily feel this is achieved by giving their children what they want (-4).

5.5 Consensus statements

Whilst the above descriptions set out the distinct viewpoints of 'good parenting' the data can also be used to look at areas of agreement within the responses. PQMethod determines consensus by identifying those statements that do not achieve a significant difference ($p < 0.01$) between any pair of factors.

There were seven consensus statements identified by PQMethod. Two statements related to showing affection towards their child:

- 'children should be told regularly that they are loved' (strong agreement from all viewpoints (4))
- 'Parents behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way' (agreement from all viewpoints (2-3)).

There was just one statement in regards to the needs of the parent:

- 'Parents should have their own support' (moderate disagreement from all viewpoints (-1).

The other statements are all related to the role of the parent. None of the viewpoints disagreed with the statements:

- 'Parents should take time to understand their child's needs and emotions by taking the perspective of the child' (0 / 2 / 3)
- 'Parents should be a role model for their child' (0-1)

There was strong consensus in disagreement with:

- 'Parents should give their children what they want' (-5 - -4)

and all viewpoints disagreed with the statement that:

- 'good parents stay at home for their child so they are available whenever the child needs them' (-3 - -4)

6. Discussion of the Viewpoints

6.1 Linking back to the research question

The aim of this study was to explore parents' constructions of what they perceive to be 'good' parenting. The findings indicate that there are three distinct viewpoints that describe a 'good' parent. Those that allow their children the freedom to grow (Viewpoint 1), those that view the family as a team (Viewpoint 2) and those that are demonstrative in their affections yet still provide clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour (Viewpoint 3).

The viewpoints have been labelled as 'Freedom to Grow', 'Teamwork' and 'Demonstrative' but the danger of labels is to give a simplistic impression of the viewpoints when in actual fact the viewpoints are fairly complex with areas of similarity and difference between them (as discussed in Section 5).

The opportunity was given to all participants to record any additional viewpoints that they had about parenting. Some participants provided a validation for how they have placed some of the statements:

- "There were lots of comments I agreed with in principle but do not actively engage in. I do not work – purely because we live far from my family. If circumstances were different then I believe this would directly affect my reasoning."

Other comments expanded on a particular statement:

- "People can't create support networks if they aren't there, so ideal as it is it is out of people's control, you're not a bad person if you don't have them."
- "Statement 25 – a certain amount of good behaviour should be the norm though."
- "Parenting books I think make people not trust their own judgement but a good family is all the opinion you need."

Encouragingly, none of the comments were in disagreement with the statements. The full list of additional comments on parenting can be found in Appendix G.

6.2 Linking back to the literature review

As discussed Section 2 there is much documented as to what constitutes 'good' parenting based on the knowledge and viewpoints of professionals and known theories of child development (for example 'attachment theory'). This study has provided a rich and textured picture of what parent's viewpoints are on what is 'good' parenting. Three distinct viewpoints emerged from the analysis of the data which suggest that there are three types of 'good' parents.

Baumrind's model of parenting offers four types of parenting styles which span over the two dimensions of warmth and control - 'disciplined', 'authoritative', 'neglectful' and 'permissive' (see Figure 2-1). The most effective style is regarded to be 'authoritative' where the parenting is loving and yet firm; where boundaries are explained in the context of a warm and loving relationship (Layard & Dunn, 2009). This appears to be a fair comparison with Viewpoint 3 (Demonstrative) as being able to demonstrate their affection and love is very important to this viewpoint. In addition, it is also important to this viewpoint that firm and consistent boundaries are established and even though they feel it is important to make their children happy these parents do not necessarily feel this is achieved by giving their children what they want.

However, this study has also identified two other distinctive viewpoints of 'good' parenting which do not fit into Baumrind's parenting styles. It has already been discussed that parenting is a very complex process and to span parenting styles over just two dimensions does necessitate a simplistic view of the styles of parenting. What Baumrind's model appears to be omitting is an appreciation or acknowledgement of the skills of the parent, the needs of the parent and the

aspirations that a parent holds for their child which motivate them to support their child with their learning, teach them life skills etc.

The process between parent and baby described by Robinson (2003) as 'love in action' requires the parent to be sensitive to the methods of communication; emotionally 'available' for the baby; able to spend time attending to the physical needs and providing additional stimulation through play and playful experiences; and sensitive to the physical and emotional needs. These are elements that are present in all three of the viewpoints. For example, spending quality time with their children; parents behave in a loving, affectionate and kind way; supporting children with their learning at school; and taking the time to understand their child's needs and emotions. This study gained the viewpoints of parents with a total of over 96 children between them (see table 3-1) yet only 28 children were aged less than 2 years. Therefore the majority of parents' children were no longer babies. There was no instruction for parents to focus specifically on what is good parenting of babies. Thus if Robinson's process diminished once the baby grows then these elements would not be expected to be present as being important features in all three of the viewpoints. The results from this study suggest that 'love in action' continues throughout childhood.

