‘The Dance of Engagement’:
A Constructivist Grounded Theory Study of Parental Engagement.

A dissertation submitted for the degree of
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.

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Lána McCarthy

Declaration

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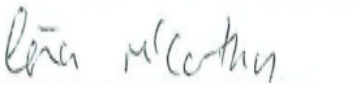

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Summary

Introduction: This thesis is focused on the process of effective parental engagement from the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. The potential positive impact of effective parental engagement is well documented and provides robust evidence in support of many practices that may improve outcomes for low-income and marginalised families Goodall (2018); (Weiss, Lopez, Kreider, & Chatman-Nelson, 2014). Engaging parents in programmes/interventions to support their child's development can enhance social, academic and behavioural outcomes for children (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021). Despite these known advantages of harnessing parental engagement, research has shown that engaging parents in interventions can be difficult (Lehtme & Toros, 2020; Rochford, Doherty, & Owens, 2014).

Method: There are two methodologies featured in this study: Action Research and Constructivist Grounded Theory. Initially, this study employed an action research (AR) methodology. Action research was chosen because of its inclusivity of participants as co-researchers involved in the identification and analysis of problems and their active involvement in creating a solution (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Herr & Anderson, 2015). However, the Covid-19 pandemic brought unanticipated challenges to the collection of data and a change in the methodology to Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) was necessary to ensure that the research could be completed effectively and robustly. Constructivist Grounded Theory views research as constructed to include "the researcher's position, privileges, perspective and interactions into account as an inherent part of the research reality" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13).

Aims: The aim of this study was to develop a theory of parental engagement by exploring the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners on parental engagement strategies employed in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. The objective to develop a framework for parental engagement was formed from two questions:

1. What can the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners tell us about how barriers to parental engagement can be addressed, to maximise how parents attending family literacy community-based programmes can support their children's learning and development?

2. How can the perspectives of parents and practitioners enhance our understanding of what works in the parental engagement practices of a community-based family literacy programme?

To gather data for this study, I held eight focus groups with 34 participants which included parents and practitioners and explored their experiences of engagement.

Findings: The findings of the data analysis and the application of the CGT methods supported the development of a theory of parental engagement, which I have named 'the dance of engagement'. At its foundation are the tenets of engagement: safety, equality and trust (SET) which are described in the data by participants as necessary for the development of the foundation of engagement. The four dance steps (i.e., **choosing to engage, co-creating engagement, connecting to engage, sharing**) represent the output of the iterative analysis of the CGT process, from data to codes to the development of categories. Every time a parent or practitioner interacted, they were **choosing to engage**, and as they co-created their relationship the opportunities to engage in programmes, conversations and services grew. Understanding that the parent-practitioner dyad occurs across three levels, individual, family and community, the category **choosing to engage** is perhaps a first step in creating more inclusive engagement practices. These practices centre on the dual roles of both parents and practitioners in effective engagement. The second dance step is **co-creating engagement** through building relationships between the practitioner and the parent that feature the three core tenets of parental engagement (SET). The third dance step, **connecting to engage**, focused on what works to make programmes accessible to parents and support their engagement in interventions. The fourth step, **sharing** describes the positive effects of 'the dance of engagement' on a community of parents, practitioners and children. **Sharing** in this study occurred at programmes, community events and in the home learning environment.

Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: Taken as a whole, 'the dance of engagement' has implications for theory, practice and support for a policy of effective parental engagement. A collective understanding at a policy and funding level is important to promote engagement strategies across services. The theory, the 'dance of engagement', has implications for the practice of effective engagement by supporting practitioners and services to reflect on their understanding and knowledge of effective engagement. The theory supports practitioners to plan effective

engagement opportunities stemming from the practitioners' and services' knowledge and specifying clear directions on what actions a practitioner should take to maximise the possibility that engagement will be effective.

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Abbreviations

AR	Action research – a methodological approach employed in the first part of this study.
BB	Breakfast Buddies – a family literacy programme delivered in Ballymun.
CGT	Constructivist Grounded Theory – a methodological approach employed in this study.
EYS	Early Years Services – Catering for children from birth until starting school.
FRC	Family Resource Centre- community-based model of family support.
GT	Grounded Theory – systematic qualitative research methodology.
HCP	Health Care Professional such as a nurse, Speech and Language Therapist working in a health care clinic.
HLE	Home Learning Environment – a safe and well organised environment with opportunities for children to play, explore and learn with the presence of developmentally-appropriate resources.
HYB	Hug Your Book – a family literacy programme.
PE	Parental engagement – multi-factorial concept that aims to build strong and effective relationships with families that support children to thrive.
PIL	Participant Information Leaflet – explains the purpose of the research and what participants will be required to do and how they will be involved.
SES	Socio-economic status – encompasses not just income but educational attainment, financial security, perceptions of social status and social class.
SS	Story Sacks – a family literacy programme.
T	Teachers employed in primary schools.
TA	Thematic analysis – a method of analysing data.
WOM	Word of mouth - the passing of information from person to person using oral communication.
YB	Youngballymun - publicly funded organisation to support the wellbeing and learning outcomes for children.

YW	Youth worker – plan, organise and oversee community programmes aimed at supporting young people.

Note for the reader: The word parent is used throughout this thesis to describe anyone who is caring full time for a child and/or in a guardianship role and is therefore not restricted to biological parents.

1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction and outline of the study

This study was supported through the Irish Research Council Employment-Based Postgraduate Programme and was conducted in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. It was undertaken while I was employed as the Family and Community Literacy Co-Ordinator of the Language and Literacy service of a community change initiative, Youngballymun (www.youngballymun.org). The language and literacy strand aims to improve the language and learning ability of all children in the community of Ballymun. This strand engages with families in a range of family literacy initiatives and programmes to support children's literacy. Family literacy refers to literacy practices within families that include "the intergenerational transfer of language and literacy from parents to their children" (UNESCO, 2008, p. 5). One of the family literacy initiatives, the Breakfast Buddies programme, supports parents to understand their role as their child's first teacher and fosters their involvement in their children's language and literacy development.

The study undertaken is set out across nine chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study describing my interest in parental engagement in family literacy programmes and the benefits and challenges of effective engagement. It describes the aims of this study and introduces my positionality. In chapter 2 a literature review describes the concept of parental engagement and opens with a discussion on what parental engagement is including its multi-stage process and multiple aspects. The impacts of effective parental engagement are reviewed, followed by potential barriers to engagement and possible ways to address these barriers. In chapter 3 both methodologies employed during this study (Action Research and Constructivist Grounded Theory) are described including their defining features and alignment with my ontological and epistemological perspectives, which provided a rationale for selecting them. Chapter 4 focuses on the application of Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) methods to data collection and data analysis. The findings of the data analyses are set out over chapters 5, 6, and 7. The application of the CGT methods that supported the development of a theory of parental engagement, which I have named the theory of 'the dance of engagement', are shared in chapter 5. In chapter 6, the core tenets of engagement, safety, equality and trust (SET) are discussed. In chapter 7, the four

steps and their influence on each other are shared. Then, the key findings are discussed in the context of existing literature and research on parental engagement in chapter 8. In chapter 9, I discuss the implications of the study for theory, policy and practice and outline recommendations for further research. Limitations of the current study are also reported, and I conclude by evaluating rigour in Constructivist Grounded Theory and a personal reflection on my learning throughout this study.

1.1 What is parental engagement?

At this early stage I think it is important to outline what I mean by the term parental engagement to ensure clarity throughout this study (this will be expanded in full in Chapter 2). From my perspective, parental engagement in family literacy programmes has five main characteristics which are outlined below.

First, parental engagement is an ***active collaboration*** between parents and practitioners, where both parties interact with each other to share, enhance and improve children's learning and development (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Parents can assume a leading role in their children's education, in an equal partnership with the practitioner (Harris & Goodall, 2007). Communication within parental engagement is a collaborative, two-way process and continues across the stages of effective engagement in a community-based family literacy programme (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Second, parental engagement is ***multi-factorial*** (Coatsworth, Hemady, & George, 2017), comprising the relationship that develops between parents and practitioners and including attitudes, behaviours, expectations, motivations and values (Bamberger, Coatsworth, Fosco, & Ram, 2014; Haine-Schlagel et al., 2016; Hock et al., 2015; King, Chiarello, Phoenix, D'Arrigo, & Pinto, 2021; Staudt, 2007). The foundational relationship between parents and practitioners is an act of being and becoming 'engaged' and 'engaging with' for both parents and practitioners, through meaningful, supportive interactions with each other, both inside and outside the programme (Melvin, Meyer, & Scarinci, 2020).

Third, parental engagement has a ***practical focus,*** centring on parents participating in family literacy community-based programmes to understand "how to" support their children's learning and development (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021). For instance, some

parents from areas of socio-economic disadvantage may experience barriers to creating a literacy-rich home environment for their children and struggle to know what to do in their role as their children's first teacher (Brito, 2017; Pruden, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkof, 2017). Therefore, a fourth characteristic of parental engagement centres on ***mutually agreed outcomes*** between parents and practitioners. Successful parental engagement within family literacy community-based programmes will be tailored to the individual needs of the family. For some parents, outcomes may focus on developing parents' self-efficacy and enhancing the creation of a home learning environment that shapes parental confidence in learning interactions with their children (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). For other parents, outcomes may be more tangible such as enhancing the ability to read a children's book with enthusiasm, supporting children's vocabulary development, helping a child to write a story for homework, enhancing digital literacy skills, and/or numeracy skills (Lynch & Prins, 2022).

Fifth, this partnership between parents and practitioners is a ***dynamic process*** that can take place in a variety of settings across the home, school and community (Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Williams & Sánchez, 2012). Therefore, parental engagement is embedded in the social-cultural framework in which it occurs and may include organisational factors, practitioner attributes, family characteristics, and familial processes that may apply to the lives of parents and children (Gill & Jack, 2007).

Throughout this thesis when I refer to 'parental engagement' it is rooted in an understanding of the former five key characteristics, and its definition can be summarised as follows: ***Parental engagement within the context of family literacy community-based programmes is a multi-factorial, dynamic process that requires active collaboration between participants and a focus on practical supports towards achieving a mutually agreed outcome*.**

Relatedly, the theoretical framework for this research is rooted in a community- based family literacy practice that is embedded in the ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979, 2001) which is often applied to family literacy programmes. Ecological systems theory focuses on the ways in which the family, school and community influence and are influenced by a child's development.

Furthermore, this study supports a socio-cultural practice that values the “funds of knowledge” parents bring to their literacy practice, viewing parents as assets in their children’s learning (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 3) and leans heavily on strengths-based perspectives (Gill & Jack, 2007). In addition, Freire (1976) describes literacy as being tied to relations of power and suggests literacy can be used to critique social injustice. These concepts are considered in the theoretical framework of this study, as they align with social change (Auerbach, 1989) and highlight the importance of direct and indirect contexts in children’s development across the family, school and community.

In addition to considering the wider contexts in which all children develop and learn- such as societal change, socio-cultural practices, community, school, and family - this study also has a discrete focus on one specific aspect of children’s development: family literacy. A family literacy perspective stems from a social lens that views literacy and learning as embedded in the culture, relationships and practices of children and their parents (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). It values the role of literacy in children’s ability to learn, grow and develop their potential (Lynch & Prins, 2022).

This theoretical framework is important, it informs how practitioners seek to engage parents in family literacy programmes and consider how contextual factors, organisational factors, family characteristics and processes may apply to the lives of parents and children (Gill & Jack, 2007).

1.1 Benefits of parental engagement

Parents play a vital role in their child’s development (Beecher & Van Pay, 2021; Connolly, Devaney, & Crosse, 2017). The quality of parent-child interactions influences children’s cognitive, emotional, behavioural and social development and improves children’s life and literacy outcomes, which enhances the benefits of public health outcomes (Allen, 2011; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; NESF, 2005; Rochford et al., 2014). Actively engaging parents in interventions that support children’s language and literacy development is fundamental to improving children’s life outcomes (Melvin, Meyer, & Scarinci, 2019). Further benefits of parental engagement will be fully discussed in chapter 2.

1.2 Challenges of parental engagement

Despite the advantages to ensuring parents' engagement, achieving effective engagement is viewed as challenging, particularly in areas of socio-economic disadvantage (Gov.ie, 2021; Rochford et al., 2014). Such challenges will be discussed in detail in chapter 2. In short, research has suggested that poverty and deprivation in areas of socio-economic disadvantage are associated with a range of reduced outcomes for children concerning health, academic achievement, and socio-emotional development, and there is an increased risk of childhood behavioural problems (Williams et al., 2009). Studies have also linked living in an area of socio-economic disadvantage to poorer psychological and health outcomes for parents (Kivimäki et al., 2018; Santiago, Wadsworth, & Stump, 2011). Therefore, a collective, shared understanding of parental engagement and all its dimensions is crucial to addressing barriers and enhancing parental engagement practices for parents living in socio-economic disadvantaged areas (Chacko et al., 2016; Haine-Schlagel et al., 2016; Ingoldsby, 2010; Klatte et al., 2020).

1.3 Aim of this study

The aim of this study was to develop a theory of parental engagement by exploring the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners on parental engagement strategies employed in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. The objective to develop a framework for parental engagement was formed from two research questions:

1. What can the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners tell us about how barriers to parental engagement can be addressed, to maximise how parents attending family literacy community-based programmes can support their children's learning and development?
2. How can the perspectives of parents and practitioners enhance our understanding of what works in the parental engagement practices of a community-based family literacy programme?

1.4 Rationale for this study

Research on parental engagement highlights its potential benefits for supporting children's language and literacy development (Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2011; Goodall et al., 2010; Lopez & Donovan, 2009). Others have confirmed that early engagement of parents has long term benefits for children's' learning and emphasise the importance of parents' attitudes and behaviours towards learning (Harris & Goodall,

2007; Sacker, Schoon, & Bartley, 2002). However, programmes that require parental engagement are often beleaguered by low participation and high attrition rates (McTaggart & Sanders, 2003; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001).

Difficulties engaging some parents in interventions that support children's learning and development have been consistently documented (Axford, Lehtonen, Kaoukji, Tobin, & Berry, 2012; Garvey, Julionn, Fogg, Kratovil, & Gross, 2006; Lehtme & Toros, 2020; Rochford et al., 2014). In parallel, strategies that set out to enhance parental engagement have often overlooked or do not adequately address the challenges faced by some parents accessing services or programmes (Wilson, Petticrew, Calnan, & Nazareth, 2010). Research has identified barriers that are entrenched in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, for instance, single parent status, poverty, having unmet literacy needs (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021; Eisner & Meidert, 2011; Ingoldsby, 2010; McDermott & Graham, 2005; Nock & Ferriter, 2005). These former barriers can be difficult for services and practitioners to counteract. Having access to the right supports from the earliest point in time of a child's life is essential as children grow and establish a strong foundation for their future (Goodman & Gregg, 2010; Maggi, Irwin, Siddiqi, & Hertzman, 2010; Strong, 2010). This becomes even more important when the wider socio-economic environment presents further challenges and obstacles (Lynch & Prins, 2022).

At the core of this research is a belief that change for communities in areas of socio-economic disadvantage happens at the intersection between children and families' engagement in services and practices that enhance life outcomes for children, with a specific focus on family literacy programmes. This research aims to contribute to the field of parental engagement in community-based family literacy programmes and act as a lever for change in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, presenting a real opportunity to transform family literacy outcomes for children and families in these areas of need.

1.5 Researcher reflexivity

During this study there were two methodologies used, action research (AR) and Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT), further described in chapter 3. Both AR and CGT encouraged me to be reflexive and to include the social and cultural context of this study (Morse et al., 2021; Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002).

In AR, a researcher's positionality is seen as a vital component to locate a researcher so that they can be cognisant of their biases, beliefs and perspectives (Herr & Anderson, 2015). Similarly, in CGT Charmaz (2021) posits that engaging in strong reflexivity supports the development of methodological self-consciousness which helps unearth the researcher's taken-for-granted privileges. Keane (2022b) describes how memo writing and journaling support researchers to ask questions of their own beliefs and positionality, which has an effect on the research process and the outcomes of the study. To aid my reflexivity, throughout this study I kept a reflexive journal, in addition to descriptive memos, notes from discussions with my research supervisors and discussions with my PhD seminar group. As Charmaz (2014, p. 17) states: "we are a part of the world we study, the data we collect, and the analyses we produce. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices".

I found reflecting on my positionality within this study central to maintaining a focus on my underlying assumptions and perspectives and ensuring my biases were brought to the fore to be challenged. In this chapter, I will highlight my positionality in relation to the study and its participants. This is my unique worldview, an opportunity to "lay my cards on the table through a critical autobiographical reflection" (Keane, 2015, p. 420). This worldview helps shine a light on my researcher biases and personal assumptions which have been shaped by my cultural and social experience. Further to this, in this chapter (section 1.9.6) I describe my personal learning and changes to my positionality as a result of completing this study.

1.6 Context of study

To set the context for this study, I think it is important to tell you a little bit about myself and my background. I am a mature student completing an Irish Research Council-funded employment partnership PhD. As a child growing up in Ballymun, an area of socio-economic disadvantage in north Dublin, Trinity College was a landmark. Never in a million years did I see myself studying there. As a resident of the Dublin City Council flats in Ballymun for many years, education only mattered to me when I started my own family. I then realised that education was the key to unlocking my family's potential and breaking out of the cycle of poverty I found myself in. I started my third-level education journey at the age of 32 years with Waterford Institute of Technology

(now South-East Technological University, SETU) and became a qualified teacher of literacy for adults. I subsequently completed a Master of Arts by research on the topic of family literacy in 2017. At the start of my third-level education journey I felt that my voice was not wanted. However, the lecturers in the Literacy Development Centre in Waterford SETU welcomed my views and views of my co-learners, which ultimately changed the trajectory of my life and that of my children.

Moreover, I was employed in Youngballymun, a publicly-funded organisation to support improvements in children's learning and wellbeing outcomes for children living in Ballymun, which is the setting of this study. My role in Youngballymun involved designing, delivering, and evaluating family literacy programmes for the area. My experience of living and working in Ballymun influences my perceptions of the world and this research study. The family literacy programmes I created have been sculpted from my lived experience as a parent and as a child growing up in Ballymun. This lived experience has made me appreciate the potential for transformation that early intervention programmes can have on families' lives and how parental engagement plays a central role in any programme's impact.

To support this research process, I reflected on my experience, my tacit knowledge, and my perspective as a resident living in Ballymun. My journal entries were a source of reflection for my autobiographical account. As explained in section 1.7 I lived in Ballymun at two quite separate stages of my life, once with my parents as a young child and secondly, as an adult, rearing my own family in the Ballymun flats. It is this insider's perspective that I will briefly share below. As Bradbury-Huang (2010, p. 83) states "being value neutral is not a pretence researchers uphold".

1.7 My social and cultural experience

My earliest memories of home and school are centred on the top-floor flat in Thomas McDonagh tower in Ballymun (Figure 1.1), that I lived in with my parents. My tower was one of seven 15-storey tower blocks that were built in the 1960s and 1970s in Ballymun to address the housing crisis in the city. Tenement houses in the city with outside shared toilets were no longer habitable and new housing was needed quickly.

Figure 1.1 Family photograph taken from our balcony in McDonagh Tower circa 1969. (Visible is the fifteen-storey block James Connolly Tower and Sillogue Road eight-storey flats behind it).

Ballymun was intended to be a new model town, a self-contained area with its own shopping complex, cinema, swimming pool and entertainment venues (Boyle, 2005). However, Ballymun became probably one of the most renowned estates in Ireland for all of the wrong reasons. It wasn't always like that: my mother tells me she was delighted to move to Ballymun as there was heating and hot water in contrast to the freezing cold flat we lived in in the city centre. She recalls the towers being so beautiful and clean. Neighbours took it in turns to clean the shared landing and the "chute" (the bin). I remember a shared sense of community, new schools and new churches were built and everyone seemed content. One of my childhood memories is walking down Shangan Road in Ballymun wearing a veil for the procession of the Virgin Mary in the month of May with my mother. The streets were crowded with people venerating the statue of Our Lady. I considered Ballymun to be a nice place to live. I attended the local primary school across from my block of flats in Shangan and I have fond memories of living there as a young child, and enjoying activities such as community sports days (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2: Family photo of me, my father and my brother from 1972 at the sports day in Coultry Park, Ballymun.

However, as time went on, promised amenities were not built and this caused lots of problems for residents. There were schools and churches but no shops. The lifts and the flats were not maintained by Dublin Corporation (now Dublin City Council). In the 1970s and the 1980s, tenancy turnover was very high which eroded the foundations of the community. Unemployment, poverty, drug misuse and other social problems took hold.

In the 1970s, my family was involved in community activism advocating for more amenities, improved maintenance by Dublin Corporation and the development of the shopping centre and swimming pool. These promised amenities did eventually materialise, but by then the poor design of Ballymun had taken its toll. Ballymun residents felt alienated and isolated and in the grips of the drug epidemic of the 1970s and 1980s. My parents saved enough money and were able to move out. Reflecting now I think my family's involvement in community activism was probably the beginning of my social activism, although at the time I probably thought it was something that everyone did. I am reminded of Raskin (2002) and his assertion that constructivists believe that all knowledge is created through our social interactions. I now see that my involvement in the protests for better services for Ballymun as a child was a part of my knowledge construction of my world.

In 1995 I moved back to Ballymun with my own family. We lived in the centre of the tower with six other families sharing our floor. As the lifts were often out of order it was a trek with young children.

Figure 1.3: Photograph of the flats in James Connolly Tower circa 1995.

In 1995 I moved back to Ballymun with my husband, John. See Figure 1.3 for a photograph of the 15-storey James Connolly Tower where we lived on the seventh floor in a two bedroomed flat.

Ballymun was a second home for me. I had extended family living there and great memories from childhood, so it felt like a homecoming. As we moved into our new flat there was a twenty-four-hour drug vigil on in the tower. Residents were fed up with the lack of activity from the Gardaí in the fight against drug dealing and were patrolling the tower themselves. This was in stark contrast to my childhood memories. Also, the tower blocks were now filthy, the lift was disgusting and often getting into it was a stomach-churning ascent and descent.

Areas of disadvantage like Ballymun are characterised by high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity, low levels of educational attainment, poor public services and environmental and social infrastructure (Kintrea & Muir, 2009; Quigley, 2002). As I became involved in my community, through schools, neighbours, various clubs and protests I could see that some residents of Ballymun had become isolated, suspicious of others and often reluctant to participate in social, economic and political life (Kintrea & Muir, 2009).

In 1997, after a sustained campaign by residents, it was announced that the tower blocks would be demolished, and new housing would be built. Ballymun Regeneration

Ltd (BRL) was set up to oversee the design of the new Ballymun by Dublin Corporation. This was a huge undertaking and was unprecedented in its scale. However, as Ballymun became one large building site the promised jobs and apprenticeships for Ballymun residents never materialised. I spent time protesting with my family for better health and safety to be included in the building projects. See Figure 1.4 for two photographs of John and I protesting in 2006 for a public inquiry into BRL. I also organised a protest with residents in James Connolly Tower against the delays in building our new houses. At one point my family was one of eight families left in the tower of ninety flats which were subject to anti-social behaviour, fires, and flooding while we were left waiting to move. The Irish Times featured an article at the time highlighting the plight of residents left in the empty blocks (Holland, 2011).

As I recall it now it is apparent that from childhood to adulthood, I have been protesting in Ballymun for better services. These protests were mostly against services that were set up to support people in socio-economic areas of disadvantage (e.g., BRL, Dublin City Council), but in fact were quite possibly and unknowingly perpetrating more injury upon them. The lack of care from services in positions of authority has understandably led to a deep dividing mistrust for some residents (Boyle, 2005). The living conditions or habitus was one of oppression, poverty, homelessness, mental health difficulties, drug abuse, drug dealing, gang violence, daylight shootings and much more (Montague, 2021).

Figure 1.4: My husband John and I protesting the delays to housing in 2006.

My unique privilege is knowing that the social fabric that unites people in Ballymun is their shared experience and identity, often with a perceived oppression by society. This perspective strengthened me in my role as a family literacy teacher for Youngballymun, creating programmes that I thought would resonate with parents and would optimise their engagement for the benefit of their children.

1.8 An established family literacy programme in Ballymun: Breakfast Buddies

I believe empathising with families' circumstances supports practitioners to understand, reflect and create programmes that address a community's needs. An established family literacy programme in Youngballymun, Breakfast Buddies (BB), and its implementation in Ballymun, was used as the setting for this research inquiry. BB is a family literacy programme developed and delivered by me for Youngballymun. Youngballymun is funded by Tusla – Child and Family Agency (www.tusla.ie) and aims to measurably improve the learning and wellbeing outcomes of children living in Ballymun. BB supports parents to understand their role as their child's first teacher and fosters their involvement in their children's language and literacy development. BB is targeted at parents of children from birth, through toddler and preschool years, and into primary school. BB is a community learning programme where parents can learn new skills to support their children's language and literacy skills and social and emotional development. BB is delivered through a unique collaborative partnership between Teachers (T), Youth Workers (YW), Health Care Professionals (HCP), and Family Resource Centre staff (FRC).

Drawing on BB as a platform for this study was helpful for me to gain deep insights into the process of parental engagement for both parents and practitioners. I was able to look at the social processes that were emerging and really delve into the underlying conditions that supported parents to emerge. The iterative process of data analysis using a CGT approach enhanced my involvement in the study with the inclusion of my social and cultural history which I have outlined above and the encouragement of reflexivity (Charmaz, 2014).

As I write this piece and reflect on my social and cultural experiences to date, I can see the threads of my ontological and epistemological perspectives leading to my role as a constructivist being established. I know multiple realities exist and through my experiences I have developed deep meanings that I have shared in this

autobiographical reflection. My worldview has influenced my perspectives and stems from my experience of being a resident in Ballymun, as a child and as an adult, in addition to my experience of being a practitioner in Ballymun These are unique perspectives: I realise it is probably quite rare for a Ballymun resident to acquire an Irish Research Council scholarship and study for a PhD in Trinity College, and it is something I am extremely proud of. These personal roots are the foundation of my positionality within this study.

1.9 My positionality

Positionality supports researchers to be continually cognisant of their "biases, beliefs, stances and perspectives" (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013, p. 71). An understanding of my positionality also explains the different stances I hold towards research participants (McNiff, 2017a). This study employed Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) which assumed my values, my positionality and is contextual to my worldview (Charmaz, 2014). Drawing attention to my positionality frames the study and acknowledging that frame enhances credibility. Credibility relies on the trustworthiness of data collection and the methods of analysis used (Silverman, 2022). The data analyses in this study were filtered through my perspectives and position, requiring me to engage in robust reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2017a), including my ontological and epistemological perspectives.

One of the methods I used to support my methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2017a) was to keep a reflective journal throughout this research process. Although I felt the inclusion of this reflective writing process in this thesis could perhaps be construed as somewhat self-indulgent, I was encouraged by the work of Mikhailovsky (1996, p. 141) who posits that "to write individual experience is, at the same time, to write social experience". I felt that recommendations for autobiographical expression reflected by Mikhailovsky (1996) aligned with the assertions of Keane (2015) on critical autobiographical reflection to "lay my cards on the table" and clarify my positionality. Similarly, Grumet (2001) discusses that a researcher must write descriptions that invite the reader into our perspectives. My journal entries supported my understanding of my positionality and really aided my understanding of it across my research journey. They also aided me in understanding and describing how and why there were changes in my perspectives. Furthermore, the writings of Charmaz (2016) on methodological self-consciousness advocate for researchers to engage in

reflexive practice on their own positionality and their own taken for granted privileges and perspectives to uncover their own biases. Journal writing supported me to describe my positionality and brought insight to my biases, ensuring I avoided importing prior experiences and assumptions into the data (Charmaz, 2014).

My journal writing supported my understanding of my life journey and how my life experiences have shaped my positionality. My ontological assumption is an interconnected narrative of my life experiences. My positionality begins with my lifelong learning journey. I left school at seventeen with a leaving certificate but no other qualifications. I worked in a supermarket stacking shelves and serving customers on checkouts. I started my third-level education journey when I was a married woman with two small children. My initial experience of living in an area of high deprivation and socio-economic disadvantage is at the core of my being and therefore impacts on everything I think and do. This perspective is my privilege. My knowledge of educational barriers, inequalities and poverty forms the basis of the deep empathy I feel for parents I work with who have a shared experience. This shared understanding informs my epistemological perspective, authenticates my practice and validates how I engage and help parents to support their children's language and literacy practices. Over the years, I have seen the importance of education and finding a voice to speak to the powers that have oppressed sections of society. I am very passionate about family literacy and parental engagement in language and literacy activities. My core value is that every parent, no matter the circumstances, is an asset for their child. As my life journey continues, I find myself becoming more reflective about the world and hoping to contribute in some way to the transformation of society, humanity and practice in relation to parental engagement. As I experience life, both personally and academically, my transformative learning experiences are changing my worldview, my positionality.

Positionality is considered to be a continuum from insider to outsider roles that highlights the fluidity of the researcher's position during the research process (Townsend, 2013). As illustrated in Figure 1.5, I held several different positions which will be explained in more detail below:

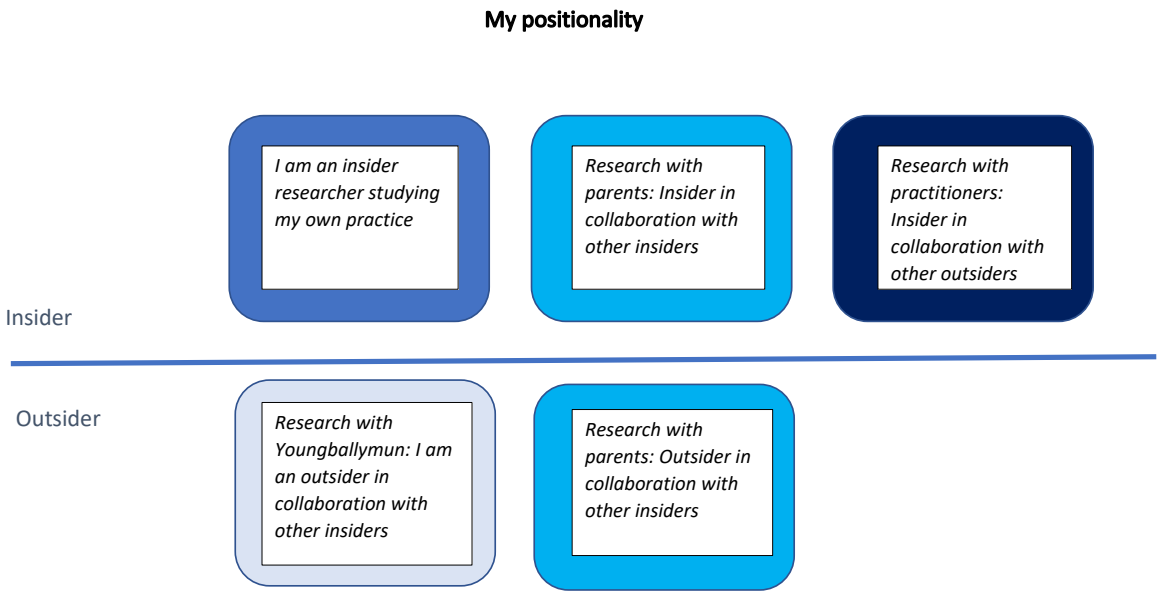

Figure 1.5: My positionality in this study

1.9.1 I was an insider researcher studying her own practice

I was an insider researcher studying her own practice, inquiring about practices of parental engagement, what works, what doesn't, how it can be improved and adapted. I was aware having reflected on my ontological assumptions and core values that I could be averse to opinions that paint parents as 'hard to reach', or less than capable. Being aware of this stance required me to reflect and understand other perspectives.

1.9.2 I was an outsider in collaboration with other insiders

Although I was an insider in Youngballymun, I felt like an outsider when I was taking on my research role, and related to descriptions of role duality (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Although I had insider information on the workings of Youngballymun, the personalities and organisational views it was my perspective that it was a constant struggle to reach a shared understanding of what parental engagement is within YB.

1.9.3 I was an insider in collaboration with other insiders

I identified with the parents in Ballymun as I understood their struggles: I had them too. Having an awareness of these issues from an insider's perspective supported my empathy and relationship building with parents. I wanted their voices to be heard in this study. However, I needed to be able to hear everyone's voice that was involved, in order for this study to be a democratic process (McNiff, 2017a; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). I strove to be aware of my interpretations of parents' perspectives and to recognise when I was taking for granted facts that others without this insider knowledge may not have experienced.

1.9.4 I was an outsider in collaboration with other insiders

I was aware as the facilitator of the BB programme that my role was one of teacher and not of parent. I was, therefore, an outsider and an insider. This could be considered confusing, but I could see how it was necessary for me to state this in relation to this research inquiry. It was necessary for me to understand that although I might have considered myself an insider with my cultural and contextual knowledge, I was probably more of an outsider due to my training as a teacher and current life circumstances.

1.9.5 I was an insider in collaboration with other outsiders

I was an insider in collaboration with other outsiders - teachers, healthcare practitioners and youth workers and family resource centre staff. I considered these outsiders my colleagues, I worked alongside them to plan and deliver Breakfast Buddies. I invited members from these outside organisations to collaborate with me as I believed we shared a common goal. We all wanted to see parents engaged in more efficient, flexible ways that supported their involvement in services.

1.9.6 Changes in my positionality

My positionality changed between my initial positionality statement at the outset of this study and my positionality upon completion of this research. At the outset, learning was always a way for me to remove myself and my children from the poverty trap and to support my community. As I reflect now as I come towards the end of this PhD journey, I am perhaps a little bit enthralled at the voyage of transition in my positionality.

As a practitioner, my experience of living in Ballymun flats with my family was previously my privileged and dominant insider perspective. However, through leading this study and engaging in multiple rounds of data analysis of raw comments from participating parents, I have learned to adapt, to become more objective and to see both sides – therefore becoming more of an outsider and falling more within the category of “an outsider in collaboration with other insiders”.

Additionally, my personal experiences of grief and ill health during this study added to my understanding of the barriers to engagement with services and programmes. I enhanced my appreciation of the value that the views of mentors and practitioners can bring, and it has brought a considerable change to my understanding of other views.

This also galvanised my positionality at the end of the study as one of “an insider in collaboration with other outsiders”. I understand now that my unique perspective as a professional (outsider) from an area of socio-economic disadvantage (insider) and my ability to lean into each positionality is more important to current research and policy practice than I perhaps originally thought. I still identify as a woman from Ballymun. However, I believe that everyone’s perspective is important and that as a researcher and practitioner I need to find the balance in those views. I hope in the future to be able to use my dual positionality for advancing the voices of socio-economic disadvantaged communities.

I think this change in positionality is a result of numerous research practices and processes I engaged with throughout the study. First, I kept a journal to enhance my methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2014). This journal was an account of my journey through the study. Coupled with writing memos, it really supported reflection on the changes in my positionality. Second, I believe the conversations with my research supervisors were very helpful throughout this research, but especially on objective data analysis. I always enjoyed their questions, even if I was unable to answer them at the time. I was left with trying to find the answer which encouraged my reflections. Third, I have some wonderful friends and mentors in my life who supported my reflective process and always had time to chat with me and help me to verbalise my changes in perspectives and understanding. Finally, the PhD seminar group with my peers was a great support to me to share my evolving thoughts and ideas and to receive constructive feedback on my study and my positionality. For these reasons, I can still locate myself as “an insider in collaboration with other insiders”, but my positionality has evolved to also encompass “an outsider in collaboration with other insiders” alongside “an insider in collaboration with other outsiders”. Brydon-Miller (2003) discusses how working with community organisations brings personal change and I agree wholeheartedly, as I have reflected on my experience of changing positionality.

1.9.7 Summary

This chapter has set the scene for this research study on effective engagement for parents and practitioners living/working in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, in particular outlining my social and cultural experiences and positionality within the study. My personal reflections aimed to help inform the reader of my unique view and

privilege which are the foundations of this study and integral to the CGT methodology employed, thereby contributing to the credibility of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2. Introduction

This chapter explores the concept of parental engagement and opens with a discussion on its multiple stages and multiple aspects. The impacts of effective parental engagement are reviewed, followed by potential barriers to engagement and possible ways to address these barriers. In this thesis the words programme and intervention are used as interchangeable forms of engagement.

2.1 What is parental engagement?

Parents are often acknowledged as their child's first teacher. Parents may support their children at home, school and in community learning environments that build on their children's potential as learners and support them to take their place as members of their community (DES, 2017; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Parents can influence their children's development supporting children's language and literacy skills, cognitive skills, social, emotional and behavioural development (Carpentieri, Fairfax-Cholmeley, Litster, & Vorhaus, 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Khatib, Gaidhane, Ahmed, Saxena, & Syed, 2020; Swain, Brooks, & Bosley, 2014). Research has consistently shown that the earlier parents become engaged in their children's learning, the more profound the results (McCoy & Cole, 2011). Programmes to support parents in their caregiving role are designed to mitigate the factors that may place some children at risk of poor outcomes through early identification and provision of supports (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005; PEIN, 2019). Central to the success of such supportive programmes is parental engagement. However, as will be discussed below, parental engagement is often complex and multifaceted as there are many stages where parents may be empowered to take an active role in their children's development (Melvin, Meyer, & Scarinci, 2020, p. 2).

Definitions of parental engagement vary from broad to narrow. For example, parental engagement is described as a 'co-constructed process and a state', an act of being and becoming 'engaged with' and 'engaging in' for parents and practitioners (Bright, Kayes, Worrall, & McPherson, 2014, p. 645). Others consider parental engagement as the behaviour, attitudes, values and activities of parents that promote their child's ability to learn (Harris & Goodall, 2007; Povey et al., 2016). A narrower view of parental engagement defines it in relation to the extent to which a parent is involved in home-based activities or school-based activities that support children's learning and

development. For example, school-based involvement relates to parents being involved on school boards or parents' committees, and home-based involvement includes supporting the work of the school at home, such as helping with homework (Epstein et al., 2019; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Goodall and Montgomery (2014, p. 399) suggest that there is a continuum between "parent involvement with schools to parent engagement with children's learning. This continuum proposes that the move from involvement to engagement requires a shift in the agency of the school to a more collaborative, partnership approach with parents which focuses on parents' engagement with their child's learning and ways to support that learning, with a focus on the mutually agreed outcome of engaging "…the act of engagement requires a greater ownership of action than is present with parental involvement" (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 2).

Moreover, (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) propose that the continuum of parental engagement is a dynamic construct, because there is a back-and-forth motion as the relationship between the parent and the school progresses. Developing the parent-school-community relationship supports the engagement of parents in programmes by building trust, empathy and establishing communication (Nguyen, Darling, Peralta, Mosier, & Garnett, 2021). Perceiving parents' engagement as co-constructed (Bright et al., 2014), a partnership between schools, families and community services, raises awareness of the benefits for parents of engaging in their child's education, and places an emphasis on role of the practitioner to support parents to acquire new skills (Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012). For parents to successfully engage, the co-construction of the relationship between the practitioner and parent is seen as central to the engagement process (Bright et al., 2014; Gonzalez, Morawska, & Haslam, 2018; Staudt, 2007; Tetley, Jinks, Huband, & Howells, 2001). This is described as a multifaceted state of interaction between a parent and a practitioner (Jensen & Minke, 2017; King, Currie, & Peterson, 2014; Melvin, Meyer, & Scarinci, 2020). The practitioner's knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence to engage with parents are therefore important factors to consider in any engagement practice (Klatte et al., 2020; Watts-Pappas, McAllister, & McLeod, 2016).

2.2 Parental engagement is a multi-stage process

Parental engagement has been described as occurring in multiple stages, and across multiple points of contact, including recruitment, enrolment, attendance, participation

and completion of home activities as outlined in Figure 2.1 (Becker et al., 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2018; Ingoldsby, 2010; Morawska & Sanders, 2006; Snell-Johns, Mendez, & Smith, 2004; Staudt, 2007). The first stage is comprised of several components: initial engagement, recruitment, intent to enrol and enrolment (Dumas, Moreland, French, & Pearl, 2010; Gross et al., 2011; McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Piotrowska et al., 2017). The second stage is on-going engagement (Piotrowska et al., 2017), manifesting in attendance (Dumas et al., 2010; Piotrowska et al., 2017), retention (McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Piotrowska et al., 2017), and attrition (Chacko et al., 2016). The third stage is reflected in technique utilisation, the application of the strategies learnt at the programme by parents in the home environment (Eisner & Meidert, 2011; McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Piotrowska et al., 2017) (see Figure 2.1).

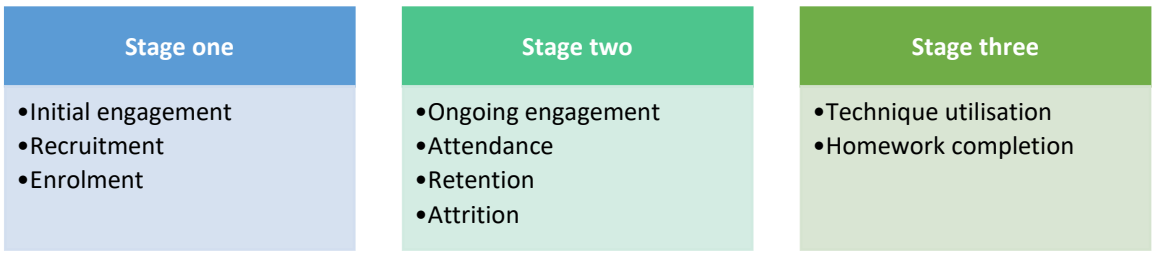

Figure 2.1: Parental engagement as a multi-stage process (Dumas, Moreland, French, & Pearl, 2010; Gross et al., 2011; McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Piotrowska et al., 2017).

The stages of engagement have been defined as “static variables”, with researchers defining component stages differently across studies (Melvin, Meyer, & Scarinci, 2020; Staudt, 2007). Outlined in Table 2.1 are the various terms used by researchers to describe behaviours and practices that align to the multi-stage process of parental engagement, highlighting a lack of consensus on terms to support practitioners in their efforts to apply effective engagement practices.

Table 2.1: Definitions of behaviours and practices across stages of engagement

Stage of engagement	Term used for behaviours	Definition
1: Initial engagement (Finan, Warren, Priest, Mak, & Yap, 2020)	**Intent to enroll / motivation to enrol**	Motivations to enroll in programme. Assessed in surveys during enrolment (Dumas et al., 2010; Gross et al., 2011)
	Recruitment	Practitioner meeting parents, informing them about the programme (Dumas et al., 2010; Gross et al., 2011)
	Initial enrollers / subsequent decliners	Parents who Initially expressed interest but then declined participation (Heinrichs, 2006)
	Enrolment	Parents who returned a registration form are enrolled (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Winslow et al., 2016)
2: On-going engagement (Finan et al., 2020)	**Attendance**	Parents attend the sessions. (Dumas et al., 2010; Ingoldsby, 2010; Winslow et al., 2016)
	Initiation	Parent attended at least one session. (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Winslow et al., 2016)
	Drop-outs	Parents who completed one hour of the intervention but then left (Heinrichs, 2006).
	Retention	Engagement practices that support parents to stay in the programme (Morawska & Sanders, 2006; Mytton, Ingram, Manns, & Thomas, 2014)
	Quality of participation/in-session participation+	Facilitators' evaluation of parents' participation in sessions (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Dumas et al., 2010)
	Attrition	Parents leaving programme without receiving the full dose. (Dumas et al., 2010; Winslow et al., 2016)
	Participation	Parents participate in the session and are involved (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Eisner & Meidert, 2011; Mytton et al., 2014)
3: Technique Utilisation (Eisner & Meidert, 2011)	**Homework completion**	Parent application of the strategies learnt in the home environment (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Eisner & Meidert, 2011).

The multi-stage nature of parental engagement is echoed in the continuum proposed by Goodall and Montgomery (2014) and outlined in Figure 2.2. The first point on their continuum is parental involvement with the school: this stage highlights the agency of the school. Information is given to parents, for example, at parent-teacher meetings. This is an opportunity for teachers and the school to establish a good working relationship with the parent (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The second point on their

continuum is parent involvement with schooling. At this point information exchange occurs between home and school to support children's learning. The parent reports on the child's home learning activity set by the school, and parents are more involved with supporting their children's learning (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). The third point on their continuum is parental engagement with children's learning. At this stage, parents are choosing to support their children's learning, which may be aided by information received by the school but is predicated on parents' perception of their parenting role (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014).

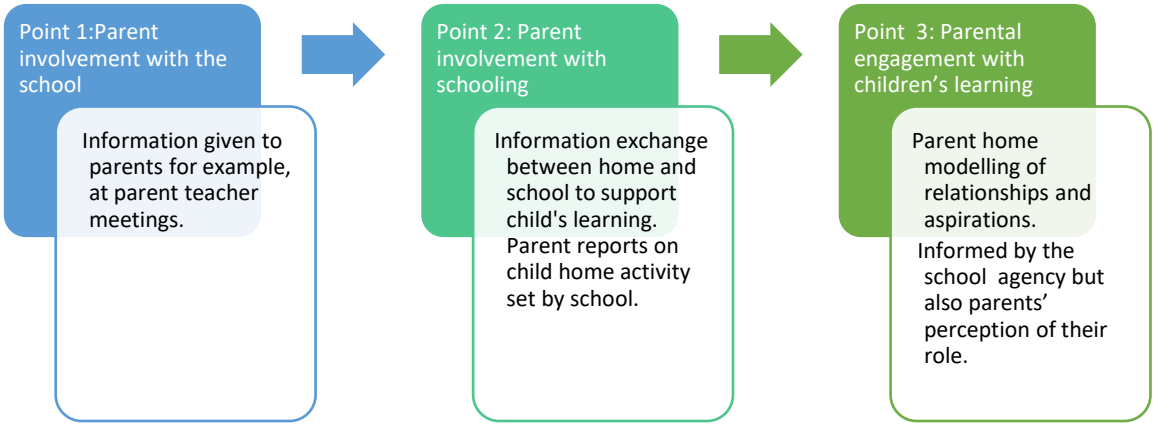

Figure 2.2: Continuum from parent involvement to parent engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014)

Similarly, the CAPE model (Piotrowska et al., 2017) describes parental engagement and the factors that influence it across three stages of engagement: initial engagement, on-going engagement and technique utilisation. CAPE has four components reflecting developmental stages: "Connect" (C), focuses on parent recruitment and enrolment to the programme; 'Attend' (A) concentrates on parents' continuous presence at sessions; 'Participate' (P) concentrates on parents taking part in the sessions to include homework completion; and 'Enactment' (E) focuses on the activation of the parenting strategies in the home environment (Piotrowska et al., 2017). Included in the first three stages of the CAPE model (Connect, Attend and Participate) are factors that may affect parents' ability to attend, for example family characteristics (e.g., parents' age, socio-economic status), child characteristics (e.g., age and gender, difficulties profile), family processes (e.g., parent's mental health, relationship quality), contextual factors (e.g., beliefs about parenting), and organisational factors (e.g., access and availability of services) (Piotrowska et al., 2017). A unique dimension to engagement included in the CAPE model is 'Enactment', describing changes in attendance that are related to direct or indirect participation (Piotrowska et al., 2017). According to

Piotrowska et al. (2017), direct participation involves a parent being actively committed and physically attending the programme and indirect participation is a parent that is attending the programme teaching their partner the strategies at home. They argue that a systemic focus on family systems as well as individuals, across the multiple stages, supports parental engagement by bringing awareness to the factors that may impinge on engagement for each individual parent (Piotrowska et al., 2017).

Therefore, it is argued that parental engagement is a multi-stage process that occurs in many contexts: the family, the home, the school and the community (Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009; Weiss et al., 2014). This systemic view of parental engagement reflects Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979, 2001) that highlights the importance of direct and indirect contexts in children's development across five levels. The first level is the Microsystem and represents the immediate setting in which the child interacts: the home, school, community and the people in the settings such as parent, friends, teachers (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009). The second level is the Mesosystem and represents the interactions and relationships between the individuals and settings, such as relationships between child and parent, parent and teacher, community and parent (Weiss et al., 2014). The third level is the Exosystem comprised of indirect influences on a child's development: for example, the current rise in inflation and the cost of living can deprive parents of the choice of being able to buy a book for their child, thus impacting on children's language and literacy levels. This level is one that is out of parents' control yet can affect them profoundly (Featherstone, 2016). The fourth level, the Macrosystem, operates at the broadest level of influence and makes up the political system, social policy, welfare entitlements and funding for education, to name a few factors that can impact parents' abilities to support their children's development. The fifth and final level is the Chronosystem: this level represents the element of time in the child's life course. For example, having no home for a period of time could have serious effects on children's sense of shame and self-efficacy and overall development (Maggi et al., 2010).

Having an understanding of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979, 2001) may ensure that contextual factors, organisational factors, and family characteristics and processes that may apply to the lives of parents and children are considered by practitioners across the multiple stages of engagement

(Gill & Jack, 2007). Understanding that engagement happens inside (the programme) and outside (the home environment) across multiple stages and systems can inform how practitioners communicate with parents (Klatte et al., 2020), perhaps supporting the co-construction of the relationship (Bright et al., 2014).

2.3 Engagement has multiple aspects

In addition to having multiple stages, it is proposed that parental engagement has multiple aspects to be considered (Coatsworth et al., 2017). Aspects that can affect parents' ability to engage include: individual characteristics (e.g., attitude towards the service, readiness to change); provider attributes (e.g., cultural competence, service delivery style); programme characteristics (e.g., timing of enrolment, supports available); and neighbourhood context (e.g., parents' social capital) (McCurdy & Daro, 2001, pp. 114, 115). Crozier and Davies (2007) emphasize that parents have different needs and different circumstances bringing a cultural view to engagement. Similarly, Bright et al. (2014, p. 651) in their conceptual review propose that "engagement appears to be a process and a state". This view of engagement also challenges the idea that engagement is solely owned by the parent and implies that engagement is influenced by other multiple factors, such as the relationship between the practitioner and parent, amongst others (Bright et al., 2014; Staudt, 2007).

Table 2.2 overleaf outlines seven key dimensions of parental engagement that will be described. The first five aspects (behavioural, relational, attitudinal, cognitive and affective dimensions) are focused on internal factors that are dependent on the parents' engagement with practitioners (i.e., direct participation) (Piotrowska et al., 2017). The final two aspects focus on external factors (i.e., indirect participation). First, it is proposed that there is a behavioural aspect to parental engagement, for example, attendance, help seeking, active participation and completion of homework tasks (Bamberger et al., 2014; Haine-Schlagel et al., 2016; Hock et al., 2015; King et al., 2021; Staudt, 2007). Second is the relational aspect, for example, the relationship between parent and practitioner (Haine-Schlagel et al., 2016; Staudt, 2007; Tetley et al., 2001). Third, is the attitudinal aspect: parents' expectations and motivation to engage; parents' emotional commitment to the intervention (Becker et al., 2018; Cortis et al., 2009; Morawska & Sanders, 2006); and parents' perception of the benefits of the intervention (Hock et al., 2015; Ingoldsby, 2010; McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Staudt, 2007). Fourth, is the cognitive aspect (King et al., 2021), for instance, a parent believing

the programme will be effective. Fifth, there is the affective aspect, for example, parents' expecting positive outcomes (Bamberger et al., 2014; Hock et al., 2015; King et al., 2021). The sixth aspect is facilitative, which is associated with addressing barriers to parents' engagement. Finally, the seventh aspect is a socialising dimension where parents feel safe to talk in the group and are happily mixing with their peers (Lindsey et al., 2014; McKay et al., 2021).

Table 2.2: The multiple aspects of parental engagement

Aspect of parental engagement	Example in practice	Stage of engagement
1. **Behavioural** (Bamberger et al., 2014; Haine-Schlagel et al., 2016; Hock et al., 2015; King et al., 2021; Staudt, 2007).	Attendance Help seeking Active participation Completion of homework tasks	Stage 1 & 2: Initial and On-going engagement Stage 3: Technique utilisation
2. **Relational** (Haine-Schlagel et al., 2016; Staudt, 2007; Tetley et al., 2001)	Relationship between parent and practitioner	Dimensions 2-7 are reciprocal effects across engagement dimensions and occur across all three stages of the process of engagement.
3. **Attitudinal** (Becker, Boustani, Gellatly, & Chorpita, 2018; Cortis, Katz, & Patulny, 2009; Morawska & Sanders, 2006) (Hock et al., 2015; Ingoldsby, 2010; McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Staudt, 2007)	Parents' expectations, Motivation to engage, emotional commitment to programme, Perception of benefits of Programme	
4. **Cognitive** (King et al., 2021)	Parent believing programme will be effective.	
5. **Affective** (Bamberger et al., 2014; Hock et al., 2015; King et al., 2021).	Parents expecting positive outcomes.	
6. **Facilitative** (Lindsey et al., 2014; McKay, Kennedy, Ranieri, & Young, 2021).	Addressing barriers	
7. **Socialising dimension** (Lindsey et al., 2014; McKay et al., 2021).	Mixing with peers	

Understanding parental engagement as having multiple aspects may support family literacy practitioners to better plan programmes that support parents' caregiving and educational roles with their children. For example, to support effective parental engagement, it may be necessary to identify engagement strategies for each aspect (Becker et al., 2018; Lindsey et al., 2014).

2.4 Impact of effective parental engagement

As previously outlined in chapter 1, from my perspective, parental engagement within the context of family literacy community-based programmes is a multi-factorial, dynamic process that requires active collaboration between participants and a focus on practical supports towards achieving a mutually agreed outcome. This understanding is important when we consider the potential impact of effective parental engagement.

Engaging parents in interventions to support their child's development is considered as a form of social investment with positive outcomes (Curry & Holter, 2019; Heckman & Masterov, 2007; Williams & Sánchez, 2012). Systemically engaging parents in their children's learning has been described as a "powerful lever for raising achievement in schools" (Harris & Goodall, 2007, p. 5). Chappel and Ratliffe (2021) discuss the impact of engagement between families, schools and communities, highlighting how engagement enhances the social, academic and behavioural outcomes for children.

Parental engagement in educational or caregiving programmes is also reported to enhance the life chances of vulnerable children and is associated with improvements for parents and children in reducing parental stress, enhancing confidence in parenting skills, enhancing the social support of parents and improving child language and literacy levels and behaviour (Hackworth et al., 2018; Sneddon & Owens, 2012; Statham, 2013). The benefits of parental engagement are also considered to support children's development potential (Feinstein, 2003; Sénéchal & Young, 2008; Swain et al., 2014).

Parental engagement in family literacy programmes has documented the promotion of positive parenting practices and enhancement of the home learning environment (Nix, Bierman, Motamedi, & Heinrichs, 2018). The home learning environment includes parents developing learning opportunities for their children, such as providing access

to literacy materials or other educational resources. Engaging parents in interventions that support their ability to develop their children's language and literacy practices could help alleviate the challenges that children born into poverty face (Brito, 2017; Neumann, Hood, Ford, & Neumann, 2012; Pruden et al., 2017; Zauche, Thul, Mahoney, & Stapel-Wax, 2016) and may have the potential to break the cycle of intergenerational literacy disadvantage (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Goodall et al., 2010; Hannon, 1995; Krijnen, van Steensel, Meeuwisse, Jongerling, & Severiens, 2020). Engagement between schools, families, and community services may also contribute to improved student achievement (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Kim et al., 2012). Engagement in educational opportunities is seen as one of the best ways to enhance achievement for children from socio-economic areas of deprivation (Fan & Chen, 2001; Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Therefore, actively engaging parents to support children's development and education is fundamental to improving children's life outcomes (Melvin et al., 2019).

Moreover, parents' engagement in their children's learning may increase parents' social capital (Carlson et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2012; Van Steensel, Bögels, & Perrin, 2011). Parental engagement also shows great promise in sustaining better public health outcomes, and maximising quality parent interactions (Haine-Schlagel et al., 2016; Lindsey et al., 2014; Melvin et al., 2019; Panter-Brick et al., 2014). Despite these benefits, however, there is a plethora of documented barriers to parental engagement, many of which are rooted in poverty and social disadvantage.

2.5 Barriers to parental engagement

Difficulties to engage parents in interventions to support children's development are frequently reported (Axford et al., 2012; Garvey et al., 2006; Lehtme & Toros, 2020; Rochford et al., 2014). In parallel, programmes that are developed to enhance parental engagement fail to recognise all of the barriers some parents may face accessing services (Wilson, 2020). In their conceptual barriers-to-treatment model, Kazdin, Holland, and Crowley (1997) posit that parents face multiple barriers when accessing interventions. Kazdin and Wassell (2000) discuss four perceived barriers to parental engagement: (i) parents' perceived obstacles to their attendance; (ii) parents' perception of treatment as difficult; (iii) the perception that the child does not need the intervention; and (iv) the perception that the relationship with the provider is not supported. Similarly, Perrino, Coatsworth, Briones, Pantin, and Szapocznik (2001)

identify five familial and societal factors that hinder parents' engagement: (i) living in an area of socio-economic disadvantage creates barriers to accessing services; (ii) parents' understanding of the need for the intervention; (iii) parents' perception of barriers to their attendance; (iv) parents' attitudes and motivation to attend the intervention; and (v) the influence of family factors on attendance.

Barriers that are rooted in long-term societal factors such as single-parent status, poverty, having unmet literacy needs, and living in an area of socioeconomic disadvantage are also reported (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021; Eisner & Meidert, 2011; Ingoldsby, 2010; McDermott & Graham, 2005; Nock & Ferriter, 2005). Such barriers are embedded in the inequities of society and can be difficult for services to counteract.

2.5.1 Individual barriers

Individual barriers to parental engagement often relate to parents' personal circumstances. These barriers may include lack of basic resources leading to the stress of daily living, family or neighbourhood conflicts, a lack of social support in rearing children, and personal issues such as depression (Ingoldsby, 2010; Kazdin et al., 1997; McDermott & Graham, 2005). Individual barriers are a part of the attitudinal, cognitive and affective dimensions of engagement as previously discussed. Parents' beliefs and attitudes, such as parents' expectations of the intervention, may preclude them from attending because they may perceive it as unnecessary, the intervention might go against cultural beliefs and understandings, or they may perceive that it is not worthwhile and a waste of their time (Finan, Swierzbiolek, Priest, Warren, & Yap, 2018; Gross et al., 2011; Ingoldsby, 2010; Nock & Kazdin, 2001; Spoth, Redmond, Hockaday, & Shin, 1996; Staudt, 2007).

Keeping appointments and attending programme sessions can be problematic for some parents. They may be working at the time the intervention is being delivered; they may have limited access to transport to and from the venue; and there could be a lot of family stress, for example, homelessness, that prevents them from keeping appointments and attending perhaps due to transport difficulties (Becker et al., 2015; Carlson et al., 2020; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Njeru, 2015; Oke, Butler, & O'Neill, 2021; Povey et al., 2016; Spoth et al., 1996).

The intervention may be free but nonetheless implies a cost to parents who may already be struggling. The cost relates to the time necessary to attend the intervention coupled with learning and implementing the new skill (Morawska & Sanders, 2006). Transport costs to the venue of the programme can also add challenges. Parents may have family commitments, for example a caring role for a child or a sick relative, or they may have family conflict or no social support, leading to high personal stress which makes it difficult for the parent to focus on anything else (McKay & Bannion, 2004; Prinz & Miller, 1996). These factors can create situations where parents do not have the capacity to pay attention, or perhaps parents are hesitant to consider new ideas, or are reluctant to contribute to discussions and participate, and are unprepared to activate the new learning at home (Baydar, Reid, & Webster-Stratton, 2003; Maggi et al., 2010).

Engagement relies heavily on parents' motivations to engage, participate in the intervention, and to engage and implement any new learning with their children in the home learning environment (Eisner & Meidert, 2011; Morrissey-Kane & Prinz, 1999). Social embarrassment and stigma have been identified as a critical barrier for parental engagement, the most recent Adult Literacy for Life Strategy (Gov.ie, 2021, p. 29) identified stigma as the most "critical" barrier that hinders adults accessing supports.

The intervention setting, whether it be one-to-one in a parent's home or group session, can play a role in parents' perceptions of stigma and their engagement (Vogel, Wade, & Kaake, 2006). Parents may have had previous negative experiences with a service or have a fear of educational settings due to their own prior experience in school (Cortis, 2012). Parental anxiety about being judged, feeling different or feeling unwelcome in the service are factors that may affect their engagement (Cortis et al., 2009). Parents can internalise stigma (Eaton, Ohan, Stritzke, & Corrigan, 2016) which they may attach to attending services.

The referral route for a parent into an intervention can produce a negative perception of the intervention (McKay et al., 2021). For instance, a parent may feel they have inadequate parenting skills if they are referred to attend a parenting programme, or they may feel if they attend the parenting programme they will be stigmatised by their community (Vogel et al., 2006). In referral engagement practices, the service provider's ability to engage and support parents is crucial, and a holistic, strengths-based

approach is needed (McKay et al., 2021; Miller & Prinz, 2003), yet some young mothers have reported feeling judged and dealing with hostile services in their help-seeking (McDermott & Graham, 2005). It is reported by some that services "continue to treat parents and their children poorly" (Carlson et al., 2020, p. 104), making parents feel unwelcome in settings (Baker, Arnold, & Meagher, 2011) with "disrespectful providers" (Miller & Prinz, 2003, p. 518).

Parents want to feel safe to talk and receive support from their peers (Mytton et al., 2014). For some parents there is a perceived risk when engaging with services, in group settings or in one-to-one collaborations, and a sense of loss of their family's privacy is a prominent issue (Bell, 2007; Heinrichs, 2006; Prinz & Miller, 1996; Spoth et al., 1996). This factor in particular can be influenced by other family members, such as a spouse or grandparent concerned about the family's privacy, and can affect a parent's decision to engage, positively or negatively (Finan et al., 2018; Nock & Kazdin, 2001; Spoth et al., 1996).

2.5.2 Systemic barriers

In addition to individual barriers, many systemic barriers have also been documented. While some systemic barriers to parental engagement can be transient, such as limited timings available for the programme, many barriers can be more deeply entrenched in long-term societal factors. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory cited earlier (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979, 2001) highlights the contextual factors, organisational factors, and family characteristics and processes that apply to the lives of parents and children across the family, home, school and community, which may contribute to barriers to parental engagement. These factors could be single-parent status, poverty, a parent with unmet literacy needs, and living in an area of socioeconomic disadvantage (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021; Eisner & Meidert, 2011; Ingoldsby, 2010; McDermott & Graham, 2005; Nock & Ferriter, 2005).

Living in an area of disadvantage can restrict parents' abilities to engage in educational opportunities for their children (Cortis et al., 2009). Recent research has drawn attention to some interventions designed to support families affected by poverty and living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage having the opposite effect by "apportioning blame and stereotyping" (Allen & Spencer, 2022, p. 9) and ultimately negatively impacting parental engagement. Currently there is an indication that the

“multiplicity of actors in the support landscape” could act as a barrier for parents in initial engagement (Gov.ie, 2021, p. 30).

A further potential systemic barrier to parental engagement relates to public health. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic (WHO, 2020) had a huge impact on families and society, with knock-on impacts on parental engagement. A move to online teaching left some parents from areas of disadvantage struggling to engage (UNESCO, 2020). Many parents were reluctant to engage in online platforms, and this reluctance has been attributed to unfamiliarity with the technology and lack of confidence in the literacy skills needed to navigate the online platform, along with having little or no access to the devices needed to go online or having no access to reliable Wi-fi (Burke & Dempsey, 2020; Marzi, 2020). Some parents lacked the confidence, capacity and resources to interact with services and interventions to support them and their children (Curry & Holter, 2019; Ratliffe & Ponte, 2018). Parents’ abilities to engage with distance and online education, access programme appointments on-line and understand technologies, or have access to them, created further challenges to effective parental engagement (Mohan et al., 2020; Njeru, 2015; UNESCO, 2020).

2.5.3 Service-provider barriers

While individual and systemic barriers are well documented and important to understand, possible service-provider barriers are often overlooked. Research has focused primarily on socio-economic factors or individual factors as barriers to engagement (Morawska & Sanders, 2006), often from a provider-practitioner perspective (Barrett, 2008), and parents are often not involved in the conversation on the barriers that prevent them from attending, or if they are, the parent’s voice is limited in the research to filling in evaluation forms (Mytton et al., 2014). Some providers can fail to reflect on what the service provider could do better and what service-provider barriers may exist (Brackertz, 2007; Bright et al., 2014; Hjörne, Juhila, & van Nijnatten, 2010). Service-provider barriers may be present in the parent-child-practitioner triad, the relationship process and/or the role of the practitioner (Gonzalez, Morawska, & Haslam, 2021; Staudt, 2007).

A further service-provider barrier may be the creation of challenges to parental engagement through certain service-provider perspectives (their attitudes or point of view) of parents and the communities they live in (Kumpfer, Alvarado, Smith, &

Bellamy, 2002; McCurdy & Daro, 2001). For example, differences in experiences between parents and service-providers could cause a disconnect between the culture of home and school, negatively impacting on parental engagement (Volman & Gilde, 2021). Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that teachers that harness the Funds of Knowledge theory (González et al., 2005) to their relationships with children and parents can be successful at developing relationships between culture of home and school. The Funds of Knowledge theory highlights the benefits that can emerge when teachers exploit the knowledge and skills that children acquire in their homes and communities. Teachers can use this theory to support academic achievement for children and to support their efforts with parental engagement (González et al., 2005).

Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979, 2001) can help pinpoint potential service-provider barriers to parental engagement such as interrelated factors that could negatively impact engagement with learning, for both the parent and children. What occurs in one context (e.g., service-provider interactions) could influence another (e.g., parental engagement) (Tudge et al., 2009). For example, a parent who is struggling to feed their children will engage with their children and the school differently to a parent who has time, money, interest and energy to support their children's learning and the school community. Consequently, it is crucial that we find ways to address the barriers to parental engagement and maximise opportunities for parental engagement, so that the potential benefits for children, families and society can be reaped.

2.6 Addressing barriers to parental engagement

Knowing what practices work at different stages of the engagement process is important in supporting practitioners in their efforts of parental engagement (Becker et al., 2018; Lindsey et al., 2014). Some interventions to address barriers to parental engagement are focused broadly on all parents, while others are specific to particular groups of parents or individual parents who may experience barriers unique to them (e.g., not all parents will require childcare arrangements) (La Placa & Hunter, 2007).

A range of strategies that may address barriers to parental engagement have been described in the literature, including pre-treatment strategies; addressing practical barriers; creating a welcoming environment; and practitioner skills. Some of the strategies described below were drawn from a systematic review on initial engagement

practices. This systematic review was conducted at an earlier stage in this study and supported an understanding of how best to address barriers to parental engagement during the first phases of engagement (see Appendix A).

2.6.1 Starting well: Engagement packages and their elements

Parental engagement packages are one method used to support the first stage of engagement with varying degrees of success. Engagement packages are a suite of approaches to support engagement, and can include advertising material, public endorsements or individual contact with the parent. Winslow et al. (2016) reported that their parental engagement package, which included a brochure advertising the programme to parents, a teacher's endorsement and a telephone call from the practitioner increased initiation for parents. Abraczinskas et al. (2020) subsequently dismantled the engagement package introduced by Winslow et al. (2016) and examined the effectiveness of each initial engagement strategy separately. Abraczinskas et al. (2020) found that the full engagement package increased initiation but that the recruitment call was the most effective method of initial engagement. The recruitment call consisted of a manualised twenty-minute telephone call by the facilitator to the parent, supporting the identification of barriers to engagement, identifying ways to address the barriers and motivate the parent to enrol in the programme. It is possible that this direct personal contact with parents is an important lever supporting subsequent parental engagement.

Addressing parents' practical barriers has also been identified by others as one of the factors supporting initial parental engagement (Ingoldsby, 2010; Miller & Prinz, 2003). It has been reported that barriers to participation primarily influence the initial stages of engagement and can stem from limited neighbourhood networks and low levels of social capital (Eisner & Meidert, 2011; Kazdin & Wassell, 2000). Parents who had concentrated links with their neighbours were more likely to sign up for the course and complete it than parents who had limited contacts with neighbours (Eisner & Meidert, 2011). Relatedly, the source of a referral can be a predictor of engagement (Breland-Noble, Bell, Burriss, Poole, & Board, 2012), highlighting the facilitator's role in the recruitment call. For example, relationships are an important aspect of engagement, retention and intrinsic motivation (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Chacko et al., 2016; Ingoldsby, 2010; Miller & Prinz, 2003; Winslow et al., 2016). However, while we can say that the recruitment call increased initial enrolment in the study by Abraczinskas

et al. (2020), parents who received the recruitment call attended fewer sessions overall, and it had no effect on homework completion or in-session participation. This is an interesting finding and perhaps highlights the challenges of engagement for parents and practitioners to address the unique barriers to attendance for parents during the twenty-minute recruitment call. Conceivably, this stresses the point made by Morawska and Sanders (2006), calling for providers to have an assortment of responsive strategies to enhance engagement and completion, and supports the need for a package of parental engagement strategies rather than a single approach across the different stages of engagement. It also implies that there are different engagement strategies required for ongoing parental engagement than those strategies used for initial parental engagement.

2.6.2 Financial incentives, do they work?

Financial incentives for increasing participation rates in parental engagement programmes have also been explored as a practical recommendation to overcome economic barriers for parents. Some studies found financial incentives made no significant difference in engagement or attendance (Dumas et al, 2010: Gross et al., 2011). Conversely, Heinrichs (2006) reported that offering financial incentives increased enrolment in the incentive condition by 20%. However, this difference faded when attendance data was analysed, and the initial enrollers/subsequent decliners were removed from the data analysis. Therefore, financial incentives may support enrolment but have little or no impact on longer term retention (Dumas et al., 2010).

Early studies by Guyll, Spoth, and Redmond (2003) suggested that financial incentives may significantly affect parents with limited education, possibly helping alleviate some of the impact of living in poverty (Gross et al., 2011). It is important to consider that external motivation through monetary incentives may undermine intrinsic motivation (Frey & Jegen, 2000). Staudt (2007) suggests that for engagement to be successful, parents need to be emotionally invested and committed to the programme. This emotional investment was seen as a motivation to enrol to be a better parent, irrespective of financial reward (Gross et al., 2011). Financial incentives are costly and perhaps an added expense to community organisations with limited budgets considering the organisation may already be addressing expensive structural barriers by providing childcare, a meal and transport costs. These findings suggest that

monetary incentives for parental engagement are not as effective as initially thought and may even reduce intrinsic motivations.

2.7 Changing perspectives: Understanding low rates of completion

Low attendance rates have been commonly reported in research studies, potentially undermining programme effectiveness through low rates of recruitment, reduced parental engagement and high rates of attrition. For example, Eisner and Meidert (2011) found that between enrolment and course completion, 40% of participants dropped out of the intervention. Abraczinskas et al. (2020) reported similar enrolment to completion drop-out rates: a decline from an initial enrolment rate of 23.6% to initiation (17.5%) ending in half of participants who enrolled actually competing the programme (12%). The challenges of engaging and retaining parents in programmes should be examined (Snell-Johns et al., 2004) but may require a shift in perceptions of the "hard to reach" or "seldom heard" by organisations and practitioners (Cortis et al., 2009). According to Hjörne et al. (2010), organisations classify people and events to make sense of their worlds, blaming sections of society for failing to engage without any reflection on what they could do better. Perhaps, the problem of attrition lies when "programme goals do not complement participant goals" (Gross, Julion, and Fogg (2001, p. 246) and are not seen as mutually agreed.

2.7.1 Changing perspectives: Understanding unmet literacy needs

Many established programmes targeted at a parental audience (e.g., Triple P Parenting Programme (Sanders, 2008), the PACE Parenting Programme (Hughes, Miles, Gethin, & Gethin, 2012) and the Chicago Parenting Programme (Garvey et al., 2006)) present inherent literacy demands. For example, the Triple P programme involves parents completing a written workbook (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Eisner & Meidert, 2011; Heinrichs, 2006; Winslow et al., 2016). The PACE programme requires parents to read handouts and posters (Dumas et al., 2010), and the Chicago Parent Programme requires written homework completion (Gross et al., 2011). Unmet literacy needs are not explicitly mentioned as a barrier to engagement, and yet most parent training programmes demand literacy skills. UNESCO (2017) estimate there are over 750 million people worldwide, two-thirds women, with literacy difficulties. It is estimated that 73 million people lack qualifications above secondary school level in Europe because of poor literacy skills. PISA, the OECD's Programme for International Assessment, shows that one in five fifteen-year-olds has poor reading skills (OECD, 2022). If a parent has unmet literacy needs, their perceived control over their

participation may be compromised (Ajzen, 1991). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that parental engagement will be affected by participants' unmet literacy needs and therefore these needs should be considered when designing parental engagement strategies.

2.7.2 Changing perspectives: Pre-treatment strategies to address barriers to parental engagement

Pre-treatment discussions with parents that address practical barriers for increasing family support have been identified as one possible solution to improve levels of parental engagement (Ingoldsby, 2010; Miller & Prinz, 2003; Morawska & Sanders, 2006). Nock and Ferriter (2005, p. 156 & 160) have suggested "preparatory enhancement strategies" and "continuous enhancement strategies". For example, a service-provider could engage with the parent to address any barriers to attendance, perhaps providing transport or child-minding facilities before the programme begins. These two suggestions could support a realignment of preconceived expectations with programme content and the process of engagement for the parent. Lefforge, Donohue, and Strada (2007) reported that preparatory enhancement strategies supported practical aspects of parents' engagement: giving parents information on what to expect may increase attendance and retention (Staudt, 2007). Providing parents with the information they need may support effective engagement by supporting initial negotiation of a mutually agreed desired outcome. Melvin, Meyer, and Scarinci (2020, p. 2) also discuss how encouraging families to attend speech and language therapy "may be a necessary precursor to realising a family's active involvement inside and outside sessions". As previously described, parental engagement is considered to be co-constructed (Bright et al., 2014). Therefore, inserting a pre-engagement strategy into the process of engagement could address parents' concerns about the programme and their need to feel safe, thereby supporting parental engagement (Barrett, 2008; McKay et al., 2021; Mytton et al., 2014). Pre-treatment strategies may also entail parents and practitioners meeting each other to discuss any other specific barriers that may need to be addressed. This could allay parents' fear of stigma and judgement and may enhance engagement (Butler, Gregg, Calam, & Wittkowski, 2020).

2.8 Addressing practical barriers to engagement

The time taken to address parents' concerns, fears and address barriers during pre-treatment strategies, for example supporting childcare or transport, is often time well

spent as it supports parents to start and stay engaged in the programme (Prinz & Miller, 1996). Likewise, addressing practical barriers may support parental engagement. For instance the use of phone call reminders, reminder letters to attend appointments, personal interviews, and low-cost or free services have all been recommended to overcome barriers to parental engagement (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Lefforge et al., 2007; Snell-Johns et al., 2004; Winslow et al., 2016). Promotional strategies such as posters and leaflets may be important to communicate with parents that the service exists and is seeking participants: given the likelihood of unmet literacy needs, colourful posters with photos may work well to support parents who may have literacy needs (Barrett, 2008). Advertising parenting programmes to a universal population has been found to allay the stigma of being “hard-to-reach” parents (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

The most common recruitment strategies reported are word-of-mouth, referral agencies, face-to-face contact with practitioners, community events and information sharing at collaborative meetings (Khavjou, Turner, & Jones, 2018). As these practical strategies, including phone calls and face-to-face contact with parents, are time consuming, it is important to have sufficient staff trained to ensure this aspect of engagement is carried out effectively (Lefforge et al., 2007). Food and other practical incentives to encourage participation is another aspect of engagement that is worthwhile (Cortis et al., 2009). Word of mouth is important as it usually stems from parents who have completed the programme and it encourages parents in the community to attend. However, there is no control over word of mouth by the service, so the extent to which word of mouth addresses barriers to parental engagement is dependent on parents’ sharing positive feedback (Rodriguez, Rodriguez, & Davis, 2006).

2.8.1 Addressing barriers: Welcoming environment

Another method of addressing barriers to parental engagement is ensuring a welcoming environment. It is suggested that this encourages interactions between practitioners and parents and creates familiarity and a sense of ownership for the parents (Boyle, Hanafin, & Flynn, 2018; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Spoth & Redmond, 2000). A welcoming environment can be established by the service and it is recommended to be grounded in strong leadership, supporting an ethos of respect and valuing of the parents in the service to help address barriers to engagement (Goodall, 2018). A welcoming environment can encompass an open shared dialogue

that enhances communication between a parent and a practitioner through modelled approaches to new learning. This can help to ensure the information given is understood, which is particularly important for parents who may be introducing new practices in the home learning environment (Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021; Kim et al., 2012; King et al., 2014; Melvin et al., 2019; Simone, Hauptman, & Hasty, 2019). A welcoming, supportive environment has also been found to be more likely to facilitate parents to feel safe and encouraged to change their behaviours in the home learning environment and to enhance opportunities for peer support (Butler et al., 2020; Goodall et al., 2010). The social aspect of peer learning is helpful for parents new to an area and in need of new friends, and it may also create a social acceptance of new practices (Doyle & Zhang, 2011). Motivation can be linked to the parents' perceived need for support and their readiness to change (Morawska & Sanders, 2006; Spoth et al., 1996). It has been reported that parents are often motivated if they perceive that the intervention is easy to engage in, to complete, and the programme suits their aim of supporting their children (Finan et al., 2018). All of the former factors can be facilitated through a welcoming environment.