7 Conclusions

7.1 The use of Q-Methodology

7.1.1 Was Q-methodology an appropriate methodology?

In order to gain an appreciation of whether Q-methodology has allowed a better understanding and engagement with the participants it was important to the author to elicit feedback from the participants who completed the Q-sorting activity. The full list of comments is provided in Appendix H. Comments pertaining to the process were all very positive about the Q-sorting procedure:

- "It has certainly given me food for thought – thank you!"
- "There is a lot to learn through this wonderful process. I think myself this is the most important thing, for every parent to reflect in every parent's life."
- "Would have spent a lot longer deciding if I had the time. Makes you think about parenting."

These comments are also reassuring in relation to the ethics of the study and that a possible negative consequence (that the parents might question their own parenting skills and/or feel as if they are being judged) appears to have been avoided.

Part of the reasoning for using Q-methodology was with the goal to elicit the meanings and interpretations (human subjectivity) that individuals have from which an understanding of the participant's 'internal' frame of reference about the concept of 'good parenting' may emerge. Comments given by participants reflect how, intrinsically, the participant's experience of parenting is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically:

- "Many of the comments/statements can be interpreted in many ways and they can be put into many contexts"
- "Most of the statements don't take into account the situation. E.g. statement 5 mostly I wouldn't but sometimes I do, so these would change day by day"

- "It was interesting to look at what is more important to me and how what's important has changed over the years".

Although the Q-sample was balanced; appropriate and applicable to the issue; intelligible and simple; and comprehensive as suggested by Stainton-Rogers (1995) it did not manage to capture contextual changes which are an intrinsic part of the participant's experience of parenting.

Another difficulty encountered was that the participants tended to agree with the majority of the statements and so they found the forced distribution (agree-neutral-disagree) problematic. An adaptation that was made to the study was to ask the participants to distribute the statements according to how important it was to them rather than whether they agreed or disagreed with it.

The use of factor analysis in Q-methodology provided a transparent and scientifically credible way to simplify complex data and presented it in an understandable way. The 3-factor solution and the factor arrays were produced through the use of algorithms. The factor viewpoints are grounded in the factor analysis data. It is acknowledged that an element of interpretation is inevitable in the authoring of the viewpoints. However, scrutiny of the viewpoint descriptions presented in this study is possible by means of examination of the factor tables.

7.1.2 Generalisability of the findings

Due to the principle of finite diversity Q-methodology the use of large sample sizes is not necessary. At the same time Q-methodology does not make claims to describe the distribution of the viewpoints to the broader population. Thus it is warranted to claim that a local theory about what parents' construction of what is a 'good' parent has been produced but it is not possible to extrapolate:

- The extent to which the viewpoints described in this study apply to the wider population (for example, beyond parents who access the Children Centres in Wellingborough).

- The extent to which the viewpoints described in this study might be distributed across a larger population of similar individuals. That is, whether there is a dominant viewpoint.

7.2 Further developments of the study

In terms of improvements to this current study, the completion of member checking would be extremely worthwhile in order to achieve confirmation and validation of the findings and interpretations made.

Although the opportunity for participants to write down their comments was given approximately only half of the participants provided any further comments. The author observed that these comments did not capture the transient thoughts that emerged in the participant's spontaneous dialogue during the completion of the Q-sort which provided an additional element to the rich and textured data. A development to this study would be to try and capture this spontaneous dialogue either through the use of an electronic recording device or for the researcher to write down the participant's thoughts at the time of speaking.

Three distinct viewpoints on the notion of what is 'good' parenting have emerged from this study. It would be interesting to complete a further study that aims to validate these viewpoints beyond the remit of this present study. It would also be interesting to understand how these viewpoints are distributed across the population; that is whether one viewpoint is more dominantly held than the others. In addition it would be worthwhile to undertake further exploration of the three distinct viewpoints in consideration of the reasons behind the variant viewpoints.

It would also be interesting to further explore whether Robinson's (2003) 'love in action' does continue throughout the whole of childhood as the results from this

study suggest and whether the elements of 'love in action' alter or develop through childhood.

7.3 Final conclusion

An initial interest in helping parents to strengthen their parenting skills led to an exploration of the research literature on parenting practices and the notion of what is 'good' parenting. There is also compelling evidence from the fields of child maltreatment and also neuropsychology that emphasises the importance of 'good enough' parenting on children's development especially during the early formative years of a child's life.

The aim of Q-methodology is to collect and explore the *variety* of accounts that people construct (Cross, 2005). A rich and textured picture of parents' viewpoints emerged which has provided three distinct viewpoints on what is construed to be 'good' parenting:

- 'Freedom to Grow'
- 'Teamwork'
- 'Demonstrative'

These viewpoints will inform the author's professional practice during the course of working with parents which includes the delivery of parenting programmes. Finally these viewpoints reinforce the notion that parenting is a complex process and that there is not a single definitive viewpoint of what constitutes a 'good' parent. This will have implications for practice with regards to supporting and reassuring parents and will provide a framework for discussions with parents in helping them to explore and reflect on their parenting styles.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – categories that emerged from the initial stages of sifting, ordering and condensing the concourse of statements

1	<u>Authoritarian style</u> – shouting at your child / smacking your child / telling your child what they can't do instead of what they can
2	<u>Permissive style</u> – letting you child be in control / giving the child what he/she wants
3	<u>Uninvolved style</u> – allowing your child to make mistakes and then helping them to address and learn from them / allow them to experience life for themselves / let them learn how to deal with social experiences that may be upsetting / foster your child's independence / encourage independence and responsibility
4	<u>Authoritative style</u> – mutual respect / being consistent with boundaries / setting limits
5	<u>Cultural</u> – children should be left to cry when upset / parenting is a family affair (13) / parents should be at home for their child
6	<u>Skills of the parent</u> – being organised / being flexible (responding to situation to best meet the needs of the child) / planning ahead / being in control of your own emotions / knowing when to compromise / knowing how to pick your battles / provide order
7	<u>Interpersonal qualities</u> – being calm / being instinctive / being confident / being patient / being approachable
8	<u>Needs of the parent</u> – parents need support networks / parents should go on 'parenting' courses / giving yourself time to be an adult so that you don't start to resent them/ realising there is no such thing as a perfect parent /recognising when tiredness affects your judgement
9	<u>Teaching Values</u> – apologising to your child when you are in the wrong / helping your child to learn how to behave appropriately / teaching your child right from wrong / teaching them how to be confident yet considerate / guidance in good morals, values and manners
10	<u>Freedom to grow</u> – allowing your child to explore and make choices / giving your child the space to be creative / giving them freedom to develop their own tastes and personalities / helping your child to learn and explore / allowing your child to make mistakes and then helping them to address and learn from them / foster your child's independence /parents should enable their child to reach their full potential / our children are not clones of us /allowing them independence gradually /
11	<u>Learning life skills</u> - bringing up your child to understand the world we live in / facilitating varied exposure to new experiences / children should help with jobs/chores around the house / allowing your child to earn treats by pulling his/he weight in the household / support with learning and help with career when the time comes / grow to their full potential as valued and valuable members of society
12	<u>Extended family</u> – parenting is a family affair (5)

13	Measure of 'good' parenting – being 'good enough', not perfect /
14	meeting physical needs - giving your child a healthy diet / protect, provide and support your child / providing a safe home, healthy foods, clothes, toys and entertainment / caring for when ill / children should take physical exercise for at least 7 hours a week / babies should be breastfed for the first 6 months
15	Meeting emotional needs – trust your child / encouraging your child to believe that his/her views of important and worthwhile / showing an interest / boosting confidence and self-assurance / parents should make their child happy / letting your child know that they are valued and loved
16	Mutual respect – trusting your child / saying sorry / treat your child with respect / listen to your child / explain your rules and decisions to your child
17	Protecting child – being accident aware – keeping any eye on your child and not putting them at risk / protecting your child from the world
18	Understanding your child – parents should understand their child's needs /parents should be responsive to their child's emotions and react accordingly / parents should take the perspective of the child / understanding your child / being patient with your child / being able to see the world from your child's point of view / being sensitive and empathetic /adapting your parenting to fit your child / children are young people with little experience and parents are older children with more experience
19	Being positive – praising your child / forgiving your child
20	Loving your child – love your child / being loving affectionate and kind / letting your child know regularly that they are valued and loved / letting your child know that you love him/her – no matter what / love them with all your heart / letting your child know they can have a cuddle whenever they like / tell your child that you love them /always being there / unconditional love /eternal love /nurture your child
21	Parent-child relationship – be a friend to your child / a parent is not a child's best friend
22	Quality time - be involved in your child's interests and life / talking with and spending time with your child/ take an interest in your child / being prepared to focus on your child when they are around / sit, play and read with your child / eating meals together / genuine communication / spend a lot of time with your child but don't smother them
23	Being negative – getting angry with your child / being critical of your child
24	Parent's behaviour – being approachable / being a role model for your child / apologising / tell your child that you love them / modelling positive behaviours /acting confident /always being there no matter what
25	Limits and boundaries – setting limits / be cruel to be kind / be consistent with boundaries / being prepared to say 'no' / dealing with your child when they push the boundaries / disciplining your child and working to boundaries / having explicit boundaries /be firm but fair / a parent should be loving yet firm / having boundaries

	for appropriate behaviour
26	<u>Rewards /praise</u> – praising your child / consistent application of rewards and sanctions / give praise, star charts and tangible rewards for positive behaviour / reward for effort as well as for achievements
27	<u>Behaviour management</u> – having boundaries for appropriate behaviour/ disciplining your child and working to boundaries / ignore minor misbehaviours / give time out for misbehaviour / back up your instructions with appropriate consequences
28	<u>Othe</u>r – giving the child what he/she wants
29	<u>Other</u> - letting your child be in control
30	<u>Other</u> – parents should bond with their new born before establishing rigid routines