2.8.2 Addressing barriers: Practitioner knowledge, skills and understanding

A further approach to addressing barriers to parental engagement is by enhancing practitioners' knowledge, skills, and understanding (Day, 2013; Klatte et al., 2020; LaRocque, 2013). The importance of practitioners' awareness and sensitivity to cultural backgrounds, and advertising of programmes in favourable terms to parents are essential factors to consider to address barriers to parental engagement (Cortis et al., 2009; McCurdy & Daro, 2001). Having a good partnership and networking with other services can be conducive to good referral pathways and sharing of engagement strategies (Barrett, 2008). Parental engagement has been found to be enhanced if it aligns well with the community where it is being delivered (Carpentier et al., 2007; Kumpfer et al., 2002). This finding highlights the importance of practitioners' developing a socio-cultural approach to parental engagement (González et al., 2005; Weiss et al., 2014). Designing interventions that are relevant to community needs can enhance parents' understanding of a service, and increase their likelihood of choosing to engage (Barrett, 2008). Continuous professional development for practitioners to enhance parental engagement is important: practitioners' level of experience, training, cultural competence and workload all contribute to enhanced parental engagement

practices (Goodall et al., 2010; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Ingoldsby, 2010). For example, professional development could enhance practitioners' interpersonal skills that are needed to engage with diverse parents with individual needs and preferences (Axford et al., 2012). Professional development may also help practitioners understand different parental cultural practices and perhaps support the understanding of the impact of disadvantage on families and their communities (Staudt, 2007). Similarly, Bright et al. (2014) calls for practitioners to reflect on their involvement in the engagement process, and consider barriers to parental engagement as a shared practitioner/parent problem whereby solutions are co-created and do not rest solely with the parents. Consequently, collaborative practice has been suggested as another way to support parental engagement, with An et al. (2018, p. 260) promoting 'relational practice' (e.g., a practitioner showing respect and empathy with good listening skills) and 'participatory practice' (e.g., engaging parents in the programme and including their needs and voice). A collaborative approach between parents and practitioners is reported to support the creation of a trusted relationship where parents feel valued and enhances parental engagement.

2.9 Evaluating engagement: Technique utilisation

Eisner and Meidert (2011) introduce technique utilisation as a measure of evaluating parental engagement. Technique utilisation is described as "the sustained and competent application of taught parenting principles in daily interactions with the child" (Eisner & Meidert, 2011, p. 84). Technique utilisation adds to our understanding of engagement with parenting programmes by focusing on parents as change agents. This component of the engagement process can be seen in the CAPE model of engagement (Piotrowska et al. (2017), although described in the model as enactment. Including technique utilisation as a component of the parental engagement process could ensure practitioners and programme designers develop research and recruitment strategies that focus on the teaching-learning environment. The relationship-building process, including course climate, could be seen as levers to support parents to act as change agents in their home practice.

2.10 Conclusion

The importance of parental engagement in interventions to support their children's development is beyond dispute (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2011; Melvin et al., 2019). Parents and community services have a role to play in activating children's learning alongside schools (DES, 2012). Working in partnership with parents is

recognised as the optimal approach (NCCA, 2009; TUSLA, 2015). Children's language, literacy, social, emotional and behavioural development is contingent on parents' capabilities to support them. Family literacy programmes that support and target these developmental areas can facilitate parents in their capacity to develop their children's abilities in each area. Evidence-based programmes, with strategies that are effective in engaging parents to maximise the potential benefits, are required. Positive changes and numerous benefits can be realised when parents and services align and engage with each other for the benefit of the children (Jeynes, 2018). A collective, shared understanding of parental engagement and all its aspects is crucial to enhancing parental engagement practices (Chacko et al., 2016; Haine-Schlagel et al., 2016; Ingoldsby, 2010; Klatte et al., 2020). Taking into consideration the multi-stage process and the multiple aspects of parental engagement, there still appears to be challenges in overcoming barriers and understanding how engagement could be further enhanced. Multiple barriers to engagement have been described above with possible ways of addressing them. However, parental engagement in interventions that support their children's development, whether voluntary or based on need, is complex and multi-faceted (Goodall, 2018; Rochford et al., 2014). Comprehensively and effectively addressing barriers to parental engagement is a challenge that continues, and despite best efforts, barriers still exist, especially in areas of low socioeconomic status (SES) (Kazdin et al., 1997).

The relationship triad between parents, children and service practitioners features highly in research but concrete, practical solutions to enhance the relationship are lacking (King et al., 2014; Staudt, 2007). Much of the available body of research adopts a positivist approach and is positioned from the perspective of the service provider or practitioner (Auerbach, 2011; Ishimaru, 2019). Evidence of parents' sense of agency, their power and their voice is less visible in the research on parental engagement (Treanor, 2017; Vincent, 2017). Further research is required, in real-life settings, to determine parents' and practitioners' perspectives on what works to enhance the engagement of parents in programmes that aim to support their child's development for optimal life opportunities (Li, Ochoa, McWayne, Priebe Rocha, & Hyun, 2023; Williams & Sánchez, 2012). A clear and cohesive understanding of further nuanced aspects of parental engagement that is grounded in evidence and that includes parents' unique perspectives alongside those of practitioners, may help ensure optimal parental engagement for families, services, and society.

2.11 Summary

This chapter has synthesized some of the literature related to parental engagement, including definitions, conceptualisations, benefits and barriers. While much is documented about the multi-faceted, multi-staged, and multiple aspect of parental engagement, gaps are evident in how to comprehensively address the apparent challenges in day-to-day practice to ensure the most effective engagement. In addition, voices of the parents themselves are noticeably absent from many discussions relating to parental engagement and how it may best be implemented. Research specific to an Irish context is also minimal.

The next chapter describes the application of two methodologies with the aim of addressing these research gaps: a summary of action research and a full description of the application of Constructivist Grounded Theory in this research.

Chapter 3: Action research and Constructivist Grounded Theory

3. Introduction

Action research (AR) was the methodology initially chosen for this research study in 2018/19. However, once the extent of the COVID-19 pandemic was fully realised a shift to a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach was deemed necessary. This chapter will summarise AR and give a fuller description of CGT, including its defining features and alignment with my ontological and epistemological perspectives, which provided a rationale for selecting it.

3.1 Research questions

This study viewed the process of effective parental engagement through the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners on engagement strategies employed in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. The research question was 'how can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage?' To address this research question and to frame the study an appropriate methodology was required. For any research project, choosing a methodology is a chance for the researcher to design a process that supports the answering of the research question. It involves reflection on the researcher's philosophical assumptions and allows the inclusion of the ontological and epistemological worldview of the researcher (Bryman, 2016; Creswell, 2014; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013).

3.1.1 Research paradigms

Research paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), ontologies and epistemologies (Crotty, 1998), or worldviews (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) are the sets of beliefs brought to a study by the researcher. In this next section I describe four research paradigms to support my choice in method based on my theoretical perspective (my ontological and epistemological perspectives). The four research paradigms under review are positivism, post-positivism, pragmatism and constructivism (see Table 3.1 for an overview on the research paradigms discussed here).

3.1.2 Positivism

Positivism is informed by an objectivist epistemology, which views 'things' as already having meaning and the researcher's role is to discover the meaning within (Crotty,

1998). In positivism the researcher is an observer of reality, seeking to discover ‘absolute truth’ (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Positivist research methods consist of objective and systematic observation. Positivism may include an experimental design as the methodology, with methods for collecting data such as sampling or statistical analysis. The results from a positivist research enquiry are seen as provable through repetition and replication (Bryman, 2016).

3.1.3 Post-positivism

Post-positivism rejects the positivist paradigm proposing that the researcher influences what is observed and therefore could influence the result (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Post-positivist research is deductive, starting with a hypothesis. The researcher then collects data that either supports or disproves the original theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This type of research is often employed in health-based research, using observations and measurements to determine outcomes and minimise researcher influence, thus enabling results to be generalised (Creswell, 2014). Therefore research conducted using a post-positivism approach is based on an objectivist epistemology, which aims to ensure the research produces valid and reliable findings that are as free from researcher bias as possible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

3.1.4 Pragmatism

Pragmatists reject the idea of a single truth and single research method and often employ mixed methods research methodologies (Patel., 2015). Truth for a pragmatist always occurs in relation to social, historical, and political contexts (Creswell, 2014). Pragmatism recognises that there are many different ways to interpret the world through multiple interactions with people. This perspective assumes that social reality is constructed through interaction that relies on language and communication (Charmaz, 2014). Furthermore, a pragmatist paradigm uses the most appropriate research methods to address the study: this supports the design of the study, using what is most suitable to address the research problem based on the circumstances and context (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Additionally, pragmatists state that reality is constantly evaluated and negotiated and gives freedom of choice to researchers on methods to choose (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.1.5 Constructivism

Constructivist researchers propose that multiple realities exist, and individuals develop meanings and understandings through their experiences (Crotty, 1998). In parallel,

constructivists assert that all knowledge is created through our social interactions (Raskin, 2002). Alongside this, meanings are "varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look at a complexity of views rather than narrowing meaning into a few categories or ideas" (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Consequently, constructivists propose that research needs to be studied in context using social and cultural understandings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Furthermore, this new knowledge is co-constructed by the values and attitudes of the participants and the researcher (Charmaz, 2014).

Table 3.1: An overview of the research paradigms outlined (Patel., 2015).

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology
Positivism	Absolute truth is out there just waiting to be discovered.	Objectivist epistemology	• Experimental research • Survey design
Post- positivism	Absolute truth is out there, and a researcher can influence findings.	Objectivist epistemology	• Experimental research • Survey design
Pragmatism	Reality is constantly negotiated in light of situations.	The best method is the one that solves the problem.	• Mixed methods. • Action research. • Grounded Theory
Constructivism	Multiple Realities exist and are created through interactions	Reality is interpreted and viewed through social interactions	• Ethnography • Grounded Theory • Action research • Discourse analysis

3.1.6 Philosophical perspectives

To begin this research study, I wanted to choose a research design that aligned with my worldview. As this study centred on the authentic perspectives of parents and practitioners, I regarded qualitative methods as the best approach to gather rich and nuanced data from participants to help answer my research question. I wanted to understand the perspectives of the research participants on engagement and how they interpreted their experiences, and I perceived that qualitative research aligned with the aim of this inquiry (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), researchers need to position themselves in relation to their philosophical

worldview and acknowledge the research design related to their view. Moreover, philosophical paradigms are used by researchers to define an ontological and epistemological research perspective to support their choice of methodology (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013) (see Figure 3.1 for an outline of the steps needed to choose a methodology). Therefore, my philosophical perspectives influenced how this study was conducted by illuminating my ontological views (my beliefs about the nature of reality) and epistemological views (my beliefs about the nature of knowledge and knowing) (Merriam & Tisdall, 2016). As discussed below, my ontological and epistemological perspectives were the foundations of this study (Grix, 2010). A research paradigm is a belief system based on the researcher's assumptions of the world, stemming from interrelated epistemological and ontological viewpoints (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). My ontological and epistemological perspectives supported my understanding of how knowledge is viewed and how I saw myself in relation to this knowledge (Patel., 2015).

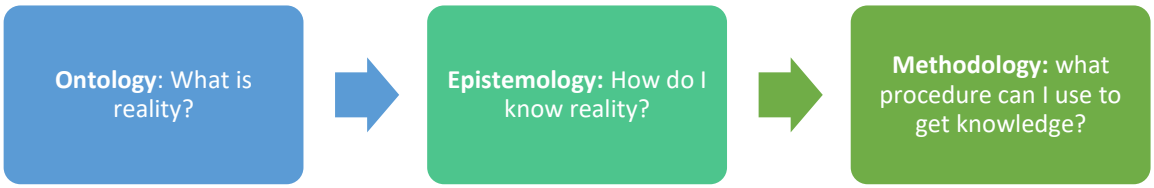

Figure 3.1: The steps needed to consider to choose a methodology (Patel., 2015).

3.1.7 Ontology - what is reality?

As previously stated, ontology refers to how a researcher may view reality. Blaikie (2007) describes ontology as claims to what makes up a researcher's social reality. According to Blaikie (2007) the two most prominent ontological positions along a continuum of ontological positions are realist ontology and idealist ontology. Realist ontologists claim only what can be observed to exist (e.g., events or objects) Conversely, idealist ontologists deem reality is people's beliefs or constructions of their reality making up their social realities (Blaikie, 2007). Similarly Bryman (2016, p. 29) describes two ontological positions, objectivism and constructionism: objectivism as an ontological position views social phenomena as external facts beyond "our reach or influence" and constructionism as reality developed through social interaction that is continually revised through experience (Bryman, 2016). Birks and Mills (2015, p. 179)

assert that ontology is “the study of being, concerned with concepts of existence and reality”. As my ontological perspective underpinned this whole research project (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014), it is important to define my ontological viewpoint in relation to this study and choice of methodology.

My ontological assumption is an interconnected narrative of my life experiences. My initial experience of living in an area of high deprivation and socio-economic need is at the core of my being and therefore impacts on everything I think and do (chapter 1). My knowledge of educational barriers, inequalities and poverty is the basis of the deep empathy I feel for this shared experience I have with the parents and the practitioners I work with. My perspective therefore aligned closely with an idealist/constructionism ontological position (Blaikie, 2007; Bryman, 2016). I regard human experience in our interactions with the social world as giving meaning to our reality.

3.1.8 Epistemology – how do I know reality?

Epistemology is a “theory of knowledge” (Blaikie, 2007, p. 18) concerned with how we know about reality (Grix, 2010) and is based on the ontological position researchers hold. Crotty (1998, p. 3) defines epistemology as “the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology”. Crotty (1998) refers to the relationship between ontology, epistemology and methodology as a way for a researcher to systematically examine their own beliefs before embarking on a research project. Blaikie (2007) describes three ways in which researchers can view how meaning is construed: objectivism, subjectivism and constructivism. Objectivism views ‘things’ as already having meaning and the researcher’s role is to discover the meaning within, it is simply waiting to be discovered and therefore all researchers will discover the same meaning. In subjectivism the observer imposes meaning and therefore each researcher will view the research differently. Constructionism rejects both objectivism and subjectivism, describing meaning as constructed with the researcher playing a role in its creation through observation and interaction (Blaikie, 2007; Crotty, 1998).

My epistemological perspective for this study was aligned with constructionism and stemmed from my ontology and my understanding of the lived reality of socio-economic disadvantage. This understanding informed and authenticated my practice and my research approach and validated how I engage with parents and practitioners. This perspective supported my understanding of how parents and practitioners might

understand knowledge differently. My understanding of my ontological and epistemological viewpoints supported how I viewed knowledge and how I viewed myself in relation to this knowledge. Awareness of my assumptions on knowledge and how it is known supported my choice of methodology.

3.1.9 My worldview

Having completed this review of my research paradigm I understood that my belief system was based on my assumptions of the world, stemming from my interrelated epistemological and ontological perspectives (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). My ontological and epistemological viewpoints are based on my life experiences and this has supported my understanding of how knowledge is viewed and how I saw myself in relation to this study (Patel., 2015). My understanding of an area of low SES is tied to my life experiences and links with my understanding of barriers to parental engagement. This research study aimed to develop a parental engagement framework that accommodates multiple realities and truths for the participants involved. I was influenced by Freire (1976, p. 53) and his theory of learning for equality and social justice “for liberation”. I consider that adults need to think critically about their understanding of their worlds and their environment and to realise crucially that they have an opportunity to change it for the better. I was aware of my influence and bias in this research and as such I openly acknowledged my positionality with regard to this study in chapter 1. This openness I hope supported my best effort to ensure that this study was trustworthy and credible.

3.1.10 Summary

Having reviewed the different research paradigms, I believed the constructivist paradigm aligned most with my ontological and epistemological perspective as I accept that there are multiple realities based on our interactions with the social world. I understood that the participants would act as co-creators for this research inquiry and support the development of a universal engagement framework for professionals from multiple disciplines. I sought to include the experiences of parents and practitioners on current engagement practices and to look collectively for ways to enhance engagement. I conceived the constructivist paradigm allowed for my presence in the research and allowed me to engage in the process with the participants. Action research (AR) was therefore chosen as the method for this research and was employed in the initial phases of the research inquiry between September 2018 and May 2021.

In the next section I will summarise action research as the original methodology chosen for this study.

3.2. Defining action research

Action research (AR) is a broad term described as a “family of practices of living inquiry” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 1) that supports practical outcomes and the creation of new understandings. AR is “an orientation to inquiry” (ibid), a desire to change with others, to create knowledge that is useful to everyday living. It is distinguished from other research methodologies by its inclusivity of participants, involving them in the identification and analysis of problems and supporting their active involvement in creating a solution (Bryman, 2016). AR involves individuals looking at ways to improve what they are doing, in dialogue and collaboration with other critically reflexive individuals, to create new forms of knowledge (McNiff, 2016). AR seeks to conduct research *with* people rather than *on* people and therefore it aims to democratise the research process (Wood, McAteer, & Whitehead, 2019). AR is a research paradigm where the emphasis is firmly placed on bringing about change, and holds each participant’s perspective as core to generating knowledge (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

3.2.1 Reasons for choosing action research.

I chose AR as a methodology for three reasons. Firstly, its inclusivity of participants would involve them in the identification and analysis of problems and support their active involvement in creating a solution (Casey, Coghlan, Carroll, & Stokes, 2023; Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). AR methodology would support the aim of this research inquiry to develop a universal parental engagement framework. Secondly, having reviewed my philosophical perspectives, my ontological and epistemological positions and my understanding of my positionality, AR aligned with my philosophical perspective on equality and justice. And finally, AR aligned with my aim of conducting research in my own organisation and with its democratising philosophy I wanted to conduct research *with* people rather than *on* people. Taken together, these three viewpoints supported my original choice of action research as my methodology.

Whilst I consider that AR was a good choice for this research originally in 2018, the methodology became extremely challenging once the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic were fully realised; cycles of AR became extremely difficult to implement

under the public health restrictions (Gov.i.e, 2020) and it subsequently became necessary to change my methodology to Constructivist Grounded Theory.

3.2.2 Change in research question

The change in methodology brought a refinement of the research question and research focus. This change meant I had to shift from the essence of AR and its focus on cycles of change to a focus on explanation and theory building. Table 3.2 outlines the change in research question from AR to CGT.

Table 3.2: Change in research question from AR to GT

Methodology	***Action research***	***Constructivist Grounded Theory***
Research question	How can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage?	An exploration into the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners on parental engagement strategies employed in family literacy programmes in an community of socio-economic disadvantage.
Principal sub-questions	1. How can an inter-disciplinary team inform how barriers to parental engagement can be addressed, to maximise how parents can support their children's language and literacy development? 2. How can involving parents in the research process enhance our understanding of parental engagement and subsequently how they support their children's language and literacy development through attending family literacy programmes?	1. What can the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners tell us about how barriers to parental engagement can be addressed, to maximise how parents attending community-based programmes can support their children's learning and development? 2. How can the perspectives of parents and practitioners enhance our understanding of what works in the parental engagement practices of a community-based programme.

3.3 Introduction to Grounded Theory

In this section I introduce Grounded Theory (GT) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and trace its development as a methodology that has become a "family of methods" including Classic GT, Straussian GT and Constructivist GT (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). I explain the epistemological underpinnings of the variation of GT methods, before I give a brief description of the three GT variants. I then review my choice of CGT in relation to my philosophical perspective and outline the approaches used in CGT. Following this, I discuss the contested view of GT to include the literature review and a critical analysis of using a GT approach (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Keane, 2015). I finish this section by discussing rigour in qualitative research as it pertains to CGT.

3.3.1 Grounded Theory overview

GT is a very popular methodology developed in the 1960s and defined as “the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1). In 1967 the idea to generate theory from data as opposed to testing existing theory was well received by social scientists who saw it as a reaction to the limitations of traditional positivist approaches (Birks & Mills, 2015; Tie, Birks, & Francis, 2019). Moreover, GT is a qualitative method that sets out to understand and develop a theory about the phenomenon under investigation (Birks & Mills, 2015). The philosophical roots of GT are embedded in Symbolic Interactionism (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Marcellus, 2005), which views the individual as developing meaning from interactions with others in the world (Blumer, 1954; Mead, 1931). The word “grounded” in the title of the methodology denotes the double role of the methodology, whereby the research question is grounded in the experiences of people it relates to, and through the process of data analysis, the theory that is developed is grounded in the data (Glaser, 2005; Lo, 2016).

GT provides many systematic methods to conduct research (Charmaz, 2017a; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; St. Clair, Hunter, Cola, & Boland, 2018). It proposes several concrete strategies to develop theory through analysing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) (see Table 3.3 for a description of GT analytic tools common to all variants). Moreover, GT methods involve a systematic iterative process of collecting data. There is constant interaction with the data through data analysis using coding. Furthermore, the grounded theory researcher analyses the relationship between concepts, using tools such as theoretical sampling, coding and constant comparison, and comparative methods across the data set which keeps the researcher interacting with the data and the evolving analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

GT has evolved over the years from the initial “discovery” book (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Currently, within GT there is a “family of methods claiming the GTM mantle”: Classic GT; Straussian GT; and Constructivist GT by Charmaz (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 11). For clarity, there are additional GT methods that are included in the “family of methods”, for example, Dimensional Analysis was proposed by Schatzman (1991, p. 303) “as a methodological approach to the grounded theory in qualitative research”. Clarke (2005) developed Situational Analysis as another version of a GT method which involves situational maps, social worlds and positional maps. Later, Thornberg (2012)

proposed Informed Grounded Theory, which supports development of theory grounded in data by GT methods while being informed by existing research literature and theoretical frameworks. Finally Goldkuhl, Cronholm, and Lind (2020) presented Multi-Grounded Action Research which combines elements from GT and AR methods. These methods will not be featured in this thesis, instead I will focus on the three major variants: Classic GT, the Straussian GT and Constructivist GT by Charmaz, as they are more attuned with this study's aims and objectives. Table 3.3 lists analytic tools that are common to all variants of GT.

Table 3.3: GT analytic tools (common to all variations of GT)

Strategy	Explanation
Iterative data collection and analysis.	Simultaneous data collection and analysis occurs in all methods (Morse et al., 2021).
Writing Memos	Memo writing is a recording of the researcher's codes and ideas about them, a recording of the researcher's understanding as the process proceeds (Morse et al., 2021).
Theoretical sampling	Process of identifying and pursuing clues that arise during analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 181).
Theoretical saturation	Decisions on next step data collection is determined by the theory under construction (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 181).
Theoretical sorting	Theoretical sorting of memos to support the development of the theory (Charmaz, 2014).
Constant comparison	Data are compared for similarities and differences which leads to the identification of concepts and categories (Corbin, 2017).
Exploration of negative cases	Analysis of instances or participants that do not fit with the emerging pattern – determining why and how they don't fit adds analytic depth and insight (Morse et al., 2021, p. 6).
Development of codes to categories to an integrated theory and explanation	The iterative process of grounded theory methods - coding, constant comparative analysis, clustering and diagramming, - supports the development of categories leading to theory development (Timonen, Foley, & Conlon, 2018).

3.3.2 The family of Grounded Theory methods

For a researcher to choose which version of GT is aligned with their personal philosophy, it is important to understand the diversity within the family of methods: Classic GT, Straussian GT and Constructivist GT by Charmaz, which will be briefly described here.

3.3.2.1 Classic Grounded Theory

The original Classic GT is a research methodology to generate theory from data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Glaser was influenced by positivism, which seeks explanation and prediction, considering reality that can be understood, measured and identified (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Data collection in Classic GT is completed through interviews that are not recorded, as Glaser deemed that recording separated the researcher from the data collected (Birks & Mills, 2015). The researcher does not develop a set of questions. Instead, the researcher approaches the interview with a broader question that allows participants to speak about their experience that supports the researcher to be more open to the emerging data (O'Connor, Carpenter, & Coughlan, 2018). Researchers' preconceptions are considered like any other variable of the research and are part of the analytical process and managed through that process. Therefore, the researcher does not need to identify their preconceptions, as they are not a part of final theory development (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In Classic GT there are two data analysis processes: substantive and theoretical coding. In the first process the researcher codes the data and then systematically analyses the codes to verify or prove a position (Birks & Mills, 2015; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the second process, theoretical coding, the researcher looks at the data for categories, uses memos to track analysis and develops constant comparison of the data across the two stages to discover theoretical ideas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The constant comparative method is an iterative process occurring across the substantive and theoretical coding stages, involving the constant comparison of concepts and incidents discovered during data analysis (Berthelsen, 2020; Glaser, 1992). A literature review is delayed within Classic GT until a theory has started to develop, to avoid predetermined ideas. Glaser (2012) deemed that the researcher needs to create distance for themselves from the data and abstraction which will lead to better explanatory power of the theory. Glaser asserts that this distance supports the researcher to avoid forcing data into any preconceptions (Glaser, 1992) (See Table 3.6 for a comparison of the family of GT methodologies).

3.3.2.2 Straussian Grounded Theory

As GT methodology evolved, Strauss developed his own version (Corbin, 2021). Strauss' version has its epistemological roots in pragmatism, although this is only lately being acknowledged (Corbin, 2017). Straussian GT views the researcher as affecting the research process through their interaction, "taking an active role in responding to

the events and problems encountered in lives" (Corbin, 2021, p. 301). Straussian GT has a clear procedure and a defined coding paradigm based on "coding families" that are present in the Straussian procedures of open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The Straussian GT researcher uses unstructured interview questions to allow participants speak freely and uninterrupted (Birks, Hoare, & Mills, 2019). Straussian GT differs from Classic GT in the data analysis process, the procedures used, and in its epistemological approach (Walker & Myrick, 2006).

Both Classic GT and Straussian GT use coding, constant comparison, questioning of the data, theoretical sampling and memos in the process of developing theory, and the differences are seen in how the procedures are performed (Walker & Myrick, 2006). Strauss's version of GT emphasises that induction, deduction and verification are essential components of theory development (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Glaser (1992) argued that Straussian GT is not a variation of GT but a different methodology because of the differences in coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Although coding is important in both Classic GT and Straussian GT, both versions approach coding differently. For example, in Classic GT there are two coding procedures: substantive and theoretical coding. Substantive coding has two subphases, open and selective coding which produces categories. Theoretical coding brings the substantive codes together to develop theory. In Straussian GT coding consists of three phases: open, axial, and selective coding. Straussian GT applies the constant comparative method and questioning across the three coding phases (Walker & Myrick, 2006). The role of unstructured interview questions when collecting data is another difference between Straussian GT and Classic GT. Unstructured interview questions enhance the participants' ability to speak freely and uninterrupted (Birks et al., 2019) (see Table 3.4 for a comparison of the family of GT methodologies). A general reading of literature is seen as important to support the Straussian GT researcher in looking for gaps in knowledge and justification for the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).

3.3.2.3 Constructivist Grounded Theory

An additional advancement in the growth of GT methodology is Constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2021). This methodology views theory as constructed rather than discovered and assumes a constructivist epistemology. CGT views research as constructed taking "the researcher's position, privileges, perspective and interactions into account as an inherent part of the research reality" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13). The

Constructivist GT researcher develops an “interview guide” prior to engaging with participants and gathering knowledge from the relevant field of literature is encouraged to support the interview process (Charmaz, 2014). The first procedure in CGT data analysis is initial coding. The procedure of initial line by line coding supports the researcher to get close to the data and to start constructing ideas. The use of gerunds and in-vivo codes as symbolic markers of participants’ speech and meanings is encouraged. Gerunds are used in the coding process to “define implicit meanings and actions” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 124). Following the first phase of coding there is a process of focused coding which develops the most salient codes followed by theoretical integration which connects codes into categories (Charmaz, 2014).

CGT methodology is also in contrast with the methods of both Strauss and Glaser on ontological and epistemological grounds (Charmaz, 2021). The core difference between other GT methods and Constructivist GT is the shift from what is proposed as an objective stance of the researcher. In Constructivist GT, the researcher is considered part of the data creation process and must examine their preconceptions and privileges on the analysis of the data (Charmaz, 2017a; Herron, Priest, & Read, 2020). Consequently, CGT is frequently associated with social justice enquiries due to the understanding that the researcher and research participants are co-creators of the theory (Hallberg, 2006; Levers, 2013; Prigol & Behrens, 2019). In Constructivist GT, data is analysed with a contextual view to the lived experience of the participants (Hudson, 2020; Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019; Stokes & Ross, 2020). Constructivist GT requires the researcher to be reflexive and be cognisant of their actions and decisions during the research process (Charmaz, 2017a). The development of the researcher’s methodological self-consciousness supports the researcher to be reflexive and not force preconceptions onto the data (Charmaz, 2014, 2017b). This process involves incorporating participants’ worldviews and experiences, allowing theory to evolve from the iterative data collection process and making meaning from participants’ experiences (Charmaz, 2021). Engaging with the literature is not only allowed in CGT but is encouraged in order to clarify ideas, to support making comparisons, to develop theoretical discussions and to provide justification for the research (Charmaz, 2014; Keane, 2015; Thornberg, 2012) (see Table 3.4 for a comparison of the family of GT methodologies).

Table 3.4: A comparison of the family of GT methods

	The Family of GT methods		
	Classic GT	**Straussian GT**	**Constructivist GT**
Epistemology	• Positivist.	• Pragmatist.	• Constructivist.
Role of researcher	• The researcher remains remote from participants.	• The researcher affects the research process through interaction	• The researcher views research as co-constructed
Research questions	• Researcher does not develop a set of questions. • Researcher approaches the interview with a broader question allowing participants to speak about their experience. • Researcher is more open to the emerging data (O'Connor et al., 2018)	• Researcher uses unstructured interview questions to allow participants speak freely and uninterrupted (Birks et al., 2019)	• Researcher develops an "interview guide" prior to engaging with participants. • Knowledge from the relevant field of literature is encouraged to support the interview process (Charmaz, 2014)
Data coding and analysis	• Coding consists of substantive and theoretical coding. • Substantive coding has two phases: open and selective coding, producing properties and categories. • Theoretical coding happens by weaving substantive codes together into theory (Walker & Myrick, 2006)	• Coding consists of three phases: open, axial and selective. • Uses constant comparative method and questioning in these phases (Walker & Myrick, 2006).	• Initial line by line coding • The use of gerunds and in-vivo codes as symbolic markers of participants' speech and meanings. • Focused coding develops the most salient codes followed by theoretical integration (Charmaz, 2014)
Literature review	• A literature review is delayed until a theory has started to develop (Glaser, 1992).	• A general reading of literature supports the researcher in looking for gaps in knowledge and justification for the research (Corbin & Strauss, 2014).	• Engaging with the literature clarifies ideas, supports making comparisons, develop theoretical discussions and justification for the research (Charmaz, 2014).

Table adapted from (Sebastian, 2019).

3.3.3 Developing theory in Grounded Theory

Across the family of methods in GT methodologies (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), there is ambiguity around what a theory should be and this is mostly the result of differing epistemological stances (Charmaz, 2014). As Apramian, Cristancho, Watling, and Lingard (2017, p. 361) summarise: "for Glaser a grounded theory is abstract, for

Strauss it captures complexity, for Charmaz it is about theorising an argument about the world". The purpose of all GTs is to generate or discover a substantive theory through data interpretation (Urquhart, 2013). GT sets about developing theory through its established, systematic, iterative process of analysing data (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Creswell, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Thornberg & Dunne, 2019). As the researcher applies the essential methods of GT analysis, a set of concepts and categories are developed which are refined into a grounded theory (Tie et al., 2019). The grounded theory developed is described by Birks and Mills (2015, p. 108) as "an explanatory scheme comprising a set of concepts related to each other". Developing concepts and categories that explain the analysis of the data supports theory construction in an interpretive process (Corbin, 2017).

Grounded Theory Methodology is mostly an inductive methodology with distinctive approaches used to explore and sort data that has been collected, for example, the coding process involved after the transcription of interview data (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Morse et al., 2021). Moreover, this inductive approach is "a type of reasoning that begins with a study of a range of individual cases and extrapolates from them to form a conceptual category" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 188). Equally, as a category develops through the researcher's involvement with the data, abductive reasoning is used to create and verify concepts. Abductive reasoning supports the development of categories through the researcher's constant interaction with the data (Reichertz, 2007). The researcher analyses puzzling or interesting findings, considers all possible explanations, and then tests the explanation by analysing more data aimed at developing a theory (Morse et al., 2021; Oliver, 2012).

In the original GT (Classic GT), the final grounded theory "explains or predicts something" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 31). The theory must be consistent and have "theoretical purpose and relevance" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 48); it should be relevant to the problem researched and must be flexible to change. In Straussian GT, theory is constructed from data to explain phenomena by defining concepts in an interpretive process. "At the heart of theorising lies the interplay between researcher and data so that the final theory is a construction of both data and the researcher" (Corbin, 2021, p. 302). In Constructivist GT, the final theory is a co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants and is an interpretation of the researcher's view (Charmaz, 2021). The importance of the researcher's privileges, positions and interactions are considered in the construction

of the theory in CGT (Thornberg, 2012).

The diversity across the family of methods in GT research , outlined in Table 3.5, is caused by differing epistemological stances across the GT methods (Charmaz, 2014). Perhaps this diversity is an asset to researchers ensuring they reflect on their own ontology and epistemology before choosing the approach that is most congruent with their worldview.

Table 3.5: The family of GT methods

Developing theory across the family of GT methods	
Classic GT	• Theory explains or predicts something. • Theory must be consistent and have theoretical purpose and relevance. • Theory developed should be relevant to the problem researched and must be flexible to change (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
Straussian GT	• Constructing theory from data is an interpretive process. • Defines concepts to stand for the meaning of the data. • Interplay between researcher and data. • Final theory Is a construction of both data and the researcher (Corbin, 2021, p. 302)
Constructivist GT	• Theory is a co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants. • Theory is an interpretation of the researchers view. • The importance of the researcher's privileges, positions and interactions are considered in the construction of the theory in CGT (Charmaz, 2014).

3.3.4 Grounded Theory philosophical approaches

As previously stated, all variations of the GT method hold different philosophical underpinnings, for instance, some researchers view Classic GT as epistemologically flexible and useful for researchers holding different philosophical positions (Urquhart & Fernández, 2013; Walsh et al., 2015). Other researchers view Classic GT as having its roots in a positivist philosophy. Furthermore, researchers in Classic GT are viewed as separate from the research participants (Birks et al., 2019; Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). In parallel, as Straussian GT continues to evolve it is seen as moving away from its positivist roots to align with a pragmatist approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Morse et al., 2021). A pragmatist approach assumes social reality and self are constructed and that the researcher affects the research process with a search for multiple perspectives. For a pragmatist, social reality and interaction support the understanding of self and society. Consequently, Constructivist GT (CGT)

is seen as evolving from a pragmatist/constructivist philosophy (Charmaz, 2021). Constructivists view reality as “multiple, processual and constructed” and assume that the researcher affects the research process through their social and cultural histories. The research is co-constructed by the researcher and participants and this fosters reflexivity (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13).

It is important that a researcher chooses a methodology congruent with their “worldview” (Charmaz, 2021; Creswell, 2014). Researchers choosing a GT method are reliant on their understanding of the underlying epistemology and the differences across the Family of GT methods to support that choice (see Table 3.6 for epistemological underpinnings of GT methodology).

Table 3.6: Epistemological underpinnings of GT methodology

Positivist-Classic GT	Pragmatist-Straussian GT	Constructivist – Constructivist GT
• Assumes a single reality. • Assumes an unbiased neutral observer. • Provide explanations and predictions. • Separates the researcher from the participant. (Birks et al., 2019; Charmaz, 2021; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020)	• Assumes social reality and self are constructed. • Assumes researcher affects the research process. • Assumes a search for multiple perspectives. • Social reality and interaction with it support the understanding of self and society. (Birks et al., 2019; Charmaz, 2021)	• Co-constructed by the researcher and participants. • The researcher views research as co-constructed fostering reflexivity. (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13)

3.3.5 My philosophical perspectives and choice of Grounded Theory

Due to the change needed in methodological approach from AR to GT, I reflected once again on my ontological (the study of the nature of reality) and epistemological perspectives (the nature of justifiable knowledge), and I realised they are inherently linked to my worldview (Birks & Mills, 2015; Urquhart, 2013). My ontological perspective is aligned with an idealist/constructionism ontology as I deem that reality is what we construct. Equally, my epistemological perspective informs my worldview, and I am aligned to a constructivist epistemology. I think new knowledge is dependent on social interactions and is subject to change (Bryman, 2016). As a result of my reflections on my worldview I chose Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) as it aligned with my views on equality and social justice, and I was confident it would allow me to address my research question robustly.

CGT methodology “anchors academic knowledge in practical problems in the world” (Charmaz, 2019). Unlike Classic GT, CGT allows the researcher to use the literature to enhance theory development from the onset of the research (Charmaz, Thornberg, & Keane, 2018). In this study, I consulted the literature to write the research proposal to apply for funding. Furthermore, I consulted the literature to conduct a systematic review on initial parental engagement methods. Additionally, I consulted the literature as the theory was being developed, to enhance my conceptual understanding of what was considered engagement in the body of academic knowledge. This supported the research aim of this study of exploring with participants their experience of the process of engagement. Research from a CGT’s perspective is a meaning-making activity where the researcher constructs an understanding of interest from the perspectives of those who experience it (Foley, Timonen, Conlon, & O' Dare, 2021; Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019). My engagement with the literature supported my understanding and was amalgamated with the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners to help inform the development of the theory on effective engagement. Engaging with research participants in this study supported me to develop focus group questions that included disadvantaged and vulnerable parents’ views, coupled with the views of practitioners. This understanding reinforced the sensitising concepts of this study and enhanced the development of a theory on effective engagement (Charmaz, 2014).

Furthermore, in contrast to Classic GT, CGT encourages the researcher to examine their positionality through critical reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2017b). I did this by keeping a research journal, writing memos and reflecting on my own perspective, personal history and my privilege that I was bringing to this research (see my positionality statement in Chapter 1). I concurred with Keane’s (2015, p.422) assertion that reflection on my past experiences added an “additional layer of authenticity and reciprocity to the study”. GT pays close attention to discourse and action by looking at how experience is created, and how situations are acted upon (Charmaz, 2014; Herron et al., 2020; Stokes & Ross, 2020). Therefore, I was conscious that this could support the research aim of developing a theory grounded in the data that would identify parental engagement practices for services engaging parents in supporting the development of their children’s language and literacy skills.

Constructivist GT was also conducive to the current study on parental engagement as it acknowledges my positionality and involvement in the social and cultural setting of the study, and my part in shaping the data through my interpretation of it (Apramian et al., 2017; Herron et al., 2020). Constructivist GT values the researcher's relationship with the participants in the co-construction of data, in this case practitioners and parents (Charmaz, 2017a; Prigol & Behrens, 2019), which is relevant because of my experience of living in the area, an area of high socio-economic need, and my role in developing and delivering the engagement programme. My reasons for choosing CGT are further outlined in Table 3.7.