Appendix B – statements used in the Q-sample

1	I believe that when a child has done something wrong, parents should be able to discipline them in whatever way they feel is appropriate, for example to shout at or smack their child.
2	Children should be left to cry when they are upset.
3	If parents have got their own support networks then they can be better parents
4	I believe that parents should give their children what they want.
5	Children should be allowed to make their own mistakes and to learn how to deal with upsetting social experiences (i.e. falling out with a friend).
6	It's about 'good enough' and knowing that there is no such thing as a perfect parent.
7	There is a relationship between good parenting and giving children a healthy diet
8	Children should take physical exercise for at least 7 hours a week
9	It's my view that good parents protect their child from the world
10	It's important that parents should be accident aware and not put their child at risk
11	Children should learn how to behave appropriately by knowing the difference between right and wrong and to have good manners.
12	Parents should be calm, confident, patient and approachable.
13	You shouldn't think too much about how to be a parent – a parent should trust their instincts
14	Parents should take the time to understand their child's needs and emotions by taking the perspective of the child.
16	Children should be encouraged to be independent and to experience life for themselves
17	There is a link between good parenting and parents being at home for their child and available whenever the child needs them.
18	For me, a child should have the space to be creative and have the freedom to develop their own tastes and personalities

19	I believe that good parents bring up children to understand the world we live in.
20	Children should learn responsibility. For example, helping with jobs or chores around the house.
21	For me, a good parent is their child's best friend.
22	In my view, parents should be a role model for their child.
23	Parents should spend time with their children and be involved in their child's interests.
24	There is a link between good parenting and clear and consistent boundaries for behaviour.
25	Children should be given praise, star charts and tangible rewards for good behaviour
26	I believe children should be disciplined for bad behaviour
27	Parents should spend quality time with their children. For example, eating meals together, sitting and talking together.
28	Good parents tell their children regularly that they are loved
29	Children should know that they can have a cuddle whenever they like
30	For me, children know that their parents are always there for them, no matter what.
31	There is a clear link between good parenting and giving children time out when they misbehave.
32	In my opinion minor misbehaviours by children can be ignored
33	I believe that sometimes parents have to be cruel to be kind.
34	The parent-child relationship is about mutual respect – parents should trust their children and also apologise when it was the parents that was in the wrong.
35	I believe good parents take the time to explain their rules and decisions to their child.
36	It's recognised that good parents need to be in control of their own emotions.
37	Parents should be organised and be able to plan ahead.
38	There is a link between children having routine and order and good parenting.

39	Parents should encourage their child to believe that his/her views are important and worthwhile
40	For me, parents need time to themselves, a bit of 'me time' is important
41	Parenting can be learnt from books and by going on parenting courses.
42	Good parents use consequences when children push the boundaries and/or behave inappropriately
43	Parents should be loving, affectionate and kind
44	Parents should support a child's learning at school and, when the time comes, help them with their career.
45	I believe parents should make their children happy.