However, the change in methodology during this study was not without its challenges, which will be described below.

Table 3.7: My reasons for choosing CGT

My reasons for choosing Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2014)	
Theory development	• Explains social processes. • Concepts and categories developed from the data. • Co-constructed knowledge. • Produces theory grounded in the data.
Knowledge of the world	• Aligns with my epistemological and ontological beliefs. • Anchors academic knowledge in practical problems in the world. • Focus on process and change. • Meaning-making activity.
Researcher's role	• Acknowledges the researcher's and the research participants. multiple viewpoints, roles and realities. • Data is co-constructed. • Acknowledges researcher's positionality and involvement in the social and cultural setting.
Analysis	• Iterative analysis. • Data collection. • Initial and focused coding. • Use of Gerunds to immerse researcher in data. • In-vivo codes support immersion. • Writing memos. • Practicing methodological self-consciousness promotes researcher personal growth. • Theoretical sampling for new data. • Categorisation of data and raising categories to a conceptual level. • Developing the theory grounded in the data.
Challenges	• Transcribing and line-by-line coding data is time consuming.

3.3.6 The literature review dilemma

In the original methodology chosen for this study, AR, the literature review is part of the process of AR cycles and researchers are encouraged to read broadly and consistently throughout the research process (Herr & Anderson, 2015; McNiff, 2017a).

Conversely, in GT the literature review can be a controversial element of the methodology (Birks & Mills, 2015). The original core concepts of GT require the researcher to limit exposure to the literature to minimize researcher bias (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and to ensure the literature review does not influence the development of theory which is grounded in the data (Dunne, 2011). In GT, the controversy surrounding the literature review has gained myth-like status, asserting that GT researchers should enter the field of research without any prior knowledge of the literature, and resulting in some documented confusion around the timing of the literature review (Birks & Mills, 2015; McGhee, Marland, & Atkinson, 2007; Morse et al., 2021; Suddaby, 2006; Urquhart & Fernández, 2013). This myth is considered by many to be false, and stems from the original core concepts of Classic GT which requires the researcher to limit their exposure to the literature until the analysis is complete to minimize researcher bias (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Suddaby, 2006). According to Suddaby (2006), this misunderstanding has developed since the inception of GT that assumes that the researcher should have no prior knowledge of the area under investigation. In CGT familiarity with the literature is encouraged, as it enhances sensitivity to nuances in research reports, supports the researcher to make comparisons with new literature developments and enriches the opportunity to support conceptual development (Charmaz et al., 2018). The literature review debate is best understood as a focus on when the literature review is completed and how the researcher can successfully bracket their prior assumptions during the review (Dunne, 2011) (see Table 3.8 for information on the literature review dilemma).

Table 3.8: The literature review dilemma in GT.

Reasons to delay the literature review until analysis completed:	Reasons to conduct a literature review:
• Positivist ontology of Classic GT (Giles, King, & de Lacey, 2013) • Limit researcher bias (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) • To avoid contamination of data with preconceived ideas (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) • Fears of constraining inhibiting and impeding researcher's analysis (Glaser, 1978)	• Research proposals • Funding and ethical applications • Researcher's prior knowledge (Charmaz, 2014; Dunne, 2011; Thornberg, 2012). • Provides justification for research (Giles et al., 2013) • To detect gaps in knowledge • To develop and identify concepts. • Enhance theory development (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017; Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Lo, 2016). • Supports theoretical sensitivity (Charmaz, 2014; Dunne, 2011; McGhee et al., 2007; Thornberg, 2012)

When analysing data, a CGT researcher needs to be aware of their bias and avoid imposing existing theories on the data, allowing theories to emerge from the data while remaining open to the concepts that are emerging, keeping “an open mind versus an empty head” (Giles et al., 2013, p. E29). Current thinking in CGT acknowledges that linking research questions, findings and discussions to the existing literature and the relationships between them demonstrates the credibility and contribution of the research to the generation of knowledge (Bryman, 2016; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). Once the researcher is engaging with the literature with a critical, reflective stance it is possible then to “let this material lie fallow until after you have developed your categories and the analytical relationships between them”(Charmaz, 2014, p. 307).

To conduct a literature review across the family of GT methods, some researchers have suggested a process that can be followed across the research (see Table 3.9.). For example, a broad literature review can support the writing of the research proposal to provide justification for the research. Further recommendations are to raise the theory to a conceptual level, to compare and contrast the theory created so the literature can support the researcher to avoid contaminating the ongoing iterative analysis and theory development (Dunne & Ustundag, 2020; Lo, 2016; Martin, 2006).

Table 3.9: Process for GT literature review

Process for GT Literature Review	
Four-stage process for literature review (Martin, 2006).	1. Non-committal phase: proposal writing stage. 2. Comparative phase: researcher selective with concepts. 3. Integrative phase: developing theory compared with literature review. 4. Transcendent phase: after research completed, the application of the theory within the relevant field
Three-stage model (Lo, 2016).	1. Preliminary literature review: broad review supports the research proposal. 2. Continual literature review supports theoretical sensitivity during theory development. 3. Recursive literature review which aims to validate the theory developed.
Three-stage model (Dunne & Ustundag, 2020).	1. Position the research and provide justification for the research question. 2. Look at the literature to support construction of the theory. 3. Raises the theory to a conceptual level, compare and contrast the theory created to the literature.

In summary, the timing of the literature review in CGT requires a researcher to pause and reflect on the process. Although, “no-one enters the research process as a blank slate” (Urquhart, 2013, p. 7), the challenge for me was to ensure I addressed and acknowledged my prior engagement with the literature, remembering that “the

literature review is a means to an end and not an end in itself" (McGhee et al., 2007, p. 341). As a practitioner for over twenty years, I have prior knowledge in the field of engagement. In addition to my practitioner experience, I applied for research funding which required I justified the research using literature to support my application. In the first stage of the research, in part to clarify my question for data collection, I completed a systematic review on the topic of initial parental engagement and as I developed the theory, I consulted the research again. I have addressed my prior knowledge and my positionality in chapter 1 of this thesis. I wrote memos, practised strong reflexivity and developed methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2014). For example, I kept a methodological journal to keep track of my dilemmas, my preconceptions, and my researcher privileges, such as my insights of living in an area of disadvantage.

3.3.7 Criticisms of Constructivist Grounded Theory

Other challenges of changing to CGT methodology were not specific to this study and what was conducted prior to CGT, but generic criticisms of CGT. These short falls of CGT were acknowledged, considered and actively addressed throughout this study.

For example, since its inception in 1967 by Glaser and Strauss (1967), GT has had many critics and has been called an "epistemological fairytale" by Wacquant (2002, p. 1481). It has also been described as a qualitative research methodology that lacks any logical strategy (Hood, 2007). With each version in the family of GT methods prescribing different epistemologies, it is no surprise that there are common misunderstandings amongst researchers applying it (Levers, 2013; Suddaby, 2006). As GT has evolved over the years from the objectivist Classic GT to the pragmatist Straussian GT, and to a constructivist lens on CGT, the objectivist approach of the original Classic GT has been challenged. The criticisms about the epistemological underpinnings of GT perhaps highlight the importance for the researcher to clarify which epistemological version of GT they are using (Charmaz, 2014; Corbin, 2009; Staller, 2013). By pinpointing CGT as my chosen methodology, I made it apparent that the epistemological perspective of this study aligns with the constructivist paradigm as it allowed for my presence in the research and allowed me to engage in the process with the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Furthermore, induction and theory development within GT is cited as a way of advancing an alternative approach to research. However, some researchers contend

that theory within GT is not a discovery of grounded theory, but an elaboration of an existing theory (Burawoy, 1998; Snow, Morrill, & Anderson, 2003). GT is considered by some to be unclear on the differences between concepts and categories and the idea of concepts emerging in the data without any reference to literature seems to be a moot point (Bryman, 2016; Thomas & James, 2006). In parallel, how the move from induction in the initial stages of the research, to abduction as the theory is developed can be viewed as confusing (Bryant, 2017; Morse et al., 2021; Timonen et al., 2018). This is especially true in light of the aforementioned differences in opinion on when a literature review should be conducted (see Table 3.10 for the literature dilemma across GT methods). For example, Timmermans and Tavory (2012) question theoretical sensitivity in GT wondering how theory is developed when a researcher has been asked to ignore pre-existing theories. This shortcoming was addressed in this study by staying actively involved with my data when I was using initial and focused coding. I was aware that coding and theoretical sensitivity influence each other during the iterative coding process. This way of coding supported me to develop concepts and categories in the process of theory development (examples of this process can be found in chapter 4 on data analysis in CGT).

Perhaps these criticisms of GT are merely misunderstandings of the complexities of the research analysis process. Throughout this study, I ensured I had a thorough understanding of CGT and its strategies to guarantee a clear understanding of CGT and a strict adherence to its processes (for example, following the recommendations of Suddaby (2006) to ensure the iterative process of data collection, analysis and the use of constant comparative methods occurred). Charmaz (2014) stresses that critiques of GT are often based on one version of GT and do not apply to them all and she highlights the importance of triangulation of findings to address theory development and ensure robust findings in research. Triangulation in this study was completed by seeking multiple accounts of experiences of engagement from parents and practitioners involved in multiple services in the community of Ballymun.

3.3.8 Summary of CGT

In summary, GT is a qualitative method that sets out to understand and develop a theory about the phenomenon under investigation (Birks & Mills, 2015). It is a systematic method to conduct research and consists of several strategies to develop theory through analysing data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The GT method has evolved

over the years from the initial “discovery” book (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to comprise a “family of methods claiming the GTM mantle”: Classic GT, Straussian GT and Constructivist GT by Charmaz (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 11). The version of GT used in this study was Constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2021). I chose this version as it views the research as constructed rather than discovered and assumes a constructivist epistemology which aligns with my personal philosophy. In CGT, the final theory is a co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants and is an interpretation of the researcher’s view (Charmaz, 2021). The importance of the researcher’s privileges, positions and interactions are considered in the construction of the theory in CGT (Thornberg, 2012).

Although the literature review is often seen as a controversial aspect of GT research, in CGT familiarity with the literature is encouraged. I was supported by my ability to bracket my prior knowledge and assumptions ensuring it did not influence the coding process and allowed the theory to develop grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2021; Urquhart, 2013). Criticisms of CGT research have been discussed, highlighting the need for rigour which I have addressed using the rigour criteria associated with CGT.

3.4 Introduction to ethics procedures for this research

In this section I will outline the five applications for ethical approval for this study and the reasons for each. I will begin with a brief review on ethical considerations in qualitative research and their important guidance. I will then discuss the two main reasons for the delays to data collection in this study and the impacts the Covid-19 pandemic had on collecting data. I will describe the consequential changes necessary to ensure data was always collected ethically. Finally, I will discuss data storage procedures implemented in line with the university’s data protection policy.

3.4.1 Ethical considerations in qualitative research

Ethical considerations in qualitative research are of utmost importance and all research studies are required to observe the key ethical principles of informed voluntary consent, confidentiality and anonymity of participants, data retention, protection and destruction and a limitation of risk (Silverman, 2022; TCD, 2023). Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences Trinity College Dublin. In total, I submitted five research ethics applications and a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) to support the applications for ethical approval for the different phases of this research inquiry (MT06, HT30, MT5), (The five

applications for ethical approval are summarised in Figure 3.2 and will be described in detail below). See Appendix B for five copies of ethical approval received.

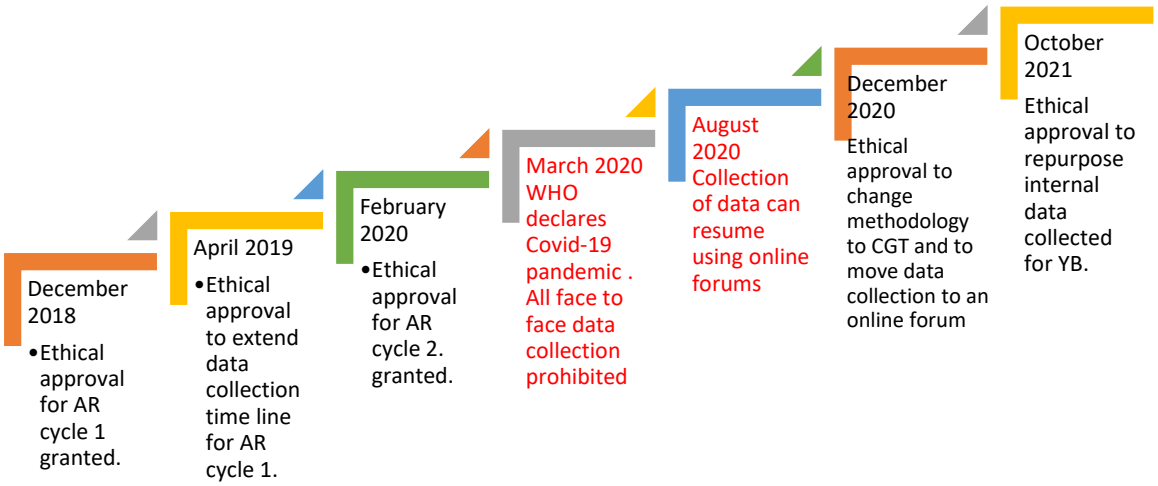

Figure 3.2: Timelines of applications and ethical approval granted

3.4.2 Data collection delays

There were two significant delays to data collection in this study that impacted the ethical processes completed. At the start of this study in 2018/19/20 the methodology was AR, and the key focus for data collection was the parental engagement family literacy programme BB. The first delay occurred In December 2018, after I had received ethical approval to collect data for the first AR cycle. Due to the terminal illness of my husband and my subsequent bereavement, I paused the study and reapplied in April 2019 to extend my data collection timeline.

The second delay was caused by the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic which resulted in a change in the research methodology from AR to CGT. This adjustment brought a change to the sampling procedure as it moved from convenience sampling to theoretical sampling to align with the methodology of CGT (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.4.3 Ethical implications of Covid-19 on this study

In February 2020 I had received ethical approval for the second AR cycle, and I was preparing to recruit participants for face-to-face focus groups. However, as previously described in earlier sections, in March 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared global Covid-19 pandemic (WHO, 2020) and face-to-face data collection was

prohibited to ensure safety for all (TCD, 2020; WHO, 2020). This was a very challenging and unnerving situation, and I needed to rethink the research study plan and how I was going to progress it. While stay-at-home protocols were in place, I completed three tasks that were not in my original research plan. First, I conducted the systematic review on initial parental engagement (PE). Second, I completed a literature review on potential suitable methodologies as I knew my research plan had to change. Third, I reviewed PE strategies to support the development of my employer's strategic plan (as the funding for this study was an IRC Employment-Based Postgraduate Programme between the university and Youngballymun). To support this review, I held three online focus groups with Youngballymun's staff. During collection and analysis for the organisation's strategic plan I realised that this data was also pertinent to my CGT research enquiry due to the alignment to the research study aims and objectives. In October 2021 I applied for ethical approval to repurpose this data acquired during lockdown related to parental engagement strategies (see Table 3.10 for the data collection timetable for this study).

Table 3.10: Data collection timetable for this study.

Data collection timetable	Data collection format	Methodology used	Covid-19 adaptations
May & June 2019	Face to face focus groups	AR	This data was analysed using TA then reanalysed using the CGT methodology.
June 2020	Online focus groups	CGT	Ethical permission to repurpose this data was acquired in October 2021.
March 2021	Online focus groups	CGT	This data was collected using CGT methodology after resumption of data collection procedures.

3.4.4 Adapting to new ethical guidelines

As part of the new TCD data collection policy to adhere to Covid-19 restrictions (TCD, 2020), it became necessary to hold focus groups online instead of face-to-face. Researchers were required to ensure social distance and participants' safety was taken into account for any data collection procedures (Costa & Schoales, 2022). This process required a rethink of the ethical application for face-to-face data collection to ensure ethical guidelines were met. Charmaz and Thornberg (2020) posit that researchers must be flexible and understand the real worlds of participants, so I needed to reflect and really think about how I could pivot my research plan to ensure the safety of everyone during data collection.

Most of the changes introduced to the ethical procedures revolved around gaining access to participants and moving data collection to an online forum (see Table 3.11 for ethical changes to informed consent process for data collection). What appeared like an easily accomplished task was in fact quite challenging. Finding a suitable time when participants could contribute was difficult. The practitioners were dealing with the effects of the pandemic on their own working schedules and the parents had school closures and children at home to deal with. It was certainly demanding to create an opportunity that suited everyone. For example, Youth Workers involved in the initial sampling round of data collection, although willing to participate again, could not find a suitable time to attend due to an increased workload (Rossouw et al., 2022; Shaw, Brady, & Dolan, 2022). The changes to the ethical procedure for informed consent are listed in Table 3.11 overleaf. Appendix D has consent forms used for this study.

3.4.5 Data storage

Data storage is an important part of the ethical procedures for all research (TCD, 2023). Data storage for this study did not change due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The only notable difference was access to my office was curtailed with admission only available on specific days or with a prearranged appointment.

Table 3.11: Ethical changes to informed consent process for data collection.

Participants involved	Changes made to informed consent process for online data collection during Covid-19 pandemic
Gatekeeper	• Sent email to manager explaining gatekeeper role. • Online meeting held to ensure understanding or research and changed role. • PIL and informed consent letter received.
Parents	• Poster email sent to all parents previously involved in BB. **A sample of this poster is available in Appendix E.** • Parents text their interest. • Researcher phones and explains informed consent process and the online focus group format. • PIL and consent form sent to parents. • Parents asked to return their research consent form in the prepaid envelope provided.
Practitioners	• Received email from gatekeeper. • PIL and informed consent form provided in email. • Gatekeeper set up online focus group.

3.4.6 Conclusion

There is no doubt that observing Covid-19 protocols impacted this research and the planned methods of data collection. Ensuring the safety of the participants during the pandemic required me to rethink the data collection strategy to ensure ethical

guidelines were met within the parameters of a pandemic. The realisation that AR cycles would no longer be possible meant a change in methodology was required. Consequently, it became necessary to reanalyse data already collected in 2019 employing the methods of the new methodology, CGT. A further complication was the repurposing of data collected for Youngballymun on PE as part of my employment role in June 2020 for their strategic plan.

Rethinking data collection strategies to ensure ethical standards were upheld, informed consent received, and data collection remained a confidential process became a necessary development during the pandemic. I have highlighted here some of the challenges I faced to complete this research, and despite the inevitable delays and enforced changes, how I addressed these challenges to ensure the ethical standards of this research study were upheld.

The next chapter will describe the use of the Constructivist GT methods of analysis to develop the theory.

Chapter 4: The Application of Constructivist Grounded Theory Methods to Analysis

4. Introduction

This chapter is focused on the CGT methods of analysis employed to develop the theory of parental engagement. Prior to Covid-19, data was collected face to face for the initial data generation for AR methodology. However, due to the global Covid-19 pandemic (Gov.i.e, 2020; WHO, 2020) and to ensure this research could continue, the methodology was changed from AR to CGT. The original data collected using the AR methodology was subsequently repurposed and reanalysed as part of the CGT study.

4.1 Research aims

As a practitioner I know that reflection on practice is crucial to professional development. To support my immersion in this research study, Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) encourages reflection for the researcher with the aim of developing a theory to understand what is happening in the data (Morse et al., 2021). Given the study setting and my role as the coordinator of family literacy programmes in Youngballymun (YB), a key reason I chose CGT was the recognition of the researcher's participation in the co-construction of data that reflects the researcher's relationships with participants (Charmaz, 2017a). The participants in this study were parents and practitioners who were already engaged in community-based family literacy programmes and had already chosen to attend.

The aim of this study was to explore the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners on engagement strategies employed in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. The objective to develop a framework for engagement from the theory was formed from the sub-questions:

1. What can the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners tell us about how barriers to parental engagement can be addressed, to maximise how parents attending family literacy community-based programmes can support their children's learning and development?
2. How can the perspectives of parents and practitioners enhance our understanding of what works in the parental engagement practices of a community-based family literacy programme?

4.2 Profile of research setting

Youngballymun (YB) is a publicly-funded organisation that supports the delivery of a series of integrated health and educational services for children, young people and families living in Ballymun. Ballymun is a small geographical area in north Dublin with a history of social, economic and educational disadvantage. The Trinity National Deprivation Index categorised Ballymun as a 'highly disadvantaged community' (Teljeur, Darker, Barry, & O'Dowd, 2019) with Pobal[1] (Haase & Pratschke, 2017) describing 30% of the Ballymun population as 'very disadvantaged'. At the time of this study, I was employed by YB as the Coordinator of the Language and Literacy Strand since 2010. In this role I developed and delivered many diverse family literacy programmes in Ballymun to support parents in developing their child's language and literacy development. I have also modelled and coached local practitioners to integrate language and literacy practices into their everyday interactions with parents to support children's language and literacy development.

4.3 Data collection in this research

There were two methods of data collection in this research. Prior to Covid-19 data was collected in face-to-face focus groups for the initial data generation for AR. The second method used for data collection was online focus groups after restrictions were introduced as part of the Covid-19 response (Gov.i.e, 2020; WHO, 2020) and the methodology was changed from AR to CGT. The original data collected using the AR methodology was subsequently repurposed and reanalysed as part of the CGT study. This chapter focuses on the data analysis using CGT methodology (Charmaz, 2014)

4.4. Focus groups

The decision to conduct focus groups was taken to try and collect as much rich data as possible from several different sources. Focus groups are often conducted in CGT research as a means to collect data for theory development, so it was my aim that focus groups would support parents and practitioners to express their experiences with their peers, feeling safe in a familiar environment, with familiar peers (Hennink, 2014; Mitchell, 2014). Figure 4.1 describes the data collection, analyses, reanalyses and repurposing timeline.

[1] Pobal administers and manages Government and EU funding to address disadvantage and support social inclusion.

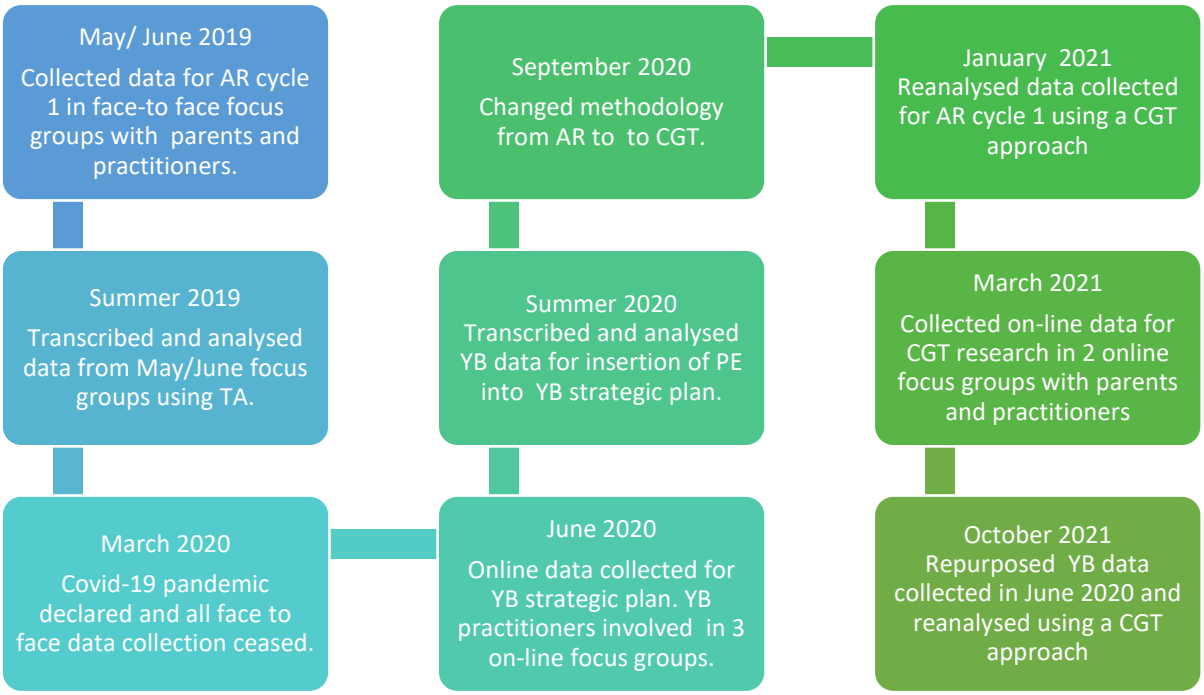

Figure 4.1: Data collection, analysis, reanalysis and repurposing timeline.

Common across all GT methods, data collection and analysis happen iteratively. Constant comparison of new data with previously collected data continued throughout this study. Initial sampling was used at the first stage, to gather rich data from both parents and practitioners: “rich data are detailed, focused and full” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 23; Conlon, Timonen, Elliott-O'Dare, O'Keeffe, & Foley, 2020). I decided to use focus groups as the context for data collection, because focus groups are reliant on good social interaction (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Across GT methods there is no recommendation on the number of participants to be interviewed (Suddaby, 2006), although, according to Hennink and Kaiser (2022), saturation can be reached in 4-8 focus group interviews.

I followed the guidelines offered by Charmaz (2014): I immersed myself in the interviewing process followed by the data analysis and allowed the data to support new leads and to reframe conceptual categories. During data analysis I was conscious of reaching theoretical saturation and looked at making comparisons in the data within and between categories to see if my analysis and comparisons were supporting my theoretical categories (Charmaz, 2014). Alongside this, it was clear to me that the number of focus groups conducted is dependent on data analysis: “You are unlikely to know what you need to find out until you grapple with analysing your data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 106).

4.5 Participants

A total of thirty-four participants took part in one or more of the 8 focus groups in this study (see Table 4.1 overleaf for an overview of participant contributions). For the face to face data collection I held three focus groups, two with parents and one with practitioners, in May and June 2019. The two parent focus groups were conducted on alternate days to allow as many parents as possible an opportunity to attend and contribute to the discussions. There were eight participants in the first focus group (Group 1 Parent) and three participants in the second (Group 2 Parent). I was familiar with the participants so could ask parents by name to contribute. Parents engaged with each other, joking and laughing and sharing common anecdotes about their children's learning. These parent focus groups were audio-recorded using a digital Dictaphone to facilitate re-playing, transcription and data analysis.

The practitioners' face to face focus group (Group 4 Practitioners) was held in a local school. It was recorded using the same Dictaphone. I was familiar with the practitioners as we worked side by side on the family literacy programmes so there was an ease about the discussions and practitioners were forthright and direct in their contributions.

There were six online focus groups, one with parents (Group 3 Parent) and four with practitioners (Group 5 Practitioner and Group 6-8 YB Practitioners). Two parents had previously participated in two former face-to-face focus groups in the earlier phase of the study. All names have been pseudonymised in this study and the changes are reflected in the tables and data throughout this thesis.

Nineteen practitioners participated in 5 focus groups. Nine of these practitioners were employed in various roles across the community of Ballymun as teachers (T), youth workers (YW), healthcare professionals (HCP), or family resource centre staff (FRC). A further ten practitioners were employed by Youngballymun (the setting of the study) in various roles (see Table 4.2 for demographics of all participants).

Table 4.1: Overview of participant contributions

Focus Group	Ethical permission granted	Data collection Stage	Date data collected	Duration of interview	Number of participant	Unique contributor	Repeat contributor	Format
Group 1 Parent (face to face)	April 2019	Stage 1	May 2019	37 minutes	8	8	0	**Face to face focus group in community centre**
Group 2 Parent (face to face)	April 219	Stage 1	June 2019	31 minutes	3	3	0	**Face to face focus group in community centre**
Group 3 Parent (online)	March 2021	Stage 3	March 2021	63 minutes	6	4	2	**Online focus group**
Group 4 Practitioners (face to face)	April 2019	Stage 1	June 2019	33 minutes	7	7	0	**Face to face focus group in community centre**
Group 5 Practitioners (online)	March 2021	Stage 3	March 2021	55 minutes	5	3	2	**Online focus group**
Group 6 *Youngbally mun (online)	October 2021	Stage 2	June 2020	54 minutes	4	3	1	**Online focus group**
Group 7 *Youngbally mun (online)	October 2021	Stage 2	June 2020	55 minutes	5	4	1	**Online focus group**
Group 8 *Youngbally mun (online)	October 2021	Stage 2	June 2020	58 minutes	3	2	1	**Online focus group**

*YB data was originally collected for YB and repurposed after ethical permission received.

Table 4.2 Demographics for all participants.

Participant number	Pseudonym	Role	Focus group	No. of focus groups participated in
1.	Marg	Parent	PAR	1
2.	Jan	Parent	PAR	1
3.	Holly	Parent	PAR	1
4.	Brigid *	Parent	PAR	2
5.	Catherine*	Parent	PAR	2
6.	Shane	Parent	PAR	1
7.	Enya	Parent	PAR	1
8.	Sheila	Parent	PAR	1
9.	Ann-Marie	Parent	PAR	1
10.	Saoirse	Parent	PAR	1
11.	Ciara	Parent	PAR	1
12.	Jackie	Parent	PAR	1
13.	Michela	Parent	PAR	1
14.	Deirdre	Parent	PAR	1
15.	Emily	Parent	PAR	1
16.	Emma*	HCP	PR	2
17.	Angela*	Teacher	PR	2
18.	Cliona	Teacher	PR	1
19.	Caoimhe	Teacher	PR	1
20.	Sadhbh	Youth worker	PR	1
21.	Maureen	Youth worker	PR	1
22.	Gretta	Teacher	PR	1
23.	Trudi	FRC Staff	PR	1
24.	Rosemary	Teacher	PR	1
25.	Blathnaid*	YB Staff	PR	2
26.	Brid	YB Staff	YB	3
27.	Marion	YB Staff	YB	1
28.	Dympna	YB Staff	YB	1
29.	Noreen	YB staff	YB	1
30.	Niamh	YB Staff	YB	1
31.	Dervla	YB Staff	YB	1
32.	Kathleen	YB Staff	YB	1
33.	Charlotte	YB Staff	YB	1
34.	Rena	YB Staff	YB	1

*Numbers 1-34 are pseudonyms. *PAR = Parent. *PR =Practitioner. *YB = Youngballymun

Two focus groups (Group 4 & 5) were held for practitioners in the community. The first focus group with 7 practitioners from the community was thirty-three minutes in duration and was held face-to-face. The second focus group was held online, had 5

participants and lasted fifty-five minutes. Two participants, Emma and Angela, participated in the two focus groups held for practitioners.

Of the nineteen practitioners that took part in focus groups, 10 were staff members from YB taking part in one of three focus groups (group 6-8) spanning a range of YB services. These focus groups took place in June 2020, as part of a team meeting aimed at developing a strategic plan for YB for internal use only. The manager and the staff consented to the collection of the data. The three YB online focus groups averaged fifty-five minutes each. Two of the participants were involved in two or more focus groups. One YB staff member took part in all three YB focus groups and one was involved in a practitioner focus group and a focus group for YB.

The term Health Care Professional (HCP) covers a wide range of health care disciplines and is used to provide anonymity to the participant taking part in this research study.

4.5.1 Recruitment for data generation and the role of the gatekeeper

A gatekeeper supported my access to practitioners and parents (Striepe & Cunningham, 2022). As a researcher, my involvement and experience working with many of the participants made it important that a gatekeeper was employed to contact participants asking for their participation and gaining their voluntary and informed consent. I felt that this action would support the credibility of this study and the data collection process, facilitating potential participants to decline the invitation with greater ease. I based my decision to ask the manager of YB to be the gatekeeper because of her understanding of the study (she is a named partner in the IRC Employment Based Programme) and her role as the manager of the organisation. To recruit parent participants, the gatekeeper displayed a poster in the Arts Centre advertising the study and the participant information leaflet (PIL) (See Appendix C for copies of the PIL for this study). Parents were then able to contact me by phone, text or email if they wished to participate. Once a parent expressed interest in the study, I contacted them by phone and explained the study and their rights. At the start of each focus group, face to face or online, parents were provided with their own copy of the PIL. I read the PIL aloud to each parent to ensure they individually understood their rights to voluntarily give their informed consent. Parents were then invited to sign the consent form if they

agreed to take part. Parents were advised that they could opt out at that point or at any stage in the focus group interviews.

For the focus group with practitioners, face to face and online, the gatekeeper emailed practitioners inviting them to participate and attached a copy of the PIL. My relationship with practitioners stemmed from their involvement in supporting the facilitation of the community-based family literacy programme BB. I did not contact the practitioners to ask for their involvement in this research. Instead, they were contacted by the gatekeeper and asked if they would like to be involved. At the start of the focus group, practitioners were given another copy of the PIL and asked to sign the informed consent form.

4.6. Change in sampling procedure

As previously stated, at the start of this study in 2018 I was using AR methodology and convenience sampling. At that time I felt that convenience sampling was suitable as the participants fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were accessible to me (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, the Covid-19 pandemic challenges resulted in a change in the methodology to CGT and this meant that the sampling procedure changed to that of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The methodological change to CGT supported the study aim of exploring with participants their experience of parental engagement. The main purpose of theoretical sampling is to develop theoretical categories from the data. Morse and Clarke (2019) highlight how a researcher can use theoretical sampling to distinguish variation in a category, to highlight different perspectives among people, and to link concepts during theory development. Morse (2001) highlights that the use of theoretical sampling supports comparisons with codes and concepts. In CGT there are two types of sampling, initial sampling and theoretical sampling: “initial sampling in grounded theory gets you started, theoretical sampling guides you where to go” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 197) (see Figure 4.2 for information on the three stages of data collection in this study).

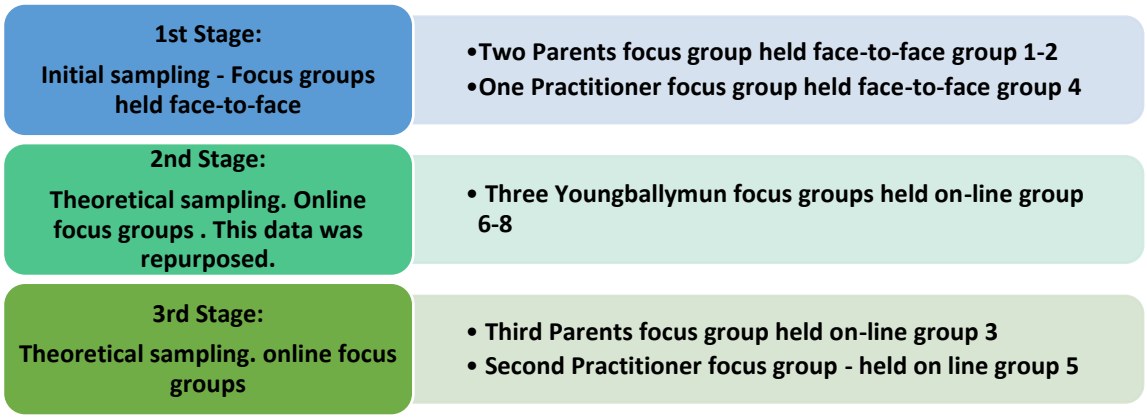

Figure 4.2: Three stages of data collection using CGT

This change of methodology to CGT meant data collected using AR methodology was re-analysed using CGT methods. After much reflection and lengthy discussions with my supervisor on the best way to proceed with the data I had already collected, I considered how the data I had was compatible with the new methodological approach. I found it aligned well with the criteria of initial sampling in CGT. I therefore reconstrued the data I had previously collected as initial sampling. Initial sampling is the first stage of the grounded theory process: "for initial sampling you establish sampling criteria for people, cases, situations and/ or settings before you enter the field" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 197). For subsequent data collection, stage two and stage three, I used CGT theoretical sampling. Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 45) defined theoretical sampling as "the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his (sic) data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges". See Figure 4.3 for an overview of the CGT iterative analysis process that leads to theory development in CGT.

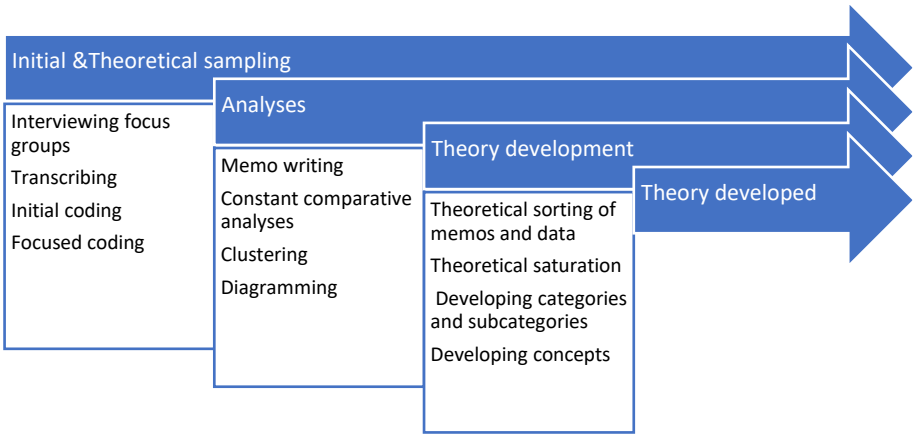

Figure 4.3: The iterative process of theory development in CGT

I kept the same inclusion criteria for the theoretical sampling of the data as applied in stage one (initial sampling). Applying theoretical sampling to the data collected, as the categories developed and I refined my study, I included participants according to surfaced ideas and insights related to the analysis completed (Butler, Copnell, & Hall, 2018). However, Covid-19 impacted further on the timing and availability of participants. For example, I included youth workers in the initial sampling, but due to their increased workload with children at home from closed schools I was unable to include them in the theoretical sampling stage. However, using theoretical sampling enabled the data collection process to be opened up to include more practitioners from other services, for example, staff from a local family resource centre (see Table 4.3 for the inclusion criteria applied).

Table 4.3: Inclusion criteria.

Participant group	Stages involved in data collection	Inclusion Criteria
Parents	Initial sampling and Theoretical sampling	• Attended at least one session of BB. • Child/ren aged between 0 - 12 years of age
Healthcare Practitioners (HCP)	Initial sampling and Theoretical sampling	• Involved in the delivery of BB. • Involved in the engagement of parents
Teachers (T)	Initial sampling and Theoretical sampling	• Involved in the delivery of BB. • Involved in the engagement of parents
Youth Workers (YW)	Initial sampling	• Involved in the delivery of BB. • Involved in the engagement of parents
Family Resource Centre Staff (FRC)	Theoretical sampling	• Involved in the delivery of BB. • Involved in the engagement of parents
Youngballymun (YB) staff	Theoretical sampling	• Involved in the delivery of BB. • Involved in the engagement of parents

4.7 Applying Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) methods to data collection and data analysis

The data collection and the analysis process are described as discrete sequential steps in this section. However, in practice CGT methods are far from linear and with

the added Covid-19 adaptations, there were many points where I had to double back to re-evaluate, adapt, and re-analyse.