Appendix C – the distribution grid layout used in the Q-sort

| +5 | +4 | +3 | +2 | +1 | 0 | -1 | -2 | -3 | -4 | -5 |
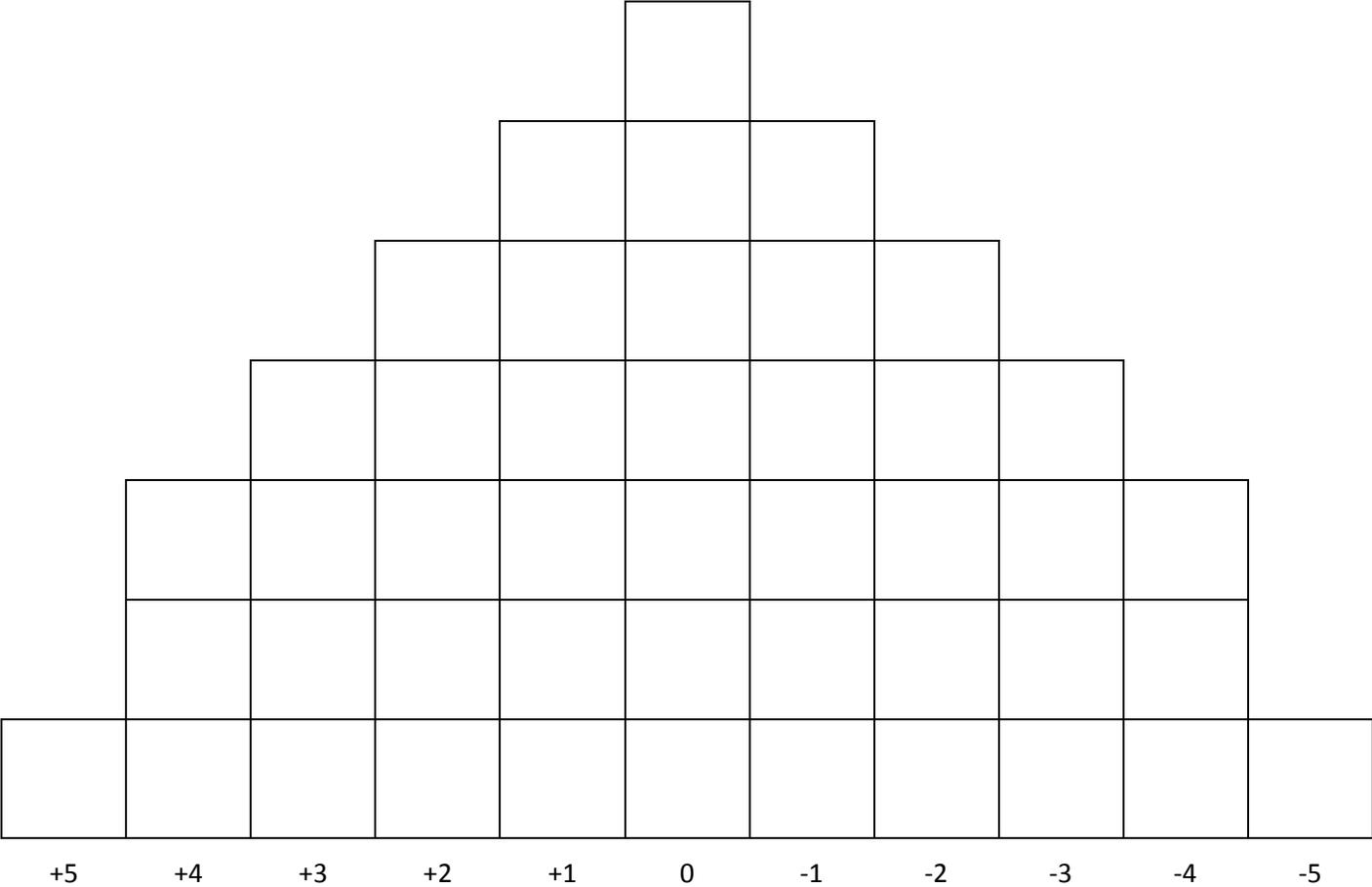
Dear Colleague

Thank you for allowing me to visit your Children Centre for the purpose of the collection of the data needed for my research study. Following on from our conversation I would like to provide more information about my research study.

As you know I work as an educational psychologist in Northamptonshire. My role involves promoting the learning and development of children from 0-19 years of age by working with schools, other professionals (i.e. Speech and Language Therapists, Specialist Teachers and Community Paediatricians), parents; and of course children. The focus of this study stems from my interest and experiences with parenting programmes. Within Northamptonshire there are numerous parenting programmes or activities in place. I have had experience of delivering parenting programmes (Quinn Parenting Programme); I am trained to deliver others (Solihull Approach Parenting Programme); and I have been involved in the development of the 'Northamptonshire Baby Room Project'. In addition, the author is a parent of two children, aged 5 years and 2 years.

This research proposal is for a study using Q methodology to explore how parents construct the notion of 'good' parenting. The uniqueness of this study is two-fold. First is the focus on what parents perceive to be 'good' parenting and the second is the use of Q-methodology.

I am looking for approximately 50 parents (across 4 Children Centres) to complete a Q-sorting activity with me where they will be asked to map 45 statements on the subject of 'good' parenting. The Q-sort will take just a few minutes and it can be completed within the 'Stay and Play' session. I will be asking for some background information for the purposes of analysis but I will not be asking for any identifying information and of course all data collected will be kept strictly confidential. Participants do have the right to withdraw from the study at any point, even after the Q-sort has taken place.

Once I have finished the study you will be welcome to have a copy of my findings and I am also happy to come back to your Children Centre to provide a debrief to yourselves and the parents.

You may have further questions or queries and I would be happy to answer them as best as I can. Please contact me either via email on_____ or phone me 01933 _____

WHAT'S YOUR VIEWPOINT?

"My name is Mel Shirley and I would like to know what your viewpoint is on "good" parenting.

I would like to invite you to sort out some statements I have collected on "good" parenting. It won't take long and your answers will be kept completely confidential.