In the next segment I focus on the systematic process for analysing data using CGT methods. This understanding is coupled with initial coding and focused coding methods, with memo writing and methodological self-consciousness bringing a constant reflexivity into the process. The application of the CGT methods of clustering, diagramming, constant comparative analysis and the ongoing development of categories from the data are demonstrated to describe how these processes supported the development of the theory in this study. I also illustrate the application of theoretical sensitivity, theoretical saturation and theoretical sorting to this study. These three concepts are integral to the processes of CGT and taken collectively they enhance theory development.

4.7.1 Changing methodology and data collection

Having changed the methodology from AR to CGT in September 2020, my first step involved reanalysing my initial data sample using CGT. The second step involved identifying other potential sources of data to progress the study. I sought ethical approval from TCD to repurpose the data that was collected as part of my employment role with YB, and, subsequently, sought consent from YB staff to include this data. I was happy that the CGT methodology respected individuals and communities by valuing existing literature and data, meaning that participants did not have to be interviewed again and I could proceed using CGT methods (Clarke, Healy, Lynch, & Featherstone, 2023). Figure 4.1 above outlines the data collection, analysis, reanalysis and repurposing timeline for this study.

4.7.2 Stage one: Initial sampling and the initial interview guide

Semi-structured interviews fit GT research for the process of theory building (Conlon et al., 2020). They support the process of identifying patterns in data, and as data collection and analysis happen iteratively, new questions can be asked to inform the emerging theory (Birks & Mills, 2015; Foley et al., 2021). Before inviting participants to attend the focus group, I prepared an interview guide (Charmaz, 2014) (see Appendix F for the interview guide for parents' initial sampling focus group).

This guide facilitated flexibility to ask other questions and follow any leads related to the engagement process (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012). To create each interview guide,

I devised questions based on the research aims and objectives. I was aiming for open-ended, non-judgemental questions (Charmaz, 2014). Constructing the interview guide supported my reflexivity, because it involved questions about my assumptions, my biases, and ensuring the questions could fulfil the objectives of the research (Charmaz, 2014). Each time I prepared to interview participants I organised a practice interview with a colleague to ensure the interview questions were understandable and did not use terms likely to cause offence; for example, phrases like disadvantaged, hard to reach and uninvolved are deficit words that may cause offence to some parents (Charmaz, 2014). As I conducted these focus group interviews I had confidence knowing I had my interview guide but I knew I could divert from the guide at any time to follow a lead, gather more knowledge and gain more insights (Staengle & Fringer, 2022).

As a prerequisite to this study and to ensure reflexivity, both AR and CGT require the researcher to understand and reflect on their positionality (Charmaz, 2021; McNiff, 2017a). In AR, Coghlan and Brannick (2014, p. 53) call this "interiority", a "shifting from what we know to how we know". My positionality, which is highlighted in chapter 1 forms a crucial part of my reflexivity. As CGT involves constructing theory with participants it was critical that I engaged in self-reflexivity to develop my methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2014, 2016, 2021). As both AR and CGT require deep reflexivity, I engaged in journal writing and memo writing from the start (2018) to highlight my study journey and the evolution of my thinking (more on writing memos in section 4.8.1). Methodological self-consciousness involves developing my understanding of "who we are and what we do in our research practice" (Charmaz, 2021, p. 161). Table 4.4 is a journal entry I wrote after the initial three interviews with parents and practitioners to support my reflexivity. Although it was written as I used an AR methodology, I can see how important it is to my CGT journey. Taking the time to write my thoughts on how the initial interviews proceeded, enabled me to recall the nuances of the interview process, supporting my repurposing of the data, as seen in this extract:

Table 4.4: Journal entry to enhance reflexivity.

Reflective Journal entry for the initial three focus groups Tuesday 25th June 2019.
I am certainly glad that the first round of data collection is completed. I had eleven parents across two focus groups and seven practitioners attended their focus group. On reflection the choice to use

focus groups was a great idea. I felt both parents and practitioners bounced off each other building on each other's points and adding to the knowledge and experience of their engagement (in their separate Interviews). It was nice for me as a practitioner to see how the programmes are working to enhance language and literacy for parents. However, I need to be mindful of this and not get side tracked. That is why reflexivity in this study *is going to be so important. This study is about engagement not how great BB is, as my supervisor reminds me.*

There is so much data on engagement and how it is so important for parents and practitioners for multiple reasons. I don't think I realised just how difficult it is for some parents to attend and then adding to that how frustrating it is for practitioners when parents don't attend. Lots of thinking to do here for me.

The interview guides worked well. It took the fear out of the focus group for me as the researcher and allowed me the flexibility to follow a lead or get the study back on track. Knowing the participants was also a great start as there was no need to waste time getting to know people, especially the practitioners as they are so busy. I am grateful that all the participants took part. I am happy with that – now to do the transcribing!

4.7.3 Initial coding

The coding process in CGT links data collection to the developing theory: "Through coding, you define what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). Initial coding in CGT supports the researcher to remain open to exploring the data, looking for theoretical possibilities perceived in the data (Charmaz, 2014). To begin the analysis, I transcribed the digitally-recorded interviews verbatim. I then read the transcripts to reignite my memory of the interviews and I began to code the transcripts using initial line-by-line coding using gerunds (see Table 4.5 for a sample of initial line-by-line coding). This stage of coding supported my interaction with the data, and I was embedded within it, "defining implicit meanings and actions" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 121). During this process I was "acting with the data" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 115), thinking about the meaning of the data, what were the participants describing, trying to make sense of participant experiences. Line-by-line coding supported me to see new ideas, concepts and areas to follow in later interviews (Boddy, 2016; Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020) (see Table 4.5 for sample of initial coding). To support the coding process, I followed the guidelines of Charmaz (2014) when coding:

- Remain open.
- Stay close to the data.
- Keep your codes simple and precise.
- Construct short codes.
- Preserve actions.
- Compare data with data.
- Move quickly through the data (Charmaz, 2014, p. 120).

Table 4.5: Sample Initial line-by-line coding using gerunds.

Transcript sample Practitioners focus group 1, June 2019, L4, **Angela**	**Initial coding using gerunds.**
ANGELA*: I suppose you've different levels of engagement because lots of parents will say to me 'oh I'll do that, I'll definitely do that course' so you've got the ''come in?' text, have they got the WhatsApp? And you've met them, and they say they will and then you give them the reminder and they might say they will, and they won't, on the day there's no show.*	Differing levels of engagement. Hearing parents say yes. Hearing parents promise to do course. Texting reminders. Meeting parents. Hearing parents say yes. Sending a reminder. Parents saying, they will attend. Feeling frustrated they don't turn up.

I was acutely aware of recommendations from Glaser (1992) to provide initial coding without any preconceived ideas, because a researcher needs to be aware of their bias and avoid imposing existing theories or conceptual ideas on the data. I also aimed to listen to the advice of Charmaz (2014, p. 117) who suggested that researchers "remain open to seeing what you can learn while coding and where it can take you. Make efforts to learn and examine how your past influences the way you see the world and your data". The process of line-by-line coding was essential. Using line-by-line coding with gerunds supported flexibility with the data, allowing the development of theoretical categories, reinforcing how I was defining the data, and building the analysis from the "ground up" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 125). The analytic process of coding data was a "thinking process" (Corbin, 2009, p. 41), and line-by-line coding assisted me to remain free from accepting participants' world views without questioning the data. Critically thinking about the data included me asking questions about the data, identifying actions and processes within the data and gaining an understanding of further avenues of inquiry (Charmaz, 2014).

During the coding process I used in-vivo codes (participant quotes) when I felt it was important to preserve the words of the participants, especially when similar words were used by other participants to describe their experience. For example, "different levels of engagement" was often used by practitioners to describe their sense of frustration and confusion around engagement, and I used this phrase as an in vivo code (Charmaz, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Tie et al., 2019). In-vivo codes are important as they preserve the participants' point of view and become a part of the analytic

process (Urquhart, 2013) (see Table 4.6 for a sample of in vivo codes). For instance, the in-vivo code “being in the same boat” became a part of the category ‘connecting to engage’. This code was characteristic of the social world of participants (Charmaz, 2014), and it captured their sense of frustration and confusion before their engagement with BB. By using the in-vivo codes I secured my analysis in the social worlds of participants, interpreted and developed my understanding by looking at their implicit meanings and actions (Charmaz, 2014).

Table 4.6: Sample of some in vivo codes used.

Sample of in vivo codes used from across the data set	In vivo codes supported category development
Different people, different schools	Choosing to engage
Being in the same boat	Connecting to engage
Bringing the community together	Sharing
Being in a great environment	Connecting to engage
Making it easy to get in	Co-creating engagement
Hardwired for connection	Co-creating engagement
Everybody’s equal	Co-creating engagement
Recruitment can be heart-breaking	Choosing to engage
Parental engagement is different	Choosing to engage
Being human	Choosing to engage

Figure 4.4 is a visualisation of this iterative process. Theoretical sensitivity and reflexivity are activities that occurred at all stages of the process.

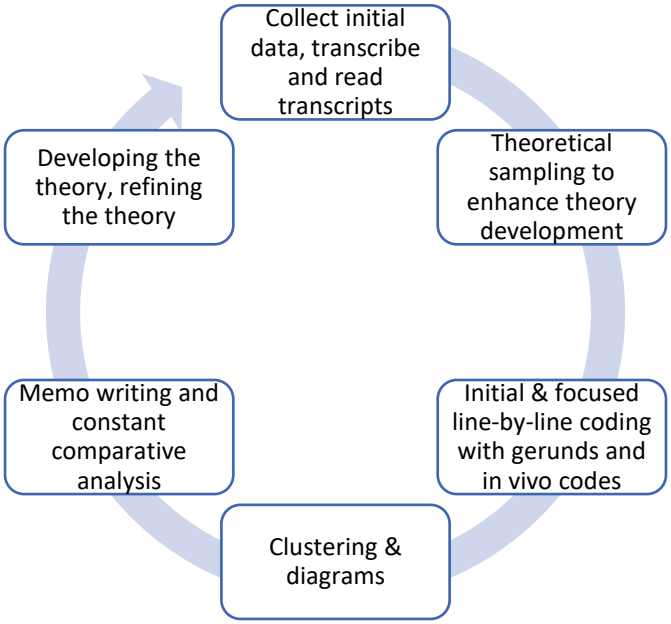

Figure 4.4: The iterative CGT process

4.7.4 Focused coding

Focused coding is the second phase in coding in CGT. A focused code was assigned to summarise or elaborate on codes to raise them to a conceptual level and synthesise the data (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2020; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1978; Hudson, 2020). Focused coding assists the researcher to condense the initial codes and emphasises what is emerging in the data analysis. The move from initial coding to focused coding was an iterative process of writing memos, constant comparative analysis, clustering and diagramming (Carmichael & Cunningham, 2017; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019; O'Connor et al., 2018; Tie et al., 2019). Focused coding, organising the data and synthesising initial codes supported the "theoretical reach, direction and centrality" of the "nascent analysis" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 141). The process of coding is a strength of the CGT method: because focused coding is an emergent process, it ensured I remained involved and continuously interacting with the data. The emphasis on coding interactions and perspectives also enhanced my reflexivity on preconceptions and supported new ideas to develop (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Holton, 2007). The process of analyses in focused coding supported me to raise the codes to a tentative conceptual level (Charmaz, 2014). Theoretical coding (Glaser, 1978) is a complex level of coding that can follow on from focused coding and may support the analyses of the data by describing how categories and codes may or may not relate to each other conceptually. Theoretical codes were not used in this study, I followed the advice of Charmaz (2014, p. 147) who has stated that initial and focused coding can be enough for most projects . However, on reflection I appreciate how they could add to my abductive reasoning process and occur implicitly through the focus coding process (Charmaz et al., 2018). Utilising my memos and the comparisons I had made between initial codes enhanced this process. For example, from analysing the data in the initial coding process I began to see a pattern emerging concerning parents' motivations for engaging with BB. Parents spoke about attending BB, receiving a free children's book and learning new ways to support literacy in the home through vocabulary games and enhanced reading of books. The analysis of the parents' experience led me to create the code 'an act of self-care' (see Table 4.7 for a sample of line-by-line initial coding and focused coding). The focused code 'an act of self-care' became part of the category 'choosing to engage' and 'changing the HLE' through further analysis became a part of the category 'sharing'.

Table 4.7: Sample line-by-line initial coding and focused coding.

Sample Transcript Parents focus group 2 June 2019	Line-by-line initial coding using gerunds	Focused coding
L.6 Saoirse: I love going to BB because you get a free book, but not only do you get a free book you get to learn all about how you can make your child love reading and even finding games within a book like asking them about the pictures or trick words and at BB you get to play fun games and win little prizes as well *L.7 Ciara: Yes like for me as well, I love going to BB as well like because say if you're reading a story and there's a word in it like for example the other day that word chortled kids wouldn't ordinarily hear that word and you probably read the story and not explain what it is if they didn't ask so explaining about different words and (son's name) actually said when I said it's like laughing he said why don't they just say laughing and I said it's just another way to show you don't always have to say laughed you can use one word to describe laughed. There's lots of different words so expanding on their vocabulary as well*	Loving going to BB Getting a free book Getting tips on how to use book. Supporting child to love reading. Finding games in a book Asking child about picture in book Helping child with tricky words/lang. dev. Playing games at BB Winning prizes Loving going to BB Reading a story Finding a word Giving an example Hearing an unusual word Reading the story Not explaining the word Children not asking. Explaining about different words Explaining what word is Explaining about using other words Telling children to use different words. Explaining lots of words to use Expanding children's vocabulary	Act of self-care Receiving free materials Changing home learning environment (HLE) Supporting vocabulary development Sharing activities with children Act of self-care Act of self-care Supporting vocabulary development Changes to HLE (sharing with children) Parent understanding How to support HLE Motivations to engage. Choosing to engage Sharing with child

4.8. Stage two and three: Theoretical sampling

The initial sampling and analysis of the three focus groups led me to construct explorative ideas. This iterative process of data analysis supported the development of early conceptual ideas, and these ideas raised questions around the emerging categories requiring the collection of more data to fill in the exploratory categories (Birks & Mills, 2015; Cepellos & Tonelli, 2020; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Identifying gaps in the data, theoretical sampling provided the direction for the second stage of data collection, which was to conduct YB practitioner interviews (See Appendix F for interview guides).

At the second stage of data collection, theoretical sampling, I invited participants who would enhance opportunities for comparative analysis. Charmaz (2014) discusses the use of theoretical sampling to collect more data to elaborate and refine categories. As I became more involved in CGT methodology, I realised that some of the initial data would benefit from a comparative analysis with data from the theoretical sampling data collected from YB (See section 4.8.3 on comparative analysis for further details). I was interested in hearing the perspectives of the practitioners in YB on their experience of parental engagement in their respective fields. Through the analysis and coding of this data I could see opportunities to enhance the networking of participants to support parental engagement and also the difficulties faced by some practitioners in letting go of their expert role.

In the third and final stage of theoretical sampling, I returned to some participants for further data, to fill in gaps in the grounded theory (Corbin, 2017; Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019; Prigol & Behrens, 2019). I used abductive reasoning to look for explanations and to seek more data. Abductive reasoning supported me to understand different practices that support engagement and try to understand how that process was working in the data. I knew further data collection (through theoretical sampling) would help me to unlock more (Conlon et al., 2020). Subsequently engaging with the YB data through the same process of coding, analysing, and memo writing led me back to the parents and practitioners for the third round of data collection. The iterative process of grounded theory methods - coding, constant comparative analysis, clustering and diagramming, supported the development of the categories leading to theory development. Applying theoretical sampling supported the saturation of concepts and supported theory building (Timonen et al., 2018). For example, in the initial interviews with practitioners and parents, building relationships was a recurring pattern in the data, as it became clear that both parents and practitioners were choosing to engage in BB. I thought it would be relevant to see how relationships are developed between services and between services and parents.

Throughout the process of data analysis, I practised reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness through memo writing, journal writing and using my post-it notes on my memo tree[2] to capture my thoughts, my preconceptions, and anything tacit that I

[2] My memo tree was a section of my office wall on which I posted memo, notes and ideas.

couldn't yet explain (Charmaz, 2014) (Figure 4.5 is a photograph of my memo tree). These strategies supported my theoretical sensitivity: I gave meaning to the data, asked questions, saw the possibilities and understood its relevance to the study (Foley et al., 2021).

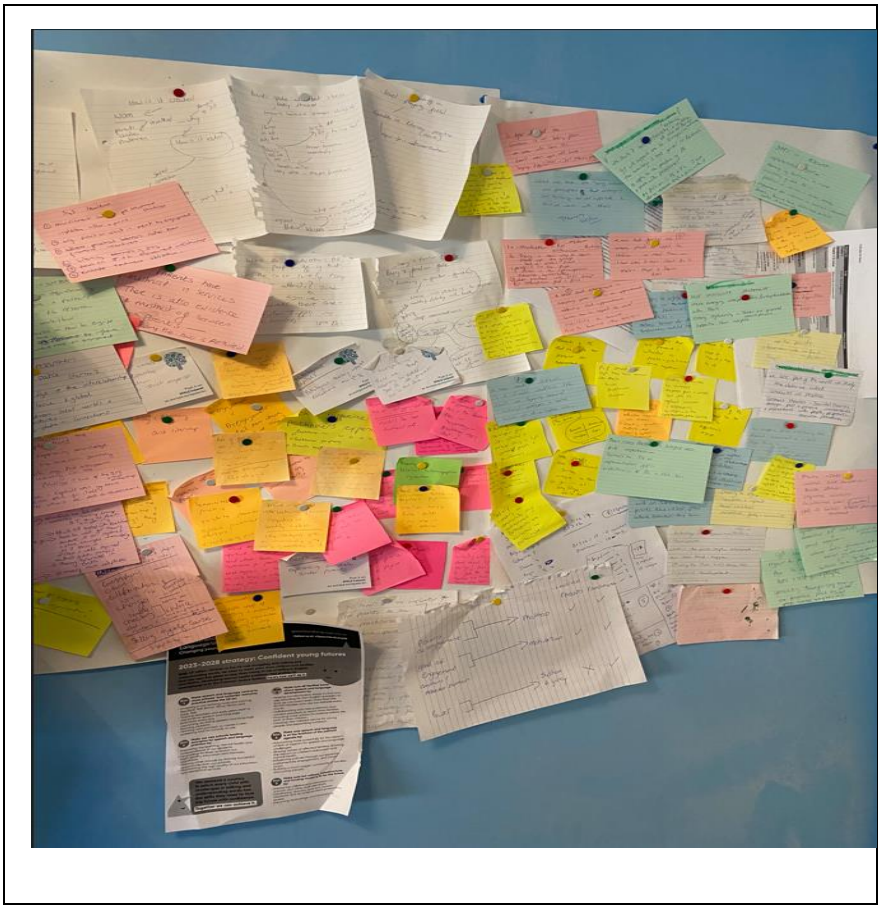

Figure 4.5: A photograph of my memo tree.

4.8.1 Writing memos

Memos are informal notes written by the researcher about the data and the connections between conceptual categories (Glaser & Holton, 2007). Memo writing throughout the research is a crucial step in the analytical process of the GT method because it keeps the researcher involved in the analysis and supports the construction of ideas (Charmaz, 2014; Prigol & Behrens, 2019). There are a number of purposes for memo writing: it supports the comparison of data with data. Codes and data, codes and categories, and supports the researcher to be critically reflexive with the data (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg, 2012). According to Lempert (2007, p. 245), writing memos "is the fundamental process of researcher/data engagement that results in a "grounded theory"". Writing memos brings a pause to the coding process supporting

the researcher to analyse their ideas about the codes in that moment (Glaser, 1998, 2013). Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 113) emphasised the importance of writing memos: “stop coding and record a memo on your ideas”. Memos supported me to take a reflexive step back, and to view the data from an analytic perspective (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019).

Table 4.8 provides an example of a memo I wrote after I read the original transcript of parents focus group 1, May 2019. This focus group was a part of my initial sampling. By asking questions in my memos I began the process of identifying potential gaps in my data collection and highlighted further areas of exploration for the theoretical sampling stage (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014; Lempert, 2007). I aimed to capture my initial thoughts after the first read of the transcript. This was a spontaneous reaction to my reading of the transcript (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1978). I sought implicit meanings in the data, asking questions about parents’ sense of power over their engagement and asking why they attended, I actively sought answers in the data, and I recorded my thoughts in memos. Writing memos is an informal process, there are no limits on the word count, they can be long or short, free and flowing - it is capturing the analytic process that is important (Birks & Mills, 2015; Braun & Clarke, 2013; Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1978). This early memo writing process is described by Keane (2022a, p. 263) as a “preparatory memo” that can support a researcher to get started and capture a summary of what is occurring in the data from participant experiences.

Table 4:8: Sample memo – initial thoughts

Parent Interview 1 memo on initial thoughts after reading transcript.
Parents feeling it’s ok to have fun at BB – this is interesting. Parents feel like they can’t have fun elsewhere. This feels key and important, is this a “power” piece? Is this why parents feel like BB is their space? *Lots of parents talking about reading out loud and not liking it. Perhaps something from school left over from their time in school – is that why programmes are engaging because it’s nothing like school, but parents are learning? Parents are talking about child’s excitement – might explain why children like parents to go to BB – evidence parents have fun at home- does children’s excitement explains why parents attend?* *Just thinking about parents talking about being stressed reading to kids and now having attended BB they are not. What is happening there? I think parents’ stress is something that is not often discussed,*

the pressures placed on parents to read if they have other things going on in their lives, like mental health, homeless, feeling stressed. How does that get addressed during engagement?

Although some memos in the samples here may seem short and therefore quick, the analytic process was slow. I constantly reminded myself to be reflexive and sought not to impose any preconceptions on the data. I was aware of my "insider knowledge" and I knew it was not equally balanced across the groups of participants (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Lempert, 2007). I was aware of my closeness in understanding the experience of the parents, I realised through my reflection on my positionality that this was my privilege. I felt privileged to have a shared social and cultural history with parents, and I knew because of my privilege reflexivity was really important.

Once I began to code the data, using initial and focused coding, my memos focused on quotes in the data that I felt were important. Memos are not one-off notes: a researcher revisits and revises them as the analytic process continues (Charmaz, 2014; Hudson, 2020; Lempert, 2007). Throughout the coding process I aimed to be reflexive with the data, working on my methodological self-consciousness, writing memos about what was striking me as important and questioning the importance I placed upon it. A sample of a memo is provided in Table 4.9 when I came across puzzling data. I found that each memo brought me deeper into the analysis by raising questions about what I was seeing in the data, and theoretical sorting helped me process these memos into categories and then a logical theory.

Table 4.9: Sample memo describing puzzling data

Memo for YB focus group 3 December 2021
The material going deeper than parents want it to go is interesting. Is there a need there for a pre-engagement strategy to support parents through that process? Who is saying it's too deep? Is that the practitioner experience or the parents' experience? What makes it difficult? *Practice piece: what could be put in place to support parents and inform them that some have found the material too deep. That could be across the steps of engagement. Other practitioners have spoken about being able to raise issues with parents at BB as they are relaxed. I wonder are parents stressed out that they can't deal with some issues to discuss them. I am wondering about a practice/practitioner bias or expert role? It has come up a few times now in the data. Talking about authenticity and being able to talk to parents – but there are boundary issues etc. It's quite hypocritical to me to hear a practitioner saying that they're being authentic but all the time focusing on the trauma*

that parents face and saying if there is a blurring of professional boundaries well then you can't raise the tough issues. The blurring of practitioner boundaries lies in the practice of engagement as they (the practitioner) understand engagement and how it relates to their professional role. Whereas other practitioners are highlighting that the authentic relationship from working at BB supports that relationship building with parents, even in a clinical setting. Is there an expert snobbery or professional line that needs to be crossed? I can see from the parents' data that they are seeking out support at BB from the practitioners, so it does seem to have a different spin. I need to use the constant comparative method that will help me figure this out.

The sample of memos in Appendix G helps to demonstrate the process I used to develop my analysis: each memo developed my thinking based on sample quotes, and I had conversations with myself through memos on the study (Thornberg, 2012). The quote from a parent "making it easy to get in" really struck me as a way of dissecting how parents engage to attend. I began to ask questions of the data, to identify the process for parents and practitioners that made it "easy to get in". Study participants discussed how they felt attending BB, but "making it easy to get in" was not fully explaining the process involved. This was just the entry point to BB, so much happened after that. As I went back to the data again, the atmosphere at BB seemed crucial to keep parents engaged in the process. Featured in the data in Appendix H, I compared two incidents from two separate interviews where participants discussed "familiar faces – making connections" with services and parents at BB. I analysed these instances to understand participants' experiences. Charmaz (2014, p. 114) discusses how the reality of the world is known through the language used to describe it: "specific use of language confers views and values". I felt it was important to compare these incidents to see the emerging links in the data (Charmaz, 2014). I first looked at the context of each incident and compared them. I could see that one of the participating parents was describing her interaction with the healthcare practitioner at BB and how she was motivated to engage to make an appointment to allay her child's fears. The parent seemed to feel confident discussing the appointment with the practitioner: she knew her, she was a familiar face from BB. Next, I looked at the practitioner's experience of her participation at BB and the benefits to the practitioner's service as a result. The practitioner was becoming a familiar face to parents through attendance at BB and this was impacting service delivery positively. I coded and labelled the incidents. Charmaz (2014, p. 128) highlights that by "coding the codes" it ensures the researcher is looking for patterns in the data and encourages analytical thinking, making sense of data in

new ways. I looked at the properties of this incident and labelled what I felt was important to my developing analyses. Finally, I ensured these codes were included in the emerging concepts. I then wrote a memo to capture my thoughts on the ideas arising from the ongoing analyses, clarifying my thoughts (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014; Keane, 2022b). Table 4.10 is an example of the memo I wrote after the constant comparative analysis process outlined above.

Table 4.10: Example of memo on coding incident with incident

Becoming a familiar face – memo
Being a familiar face to parents that supports their engagement with BB and other services and practitioners. However, it has struck me that the practitioner has to "become" that familiar face which is perhaps tied up with resolving to engage and motivated to engage, those developing concepts. Are these conscious decisions being made, are practitioners choosing to be the familiar face or is it just happening as they develop their engagement practices through participating in BB? Worth thinking about as practitioners make the choice to become a familiar face whether knowingly or not. The practitioner is the familiar face, do they make a choice to be that familiar face? Would this be part of a motivation for both parents and practitioners? Clearly parents are motivated to engage to seek support from practitioners. Are practitioners equally motivated as they see change in practice of parents. Are practitioners and parents choosing to engage with each other and create that relationship?

New insights into data analysis are a key reason for writing memos (Birks & Mills, 2015; Prigol & Behrens, 2019). The idea for equality in participation became a tentative code in my analysis and with each memo I asked more questions of the data and of myself (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020; Lempert, 2007). As previously described in section 4.7.4 on focused coding, the concept of theoretical coding families (Glaser, 1978) is clearly relevant to the construction of what is described by participants as important in effective engagement (the six Cs of causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances and conditions). On reflection, the 'condition' for effective engagement stemming from the above memo is focused on equality in participation and reflects my interrogation of the data (Charmaz, 2017b). Theoretical codes are meant to be integrative and emerge from the data (Glaser, 1978). The concept of a familiar face emerged from the data through my interaction with the data, comparing codes with codes, developing categories and writing memos. Charmaz (2014) suggests that Theoretical codes can help a researcher identify relationships between categories but cautions researchers to make sure they are not imposing Theoretical codes and coding families. Charmaz (2014) has discussed the tension in theoretical coding as lying

between emergence and application and has suggested that Initial and focused coding are sufficient for many projects. In this study I did not explicitly employ theoretical coding in this analysis, however, I can see aspects of this approach were included in my approach to data analysis through my memo writing. I constantly tried to guarantee my reflexivity to ensure I analysed the data to explain the experiences of participants. In Memo 3 (Appendix G), I began to combine my analysis from both parents' and practitioners' interviews, seeking similarities and differences. Looking for the nuances that have created the atmosphere of BB led me to look at the equality in practice that supported engagement.

Memos supported my thinking process and enabled me to delve deeper into the analysis of the data. Explaining what I saw in the data through memos really supported the clarification of my thoughts, the analysis and the explanation of participants' experience (Birks & Mills, 2015; Borg Cunen, Jomeen, Poat, & Borg Xuereb, 2022; Charmaz, 2014). I began to see that there were separate processes happening that were allowing parents and practitioners to engage before, during and after BB. I raised these codes to a conceptual level and treated them analytically (Lempert, 2007). Raising early memos to a conceptual level supported me to look at relationships between what I included in a category and how it related to other categories and to ask questions of the data with a reflexive view (Keane, 2022a). I started to realise that practitioners and parents were both experiencing engagement in similar ways. Both parents and practitioners spoke about the atmosphere being important, needing the concepts of equality present and how important it was to "make it easy to get in", to use a personal touch for invitations to engage, to create the foundations of engagement. Although at this stage of the analysis I couldn't see the fully developed theory, I knew I was getting close. I began the process of clustering or diagramming to pull out my ideas.

4.8.2 Clustering and diagrams

After the memo writing process, I used clustering or diagramming to enhance my analytic process (Charmaz, 2017a; Lempert, 2007). Clustering made the relationship between categories and codes clearer (Buckley & Waring, 2013). Diagrams improved my analysis of the data, ensuring I could visualise theoretical codes (Glaser, 1978). Using clustering allowed me to see the data represented in a new way, I could see data was fitting together (Charmaz, 2014). Most of the clustering I did by hand, so it

became a quick and easy process. I put an idea or concept word at the centre of my cluster and drew my ideas out from it. For example, Figure 4.6 is an example of clustering I used to focus my thoughts on the practitioner engagement process. I drew around my central idea the codes I felt were related to it. This enabled the visualisation of the data, rather than just having a mental image (Charmaz, 2014). From this visualisation process I could view what was happening in the data, how it was related to other categories and I was supported to see if I was missing something tacit, or ignoring something implicit (Charmaz, 2014).

Figure 4.6 Example of clustering used.

Similarly, diagramming, which visually displayed the categories, allowed me to view the relationships between the categories more clearly. For instance, I could see the connections between the categories and how one category could subsume another, or how a category didn't fit with the current analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Figure 4.7 is an example of diagramming used that supported my analysis and understanding of why participants were engaging. This process facilitated my understanding of the social worlds of participants, and their experience of engagement. I employed the tools of clustering and diagramming as it supported my reflexivity, looking at the visuals created supported my reflection on my privileges, my positionality, to ensure I was being transparent in my analysis (Buckley & Waring, 2013).

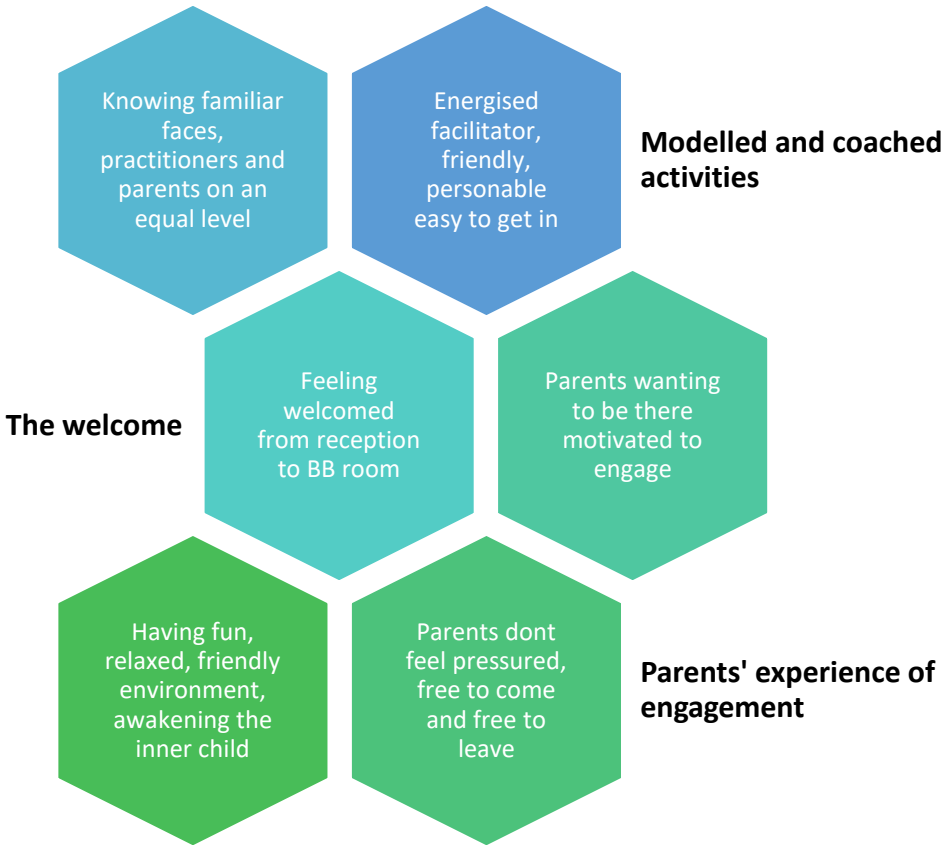

Figure 4.7: Example of diagramming used to support analysis.

4.8.3 Constant comparative methods

The constant comparative method allows for theory to be generated during the systematic analytic procedures of the GT method (Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Holton, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). I compared "incident to incident, incident to codes, codes to categories and categories to categories" (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 11). The use of constant comparative methods facilitated me to examine similarities and differences

in the data and to refine the concepts (Prigol & Behrens, 2019; Wiener, 2007). According to Wiener (2007, p. 303), “If memos are the skeleton of grounded theory method, use of the constant comparison is the full body”. Implementing the constant comparative method helped to ensure that I kept the developing data and theory closely aligned, which supported me in minimising the risk of bias in the analysis (Charmaz, 2014; Marcellus, 2005). Appendix H features a sample of the constant comparative method of analyses applied in this study.

4.9 Theoretical saturation and conceptual depth

In section 4.7.1 I highlighted how the CGT method enables existing data to be valued and therefore participants at a previous working group for Youngballymun did not need to be interviewed again to enable the existing data to be utilised (Clarke et al., 2023). Being able to analyse data I had previously collected for another purpose was also an asset when it came to theoretical saturation.

Charmaz (2006, p. 113) defined theoretical saturation as the point “when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of your core theoretical categories”. Theoretical saturation is what GT researchers aim for in their theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014). There are many similar positions on theoretical saturation from various theorists documented in the literature. For example, Morse et al. (2021) suggest that the researcher reaches saturation when they are familiar with the context and can predict participants responses. Furthermore, Foley et al. (2021) describe theoretical saturation as being reached when the categories have been fully explained in relation to the theory. Likewise Strauss and Corbin (1990) propose theoretical saturation is achieved when the relationship between categories is well supported. Similarly Morse and Clarke (2019) propose that theoretical sampling stops when the categories and theory are thorough, explain the phenomena and are applicable to contexts beyond the research.

Wiener (2007) considers theoretical saturation to be a judgement call on the part of the researcher, suggesting that time and cost of research are factors to be considered in reaching theoretical saturation. However, this reliance on the researcher’s conjecture that the properties are saturated was previously called into question by Dey (1999). Instead, Dey (1999, p. 257) suggests using the term “theoretical sufficiency”. Further to this, O'Reilly and Parker (2013) discuss the transparency around data saturation in

research, suggesting that saturation is improbable given that themes emerging from a data set could be infinite. Moreover, the terms “conceptual density” and “conceptual depth” to describe saturation are used by Nelson (2017, p. 559) to address what he terms the ‘misleading’ term of saturation.

To add to the rigor of this study, I drew on the assertions of Nelson (2017) for theoretical saturation, who established a method for establishing sufficiency of conceptual depth. Nelson’s five criteria for theoretical saturation are built upon the systematic approach of GT and aligned with objectives of establishing quality in GT research, as proposed by Charmaz (2014) and Corbin and Strauss (2014). I have applied these conceptual depth criteria to this study:

1. A wide range of evidence can be drawn on to illustrate the concepts.
2. The concepts are part of a rich network of concepts and themes in the data within which there are more complex connections.
3. Subtlety in the concepts is understood and used by the researcher to articulate the richness of its meaning.
4. The concepts have resonance with existing literature in the area being investigated.
5. The concepts, as part of a wider analytic story, stand up to testing for external validation (Nelson, 2017, p. 559).

4.9.1 Criterion one: range

Range is met by ensuring multiple examples of concepts in the data are provided. I have provided evidence of this criterion through multiple sources of data collection, diverse participants from parents to practitioners, varied samples of my memos, and demonstration of my immersion in the data through the process of initial and focused coding. I consider the range of evidence I have provided supports my conceptual depth in this study.

4.9.2 Criterion two: complexity

Complexity requires that concepts are part of a rich network of other concepts and themes in the data. This criterion is evidenced within this study through clustering and diagramming of complex concepts and findings. GT research requires the use of clustering and diagramming to enhance the analytical process (Charmaz, 2017b; Glaser, 1978). I used clustering and diagramming frequently during this study to support my analytic thinking and reflexivity and address the complexities of the data

and findings. I have included samples of these analyses in section 4.8.2. This visualisation process supported me to see if I was missing something tacit, or ignoring something implicit and to see the connections in the complexity of the data that may not have been otherwise visible (Charmaz, 2014).

4.9.3 Criterion three: subtlety

Subtlety is demonstrated through the use of the comparative method which supports the researcher to examine similarities and differences in the data and to refine the concepts (Prigol & Behrens, 2019; Wiener, 2007). An example of this criterion is outlined in section 4.8.3, and featured in Appendix H, where I provided a sample of my use of the constant comparative method as it applied to this study. The example describes two incidents that I compared from two separate interviews using participants in-vivo codes to ensure I remained embedded in the data. For example, the in-vivo codes "familiar faces – making connections" were used to describe engagement between practitioners and parents at BB. I analysed these instances to understand participants' experience and I also included a memo in my example. The application of constant comparative method demonstrates subtlety in this study.

4.9.4 Criterion four: resonance

The concept of resonance is related to using literature to test for sufficient depth in the emerging theory (Nelson, 2017). As reflected on in chapter 3, the literature review and when to complete it in GT research is a controversial element of the methodology (Birks & Mills, 2015). Dunne (2011) suggested this controversy is best understood as a focus on when the literature review is completed and how the researcher can successfully bracket their prior assumptions during the review. In CGT there is no delay with a literature review and familiarity with the literature is encouraged, as it supports the researcher to make comparisons with new literature developments and enriches the opportunity to support theory development (Charmaz et al., 2018). I engaged with the literature in the beginning of this study to complete a systematic review of initial parental engagement. This literature review helped in the development of how I construed engagement and gave me an understanding of the current field of research in relation to initial engagement. Following the advice of (Charmaz, 2014, p. 307), I conducted an additional literature review to support the specific research context. The criterion of resonance tested the conceptual depth of my developing theory and highlighted to me the similarities and differences between my developing theory and the literature. I have outlined this comparison in the discussion chapter 8.