I will be at _____

on _____

and _____.

I hope you will be able to help me. For further information please email me () or phone) or speak to _____.

THANKS!"

"Hello my name is Mel and I work in Wellingborough but today I am here as a student. I am completing a study on what parents' think is good parenting. I have put together a sort-of-game. I have collected 45 opinions from all different sources which all say an opinion about parenting. I would like to invite you to sort them for me from those you agree with to those you disagree with. It's completely anonymous and confidential but if you would rather not do it then that is absolutely fine.

Would you like to give it a go? That's great and even if you decide half way through you don't want to continue that is still absolutely fine."

Appendix G – Comments provided by participants in relation to 'parenting'

- How can children learn if they never see parents argue

- You have children to have them, not abuse them! Look after them, not hurt them!

- Need to spend time with child in the 1st few years and need to let them know they are loved. But you cannot always give into a child.

- Parents should always give their child love

- There were lots of comments I agreed with in principle but do not actively engage in. I do not work – purely because we live far from my family. If circumstances were different then I believe this would directly affect my reasoning.

- People can't create support networks if they aren't there, so ideal as it is it is out of people's control, you're not a bad person if you don't have them.

- Statement 25 – a certain amount of good behaviour should be the norm though

- Parenting books I think make people not trust their own judgement but a good family is all the opinion you need.

- I also think letting them decide for themselves and be independent is the best for their development

- Not only a parent can be a role model

- I am particularly interested in comparing my parenting style to that of my twin sister. We both have children of similar ages but the differences in parenting is remarkable. I think a balance is always needed between being a relaxed parent and a strict parent. Discipline is important at the right time and place. It is very important to have children who are well mannered, polite and caring towards others. I also think expressing love to my children is very important so that they can trust that, even though I may tell them off sometimes that I do love them. You certainly cannot learn how to be a parent from a book because children throw lots of things / scenarios your way – no manual could cover some of the things we've dealt with.

- Important things are giving your child love and attention. Helping them prepare for life ahead.

- I think parenting is a family affair and it involves lots of responsibilities, support, affection etc. In my opinion we should enjoy and explore parenting.

- I think parenting can be fun but sometimes stressful when kids don't do as they are told.

Appendix H – Comments provided by participants in relation to the Q-sorting activity

- Many of the comments/statements can be interpreted in many ways and they can be put into many contexts.

- It has certainly given me food for thought – thank you!

- Most of the statements don't take into account the situation. E.g. 5 mostly I wouldn't but sometimes I do, so these would change day by day.

- It was interesting to look at what is more important to me and how what's important has changed over the years.

- Some of the statements said very similar things so it was hard to fit them in and keep the priority

- There is a lot to learn through this wonderful process. I think myself this is the most important thing, for every parent to reflect in every parent's life.

- Some comments quite similar also some are just as important as others but in a different way for example I think emotions are important and also accident aware just as important but on a different level.

- I agreed with a lot more statements than disagreed

- Would be a good group activity

- Some comments depend on age of the child

- I felt I agreed with a lot of the statements and some of them I think I need a lot more information to decide whether I agree or disagree.

- Would have spent a lot longer deciding if I had the time. Makes you think about parenting.

Dissemination and Impact Evaluation

CONTENTS

1 Introduction

The three research studies completed over the period of the doctorate course have all related to aspects of parenting. The first study focused on parents' perceptions of the judgements they make when their child presents with heightened emotions, such as anger, distress and frustration. The second study explored how parents construct the notion of what is 'good' parenting. The third study explored a school's approach to engaging parents in decision making processes.

This assignment will explore and discuss how the findings from these studies have been disseminated to the Educational Psychologist researcher's own practice and the researcher's immediate Service context and other colleagues and the impact this has had. There will also be reflection on barriers and future opportunities.

2 Year 1 Study: Research Using Qualitative Methodology – How do parents make sense of their child's behaviour during times of heightened emotions?

2.2 Purpose of the study

The researcher's own experiences of the outward display of behaviour by children of all ages when they are feeling frustrated and angry led to a curiosity into how parents make judgements about how to handle their children's behaviour whilst they are exhibiting heightened emotions, in other words a 'tantrum'. To further study this area, within the remit of employing qualitative

methodologies, the research focused on parental perceptions and how they construe their child's behaviour during these times of enhanced emotion.

The literature review drew on Bowlby's Attachment Theory which offered an insight into why the child's and parent's perception of their relationship are fundamental in the child's developing ability to regulate their emotions (Hay, 2001). Yet little systematic research had been carried out about how parents perceived their relationship with their child when the child was experiencing heightened emotion – a time when the efficiency of their child's ability to regulate their emotions was put to the test.