4.9.5 Criterion five: validity

According to (Motulsky, 2021), reliability and validity are part of a researcher's epistemological philosophy and their understanding of what comprises evidence in their research. Validity is often viewed as an opportunity to describe the accounts of participants in and out of the qualitative research context (Spiers, Morse, Olson, Mayan, & Barrett, 2018). In this study internal validation was demonstrated through the use of memos, clustering, coding, diagrams and many examples of the theory in its various stages of development. External validity was supported through the use of the PhD seminar group, by creating a space to discuss the research with peers. Brodie (2013) recommends the use of critical friends to challenge the researcher's thinking, albeit in a constructive manner. Similarly, McNiff (2017a) suggests that a researcher should be able to communicate how their work establishes a theory of practice if it is to be deemed a contribution to educational theory. External validity for this study was also ensured by looking at the usefulness of the theory and its applicability in the working lives of practitioners (Nelson, 2017). To establish external validity, I have discussed in chapter 9 the application of this study's theory to policy and practice and the implications of 'the dance of engagement' for practice, by providing opportunities for practitioners to focus on four key areas: (i) knowledge; (ii) planning (iii) actions to support effective parental engagement and (iv) evaluate and reflect. This process also includes parents' knowledge to include parents voice in any planning on effective engagement.

In summary I drew on the assertions of Nelson (2017) for theoretical saturation. Nelson's five criteria for theoretical saturation are built upon the systematic approach of GT and aligned with the objective of establishing quality in GT research, as proposed by Charmaz (2014) and Corbin and Strauss (2014).

4.10 Abductive reasoning and category building

Abductive reasoning is "a mode of imaginative reasoning researchers invoke when they cannot account for a surprising or puzzling finding" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 200). I used abductive reasoning to compare categories with other categories to develop my analysis further. Abductive reasoning "is a cerebral process, an intellectual act, a mental leap, that brings together things which one has never associated with the other: a cognitive logic of discovery" (Reichertz, 2007, p. 220). Abductive reasoning facilitated me to restructure and develop my tentative codes especially with regard to negative

cases in the data (Charmaz, 2014). Negative cases, or outlying data, are data that offer differences to the pattern emerging. According to Charmaz (2014, pp. 198-199), "researchers often use negative cases to identify new variables or provide alternative explanations for their developing theory". Abduction is crucial because "it demands researchers consider all possible theoretical understandings for puzzling data" (Charmaz, 2019, p. 17). An example of a negative case within this study's analysis can be found in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11: Sample of constant comparison analyses of a negative case.

Excerpt 1	**Excerpt 2**
YB focus group 1, June 2021, L44, Marion: YB Practitioner discusses boundaries and relationships – risks involved	**Practitioners focus group 2, Mar 2021, L8, Rosemary:** Practitioner discusses raising difficult conversations at BB and how BB supports this process
Sometimes it can be hard to say in these organisations if we over identify with the parent, we could in same way, now, I mean, smaller scale, not see the child's needs. You know, if we over identify with the parent we could collude in some way with the child's needs or miss them in some way. Because you know, if you develop such a strong relationship, you might find it really difficult to raise difficult issues because this parent is really- feels close to you, and all the rest. So, I'm not wording that correctly but I'm trying to build on your point that when the boundaries become blurred, you need to be very careful that, even though we are trying to be strong advocates for parental engagement, we still have to also have the eye on the relationship and the child if you're concerned	*…we're so hardwired for connection that when you meet like that you can get a multitude of things done, it just resonates with me so much the time going into that big room you can just casually start the conversation then other things come up. And I think too, as humans, even with the parents they relax more, you know yourself you learn more when you're in a relaxed environment. So when you relax in that environment you can have those conversations that you might not have wanted to, they come up naturally about another agency that you need to link them in with, so yeah I miss that for sure*.
Properties of: Having difficult conversations "being hardwired for connections" at the risk of "being human". • Developing strong relationships with parents brings risks: taking a risk as a practitioner to have authentic engagement. • Holding difficult conversations: difficult conversations easier when relationships exist already. • Blurring boundaries: practitioner boundaries needing to be maintained	

In this example, I was interested in the practitioner discussing the blurring of relationships with parents and how engagement relationships can be perceived by a practitioner. It went to the core of the engagement process. This account of blurring boundaries raised questions about the tentative categories I had in development on motivations to engage for practitioners. I contrasted this data with another practitioner

account which discussed raising difficult conversations with parents and how that process can be facilitated through engagement at BB as parents are relaxed. Using abductive reasoning, I developed the properties to enhance the analysis and understanding of the risks to practitioners of authentic engagement. The process of abduction allowed me to understand different practices to support engagement, the barriers for practitioners to engage and crucially to learn how that process can change (Charmaz, 2019).

Applying abductive reasoning to my data collection supported my understanding of the data and the changing research environment. I was comforted by Charmaz (2014) as she discussed going back through data to re-examine it or to collect more data. As I changed methodology and re-examined the data already collected using CGT methods, I could see how my analysis was deepening as a result. I had to situate my study in its social context (Charmaz, 2021), as I thought CGT had the ability to evolve as a tool to navigate the study during a pandemic and that I had made the right choice in switching from AR to CGT.

4.10.1 Theoretical sorting

The iterative process of coding and writing memos that underpins GT analysis continues as part of the theory-building process (Urquhart, 2013). During the later stages of analysis the researcher sorts memos to support the generation of the final theory (Birks & Mills, 2015). To remain “creatively conceptual”, I sorted the memos by hand when developing the categories and the final theory (Glaser, 2005, p. 39). I also took the memos I had written on my “memo tree” on post-it notes and included them in my efforts to develop the final theory. My “memo tree” was made up of my thoughts, my preconceptions, and anything tacit that I came across in the data as my process of analysis developed. I wanted to ensure nothing was lost in transition as I went through the iterative process of CGT, from data to codes to memos to categories to theory. Charmaz (2014, p. 218) suggests sorting memos into categories to support the ongoing analyses: “to create the best possible balance between the studied experience, your categories, and your theoretical statements about them”.

4.11 Developing theory with categories

The final theory was developed through the composition of categories and the development of a model that gave a visual description of the theory and explained the relationship between categories and concepts (Herron et al., 2020; Marcellus, 2005).

The categories were developed through the iterative process of analysis. Categories are “a higher-level concept that represents a group of codes” (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 177): they are “conceptual elements of a theory” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 36) that “explicate ideas, events, or processes” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 189). I generated categories from the data through the processes of abstraction (coding), and every category secured its place in the analysis by being grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; Hallberg, 2006). Categories were grounded in the data through constant interaction with the data. I kept an open mind and remained reflexive, and through the iterative process of coding, constant comparative analysis, memo writing, checking and revising what categories I developed I reached a deeper analytical level (Dey, 2007; Kelle, 2007).

4.11.1 Generating initial categories

According to Grodal, Anteby, and Holm (2021, p. 596), there are three general stages in the process of developing categories: 1) generating initial categories; 2) refining tentative categories; and 3) stabilising categories. Generating initial categories in this study occurred at the data collection stage. Refining tentative categories occurred when data analysis shifted from making initial categories to dropping, sorting and comparing categories. The stabilising category stage occurred when the categories were reanalysed and integrated with concepts.

To generate initial categories, I employed the CGT procedures of theoretical sorting, diagramming and integrating memos to enhance the development of the emerging theory (Charmaz, 2014; Wiener, 2007). Theoretical sorting of memos was “an essential step in the grounded theory process that cannot be skipped” (Glaser, 1978, p. 116). Theoretical sorting was a process I did by hand: I laid out all the memos on a table and read through them. I then began to sort them into categories where I could see there was a relationship between the ongoing analyses and the memo. Charmaz (2014) highlights the importance of sorting for theoretical integration bringing the comparison of categories and memos to an abstract level of analyses.

To develop the initial categories I took the focused codes and the categorised memos and began to assign them a category that I felt was making sense of participants’ worlds and what they had told me. This iterative process supported me to ask

questions of the data and conceptualise the possibilities (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table 4.12 demonstrates initial development of categories in the analysis process.

Table 4.12 Sample of initial development of categories

Methods to engage.	Motivations to engage.	Dichotomy of engagement		System ethos and leadership
Resolving barriers to engage – creche corner, welcome "easy to get in", hugs, interest, valued, free food – tea coffee, breakfast, free resources, availability of practitioners, practitioner skills and personality, posters, phone calls texts, parents like the personal invite, supportive environment, relaxed.	Motivation to engage for the child. Parents: Supporting children's L & L skills/Free resources for child Changing the dyad between parent and child. Motivation to engage for the practitioner: making connections Building trust/ becoming a familiar face "reaching out so parents can reach in"	Fearing engagement: practitioner Blurring boundaries - practitioner – parent dyad Engagement is hard. Fearing engagement: parent Parents feeling anxious, intimidated and judged.	Enhancing engagement – Attributes of facilitator, Facilitator acting silly, being vulnerable, "being human." Coaching and modelling activities Power shift "Hardwired for connection" relationship dyad. Being flexible with agendas and objectives "power" Learning from each other – two-way practice Parents as experts supporting participation	Leadership/Implementing the ethos of engagement: Supporting the practitioner: Training for staff in engagement practices – Reengagement, phone calls, the welcome etc Referral or voluntary – differences- similarities taking charge of referrals (language used etc) leadership role/ "having difficult conversations" solving issues/ Modelling respect and equality to parents and practitioners "leading by example."

4.11.2 Refining the initial categories

To begin a refinement of categories (Grodal et al., 2021), I utilised theoretical sampling, saturation and sorting until I developed robust categories (Charmaz, 2014). Merging categories is seen as a necessary move that enhances theory development (Charmaz, 2006). Categorising supported me to "raise the conceptual level of the analysis from description to a more theoretical level" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 186).

In CGT, emphasis is placed on describing categories and sub categories and how they produce a cohesive grounded theory (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). In this study a core category was not developed as I felt that the categories were naturally related

to each other and I did not see the need for a hierarchy: each category, I decided, was essential to the process of engagement.

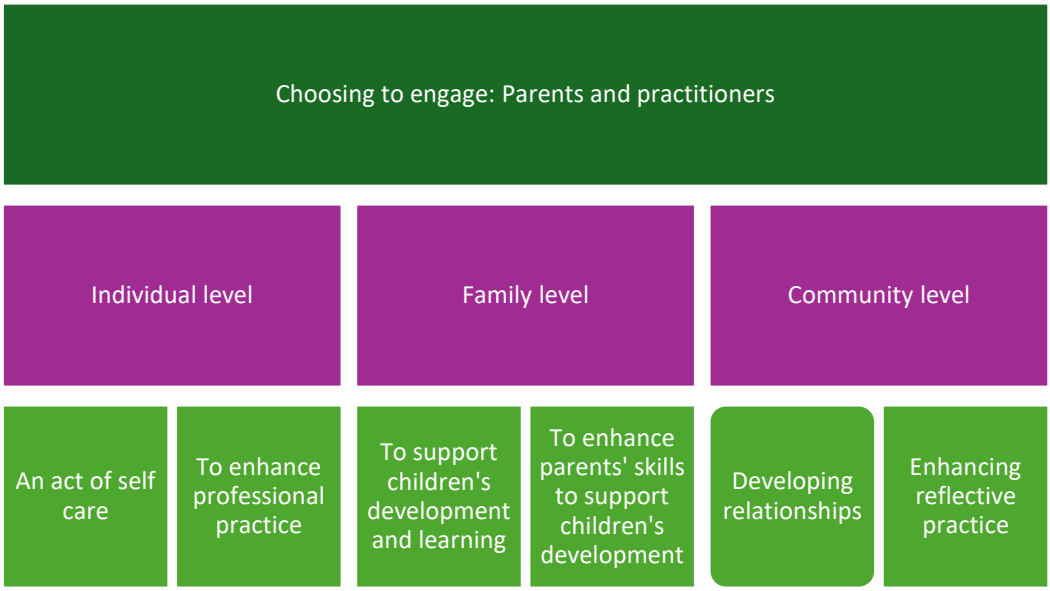

Figure 4.8: The benefits of engagement to participants

The theory started to evolve, and I could see how parents' and practitioners' process of engagement were similar. For example, in Figure 4.8, although the idea was further fleshed out as I wrote about it, it was apparent that choosing to engage was a category. Through the data analysis, I recognised that participants were choosing to engage across different levels (individual, family, and community) and that this affected their reasons for choosing to engage. The coding process using gerunds was also valuable to the construction of the categories. As I viewed this process as it occurred in my analysis, the more I engaged with the data and I moved closer to theory development. Through the iterative process of refining the analysis, I continued to move back through the data, looking at transcripts, matching up codes, reflecting on memos and looking at the memo tree I created with post-its that captured my thinking process. This was a reflective process as well as an active one as I developed the theory. At this stage in the development of the theory, I decided it was timely to engage with existing literature to see how the categories "fit, extend or challenges leading ideas" (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020, p. 18) in my field.

4.11.3 Stabilising categories to develop the theory

Having spent time completing a literature review in the field of engagement I turned my attention back to the data and the categories I had developed. To begin stabilising the categories (Grodal et al., 2021), I took the advice of Suddaby (2006, p. 635)

regarding the literature review: I was aware of the research in the field of PE, but I also needed to acknowledge my positionality in the study “to achieve a practical middle ground”. To do this I read through my analyses to immerse myself in the data again. I examined the categories on engagement I had developed to ensure the data supported the theoretical conclusion I had reached. I went back to my memos and relooked at the categories, and then went back to my study question. I asked myself did the categories explain engagement? Was the theory refined enough? Had I found any new knowledge? Had I explicated it?

After this reflective process I realised I needed to reorganise the categories and raise some categories to a theoretical concept to develop a more cohesive theory. Theoretical concepts support an “abstract understanding of relationships – subsume lesser categories with ease and by comparison hold more significance, account for more data and often make crucial processes more evident” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 248). Having developed the concept on choosing to engage at different levels across the process of parental engagement, I went back to the categories again. During the iterative process of reviewing the data, I realised that embedded across the categories was the experiences and perspectives of participants: trust, safety, equality, and knowledge sharing. These four areas were integral to the relationship-building process and represented parents’ and practitioners’ requirements for trusting relationships with each other, safe spaces to connect within the community, to feel safe to participate, to be treated and respected with equality, and to have ownership of their engagement with each other. Once these concepts were established in the relationship amongst participants, a process of recognising the knowledge gained and shared among participants began (See Figure 4.9 overleaf for a model of the theory in its development stage).

During the iterative process of developing the theory I merged categories to enhance the theory. Grodal et al. (2021, p. 603) describe merging a category as a critical stage in theory development: “this move allows the researcher to examine whether the data truly support the theoretical conclusions reached in the prior stages and to be more actively reflexive on how these conclusions were reached”. At this stage of theory development, I had three categories and four underpinning concepts.

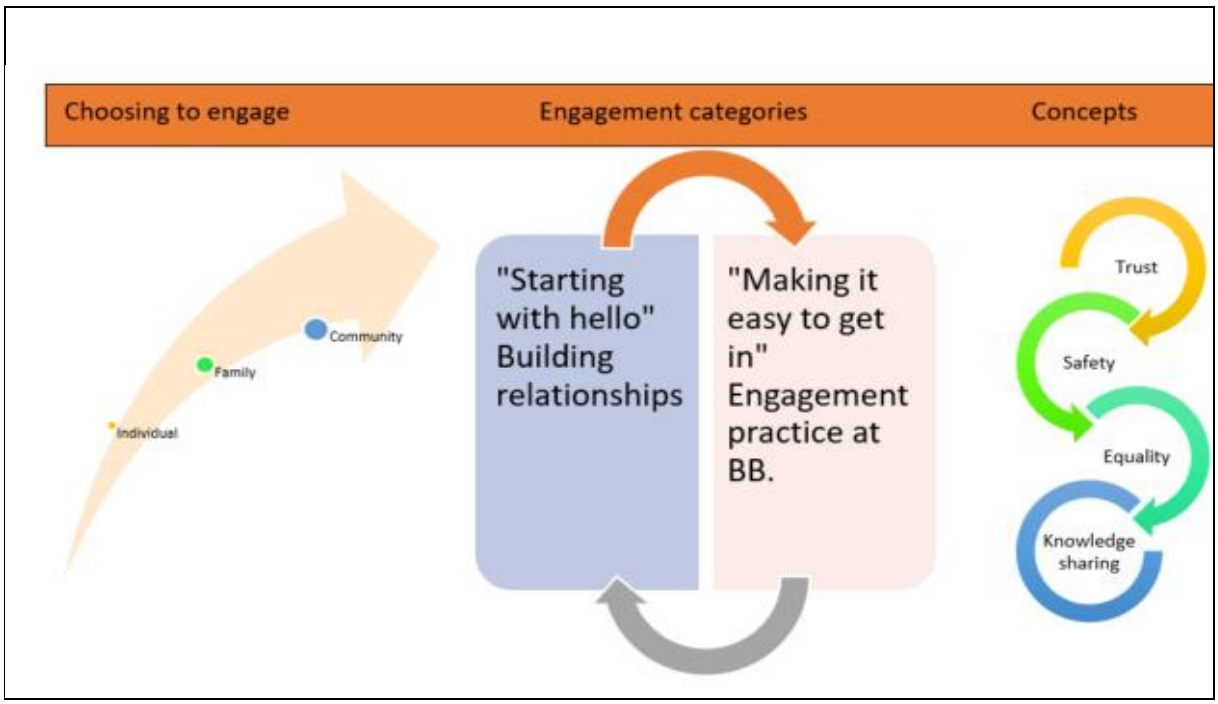

Figure 4.9: A model of theory in a development stage.

The first category was ‘Choosing to engage’ which as discussed previously encompassed participants’ reasons for choosing to engage. The second category ‘Starting with hello’, linked to the relationship-building process that occurs to enhance engagement. This category had four subcategories: 1) Valuing the partnership, practitioner and parent relationship; 2) “A familiar face”, parent and practitioner relationship; 3) “Being in the same boat”, parent and parent relationship; and 4) “it’s just so easy”, parent and child relationship. The third category was ‘Making it easy to get in’, engagement practice: this category relates to the experiences of participants of the engagement practice as it occurs. This category had three subcategories: 1) “Come as you are”, the welcome; 2) Bringing the Community together; and 3) “We were all there as equals”, Equality in practice. The concepts of engagement focused on what needed to be present for the relationship-building process of parents’ engagement: trust, safety, equality and sharing knowledge.

4.11.4 Reviewing the theory with my peers

Having reached a critical stage in the data analyses and theory development, I shared my initial constructs with the PhD student seminar group. This seminar group comprised my primary supervisor and two other PhD students. It was a reflective space, conducive to discussion and reflection. McNiff (2017b, p. 122) discusses the use of a “validation group” to provide an essential response to any claims to knowledge

and suggest alternative strategies or interpretations to the researcher's knowledge claims. Validation groups consist of critical friends that can support the researcher to ensure the research is robust (McNiff, 2016). McAteer (2013, p. 41) suggests that a "community of critical friends" is essential for the welfare of the researcher and the veracity of the research. I found my PhD seminar group was comparable to a critical friend's group: they supported my process for data analysis and brought my attention to any assumptions or interpretations I was making. As I prepared that day for the meeting with my peers and I reflected on the study, I realised that although in my head the theory made perfect sense, I was struggling to explain exactly what it was a theory of. Although the meeting did not go as I had hoped, there were many questions about the theory that I presented and it helped me to review the theory from a different perspective. Herr and Anderson (2015) suggest that critical friends may support researchers to make explicit what is on a tacit level and create deeper meanings and understanding. The PhD seminar group helped me further reflect as I began to reanalyse the theory I had presented.

4.11.5 Finalising the theory: 'The dance of engagement'

As I reflected on the theory I had developed and pondered on the questions my peers had raised, I remembered a quote I had read from Reason and Bradbury (2008, p. 7): "a key dimension of quality is to be aware of one's choices, and to make those choices clear, transparent, articulate to yourselves, to your enquiry partners and …to the wider world". To fulfil this dimension of quality in research I went back to the theory and began to ask myself crucial questions in search of a more explicit way to describe it. I began by searching for the answer as to what is it a theory of? I thought that the theory described the elements of effective parental engagement and the details in the categories described what is needed for effective engagement. I began to look at spaces that need to be created for parental engagement to be effective, and my attention turned to the concepts of trust, safety, equality and knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing, based on the data, was a category, a component of effective engagement. This category was describing the outcomes of effective engagement for parents and practitioners. Initial concepts about the foundation of effective engagement began to crystallise for me. From the data, it was apparent that these foundations were what the ensuing relationships between parents and practitioners is based upon. I then went back to the start of the study and reminded myself again of the research question. The original aim was to develop a framework for

engagement and so I considered could I do that using this theory? My answer was yes. I then looked at the sub-questions and asked myself was I answering them? Did I have an understanding through this theory of how barriers to engagement can be addressed, to maximise engagement? Was I able to explain what the theory was highlighting, how the perspectives of parents and practitioners enhanced the understanding of what works in engagement practices? The answer was yes again. This process helped me to define and explain the theory more articulately and clearly.

4.11.6 Conclusion

This chapter focused on CGT methodology and a variety of CGT methods I used for data analysis are described. I outlined the research aims, profile setting and ethical approval and brought attention to the change in sampling procedure. I also explained data collection methods employed including focus groups. I highlighted the representation of the systematic process for analysing data using CGT methods. Initial coding and focused coding methods are described, with memo writing and methodological self-consciousness conveying constant reflexivity in the process. The application of the CGT methods of clustering, diagramming, constant comparative analysis and the ongoing development of categories from the data were demonstrated as the theory was developed. I highlighted theoretical sensitivity, theoretical saturation and theoretical sorting with an example of a memo, to demonstrate the role they played in my methodological self-consciousness and the deepening of the analysis as I created a theory. The final theory developed, following the implementation of all the former methods through an iterative process, led to the theory ‘the dance of engagement’ which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings 1

The findings have been divided into three chapters across this thesis.

5. Findings 1: The theory of 'the dance of engagement'

This chapter describes the findings of the data analysis and the application of the CGT methods that supported the development of a theory of effective parental engagement, which I have named the theory of 'the dance of engagement. This first offers a conceptual overview of the model of the 'dance of engagement' and describes how the different elements of the model are interrelated. In this chapter, I will describe the theory of 'the dance of engagement' with reference to its foundations (i.e., the dancefloor), its inherent core tenets of safety, equality, and trust (SET) and the four dance steps to effective parental engagement. Furthermore, I will describe the elements of the theory and how they interrelate with the aid of the model, a visual understanding of the theory that was constructed directly from the data and findings.

5.1 My perspective on parental engagement

Grounded theories methods are flexible and rely on our emergent processes that are shaped by the researcher's interaction with the data (Charmaz 2014). As succinctly expressed by Charmaz (2014, p320) "researchers are a part of what they study, not separate from it". With this quote in mind, I think it is important to repeat my definition of parental engagement so that the theoretical underpinnings of this research are clear. My definition of parental engagement is situated within the context of family literacy community-based programmes and is considered a multi-factorial, dynamic process that requires active collaboration between participants and a focus on practical supports towards achieving a mutually agreed outcome. It is in the context of this understanding of parental engagement and how it applies to this current study that the complex interactions of engagement can be viewed in Figure 5.1 overleaf.

The data suggested that 'the dance of engagement' is a complex process with lots of energetic interactions happening across the community. For example, in the data, participants recalled the various interactions across the family, school and community to support engagement. Parents, practitioners, peers and children interacted with each other to create the dance of engagement (see Figure 5.1 for a visual representation of these complex interactions involved in the theory 'the dance of engagement'). Examples of these complex interactions were embedded in the data and in participants' descriptions of how engagement was effective for them and what was

needed to ensure the dance was successfully integrated into community-based family literacy programmes.

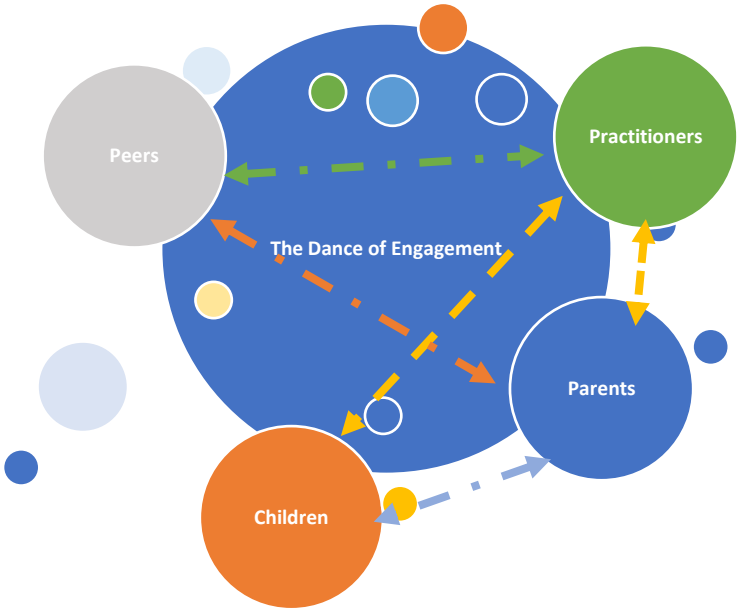

Figure 5.1: The complex interactions involved in the theory of 'the dance of engagement'

5.2 The role of CGT in theory construction

The theory presented in this chapter is the result of the application of a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach to theory development, utilising the CGT methods of clustering, diagramming, constant comparative analysis and the ongoing development of categories from the data (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Charmaz (2014, p. 228) posits that "theories try to answer questions. Theories offer accounts for what happened, how it ensues, and may aim to account for how it happened."

The theoretical framework for this research (previously described in chapter 1) is rooted in community-based family literacy practice and aligned with the ecological systems theory that recognises the inter-relationship between family, school and community (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979, 2001). In addition, socio-cultural practices that are strengths-based (Gill & Jack, 2007) and value parents' "funds of knowledge" are appreciated (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, p. 3). Further concepts that consider social change and addressing social justice are included (Lynch & Prins, 2022). More specifically, this study hones in on the theories relevant to family literacy approaches

and stems from a social lens that views literacy and learning as embedded in the culture, relationships and practices of children and their parents (González et al., 2005).

The theory development in this study was enhanced by an understanding that CGT supports researchers to make links about our worlds, our values and the structures our data represent (Charmaz 2021). Such a systemic view of parental engagement highlights the importance of direct and indirect contexts in children's development and may ensure that contextual factors, organisational factors, and family characteristics and processes that may apply to the lives of parents and children are considered by practitioners seeking to engage parents (Gill & Jack, 2007). The theory generated from the data collected in this study, "The Theory of the Dance of Engagement", seeks to explain what constitutes effective parental engagement. As a theory, it is grounded in the data and it describes a framework where effective engagement can be known and explained (Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2011; Yamauchi, Ponte, Ratliffe, & Traynor, 2017).

5.3 'The dance of engagement'

The theory of 'the dance of engagement' has the following key elements: three core tenets of the foundations of parental engagement; safety, equality and trust (SET), and four categories that comprise the process of parental engagement. I am using the analogy of a dance to explain this theory because a dance itself is recognised worldwide as a universal language. A dance transcends and embraces language and culture and connects individuals and communities. 'The dance of engagement' is not linear. There are ebbs and flows, steps forward and back, the normal push and pull of a dance, with pauses and stops along the way as the relationship and engagement between the participants of the dance develops. 'The dance of engagement' is unique to the person learning the dance steps and collaborating in the dance with others.

5.4 Explanation of the model

A visual representation of the theory of 'the dance of engagement' is presented in Figure 5.2 to support the understanding of the theory, elucidating the related concepts (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 179; Grix, 2010). The term model and theory are often used interchangeably in research. In the study reported here, the distinction offered by Cohen et al. (2011) is applied, i.e., that a model generally includes a descriptive illustration of a theory.

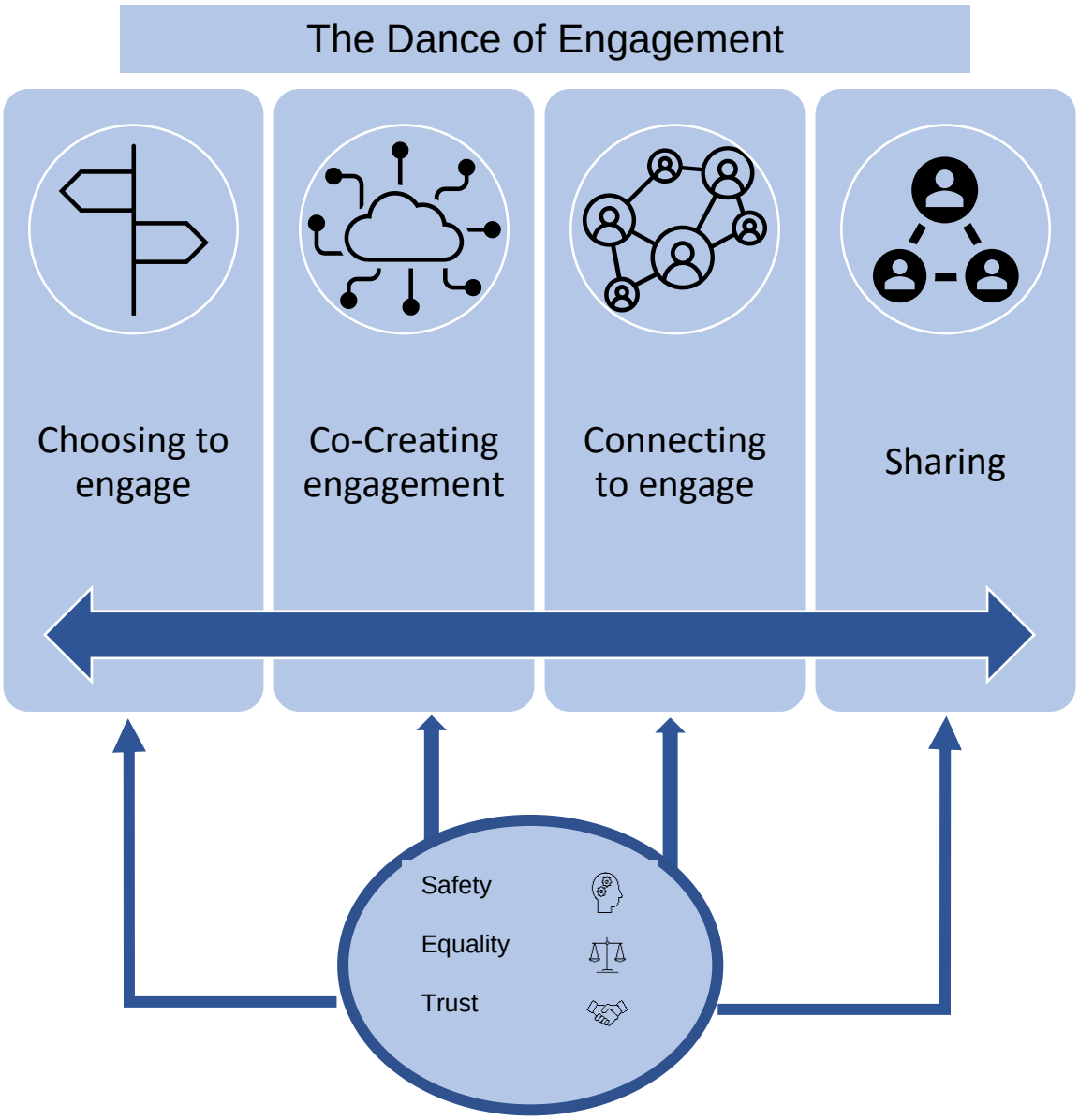

Figure 5.2: Theory of parental engagement: 'The dance of engagement'

The model above (Figure 5.2) was designed to describe 'the dance of engagement' that was constructed from the data and will be described in detail below. At the foundation of the model (the dance floor) are the tenets of engagement: **safety, equality and trust (SET)**, represented by a blue sphere under the categories. The four dance steps (i.e., **choosing to engage, co-creating engagement, connecting to engage, sharing**) represent the output of the iterative analysis of the CGT process, from data to codes to the development of categories (see chapter 4). The arrows emanating from the SET are permeating each dance step to illustrate the influence of the tenets of engagement, SET. The influence of SET on the four dance steps of engagement establishes the importance of SET in the engagement process and their impact on participants' dance of engagement. The bidirectional arrow brings attention

to the nonlinear nature of 'the dance of engagement', highlighting the understanding that practitioners and parents may be at different points in the engagement process with each other at any given time and emphasising the uniqueness of everyone's engagement.

5.5 The tenets of parental engagement: safety, equality and trust (SET)

The experiences and perspectives of participants shared across the interviews led to the generation of three foundation parental engagement concepts of **safety, equality and trust**, (see Table 5.1 for a definition of these tenets). The core tenets of engagement, SET, represent parents' and practitioners' requirements for relationships of safety, equality and trust with each other. Supporting the co-creation of parental engagement, parents and practitioners advocated for safe spaces to connect within the community and to feel safe to participate with each other in a neutral friendly environment, to be treated and respected with equality, to have ownership of their engagement with each other and to develop trusting relationships. SET are values that were represented as present and cultivated as the parents and practitioners engaged in the "dance" with each other (see Figure 5.3).

Table 5.1: Tenets of parental engagement: Safety, Equality and Trust (SET).

Concept	Definition	What needs to be present for parents and practitioners
Safety	Feeling emotionally secure and safe to speak up, to share thoughts and ideas freely without fear of negative reactions.	An emotionally safe environment is created, participants feel nurtured and encouraged to develop confidence and self-efficacy.
Equality	Being equal in status, rights and opportunities, recognising it to be true, understanding one's own inherent power.	Equality is embedded in the learning environment, in the interactions between participants. Creating perspective changes and thriving together.
Trust	Having confidence in someone's ability to support, feeling hopeful, recognising honesty and sincerity.	Creating an environment of trust and respect for everyone, being consistent and following through on commitments.

Furthermore, the concept of SET includes the multiple aspects of engagement, including Behavioural, Relational, Attitudinal, Cognitive, Affective, Facilitative, Socialising (Bamberger et al., 2014; Becker et al., 2015; Hock et al., 2015; King et al., 2014; Staudt, 2007) (see section 2.3 for full description). The inclusion and understanding of the multiple aspects of parental engagement, support the

engagement process by understanding what parents and practitioners require to shape their engagement and support the dismantling of barriers to engagement.

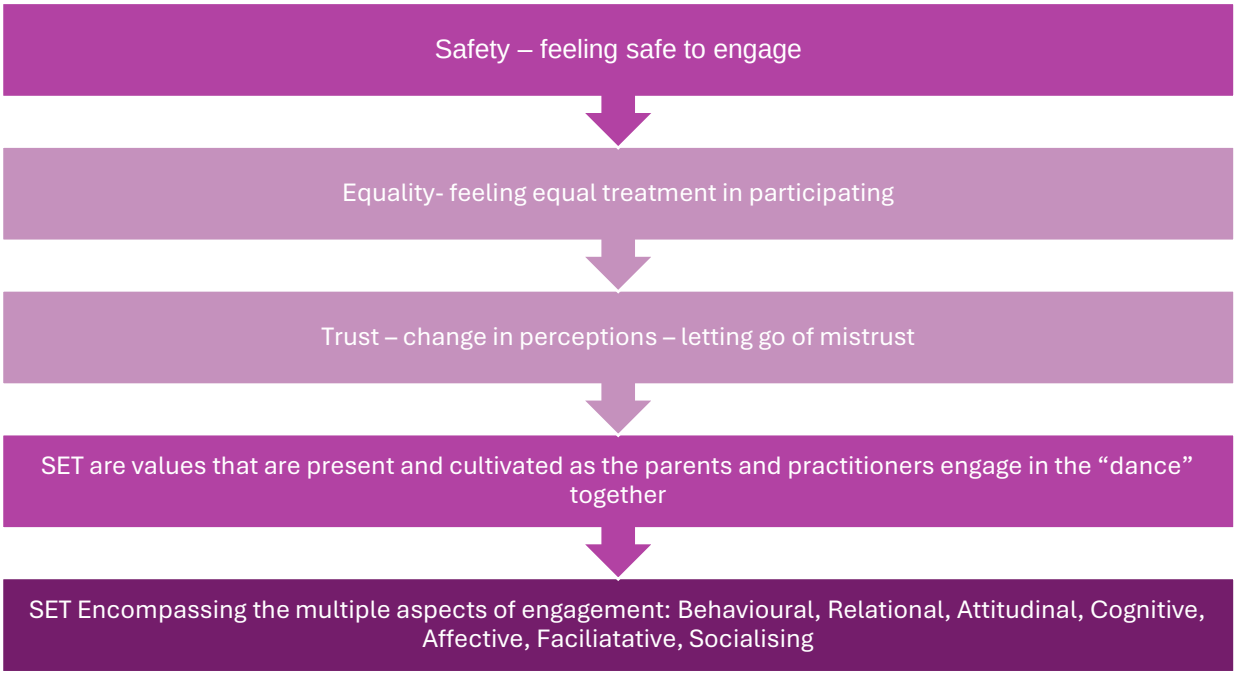

Figure 5.3: SET: Core foundational tenets of parental engagement.

5.6 Four categories of parental engagement: Process of parental engagement

Supported by the foundational tenets (i.e., SET) of parental engagement, this theory establishes the elements of parental engagement that need to be present to effectively engage parents. There are four categories in the model: **Choosing to engage, Co-creating engagement, Connecting to engage, and Sharing.** The categories are illustrated in the model (Figure 5.2) as a linear, sequential process, offering an explanation to the ongoing process of parental engagement. This model represents the partnership in the dance of engagement between parents and practitioners. However, the model is not meant to be viewed as a progression from one category to another, but rather offers an explanation of the process of engagement that occurs between parents and practitioners. The four categories "**Choosing to engage", "Co-creating engagement", "Connecting to engage"** and **"Sharing"** are interrelated and represented in the model with a bi-directional arrow to show their relationship with each other**.** When a parent and practitioner choose to engage, they decide to become a familiar face to each other and begin to co-create the relationship building process. As the relationship dyad between parent and practitioner develops, parents engage in

programmes where the practitioner has made it easy for them to attend and connect. Ensuring that parents can attend programmes and build relationships with their peers through connecting in a supportive neutral environment enhances the parents' and practitioners' connections to and across the community.

Furthermore, due to the complex nature of parental engagement and its multiple stages, participants can be at various points in the process at any one time (see Figure 5.4). Each participant's engagement process is unique to them. For instance, some of the parent participants of this study had numerous different relationships with several different services at any one time. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that participants can be at different phases of the engagement process with different practitioners. With some services they could be choosing to engage, with others they could be co-creating engagement, and with others connecting to engage or sharing to engage. This concept will be discussed in more detail in section 7.6: 'the dance of engagement': an explanation in the practice of engagement.

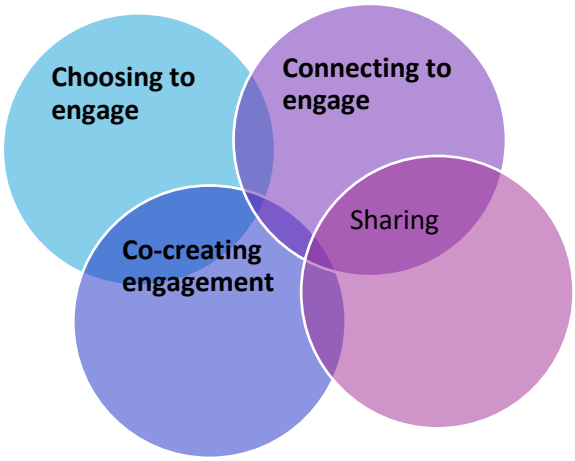

Figure 5.4: The four categories of parental engagement and their interrelationship

5.7 Choosing to Engage

The first category of the parental engagement process is '**choosing to engage'** and is represented in the model with signposts as an image to reflect the choices that participants make in **choosing to engage** (see Figure 5.2). Although it is typically the first step in the parental engagement process, the model recognises that this stage can happen at any point in the process of engagement across an individual, family and community level. Parental engagement changes, develops and fluctuates over time for each individual involved. Every time a parent or practitioner interacts, they are **choosing to engage**. As they **co-create** their relationship, the opportunities to engage

in programmes, conversations and services grows. For example, a practitioner and a parent may have several completely different relationships and interactions with each other across the community setting. However, once the participant **chooses to engage**, and the core tenets of engagement are applied: **safety, equality and trust (SET),** the relationships, although different, are based on the same solid foundations. This category has an interrelationship with the other three categories "**Co-creating engagement", "Connecting to engage"** and **"Sharing"** (see Figure 5.4). (See Table 5.2 for potential reasons why practitioners and parents may choose to engage)

Table 5.2: Choosing to engage: Reasons why parents and practitioners choose to engage.

Reasons why practitioners and parents choose to engage		
Choosing to engage	**Parents**	**Practitioners**
Individual level	An act of self-care to address: • feelings of loneliness • isolation • mental health	To enhance engagement with parents To develop their professional practice
Family level	To support children's learning and development To enhance skills to support children	To support children's learning and development. To enhance parents' skills to support their children.
Community level	To develop relationships with peers and practitioners. To get involved in services in the community.	To understand the cultural and contextual setting of the lived environment for families. To collaborate practitioners from other services and enhance engagement between services.

5.8 Co-creating engagement

The second category of the parental engagement process is **co-creating engagement** (see figure 5.4). This category represents the relationship-building process that enhances parents' engagement with services. Relationship building can be viewed as difficult by participating practitioners, and some participating parents indicated a mistrust of practitioners and services. Practitioners sought to develop their parental engagement practice and support the numerous developing relationships such as those between parents and practitioners, parents and their peers and parents and their children. The core tenets of parental engagement - **safety, equality and trust (SET),** - encourage parents and practitioners to **co-create** relationships together. Without relationships built on **SET,** parents can hesitate to engage, fail to engage at all, or drop out of programmes early. For some practitioners this felt frustrating, perhaps like taking

one step forward and two steps back in the dance of engagement. As a concept **co-creating engagement** recognises the role that both parents and practitioners play in developing their relationship with each other and amongst their peers. It requires a shared ownership of the relationship process as described by participants involved in this study. This category has established interrelationships with the other three categories "**Choosing to engage", "Connecting to engage"** and **"Sharing"** (see Figure 5.4) and relies on the establishment of **SET** and the relationships that are developed across the family, school and community setting.

5.9 Connecting to engage

The third category of the parental engagement process is '**connecting to engage'** (see Figure 5.4). '**Connecting to engage'** describes the principles of engagement that may support parents to come as they are, work together as a community with their peers and be treated with equality in practice. **Connecting to engage** focuses on the teaching and learning environment of effective parental engagement practice. Participating ppractitioners recommended the need to understand the barriers to engagement for parents and for services to be proactive in supporting parents to attend and participate in the programme in a safe informal environment. Participating parents in this study were very clear about what works to support their in-session engagement and reflected on their abilities to engage with their peers and learn in a fun informal environment. The interrelationships between **Connecting to engage** and the category **Sharing** are very clear and could be seen as an effective outcome of engagement practices (see Figure 5.4).

5.10 Sharing

The fourth category of the parental engagement process is **'sharing'** (see Figure 5.4). **Sharing** knowledge was deemed to occur at different stages of the process of parental engagement. **Sharing** was also considered an outcome of effective engagement. For participating parents, knowledge **sharing** came in various forms: they **shared** knowledge with their peers, (for example, networked on other activities within the community), **shared** knowledge with their children, (for example, recreated learning activities from a programme), and **shared** their knowledge and perspective on community activities with practitioners. For participating practitioners, **sharing** reflected their understanding of barriers to engagement through their relationship with parents and how this knowledge enhanced their engagement strategies, as they **shared** with their peers what was working and equally what was not. The bi-directional

arrow in the model represented in Figure 5.2 highlights how the categories **Choosing to engage, Co-creating engagement, Connecting to engage, and Sharing** overlap, interact and influence each other.

5.11 Chapter summary

This first findings chapter described a conceptual overview of the model of theory of 'the dance of engagement' and described how the different elements of the model are interrelated. The theory 'the dance of engagement' was outlined with reference to its foundations (i.e., the dancefloor) through the inherent core tenets of **safety, equality, and trust (SET)** and the four dance steps of an effective parental engagement process were introduced, including **Choosing to engage, Co-creating engagement, Connecting to engage, and Sharing**.The inter-relationships between each element of the theory of 'the dance of engagement' was stressed.

The next chapter will present the findings relating to the SET underpinning factors in more detail.

Chapter 6: Findings 2

This chapter will focus on the findings related to core foundational tenets of **safety, equality and trust (SET)** and its underpinning factors**.** I will present these findings in depth and illustrate the presence of the concept of SET in the data across the stages **choosing to engage, co-creating engagement, connecting to engage, sharing.** A definition of the core tenets of engagement is described in Table 6.1

Table 6.1: Core tenets of engagement: Safety, equality and trust (SET).

Concept	Definition
Safety	Feeling emotionally secure and safe to speak up, to share thoughts and ideas freely without fear of negative reactions.
Equality	Being equal in status, rights and opportunities to support the self and the family and recognising it to be true, understanding one's own inherent power.
Trust	Having confidence in someone's ability to support, feeling hopeful, recognising honesty and sincerity.

6.1 Explanation of the core tenets of engagement: Safety, equality and trust (SET)

The concepts of **safety, equality, and trust** were informed by the experiences and perspectives of participants shared across the eight focus groups. I have called these three elements the core tenets of engagement, as they are generated from the data as central underpinnings of parental engagement. This foundation supports the development of the relationship between the parent and practitioner and enhances effective engagement. SET is integral to the relationship-building process and represents parents' and practitioners' requirements for safe spaces to connect within the community and to feel safe to participate, to be treated and respected with equality and for the establishment of trusting relationships with each other. Once the three concepts of **SET** were established in the foundation of the relationship amongst participants, the four categories in the model: **Choosing to engage, Co-creating engagement, Connecting to engage, and Sharing** could be initiated**.** These four categories were punctuated from reports from participants about the need for SET to be established to enhance effective engagement. The four categories were intermingled with the tenets of SET and will be described throughout this chapter.

6.2 Safety: Establishing a safe space

The importance of safety and establishing a safe place for participants to begin effectively engaging and creating their relationships with each other was dominant in

the accounts of participants. In order to support the parents to **choose to engage**, **co-create engagement**, **connect to engage,** and **share, parents** and practitioners reported that they need safe spaces to connect within the community and to feel safe to participate with each other in a neutral friendly environment. Participants understood that establishing safety in their relationships was important to allay any fears or mistrust.

> **YB focus group 3, June 2020, L10 Rena***: I think it is that bit that's really important about normalising what's going on for people. If it is, then they are coming with a bit of stress or a bit of difficulty. I think it's just- it can be about even how you are. That you're very open and, yeah, it's just- I get what you mean, it's hard to explain the process. Your body language I think even can tell a lot for parents. You know how you set up the room. How you welcome them is really important.*

> **YB Focus group 3, June 2020, L31, Charlotte***: I think the route is a big one. So, if a social worker thinks somebody should do something or a public health nurse or whoever does but that parent doesn't have a great relationship with them. They already feel judged. How do they know that they can trust us because we're being introduced to them through these other people? Sometimes stuff like that can be a challenge.*

> **YB focus group 2, June 2020, L36, Niamh:** *So, I think distrust in the community about change or distrust even among one service or another service towards something new coming in, that can be conveyed to parents or you know I'm thinking often maybe of the role that grandparents can exert. That they may feel kind of threatened by their son or daughter getting engaged with the likes of Youngballymun who's going to tell them how to parent or whatever and be, you know, be actively saying, you know, you shouldn't go there and they'll only take control and they'll tell you to do this and to do that. So sometimes, the external forces are against you.*

Participants spoke about feeling emotionally secure and safe to engage - to speak up, to share thoughts and ideas freely without fear of negative reactions. When an emotionally safe environment was created, participants felt nurtured and encouraged to develop confidence and self-efficacy. The beginning of the engagement process was described sometimes as challenging for practitioners, as they looked for what was working and what was not working. Being present where parents were and being open and friendly with informal chats also supported the establishment of a safe space to engage.

> **YB Focus group 2, June 2020, L45, Niamh**: *The, just being approachable like. People might not know of Breakfast Buddies is back in the day, but they would know you and they would want to go because you're approachable and they're not scared to talk to you. People feel welcome and inviting and, you know, they sit down and be actually interested in what they have to say. And interested in their*

concerns and give out advice or point them in the right direction, you know? I think that's a huge thing, you know. That they all feel welcome.

YB Focus group 3, June 2020, L11, Brid: *I think that you're hitting the nail on the head, there. It's about nearly a welcoming space so that people- I think maybe we underestimate how difficult it can be for parents to come to a group because we're so used to groups and working with groups over time and it's that bit about how did they actually feel that they can walk in without feeling that this is huge or feeling threatened or feeling whatever, you know? It's trying to kind of enable them then to feel that this is an okay space to be in and therefore I can be honest. Because that's what we need to set up it's that honesty, isn't it? That kind of space for people.*

The establishment of safety supported parents to see that others in the community were having similar frustrations, and therefore being open was less threatening. The approach of the practitioners involved helped to allay parents' fears. Relationship building with parents based on empathy and understanding was another important aspect of practitioners' motivation - building relationships with parents made a difference to the day-to-day interactions in the community.

Parent Focus group 3, March 2021, L61, Michela: *But I think that's what it is, because even though you're learning stuff and how to help your children, but it's getting out there and just talking crap, even that, we're talking about nothing, I think that's what it is, especially for people whose friends are in work it's that one time to meet other people, and you don't realise how much you have in common with people in your local area, and it's kind of introducing you to other stuff in your local area because you're chatting to people, and they're like 'oh I'm into gardening' 'oh well did you know there's this in the area' you don't realise how good the networking situation you bring, even regardless of education*

Parent Focus group 3, March 2021, L19, Michela: *I was looking for something to do and I had a smaller child, but anyone I knew was working or still in college, so I kind of was on my own. And with going to BB and SS, it got me to meet people and see the same people and like everyone else said with little problems you had. It made you go "oh my God I'm not alone, everybody else is like that" and for me, it gave me confidence*

Practitioner Focus group 2, March 2021, L4, Rosemary: *It really makes me realise too that working in school and working with families we're so hardwired for connection that when you meet like that you can get a multitude of things done, it just resonates with me so much the time going into that big room you can just casually start the conversation then other things come up. And I think too, as humans, even with the parents they relax more, you know yourself you learn more when you're in a relaxed environment. So, when you relax in that environment you can have those conversations that you might not have wanted to, they come up naturally about another agency that you need to link them in with, so yeah, I miss that for sure.*

A safe space for participants to interact with each other emerged as important to allay any fears participants may have. The collaboration of participants working together to ensure a safe space is available for everyone to engage supported effective engagement. The dynamic process of engagement requires that both parent and practitioner are involved in co-creating their unique relationship. Practitioner understanding of the complexity of barriers to engagement and how barriers may affect parents differently, supported the building of safe relationships with parents. Practitioners chose to utilise empathy and understanding in their approach which was helpful in allaying parents' fear and mistrust of services.

6.3 Establishing equality

Participants in this research described the need for equality in engagement: parents and practitioners being equal in status, having rights and responsibilities, recognising equality as a truth and understanding their own inherent power. For participants, equality needed to be embedded in the learning environment, and in the interactions between participants. Participants in this research explained the importance of creating perspective changes and thriving together. In order to thrive together, equality was evidenced in the categories of the process of engagement: **choosing to engage**, **co-creation of engagement**, **connecting to engage,** and **sharing.** For example, ensuring that resources were present, nobody was hungry or unable to afford a book. When practitioners discussed their reflections on what works to enhance parental engagement, addressing barriers to engagement was a frequent theme. One approach was to reach out to parents and not expect parents to have to reach in – creating a more balanced and equal footing. This was an important strategy, ensuring the practitioner was present where parents congregated, and understanding that the term "hard to reach" can be disparaging to a community of parents. One way of reaching out to parents described was collaborating on the delivery of a family literacy programme for parents, so that the practitioners could then become a familiar face to parents.

> **Practitioners focus group 2, March 2021, L 51, Emma:** *I would hear parents say are you going to BB? I'm going if you're going. I don't think its professionals and parents, like there's no barrier, like there's teachers sitting at the table making cards the same as everybody else like …but the experience they have when they are there has made them come back.*

YB Focus group 3, June 2020, L12, Rena: *I think we're good at putting ourselves in the shoes of the parent. You know, reflecting on your- like, I know for me definitely how nervous I was when I was first going up to a group and walking by the block three times and then having to sit in groups and I try to bring myself back to that when I'm starting something new or meeting someone new about them kind of initial feelings and that it's okay to have them but I think putting yourself in the shoes of the parent can be really beneficial as well.*

Practitioners focus group 1, May 2019, L 46, Cliona*: That's what we do, we had breakfast one day for a coffee morning and that was the biggest number I'd say that had ever been in our parents' room. Eh, so I think that kind of little side of it helps as well because I think maybe for some people buying or choosing a correct book or buying a book for their child might be beyond them so I think all that helps and knowing that they might get activities to do with them and things like that so I think that all helps as well like*

Practitioners also illustrated how they **connected to engage** with parents at family literacy programmes and created equality by sitting together, completing activities together, having food together, laughing and enjoying each other's company in a safe, informal environment. This changed parents and practitioners' perspectives of each other and supported the development of greater equality in their interactions and relationships as they developed.

Parents focus group 3, March 2021, L19 Michela: *It was the confidence of being able to speak to people and not be afraid that what I was saying was wrong.*

Practitioner Focus group 1, May 2019, L24, Cliona: *it was a great opportunity to meet the parents, in like that, an outside situation, we were all there as equals, I didn't know what I was at, they didn't know what they were at so we all gave it a go together and that was fantastic.*

YB 2, June 2020, L6, Dervla*: I think exactly what you're saying there. What strikes me as parental engagement is, well, without the parent there won't be any engagement at all, you know? So, they're a crucial part of this whole process and that word of equality, absolutely. Equality and respect stand out for me. And I suppose I'm looking at it from different angles, from years of maybe involvement with community development, both at different ends of the scale like. As a participant and also, you know, working in the area. That's the thing of it. You're not doing something to somebody. You're not giving something- You're not deciding this is good for you. But between us or together or it's being done with the parent and not to the parent.*

YB 3, June 2020, L2 Rena: *Yeah, well I suppose it's about connection. Like, if you're to think about just kind of connecting words like connection, respect, collaboration, equal. They're the kind of things that pop up in my head when we talk about parental engagement.*

Equality in practice is key to the practice of engagement. Equality of practice values everyone's participation. In this research this equality in practice supported the

dismantling of the barriers to any mistrust of practitioners by a community of parents living in an area of socio-economic need and likewise, addressing any mistrust of parents by practitioners. There was no pressure placed on parents to attend and they could leave whenever they choose. This knowledge supported the parents to own their power and encouraged them to engage. They were firmly in control of their participation, it was on their terms. Parents and practitioners both have agency in the engagement process, including deciding when to engage and when to disengage.

6.4 Establishing Trust

Participants also described the need for an environment that embodies trust, where practitioners and parents follow through on commitments and recognise the central role of honesty and sincerity. A core part of parental engagement for participating parents was having trust and confidence in a service's ability to offer support, and providing hope. Seeing a change occurring in parents' self-efficacy, involvement and follow-through on guidance supported practitioner motivations to be further engaged. Short term, these trusting relationships supported the practitioner and parent to work in harmony within family literacy programme. Long term, building trusting relationships with parents made a difference to practitioners' day-to-day interactions in the community, and practitioners were becoming a familiar face:

> **YB Focus group 2, June 2020, L31, Kathleen**: *It's energising and it's also humbling because you kind of get in awe of them and it's reciprocal. But energy-there's good parental engagement, for me, is really energising.*

> **Practitioner Focus group 1, May 2019, L24, Cliona**: *Rather than, sometimes I think when they come into the school, they feel like I have to show them what to do then they'll be nervous whereas there they would see I didn't know what I was at, so we were all kind of giving it a go and having a bit of a laugh together. And they were very open, much more open in that setting then they are. We were having a good chat, doing the work and having a chat then going back you know so for me I met more parents at that probably parents at that then I have since.*

The tenets of SET were emphasised by parents and practitioners as critical precursors to engagement, supporting them to initiate the "dance" together and to create a strong foundation for the dance steps of engagement**.** The application of **SET** enhanced the developing relationship between participants on an individual, family and community level. As participants developed self–efficacy in their interactions with services, it impacted their family and community roles. Participants' willingness to engage and develop relationships with each other centred on their experience of their fears and

mistrust of services being allayed. Relationships built on SET were transforming participants' perceptions of each other and enabling effective engagement.

> **Parents focus group 1, May 2019, L148, Brigid:** *Yes, a familiar face 'because then I can go and say listen he doesn't like this, is there any other teacher there, or you know that kind of way the link is there already it's easier for me to send my kids because I know I can trust these people, they're not strangers, my kids can approach them and say like I'm not feeling well will ye get me Ma*

> **Practitioner Focus group 1, May 2019, L 38, Caoimhe:** *I also think getting to sit at the table is really important because stuff gets said and you'll hear things and they kind of, like I really realized at the last one a lot of things being said beside me that never would have been said if I was still considered as Teacher, as Miss Teacher. Like you know they were chatting away kind of involving me in discussions and like I just thought that that was really interesting because I think it's because I was sitting there with them doing the activity.*

> ***Practitioner Focus group 2, March 2021, L7, Trudi:*** *I only came to three BB and I have to be honest the first time I went I was amazed at the room because first of all it was full, which I wasn't expecting it to be, there was loads of people there but there was a real relaxed feeling with the parents. Like I got the feeling that they weren't under pressure, I think a lot of times you go into schools and parents feel like they're being watched or feel like they're being questioned or interrogated. And I'm not saying that's what's happening, but I think that's the way parents feel. So, I was amazed, and I just think all the fun, I wish I had something like that when my kids were small parents like if they want to get up and do something, they can but they're not under pressure to do it. That's what I found anyway when I went in the room and that's why I think it works*

> ***YB Focus group 3, June 2020, L17, Rena:*** *but it's that bit of, valuing their contribution and always being aware that they know their kids better than anyone, you know? And that we learn from them as much as they learn from us.*

Analysis of the data in this research suggests that a collaborative approach to supporting families is a viable option to support better outcomes. An understanding of how to approach and engage effectively with parents developed through a collaborative practice across services was evident in participants' accounts. The establishment of SET as the foundation and tenets of effective engagement practice supported the creation of new connections, new relationships and new ways of being effective in parents' engagement.

6.5 Summary

In this chapter I have focused on **Safety, Equality and Trust (SET)** and its underpinning factors. I have presented these findings in depth to illustrate the presence of the concept of SET in the data across the stages **choosing to engage, co-creating**

engagement, connecting to engage, sharing. The next chapter will discuss the four categories of the process of parental engagement.

Chapter 7, Findings 3.

This chapter will focus on the four sub-processes of parental engagement and illustrate in depth how the data supported the generation of the theory of 'the dance of engagement'.

7.1 The four categories of 'the dance of engagement' and their influence on each other

The process of parental engagement was generated from four categories: "**Choosing to engage", "Co-creating engagement", "Connecting to engage" and "Sharing"**. Each category overlapped, and was influenced by or influenced each other. First, when a parent and practitioner **choose to engage**, they begin to co-create the relationship building. Second, as the relationship dyad develops, they **"co-create engagement**" in programmes where the relationship has made it easy for parents to attend and connect. Third, ensuring that parents can attend programmes and build relationships with their peers through connecting in a supportive neutral environment enhances the parents' and practitioners' ability to **connect to engage** across the community. The fourth category, **Sharing** is an outcome of an effective parental engagement process and influences participants' motivation to choose to engage again, for example, through the effects of positive sharing engagement practices at home and in sessions for parents and through sharing knowledge with peers and parents for practitioners.

7.2 Choosing to engage.

As previously stated, the theory constructed from this study's data has been termed 'the dance of engagement'. The dance of effective engagement has four dance steps (see Figure 7.1). The dancers in the research reported here were practitioners from different services (i.e., teachers, TUSLA, HCP, FRC, YB, Youth Workers) and parents. 'The dance of engagement' is grounded in the data gathered from parents and practitioners and explains the process of engagement as it occurred for them.

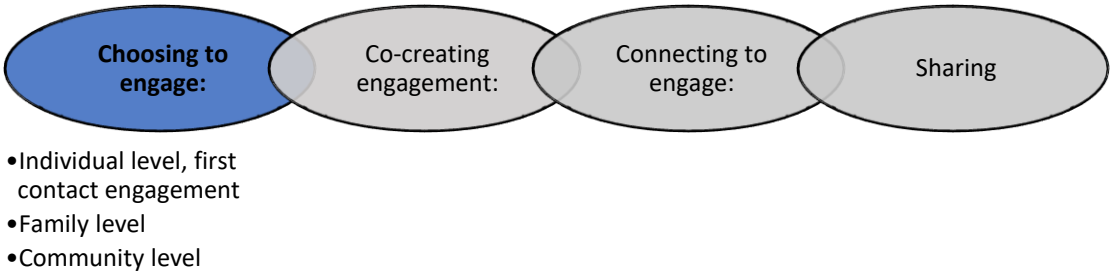

Figure 7.1: The four dance steps to effective engagement: Step 1: Choosing to engage

It became apparent as I analysed the data that the category **choosing to engage** (see Figure 7.1) is the first step in 'the dance of engagement'. However, for practitioners this step can be fraught with frustrations. Practitioners highlighted different levels of engagement among the parents they work with, and how disheartening it can be for practitioners trying to engage parents.

> **Practitioners focus group 1, May 2019, L7, Cliona[3]:** *I suppose for me it's just starting at engaging with the parents, even starting at such a basic level that they come and say 'hello' you know with some parents that would be engagement for me. With some parents that I'm really targeting it can just be that initial connection and then I suppose building on that.*

> ***Practitioner Focus group 1, May 2019, L4, Angela:*** *I suppose you've different levels of engagement because lots of parents will say to me 'oh I'll do that, I'll definitely do that course' so you've got the ''come in?' text, have they've got the WhatsApp? And you've met them, and they say they will and then you give them the reminder and they might say they will, and they won't, on the day there's no show*

As evidenced in the data, engagement changed, developed and fluctuated over time for each individual involved. Every time a parent or practitioner interacted, they were **choosing to engage**, and as they co-created their relationship the opportunities to engage in programmes, conversations and services grew. The developing relationship between parents and practitioners through their shared involvement in the family literacy programmes created opportunities to engage and collaborate further together.

> **YB focus group 1, June 2020, L14, Blathnaid:** …*It's that first interaction and knowing that maybe somebody is wondering about what we do or what services we offer but haven't got the confidence to pick up the phone and ask or haven't got the confidence to reach out and email us or talk to us in the schoolyard or come to talk and play and enrol themselves, that we have to go chasing them, you know? And we have to let them know that we are here, and this is what we can do for them.*

> **Practitioner Focus group 1, May 2019, L9, Caoimhe***: I suppose when they're willing to be involved, it can be hard just to get them to engage initially.*

> **Practitioner Focus group 1, May 2019, L6, Angela***: And so full engagement would be I suppose she's absolutely interacting and being there on the day and being present and taking in the information.*

Choosing to engage transformed and impacted engagement across social structures at an individual, family, and community level for both parents and practitioners. Table

[3] All participants' names have been pseudonymised throughout this document.

7.1 describes why participants chose to engage and what emerged as important to enhance effective engagement.

Table 7.1: Choosing to engage: Individual, family and community levels

Level of engagement	Reasons why parents choose to engage	Engagement at this level requires parents to:	Reasons why practitioners choose to engage	Engagement at this level requires practitioners to:
Individual level	An act of self-care to address: • feelings of loneliness • isolation • mental health	- Seek opportunities to engage. - Develop relationships with practitioners. - Feel it is safe to engage.	- To enhance engagement with parents - To develop their professional practice	- Seek informal opportunities to engage parents. - Feel it is safe to engage professionally. - Letting go of the expert role.
Family level	- To support children's learning and development - To enhance skills to support children.	- Develop new skills to support their children's development.	- To support children's learning and development. - To enhance parents' skills to support their children.	- See the need to support families. - Seek opportunities to address the barriers to engagement.
Community level	- To develop relationships with peers and practitioners. - To get involved in services in the community.	- Be willing to socialise and change perspectives on practitioners and services	- To understand the cultural and contextual setting of the lived environment for families. - To collaborate with practitioners from other services and enhance engagement between services.	- Become a reflective practitioner. - Discuss best practice for parental engagement with other services/ practitioners and parents.

7.2.1 Choosing to engage: Individual level: an invitation to the dance

For practitioners and parents, **choosing to engage** at an individual level supported the co-creation of relationships. Within the data, **choosing to engage** was an intentional decision, enacted by practitioners as an opportunity to connect with parents, and to be deliberate in the design of pre-planned engagement practices. For parents, **choosing to engage** was a purposeful act, designed to support their self-care, make friends and make connections to relieve their sense of isolation.

> **Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L87, Emily:** *Yeah, it's just that you are so welcoming, really personable and easy to talk to, it's easy to get in.*

> **Parent Focus group 3, March 2021, L66, Deirdre:** *Yeah now like that, if you knew somebody like a friend who could say you can come along with me, I think a lot of people if they know somebody they'll go but if you're going and then for the advertisement part I think in your leaflet you could have a little description of what goes on and how it's done and put them in local shops and even to schools give a few to the principals to hand out to the parents*

> **Parent Focus group 2, June 2019, L92, Ciara:** *And everybody's in the same position and the same boat. You're not rushing around or panicked about anything you're just more relaxed. You know what way to deal with things better*

Data in this study suggested that the practitioner is often the dance leader that gently guides and creates opportunities for parents to engage, inviting parents to take part in the dance. For example, some parents and practitioners met initially at an event or through a phone call.

> **YB focus group 3, June 2020, L 13, Charlotte:** …*You're trying to bring the parent in as a partner to try and figure out what might be helpful for them instead of being the type of practitioner that says you need to do this, you need to go there, you know?*

Leading the dance for practitioners also involved supporting other practitioners to see the effectiveness of their engagement approach and challenging any biases they may come across in interactions with other practitioners. This supported practitioners to let go of the expert role and value the parents' expertise.

> **YB Focus group 2, June 2020, L22, Niamh***: You might have a person who maybe doesn't take enough time or care about how they communicate with the parent and therefore the parent might have a resistance, unconscious or otherwise, built up before you even offer the intervention and it's because of a just a barrier with the teacher or the public health nurse or whoever that middle person is. So, you know, your relationship with the professional is very important to kind of tease out those maybe biases or assumptions.*

> **YB Focus group 1, June 2020, L27, Blathnaid:** *I think a big thing, a barrier or a big obstacle is that all of us, we all possess bias and I think that when we go to a group of people whether we like it or not or whether we want to admit it or not, we've already have an idea of those people in our heads and so I think to address our own bias because that sometimes can be an obstacle no matter where you go.*

Evidenced in the data were examples of practitioners who intentionally **chose to engage**. In these instances, practitioners reflected on their interactions with parents, considered how to engage parents and looked for opportunities to begin the process of first contact engagement. First-contact engagement typically happened informally and was the starting point for building relationships with a foundation of SET, an invitation to the dance. Practitioners ensured the tenets of parental engagement were built into service planning and delivery. The presence of these tenets in practitioners' parental engagement practice supported parents to engage.

> **YB focus group 2, June 2020, L6, Niamh:** *I'm thinking of it from a different perspective as a practitioner and - the thing that comes up for me is a sense that the parent has been thought about in the design and the delivery of the service and the intervention and a sense of agency for the parent. That it's their choice about the engaging and it's a two-way process and that there's equality in it or mutual respect in it.*

In this research parents **choosing to engage** at an individual level was an act of self-care and linked to a parent's motivation to engage, their sense of their own agency and self-efficacy. There were also examples of sharing and word of mouth opportunities for parents to enhance engagement at family literacy programmes by encouraging others to attend and choose to engage.

> **Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L7, Brigid:** *Do you know what? I was fed up doing the same thing every day, and obviously, I wasn't interacting with a lot of parents, so I need to get myself out of that little bubble and interact with people my own age. As I said, it just got me out from being in the house all the time doing the same things.*

> **Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L15, Emily:** *She had gone to a couple of them, and she was like, I think you'd really like it its great fun and that we'd been to other workshops beforehand Story Sacks, so it was good to get to go.*

Parents' motivation to engage at an individual level supported their ability to relax and relieve stress. Choosing to engage supported parents to connect to their community and their peers. This aided parents to make friends, and to feel connected to their community, creating an opportunity to get involved in 'the dance of engagement'.

Parent focus group 2, June 2019, L 83, Ciara: *I know what it's like when you have young kids and they're not in creche, they're not in anything and you're just kind of at home with them and it's nice to get out and mix and socialise you know and feel like an adult again. You know, just general chit chat and meeting everybody.*

Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L19, Michela: *I was looking for something to do and I had a smaller child, but anyone I knew was working or still in college, so I kind of was on my own.*

Parent focus group 2, June 2019, L 82, Ciara: *I know what it's like when you have young kids and they're not in creche, they're not in anything and you're just kind of at home with them and it's nice to get out and mix and socialise you know and feel like an adult again. You know, just general chit chat and meeting everybody.*

7.2.2 Choosing to engage: family level

The data analysis indicated that for participants in this study choosing **to engage** at a family level was in essence a choice to support children's learning and development. For practitioners the opportunity to **choose to engage with** parents to develop their ability to support their children's literacy skills was paramount. Children's needs were seen as a vital step in motivating parents to join in 'the dance of engagement'. For parents, receiving support to develop their skills to enhance their children's learning and development was crucial to their motivation to engage. It supported their feelings of self-efficacy and enhanced their relationship with their children. This was a collaborative effort between parents and practitioners towards the shared goal of engagement with mutually agreed outcomes.

Parent focus group 2, June 2019, L63 Ann-Marie: *It kind of makes you feel that bit happier that you're doing stuff for them. Instead of just collecting and dropping them to school, doing a bit of homework and that's it then. You have more things to do with them…more bonding time.*

Learning new skills, (new 'steps'), in family literacy programmes enhanced parents' feelings of confidence and self-assurance and supported the relationship dyad between parent and child. Parents who participated in this study were using what they had learned in the family literacy programme to engage and share with their children, thereby extending the engagement to involve their children in the dance.

Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L19, Michela: *Yeah, you encouraged me and the school because we spoke about me being dyslexic, and I was struggling. I think (child's name) was in 2nd class, and her English was starting to get that little bit harder with grammar and stuff like that, and I am useless. I'll*

be 100% honest I can't tell you a comma from a semicolon. I don't even know what I'm saying there, really. But going to BB even when she was learning poems, we were doing that in BB, and I was like 'oh my God, I can show her what to do' and similes and stuff like that. I didn't know exactly everything, but I knew what to say. And it helped with both of them even though (child's name) wasn't doing that yet. It gave me confidence because I'd forgotten all that, but I knew then it was at the back of my mind and got brought forward.

Practitioners who participated in this study believed that supporting parents to enhance their skills to support their children's learning and development was crucial in supporting parents in 'the dance of engagement'. Practitioners used the opportunity to engage with parents to enhance children's literacy skills as a hook, a connection to the parents, an invitation to the dance which provided something real and tangible that the parent wanted support with, and the practitioner could help provide. This was an active collaboration, a shared goal that practitioners could get involved in with parents and develop a dynamic process of engagement to support mutually agreed goals.

YB focus group 2, June 2020, L32 Dervla: *…But also, you know, the feedback that it's something the parents look forward to and want to come. And then for me, which I think is really crucial, the relationship within the group, with each other. You know and you can see that kind of starting off maybe kind of slowly and it takes a bit of time and then it just blossoms, and I see how comfortable people are with each other and how supportive they are to each other, you know, in a sense of people feeling they're not on their own. And, for me, that would, yeah, I think that's, pretty special.*

This opportunity to choose to engage and develop the relationship between the practitioner and the parent provided a sense of agency for the practitioner, working with the parent to produce learning and development opportunities for the child.

Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L46, Rosemary: …*We are all working together for the child because it's all about improving, it's improving oral language and reading and obviously you need the oral language first it's all that inviting and social stuff.*

Some practitioners highlighted the need to help overcome and address barriers that can hinder parents' interactions with their children at home. The barriers for parents to engage in learning and development activities were described by parents as mental health issues, homelessness, dyslexia and literacy difficulties. Practitioners believed that developing safe, trusting relationships with parents enhanced the likelihood of being able to discuss and seek to address these issues and offer support to parents.

YB focus group 2, June 2020, L22, Niamh: *I think the relationship between the person who's offering intervention and the middle person, you know, be that the*

homeschool liaison person or the teacher or whatever is absolutely actually crucial because you're dependent on each other for an understanding of how best to reach parents and to keep children's needs in mind.

In parallel, parents considered barriers can be addressed by making the target information and strategies accessible and user-friendly, so that they could be implemented with their children at home. Understanding how to enhance parents' skills and know-how in the home learning environment was a key element of the process of parental engagement. This is a shared goal, mutually agreed by participants involved in the dance of engagement that enhances the dynamic process.

> **Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L25, Deirdre:** *Just the different books. I loved getting the books for him. He couldn't come with me because he was in school, so he was delighted I was getting the books for him. So then he was coming home, and I was reading it to him, and then he was doing the same with his sisters.*

For practitioners and parents, choosing to engage at a family level created opportunities to connect in 'the dance of engagement' with the mutual motivational goal of supporting the family.

7.2.3 Choosing to engage: community level

It is clear from the data in this study that **choosing to engage** at a community level supported relationship-building for both practitioners and parents. For parents, joining in events in the community validated parents' concerns and hardships. Parents' sense of loneliness and isolation at home spurred them to make an individual choice to take action and look after their self-care and seek friendship and engage.

> **Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L15, Emily*:*** *Because it gets you out and you know you think you're the only one with little issues at home with the kids, homework, schoolwork, and you go and see you're not the only one with them little trials and errors and it teaches you fun little tips to get through the homework without getting frustrated trying to help them and them being frustrated.*

Engaging at a community level supported the development of new friendships: parents were networking and engaging with each other. Parent participants who chose to engage were gaining new knowledge on how to support their children's learning and development and making new friends.

> **Parent focus group 1, May 2019, L23, Holly*:*** *As well as that you have a wider audience you know if you're having any problems with your kids or anything like that there's somebody else that probably has kids at the same age level and they'll say oh I did that last year or whatever you know yes and you get more opinions*

like if there's a big group at a table, five or six Mammies oh well I did this or I did that, I find that's helpful as well.

Practitioners who were **choosing to engage** at a community level focused on working collaboratively with other disciplines and building trust with parents around other services. Working collaboratively with other organisations supported the engagement of parents and families through a combined reflective process on potential methods to support effective engagement. This enhanced practitioners' abilities to **share** knowledge and discuss with their peers' effective ways of engaging and collaborative practice.

YB focus group 2, June 2020, L25, Brid*: When you work collaboratively, somebody mentioned that you then model that all the way along, in terms of the parents to see that the organisations are getting on well and working well together. Then it can sometimes be just that open door for the parents. It's so important because of those trust relationships we have to build up and that the parents then can see that look they're working well together therefore I'll trust that organisation that I don't really know.*

When practitioners from different services were observed by parents to work well together, trust in services was established. Working collaboratively supported participating practitioners to view each other's engagement practices through a different lens, ensuring the cross fertilisation of ideas and engagement between services.

Parent focus group 3, May 2019, L4, BRIGID: *Yeah, because you have them all in one room, you know, instead of kinda nowadays waiting on them to answer the phone or email and stuff like that. If you're in the room, you can kinda go 'look I'm having an issue' and at the same time being around other people and going 'my kids having the same issue as your kid's having, what are you doing about it?'*

YB focus group 3, June 2020, L28, Rena: *Well then there's what we said that bit about collaborating with your colleagues as well around It and if you do feel like God am I missing something that you do have a co facilitator there to be like to be able to talk about it. I know definitely for me having supervision is brilliant around issues that come up helping me with kind of how my insecurities around dealing with particular issues in dealing with parents in the proper way, so I think that's a really important part of the process.*

The in-vivo code from parents' accounts "being in the same boat" encapsulated parents' reasons for **choosing to engage** in the community. Parents' accounts reflected the validation they received from their peers about the concerns and

hardships that they shared. The starting point for the parent-parent relationship dyad often began with parents' sense of loneliness and isolation at home.

> **Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L10, Jackie:** *I met everyone who was in the same boat as me. I thought I was the only one in the world having stress at home with the kids, and you go in the room and see everybody, and you know everybody feels the same way you do. And you come out kind of smiling it's sometimes like a counselling session you tell parents if you're after having a bad day and you might not even know them, but you feel like you know everybody in the room, it's a friendly environment, and when you do the story and do the games you feel like a little kid yourself.*

In areas of socio-economic disadvantage, stigma and shame may be two factors that parents may associate with attending services (Bojarczuk, Marchelerska, & Prionterra, 2015; Gov.ie, 2021). Data from this study demonstrated that making connections with peers at a programme reinforced parents' efforts to seek help and allayed fear and mistrust of services.

> **Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L19, Michela:** *It got me to meet people and see the same people and like everyone else said with little problems you had. It made you go "oh my God I'm not alone, everybody else is like that" and for me, it gave me confidence.*

Choosing to engage was suggested in this data as an opportunity for parents to build empathy, seek advice and develop feelings of empowerment amongst peers and practitioners. Participating parents spoke about how interacting in the family literacy programme supported them to relax.