Data was obtained from four semi-structured interviews with parents of children who fall into one of three age group categories (2-3 years of age; 7-9 years of age; 11-14 years of age) and analysis was completed using a grounded theory approach. The interpretative analysis proposed a grounded theory conceptual framework for how parents make judgements about their child's behaviour.

2.3 Outcome of the study

This research study generated a grounded theory conceptual framework for how parents make judgements about their child's behaviour. This framework encompasses the three higher order categories of:

- Factors influencing parents' judgement
- Factors being judged by parents
- Parents' reactions

From this study a possible explanation has emerged that through the process of forming a mental representation parents make a judgement about their child's behaviour. The model presents that the social cognitive processing strategy adopted is that the information that comes to mind at the point in time when parents interact with their child informs the mental representation of the child's behaviour which determines the behavioural decision made by parents. This

was felt to be a useful framework for providing an explanation as to why some factors are more influential than others when parents make judgements about their child's behaviour.

2.4 Impact of the study: current and potential future outcomes

Systematic research into how parents perceived their relationship with their child when the child was experiencing heightened emotions has been limited. Although there are acknowledged limitations to this study the grounded theory contributed to providing a possible explanation to factors that influence the judgements parents make.

2.5 Impact of the study: current and potential future outcomes

2.5.1   Impact at a personal level

This study served as the first of the research studies completed as part of the Doctoral Thesis. It was invaluable in developing strategies for recruitment of participants and developing a framework for semi-structured interviews.

Grounded theory research is a labour intensive process requiring the management of large amounts of data during the initial coding stage. It also requires time management and organisational skills in being able to record, transcribe and analyse each interview prior to the commencement of the next interview. The process of completing this study helped to develop a discipline in time management which proved invaluable in the subsequent research studies.

2.5.2   Impact at a professional level – Educational Psychology Service

The findings from this study were disseminated to the Educational Psychology Service. The presentation was given in two parts – research methodology and findings of the research. The outcome of the presentation of the research

methodology was to develop the research skills of educational psychologists and raise their awareness of the methodology of Grounded Theory. Subsequent discussion focused on concerns that rose about the practicalities of carrying out a Grounded Theory study and the time required in collecting, preparing and analysing the data.

The presentation on the findings of the research was of particular interest to educational psychologists as a possible framework to use in consultations with parents about understanding and managing their child's behaviour.

3 Year 2 Study: Research Using Quantitative Methodology – A Q-Methodology study of parents' constructions of 'good' parenting

3.1 Purpose of the study

This research piloted the use of Q-methodology for the main research thesis. It developed from an interest in parenting and the researcher's experience of delivering parenting courses. A strong political agenda, underpinning both National Government policy and Local Authority practice, emphasised helping parents to strengthen their parenting skills. Other research showed that even though the desire to be a parent may be instinctive the need for being taught the knowledge, understanding and practice to help develop skills in parenting is also required.

A review of the literature revealed that whilst there was much documented as to what constitutes good parenting this is based on the knowledge and viewpoints of professionals and known theories of child development. There was also research utilising parents' viewpoints and perceptions on what constitutes good

parenting through the use of interviews, focus groups, surveys and questionnaires. However little systematic research had been carried out to explore how parents construct the notion of 'good' parenting.

Q-methodology was deemed to be a suitable methodology for use in this study because it 'provides researchers with a systematic and rigorous quantitative means for examining human subjectivity' (Mckeown & Thomas, 1988 p.5). This study used Q-methodology to examine how parents view the notion of 'good' parenting.

3.2 Outcome of the study

This research generated three distinct viewpoints on the notion of 'good' parenting:

1) Freedom to Grow – these parents felt it is important to allow their children to have the freedom and space to grow. They also strongly subscribe to the belief that children's emotional needs are important and that a child should feel valued and loved by their parent.

2) Teamwork – the family is perceived to be a team as there is a strong sense of working together and mutually supporting each other. There is also a strong belief in the parent's role in disciplining and establishing routine and order for their children.

3) Demonstrative – meeting the emotional needs of their child is very important to this viewpoint and being able to demonstrate their affection and love is strongly significant to their perspective of being a good parent. However, even though they feel it is important to make their children happy these parents do not necessarily feel this is achieved by giving their children what they want.

These viewpoints reinforced the perception that parenting is a complex process and that there is not a single definitive viewpoint of what constitutes 'good' parenting.

3.3 Impact of the study: current and potential future outcomes

A uniqueness of this study was the use of Q-methodology. Notwithstanding the limitations of this study a systematic exploration of how parents' constructions were achieved. Three distinct viewpoints were generated which provide further insight into the notion of what is 'good' parenting.

3.3.1 Impact at a personal level

The use of Q-methodology in this study proved to be an important experience in preparation for the final thesis which also used Q-methodology. Valuable learning points included the development of the concourse and the subsequent Q-sample; and the importance of using pilot studies.

Although the outcome of this study provided further insight into the notion of what is 'good' parenting the researcher felt that whilst this insight was interesting it did not lead straightforwardly to clear practical applications. A learning point for the researcher was to ensure that the research questions were linked to possible application of findings. For example, how the newly gained information will be used and what is going to be the impact of having this information?

3.3.2 Impact at a practice level - school or Service

A poster summarising the methodology and findings of this study was produced for display at a county Educational Psychology training seminar. Of particular interest was the viewpoints generated and an outcome has been to incorporate these viewpoints into the parenting programme that is facilitated by Educational Psychologists and Children Centres. The viewpoints underpin a discussion with parents about the notion that there are many models of parenting and that there is not a single ideal model of parenting that parents should aspire to attain.

4 Years 3 and 4: Doctoral Research Project - Engaging with Parents in Decision Making Processes: a two phase Q-methodological study exploring a school's approach

4.1 Purpose of the study

The initial inspiration for this research came from the publication of The Lamb Inquiry (DCSF, 2009) which brought the voice of parents, children and young people to the forefront of the Special Educational Needs (SEN) system. The Lamb Inquiry concluded that the SEN system works best when the schools, local authorities and parents operate in true partnership with each. One aspect of working in partnership is for parents to be involved in decision making processes as research indicates it helps promote and develop more meaningful engagement (Harris & Goodall, 2007).

The literature review revealed that whilst there was a plethora of research exploring the types of activities that parents can be involved with there was no published research on *why* parents become involved in decision making processes and *how* that is enabled to happen. This study was conducted in two stages. The first stage used Q-methodology to illuminate the practice of an individual school regarding how they viewed engaging with parents in decision making. The second stage used a focus group and survey to explore the activities that the school employed in engaging with parents and which of these activities the parents viewed to be important, positive and worthwhile.

4.2 Outcome of the study

The Q-study generated two viewpoints ('Parents as Partners' and 'Respecting and Valuing Parents'). Although there were differences between the two viewpoints there were also several strong similarities. Both viewpoints placed parents at the heart of the process and strongly felt that it is of paramount importance that parents are respected and valued. That is, parents are viewed

as partners in the process. Communication was also revealed as a theme that ran through both factors that is perceived as essential in developing a trusting and respectful two-way relationship.

The findings from the second part of the study indicated that it is important and worthwhile for schools to foster and develop parents' intrinsic motivation; in particular parents' sense of competency and relatedness. The findings also reinforced the view that parents' perceiving that the school wants them to be involved is a central and decisive factor for parental engagement.

4.3 Impact of the study: current and potential future outcomes

4.3.1 Impact at a personal level

An outcome of completing the study has been a reflection on the researcher's own practice of engaging with parents including:

- prioritising returning parent contacts, e.g. phone calls, and following up promptly on professional activities involving them;
- acknowledging with parents that they are the 'expert' upon their child;
- making meeting arrangements according to the needs of parents;
- allowing parents plenty of notice for meetings.

An impact of this reflection has been the creation of a help-sheet for parents to give them prior understanding of what to expect at a consultation meeting with an educational psychologist.

4.3.2 Impact at a practice level - school or service

Findings from this research have been presented to the county Educational Psychology team. Of particular interest was the mapping of the activities that the study identified as being worthwhile onto the concepts of relatedness, competence and autonomy as factors which mediate intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2007). Discussion ensued as to how educational psychologists could

support schools to foster and develop a parent's motivation to engage; especially with those parents that are deemed as 'hard to reach' or 'difficult to engage'. Suggestions include:

- Offering training to schools to develop their awareness and knowledge on the issue of parental engagement
- In consultations to schools making reference to the findings from this study
- Producing a guidance document to send out to schools

4.3.3 Impact at a policy level – service, LA or national

A leaflet aimed to raise awareness of the issues behind parental engagement was produced and distributed at a local authority conference on the Solihull Approach Model. The Solihull Approach promotes emotional health and well-being in children and families. The model supports practitioners to work with children and families and supports parents and foster-carers to understand their child (Douglas, 2007).The conference was attended by professionals from all areas of the children's workforce including schools, social care, health and the voluntary sectors. All the leaflets had been distributed by the end of the conference. An adaptation to the leaflet is currently being planned to make it more parent-friendly.

4.3.4 The next steps for dissemination

The researcher has been approached by the local authority's parenting support co-ordinator to provide consultation with regards to the drafting of the parent support strategy which will form part of the local authority's targeted early prevention strategy. The researcher is also hoping to work together with the local authority's parent partnership service officer who has responsibility for developing parental engagement to produce a guidance document for schools. In addition, the researcher has been approached by the local authority's Education, Health and Care (EHC) Implementation Manager to consult on how

to develop a true working partnership with parents in the EHC process which includes looking at strategies to motivate and empower parents as well as training for professionals involved in the EHC process.

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