> **Parent focus group 2, June 2019, L91, Anne-Marie:** *And I think going to the groups makes you a lot calmer with the kids, you're not as snappy with them kind of you learn how to rewind and sit down with them.*

For practitioners, an understanding of the individual reasons a parent may have been **choosing to engage** supported practitioners to enhance their understanding of parents' cultural contexts, their lived experience and to gain a new perspective on the barriers to engagement.

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L27, Emma:** *I think the real culture in [this area] in schools and the service to fully respect the parents we are working with and listen to them and you know realise that our agenda isn't always the most important thing sometimes and I think you can't just tell somebody that, you learn it through working with people who work like that.*

Practitioners in this study advocated the importance of strengthening informal networks in a community through peer-to-peer learning opportunities that may enhance parents' sense of agency and their ability to engage.

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L46, Rosemary:** *it's just being open and maybe breaking down that mould of what people think teachers are like or what just to see that we are a community and we are all working together for the child because it's all about improving, it's improving oral language and reading and obviously you need the oral language first, it's all that inviting and social stuff that helps to enhance the language so it comes you know and you learn from each other.*

Consequently, it would appear that knowing how and why parents ***choose to engage*** may support practitioners to find common ground with parents and develop the tenets of engagement: safety, equality and trust, supporting the invitation to 'the dance of engagement'.

> **Parent focus group 1, L144, Brigid:** *The liaison teachers they can see how other liaison teachers approach parents [for] the likes of learning. For example, they can see well you can't force it maybe they go back to the classroom teachers and say look this is the way mammies have found it easy, try that and interpret that in the classrooms or like don't speak like that, speak [in] a jolly way.*

The ways in which the community of practitioners and parents were choosing to engage for individual, family and community domains highlights the importance of understanding the 'why' of engagement. Being aware of why people choose to engage ensures that effective engagement strategies are likely to appeal to both parents and practitioners' and can be enhanced and included in future planning.

7.3. Co-creating engagement

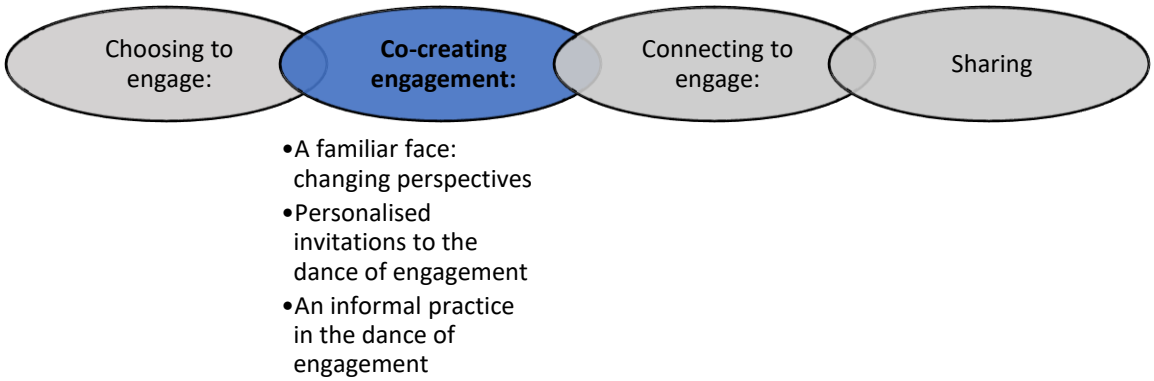

Figure 7.2: The four dance steps to effective engagement: Step 2: Co-creating engagement.

This dance step describes **co-creating** 'the dance of engagement' through building relationships between the practitioner and the parent that feature the three core tenets of parental engagement (SET) (see Figure 7.2). As evidenced in the data, relationships were deemed to be a fundamental component of enhancing engagement. Without relationships built on SET, it was suggested that parents may hesitate to engage, fail to engage at all, or drop out of programmes early.

> **Practitioner focus group 1, May 2019, L9, Caoimhe:** *It is when they're willing to be involved, I understand …it can be hard just to get them to engage initially. But I often find that let's say you do make the phone call and maybe you're arranging that meeting that the teacher has been dying all year to have, we're genuinely very worried about the child and the parent just won't engage to that level and you can't get into the house, can't get them involved at any level and that to me is very difficult to get past that level to get them to engage in the first place can be really hard.*

> **YB Focus group 3, June 2020, L40, Charlotte***: I was just talking about on the phone for referral and I knew the person so you both have that opportunity to keep building and building [the relationship] and that can be tricky because you've got that one opportunity*.

For some practitioners, the co-creation of relationship building began in the school setting from something as small as an informal greeting in the school yard. For practitioners working in a clinical setting, relationship building commenced from the very first communication, for example, the practitioner contacting the parent about setting up an appointment to see a HCP. Practitioners indicated that building relationships or even starting to establish relationships with parents could be difficult:

> **Practitioner focus group 1, May 2019, L7, Cliona:** *But sometimes even getting that initial connection can be difficult. And I suppose building that trust with them, sometimes I'm not sure if what they're presenting to me is what they're really like or if they're just putting on a show for me. So that really, I suppose I think that open engagement and honest engagement is one of the key things for me working with the parents.*

> **YB Focus group 2, June 2020, L5, Niamh:** *For any practitioner, you know If you do not put enough thought into the parent's experience of being engaged with, approached, communicated with or, you know, whatever, then, you know, it just may not work.*

> **Practitioner focus group 1, May 2019, L55, Cliona**: *I know if something is going to go well then putting in the effort is worth it because like that, I get the benefit out of it then when I go up and we're engaging, and they've learned something and I'm able to make those connections.*

Conversely, data from parents indicated that the relationship between parents and practitioners was often anxiety-inducing. Feelings of mistrust of practitioners were described which led to some parents' hesitation to engage.

> **Parent focus group 3, Mar 2021, L56, Brigid:** A*t the start, I was really reluctant and really nervous, I was like people are gonna be judgemental, people are gonna be talking about me behind my back.*

> **Practitioner Focus group 1, May 2019, Emma:** *I remember having a parent outside my door years ago who was physically shaking to come into an assessment.*

> **YB Focus group 3, June 2020, L17, Brid:** *It's that bit that then it's already an unequal relationship because it's that expert piece and therefore if you have that sense then it's much harder for people then to really give of their true selves and that's the meaningful participation.*

Some parents indicated that they did not trust the school/service, and therefore were unlikely to attend programmes, even if the purpose was to support their children's learning and development. Although I did not use theoretical coding in this study I could see its relevance as the theory emerged. The concept of theoretical coding families (The Six C's of causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances and conditions) is relevant here (Glaser, 1978). One of the 'conditions' needed for effective engagement requires referrals to be from a trusted source. This understanding supports the theory of effective engagement by proposing that referrals from one service to another also present challenges to engagement if the relationship between the practitioner and the parent is not built on SET:

> **Parent focus group 3, Mar 2021, L84, Brigid:** *I hate being in the school, I'm not being funny or smart, and I don't know about anyone else, but I just hate school… I'd rather be out than in the school. I just don't like the schools. You know you could be saying something you don't want them to repeat back to someone.*

> **YB Focus group 3, June 2020, L31, Charlotte***: I think the route is a big one. So, if a social worker thinks somebody should do something or a public health nurse or whoever does but that parent doesn't have a great relationship with them. They already feel judged. How do they know that they can trust us because we're being introduced to them through these other people? Sometimes stuff like that can be a challenge*

Co-creating engagement can be difficult for both practitioners and parents. A relationship based on SET was deemed by participants to be supportive in allaying parents' feelings of mistrust. Engagement practices for family literacy programmes requires careful planning and collaboration to ensure barriers to engagement are addressed to enhance effective engagement.

7.3.1 Co-creating engagement: A familiar face; changing perspectives

Contributions from participants demonstrated that parents needed to feel they could trust the practitioner, that they were in a safe space and would be treated equally. A key principle to allay parents' mistrust in services, indicated in the data, was the importance of practitioners developing trusting, safe, informal relationships with parents. Developing informal relationships between practitioners and parents could be difficult, though, a perspective change for both parents and practitioners was co-created when informal relationships were developed through 'the dance of engagement'.

> **YB focus group 3, June 2020, L63, Charlotte:** *Somebody was saying about having to hold the expert stance but then not exude that on top of people when you're dealing with them.*

> **YB Focus group 3, June 2020, L64, Brid:** *For me, it's something about not diluting the work that we do and not forgetting that a big part of our work needs to be changing the mindset of the practitioners in order to help them in their work with the parents. So, it's nearly like the one that we talked about earlier around kind of having the real expert opinion. It's how do you get them to swing and realise that they get so much more in terms of supporting the parents if they flip that, you know? And begin to look at real parental engagement.*

Informal relationships with parents were difficult for some practitioners to reconcile with their understanding of their professional 'expert' role, their professional responsibilities, and their typical role-defined behaviours.

> **YB focus group 1, June 2020, L44, Marion:** *I was just thinking that sometimes it can be hard to say in these organisations if we over-identify with the parent, we could in some way, now, I mean, smaller scale, not see the child's needs. You know, if we over-identify with the parent we could collude in some way with the child's needs or miss them in some way. Because you know, …if you develop such a strong relationship, you might find it really difficult to raise difficult issues because this parent is really- feels close to you, and all the rest.*

However, the data suggested that practitioner boundaries in informal practice with parents were often addressed through reflective practice. For example, one practitioner contemplated their role in the relationship-building process and re-evaluated how they may unknowingly influence or hinder parents' engagement.

> **YB focus group 3, June 2020, L6, Brid:** *That piece of wondering then, if they don't engage. What's blocking them from engaging? And sometimes we often think well it's perhaps because of their own circumstances which might be their own family situation or whatever it is. But then we also need to be asking ourselves are we putting up any blocks or barriers to that engagement?*

The importance of a reflective space and practice for the practitioner to address any bias was emphasised, representing a significant feature of parental engagement practice for practitioners in the data collected.

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L21, Rosemary*:*** *I suppose it [engagement] makes you very much aware of what people are going through themselves you know? They're not in the mood, their heads are full of trauma.*

Services that implemented a reflective practice space were deemed as supportive to ensuring that parental engagement is an integral aspect of practitioners' reflections on their practice.

> **YB focus group 3, June 2020, L65 Charlotte:** *Having that space to step out of that expert role can help with parental engagement so it is a big piece.*

Practitioners who were a familiar face to parents were well placed to create a safe space where parents could relax and show their 'human side'. Data in this research suggested that seeing the 'human side' of practitioners can enhance parents' engagement.

> **Parent focus group 2, June 2019, L94, Saoirse:** *With the T, especially with new ones like, when you see them at BB then you see them kind of joining in and having the laugh it makes them more approachable. If you did have an issue inside the school that you needed to talk to them about…like when you see them at BB and they're helping out everyone and they're laughing, and everyone is having a good time it's like "ah yeah it's grand, I can just go and talk to them about that, that's fine, they're human being You know what I mean? They're not robots behind a desk.*

> **Parent focus group 1, L144, Brigid:** *The liaison teachers they can see how other liaison teachers approach parents [for] the likes of learning. For example, they can see well you can't force it maybe they go back to the classroom teachers and say look this is the way mammy's have found it easy try that and interpret that in the classrooms or like don't speak like that speak [in] a jolly way.*

Practitioners who were able to show their 'human side' to parents and step out of the professional 'expert role' helped to build a trusting, safe relationship with parents. Once the practitioner chooses to engage, applying the core tenets of engagement (safety, equality and trust (SET)), the relationships, however different, are based on the same solid foundations.

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L8, Rosemary:** I *think all of us we're hardwired for connection as humans, we live and thrive. That connection is vital to relax, once you relax then you can find even the quietest parents will come out of their shell…they see the teachers as "oh they're not a real stereotypical teacher there's a bit of craic to her", so you see that everyone is a bit human.*

> **Parent focus group 2, June 2019 L90, Ciara:** *Or somebody might say "God I'm having this awful problem, this issue" and I'll say "this one's so lovely go to her, honest to God, I've met her, I know her on a first name basis".*

Some participants found it difficult to develop informal relationships between practitioners and parents. A perspective change for both parents and practitioners was co-created when informal relationships were developed through 'the dance of engagement'. This perspective change was seen to enhance effective engagement.

7.3.2 Co-creating engagement: Personalised invitations to 'the dance of engagement'

The data indicated that personalised invitations from practitioners were a way to engage parents and may be vital tools for the relationship-building process. Personal invitations from a practitioner to a parent elevated the invitation to attend and enhanced parents' motivation to engage. The simple act of using a parent's name in a text message invite supported the participants of this study to value the co-creation of the relationship dyad through their input and participation creating and enhancing SET.

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L17, Rosemary**: *Sometimes even knowing someone's name and putting a name in a text, …I find using their names really helps. Personal invitations to something as small as a coffee morning really helps. I think being personal, on the ground, being seen.*

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L10, Angela:** *You try and build a relationship with them in the yard, then you remind them, then you try and meet them at the gate to walk over that morning or sometimes we might be late because we're doing something that morning so you might text a parent 'oh keep me a seat'.*

Personal contact enhanced the connection between the practitioner and the parent and created opportunities for parents to reflect on their relationship and perspectives on the service. Participants believed that this enhanced the co-creation of the relationship between participants. Spending time to build relationships with parents and walking to events with them supported the engagement process and their participation.

> **YB focus group 1, June 2020, L7, Marion***: Yeah, and I think it's what you're saying at the end there, it's when the parent hangs up or walks out, that they have felt valued by us. That we didn't just switch on to the child's age, developmental*

summary, that we value them. They are that child's parent and that they leave feeling valued.

Parent focus group 2, June 2019 L11, Ciara: *A text from you or sometimes the school sends a text message out or other parents, say if you're not on Facebook, or your phone is out of action some people will remind you it's on, like text you the night before and say don't forget BB in the morning.*

Some parents reported feeling valued and important to the practitioner when they received a personalised text message, text messages helped to build trust in the developing relationship. Other parents indicated that receiving several text messages from different sources, for example, practitioners, the school, and other parents, validated and emphasised the importance of parents' engagement at an educational event, and legitimised the event and parents' engagement with it.

7.3.3 Co-creating engagement: The informal practice of 'the dance of engagement'

The data in this research suggested that practitioners who used a strengths-based approach when co-creating engagement harnessed empathy and understanding in their approach and worked hard to allay parents' fear and mistrust of services, created safety and helped address barriers to engagement.

Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021 L5,Emma: …*I think the parents see me in a non-clinical role and then sometimes you're talking about sounds with their children and actually they've got loads going on in their lives and I find that sometimes parents won't go there with me clinically but I would find parents I see in BB are more open to have those conversations and those things are actually getting in the way of their intervention in the clinic but they kind of see me as someone who's actually involved in their lives and their day to day and it makes a huge difference to the therapeutic relationship we have.*

It was reported that informal meetings between practitioners and parents also supported the **co-creation** of agency as the relationship developed on familiar ground. Proactive practitioners made efforts to meet parents *where they were at* enhancing the opportunities to engage in an informal setting. This really supported the breaking down of any barriers for parents as they began the dance of engagement.

YB focus group 1, June 2020, L20, Marion: *I think that's proactive, being in the yard, meeting the parents even in the [local café] downstairs, going downstairs having chats with them.*

YB focus group 1, June 2020, L14, Blathnaid: *I feel like as well part of the process is like …about being active, not expecting to be in the background while*

the parents reach out to you for what they need. Kind of, you have to go and be proactive and approach the parents.

This relationship-building process helped allay any parental fears of the service and the practitioner. Practitioners tended to take the lead in 'the dance of engagement' by **co-creating** the core tenets of parental engagement, illustrating a partnership of collaboration between practitioner and parent in the ***co-creation*** of parental engagement practices.

> **YB focus group 1, June 2020, L14, Blathnaid**: *I feel like as well part of the process is like …about being active, not expecting to be in the background while the parents reach out to you for what they need. Kind of, you have to go and be proactive and approach the parents.*

Alongside this, practitioners reported understanding parents' mistrust of services and welcomed opportunities to help address the barriers to access for parents. They recognised parents as the experts on their child and valued every parent's contribution.

> **YB focus group 3, June 2020, L17 Rena:** *but it's that bit of, valuing their contribution and always being aware that they know their kids better than anyone, you know? And that we learn from them as much as they learn from us.*

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L8, Rosemary:** *I suppose once you show your vulnerability a bit they're like 'oh Jesus' and I suppose, like anyone, its awful teachers get such a hard rap for being this way or that way but deep down we're just human too so I think that helps people to connect for sure. And then you can thrive when you're more relaxed with people I think that's just it really, connection is a big thing.*

It was stressed by many participants that valuing parents' contributions helped to ensure practitioners' day-to-day interactions in the community were filled with meaningful interactions, acknowledging practitioners as being part of parents' lives and part of the community they lived in:

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L3, Angela**: *she* [The parent] *spoke to me yesterday like we were best friends again and like I really needed that for the benefit of the child…it's not even about literacy it's just how we can all work together multidisciplinary in a community that it has effects not even in ways we think.*

Methods suggested by practitioners and parents to ***co-create engagement*** included creating opportunities for people to join events delivered in community settings and hosting drop-in events for parents involved in the service. ***Co-creating engagement*** created opportunities for parents and practitioners to engage and interact with each

other, seek advice, and develop a relationship of safety, equality and trust, that supported barriers to engagement to be addressed and broken down.

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L12 Rosemary:** *You've come to my coffee morning, there's great banter between you and my parents that's even unusual, I think we seem to know each other quite well because we've built up that relationship over the last couple of years. Me and you have a bit of banter, but we let people in, it's not closed. That happens over time when you get to click with certain people and allow it in and it relaxes people then. I think humour really allows people to come in and join a group.*

Some advocated for practitioners to use a strengths-based approach, one that values parents' expertise and supports the relationship building process through their welcoming approach. As suggested by participating parents, this supports self-efficacy to be developed in their interactions with services, it impacts their family and community roles, and enhances social and cultural capital.

> **Parent focus group 3, Mar 2021, L61, Michela:** *It's that one time to meet other people, and you don't realise how much you have in common with people in your local area, and it's kinda introducing you to other stuff in your local area because you're chatting to people, and they're like 'oh I'm into gardening' 'oh well did you know there's this in the area' you don't realise how good the networking situation you's bring, even regardless of education.*

Practitioners and parents co-created engagement by joining events delivered in community settings and hosting drop-in events for parents involved in the service. Co-creating engagement generated opportunities for parents and practitioners to interact with each other, seek advice, develop a relationship of safety, equality and trust, that supports the breaking down of barriers to engagement.

The category **Co-creating engagement** offers an understanding of the ways in which a parent and a practitioner can develop their relationship and collaborative partnership with each other to enhance children's language and literacy skills. Practitioners who look for opportunities to become a familiar face to parents, harness the chance to personalise invitations to events and develop an informal practice in their collaborations with parents can enhance effective engagement. ***Co-creating engagement*** created opportunities for parents to engage and interact with practitioners, to seek advice from a familiar face, and participate in the development of a relationship of safety, equality and trust.

7.4. Connecting to engage: The in-session dance of engagement.

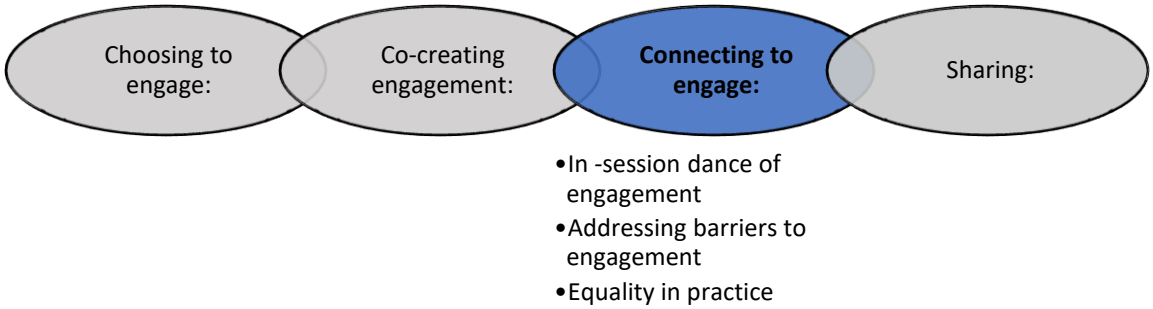

Figure 7.3: The four dance steps to effective engagement: Step 3: Connecting to engage.

The third step, **connecting to engage**, focused on what works to make programmes accessible to parents and support their engagement in interventions (see Figure 7.3). Practitioners who participated in this research signaled ways of connecting to engage. For example, hosting a community event, a programme, and/or a clinic visit for parents canensure parents have the opportunity to know that the programme is welcoming for them, and that the tenets of engagement, SET, are ensured.

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L31, Emma:** *When I hear that the person has arrived if I'm not quite ready for them I pop out and talk to them about something that's not SLT and if I see that they are nervous I try and name that they're nervous for them, but it is tricky like people are so nervous of it and I get it like it's their child it's a service an additional service that not every child has to go to so it's I think listen to their fears, the way we try to set up parents come in to us first and we are taking the case history we try and get the parent's perspective.*

Making connections was described as the co-creation of an informal, fun-filled environment in a neutral venue that supported both parents and practitioners to relax and develop relationships based on SET. Making connections between practitioners and parents in a neutral venue enhanced 'the dance of engagement'.

> **Parents focus group 3, March 2021, L29, Catherine:** *Just the atmosphere in the room, the laughs, the jokes and the silly things that happened in the room. The book, you do all the actions and all, and it makes people laugh, and it's just the laugh and fun. The atmosphere in the room is just so good and calming. And I always end up leaving in a good mood and a smile on my face.*

The relationship-building process between the parent and the practitioner was evidenced in the data centred on the value of an informal learning environment. Having fun supported parents' engagement with practitioners and crucially engagement with their children later at home. The creation of an informal learning environment was

recognised as influential in ensuring parents' engagement at the programme and also in the implementation of the learning at home because parents knew what to do to support their child's learning. An informal fun-filled atmosphere was supported parents and practitioners to enjoy the process of **connecting to engage** with each other.

> **Parent focus group 2, June 2019, L6, Saoirse:** *I love going to BB because you get a free book, but not only do you get a free book you get to learn all about how you can make your child love reading and even finding games within a book like asking them about the pictures or trick words and at BB you get to play fun games and win little prizes as well*.

> **Practitioner focus group 1, May 2019, L59, Gretta:** *It's bringing the community together, like bringing the schools together like I don't know maybe our school is a bit different, there's a tendency that you're kind of in that clique of your own school but when you're going to Breakfast Buddies they're at their table but there's other parents going up and down and a nice way for them to mix.*

A neutral venue was regarded by participants as one that enhanced a shift in the power dynamic as it created agency for parents over their attendance and improved their engagement: parents had the ability to choose to engage or not in the dance - they were in control.

> **Practitioner focus group 1, May 2019, L24, Cliona:** *I think it's possibly because it's the community maybe? It's not in the school. I think sometimes when it's in the school they feel like it's going to be very structured and you know they're nervous about coming in- will be watching them and the teacher will be saying 'aw this one doesn't know what they're doing' you know because even though we are teachers and they know we're teachers--Like… so I think the venue is really important, it's a neutral venue everybody goes in they feel like they can leave when they want…it's all very open and I think that really helps. I also think because you pull in a big crowd for whatever reason it's not as intimidating when you go in because there's a big crowd so you can kind of just mosey in and then find your feet and then there's a good atmosphere going so em, I think that's one of the real benefits of it, it draws people if they're not sure they can go in have a look then just you know find a little spot and then the next week they might come back, or the next time come back and get a bit more engaged.*

The concept of **connecting to engage**, the in-session dance of engagement focused on what works to make interventions accessible to parents and support their engagement in family literacy programmes. Participants in this research spoke about the benefits of their engagement and what they liked. For instance, parents liked the free resources and described their learning to support their children's language and literacy skills. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to connect as a community and share the family literacy activities in a way that was very accessible to parents.

Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L83, Deirdre: *You always come away from it having learned something new. Always.*

7.4.1 Connecting to engage: Addressing barriers to engagement

The findings of the data analysis demonstrated that practitioners understood that it can be difficult for parents to go to an event, programme or appointment on their own, so they found ways to help ensure they could "make it easy" and "fun" for parents to engage. Addressing barriers to engagement was completed through careful planning for the family literacy programme to ensure it was accessible to all parents, to include parents with unmet literacy needs.

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L9, Trudi:** *It's fun, it's made fun for the kids, the parents are more relaxed and it's a bit of time out for them because they can mix with other parents and the kids can mix as well.*

Making arrangements to attend an event with a parent was one approach evidenced in the data to support **connecting to engage.** Once practitioners had a relationship of trust with parents, the familiar face of the practitioner in the room was often enough to support parents' attendance. This was another vital way to address barriers to engagement for parents attending a programme. Participating practitioners described barriers to engagement and revealed how they planned to address as many barriers as possible to support attendance.

> **YB focus group 3, June 2020, L11, Brid:** *I think maybe we underestimate how difficult it can be for parents to come to a group because we're so used to groups and working with groups over time and it's that bit about how did they actually feel that they can walk in without feeling that this is huge or feeling threatened or feeling whatever, you know?*

> **Practitioner focus group 1, May 2019, L27, Maureen:** *They're a little bit nervous but it's easy for them to go in if they know that we're going to be in the room, and they know a friendly face.*

Drop-in events/programmes/advice clinics were stressed as a great way to establish relationships between parents and practitioners. It was indicated that the practitioner's presence was a source of comfort for the parent who was seeking advice on their child's learning and development. This supported the relationship building process and supported parents to engage. The whole community got involved to create a welcoming, safe environment for parents to engage. Parents in this study considered waiting lists for appointments for services as frustrating, and anxiety inducing as they tried to access support for their children's learning and development. The opportunity

to attend a family literacy programme and to meet practitioners that could support parents as they were waiting for a different appointment was seen as invaluable.

> **Practitioner focus group 1, May 2019, L61, Gretta:** *This is a way that it actually does work. I mean parents come along, they sign in their name, you're free to come, you're free to leave.*

> **Parent focus group 3, March 2021, L76, Saoirse:** *Even before you get to the room to you, you walk in the door of the Axis, and the girls at reception tell you where to go, then you go upstairs and the girl that signs you in is like "aw hiya" if you walked in there and no one at reception said anything you'd walk back out, and same with the girl who signs you in if she was all snotty you'd be gone. So, it's everything, like everything.*

> **Parent focus group 2, June 2019, L76 Saoirse:** *All the other people that you could be waiting weeks to have an appointment with, they have every minute that they have there to sit down and reassure you if you have any issue, it is just, it's amazing.*

Addressing barriers to engagement was regarded by participants as central to supporting parents' engagement through **connecting to engage.** Potential different methods to tackle barriers to engagement were reflected on by participants, including the provision of incentives such as food.

> **Practitioner focus group 2, March 2021, L22, Emma:** *We've done a few things in the health centre to try and get people to come over and talk- not even to do anything. But the ones where we have buns people are more likely to come over.*

> **YB focus group 3, June 2020, L37, Rena:** *I think it's sometimes it is persistence because it's the same-the parents might not necessarily have a great relationship with the school, you know? And it is like okay, well maybe if there's a bad relationship with the school, we offer somewhere else. It's really trying to accommodate the parent where they are and I suppose if there's ways, we can change our work or our practice or work around, facilitating them to make them I suppose to make them feel that trust and comfort.*

> **Parent focus group 2, June 2019, L87, Ciara***: It doesn't make it feel conscious, like I'd never feel like 'oh no there's such and such' and know you'd think 'oh social workers' know the way some people have a stigma towards them, ya'know? But they're just all so warm and welcoming and if you have any queries or any questions, they'll always help.*

> **YB Focus group 2, June 2020, L43, Blathnaid:** *Just being approachable like. People might not know what Breakfast Buddies is back in the day, but they would know you and they would want to go because you're approachable and they're not scared to talk to you. People feel welcome and inviting and, you know, they sit down and [to] be actually interested in what they have to say. And interested in*

their concerns and give out advice or point them in the right direction, you know? I think that's a huge thing, you know. That they all feel welcome.

7.4.2 Connecting to engage: Equality in practice

Analysis of the data highlighted equality in practice as critical to dismantling barriers of mistrust of services for a community of parents living in an area of socio-economic need. The in-vivo code "we were all there as equals" described equality in practice where parent/practitioner barriers to engagement no longer existed and both sets of actors ***connect to engage***:

> **Practitioner focus group 1, June 2019, L42, Cliona:** *To build a lot of relationships which is what I'm trying to do all the time, on a nice, social, even playing field.*

> **Practitioner focus group 1, May 2019, L24, Cliona:** *We were all there as equals, I didn't know what I was at, they didn't know what they were at so we all gave it a go together and that was fantastic*.

Informal practice supported the creation of an equality in practice. Practitioners described the opportunities they created to model and coach activities with parents in a family literacy programme.

> **Parents focus group 3, March 2021, L87, Emily:** *It's like parents talking to parents, not facilitators, you're on our level interacting with us, and the tips and hints are brilliant, time and again you'd go back.*

> **Practitioners focus group 1, May 2019, L 38, Caoimhe:** *Like it wasn't like I was standing up at the top of the room dictating what everyone should do, it was sitting with them [parents]and I think that really helped as well.*

> **Practitioner Focus group 2, March 2021, L 55, Gretta:** *I would hear parents say are you going to BB? I'm going if you're going. I don't think it's professionals and parents, like there's no barrier, like there's teachers sitting at the table making cards the same as everybody else like …but the experience they have when they are there has made them come back.*

In this study, practitioners who facilitated a programme/intervention using equality in practice supported breaking down existing barriers to engagement for parents in areas of socio- economic disadvantage.

> **Practitioners focus group 2, March 2021, L13, Emma:** *I think the tea and coffee and the roll really helps: it creates like an "everybody's equal" type of thing. We're going up and getting a tea and coffee and something to eat and all the parents are, and the amount of chats I've had over a cup of tea before it's even started. And then that wee craft activity you do, sometimes I think if people are busy with*

their hands, they're more likely to talk and chat and it really opens people up. And I think humour is huge I think the fact that we can kinda look silly. That's a real level playing field and at those things parents really mix.

One practitioner reflected that addressing barriers to engagement and creating an environment where equality in practice is established was the most advantageous way to **make connections** and develop engagement. Practitioners told parents they were valued, their contributions were important, their engagement at the programme and with their children at home was vital.

> **Practitioners focus group 1, May 2019, L28, Cliona:** *So, I think that's why it's important that I am there and that it is that we're all included there- even for us that it's not just put on for the parents it's for everyone really.*

Making connections establishes the "what works" of programme engagement: the co-creation of an informal, fun-filled environment in a neutral venue that supports both parents and practitioners to relax and develop relationships emerged as crucial to enhance engagement in this programme. Practitioners reflected and addressed barriers to engagement to create an environment where equality in practice was established. In this study, these actions emerged as an advantageous way to develop parental engagement.

7.5. Sharing: 'the dance of engagement'

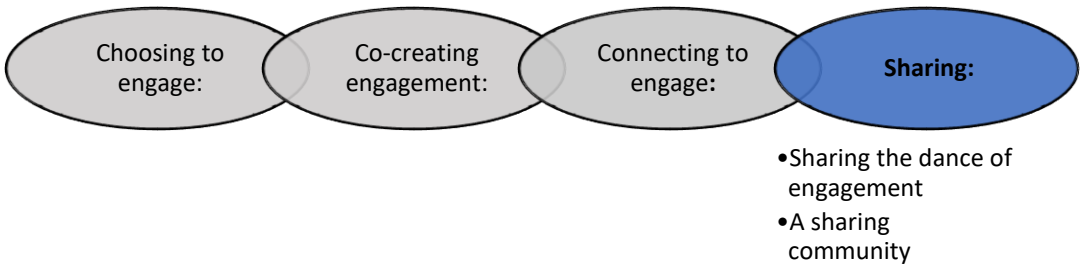

Figure 7.4: The four dance steps to effective engagement: Step 4*:* Sharing*.*

The fourth step, **Sharing*,*** captures the ripple effects of effective parental engagement. **Sharing** in this study occurred at programmes, community events and in the home learning environment. **Sharing** describes the positive effects of 'the dance of engagement' on a community of parents, practitioners and children (see Figure 7.4). This step may also be the first step for parents and practitioners to re-engage in 'the dance of engagement'.

There were numerous examples in the data of the effects of how information was modelled and coached to parents to enhance their engagement practice with their children - for example, practitioners who ensured parents could access the information being shared. To enhance this process, practitioners considered how to share information on supporting children's learning and development with parents. Participating parents expressed a dislike of formal practice in services. Practitioners reflected on how they shared information with parents in a format that parents could adapt into their home practice. Likewise, parents shared their new knowledge with their children. Practitioners also encouraged parents' self-efficacy to enhance their understanding of the crucial role they play in their children's learning and development.

> **Parent Focus group 1, May 2019, L80, Catherine:** *I think it's great to see how the books rhyme, every book we get the books seem to rhyme and for my daughter that's great because it's easier for her to remember. It's good because it's easier for you when you're at home to read it as well.*

> **Parent Focus group 3, March 2021, L23, Deirdre:** *He absolutely loves reading: he reads to his sisters all the time, like every night before they go asleep and all. If I didn't actually start going to BB, I wouldn't have thought of even doing that because I'm not one to sit down and read or anything like that. I'd look through the pictures, but I wouldn't read it.*

> **Practitioners focus group 1, May 2019, L52, Gretta:** *Even what you said about creativity if like parents themselves struggle with literacy themselves, there are techniques we've all seen it at these [programmes] where you can discuss the cover [of the book] or the illustration, use prediction where they don't necessarily need to be highly literate themselves, it's the interest in it that's as effective as the reading of it.*

To enhance this process further, practitioners considered how to **share** information on supporting children's learning and development with parents. One way of doing this was described through an informal relationship-based practice.

> **YB focus group 2, June 2020, L18, Noreen:** *I think it's good from the children's perspective that they see the parent being involved and they want to be involved. They're not just going because they have to go and they actively want to be engaged with whatever process it is, you know? So, I think it's very good for the children's perspective, to see that. You know that the parent is actively involved and is interested in what they're doing and meeting the teachers, principals, homeschools, yourselves and I think that's good, from my perspective anyway, you know?*

Data analysed in this research suggests that **sharing** activities with children that had been coached and modelled to parents by the practitioner supported the "how to" for parents and made the activity easy to replicate at home.

> **Parents focus group 1, May 2019, L89, Holly:** *It's helping you to interpret, like it's not like school work, even though you're helping them learn it's not like school work, it's not like school, it's fun and you're having the laugh, it's like you're giving us little tips on how to phrase things and telling them different things about the book and all that so if you get the tips about the book you can pass them on to your child like.*

> **Practitioner Focus group 2, March 2021, L 41, Emma:** *I think people at BB feel so valued and they feel so empowered like, they can go home, like they have these skills that you have done this activity with them, like "oh I enjoyed that activity I feel valued I want my child to feel valued", like that like a parallel process for them.*

The knock-on impact of making information accessible to parents, was that parents reported they could then **share** their new knowledge with their children. Parents' experiences of ***sharing*** their new knowledge with their children was described as easy, and it enhanced the parent-child relationship.

> **Parents focus group 1, May 2019, L80, Catherine:** *I think it's great to see how the books rhyme, every book we get the books seem to rhyme and for my daughter that's great because it's easier for her to remember. It's good because it's easier for you when you're at home to read it as well.*

> **Parent Focus group 2, June 2019, L33, Ciara:** … *it definitely gets the kids more involved like they wouldn't be interested in anything else I've went to you know like because it's not fun and exciting for them. But like that who would have thought that reading and teaching your child different words and all could be fun?*

Parents reflecting on their own childhoods described books not being read to them, the gaps in parents' knowledge of the "how to" are addressed through coaching and modelling activities to parents. As a consequence of their new skills and confidence, parents described feeling calmer in their interactions with their children and being able to show their "fun" side. Parents' perceptions of supporting their children's learning and development changed, as they began perceiving supporting children's learning and development as enjoyable and fun.

> **Parents focus group 3, March 2021, L10, Jackie:** *It kinda teaches you that learning is fun because sometimes when A [child's name] was little, if she didn't understand something, you'd be getting stressed over it, so instead of getting stressed, you kind of make it fun for her, and she'd get what we were saying then but that was only because of how you all showed us in BB.*

> **Parent Focus group 3, March 2021, L17, Emily***: It was just easy. It made you realise if you take a step back a little bit and think on their level, they're learning as well, so not to get frustrated as easily with them because if you make it fun for them, they pick it up easier.*

Parents reflected on feeling happier and more confident in their relationship with their child, the shared enjoyment enhancing their relationship.

> **Parents focus group 3, March 2021, L23, Deirdre:** *He absolutely loves reading: he reads to his sisters all the time, like every night before they go asleep and all. If I didn't actually start going to BB, I wouldn't have thought of even doing that because I'm not one to sit down and read or anything like that. I'd look through the pictures, but I wouldn't read it.*

> **Parent Focus group 2, June 2019, L62, Ann-Marie:** *It kind of makes you feel that bit happier that you're doing stuff for them. Instead of just collecting and dropping them to school, doing a bit of homework and that's it then. You have more things to do with them…more bonding time.*

> **Parent Focus group 3, March 2021, L19, Michela***: It was just so much easier for me when I had tips, and I was like, 'oh my god, that's so simple why couldn't I think of that?' and then not having battles with the kids at home when trying to do homework.*

7.5.1 Sharing: A sharing community

The data also highlighted benefits to practitioners from **sharing** knowledge with their peers and with parents. Practitioners reported feeling more energized and empowered in their engagement practices which enticed them to enhance their engagement practice even more.

> **YB focus group 2, June 2020, L31, Kathleen:** *it's energising and it's also humbling because you kind of get in awe of them and its reciprocal. But energy, good parental engagement, for me, is really energising.*

Practitioners reported that once they chose to engage and co-create relationships, a **sharing** of knowledge occurred between parents and practitioners. This **sharing** supported practitioners to reflect on their learning through the process of parental engagement.

> **Practitioners focus group 2, March 2021, L24, Rosemary:** *I'm in [this area] so long and people go on about empowering people and it gets to me because I find they empower me when you hear of the trauma some of them are coming from. You empower each other, you are learning from each other...because they empower me too or people empower each other, it's not just one class of people empowering another.*

For parents in this research, knowledge **sharing** with their peers was found to enhance learning opportunities, reinforcing parenting skills and parents' self-efficacy.

> **Parents focus group 1, May 2019, L6, Holly:** *You get to meet different people from different schools as well, you know? Not just like the same Mammies you see all the time, you know, different people.*

Parent Focus group 3, March 2021, L61, Michela: *You don't realise how much you have in common with people in your local area, and it's kind of introducing you to other stuff in your local area because you're chatting to people, and they're like "oh I'm into gardening" "oh well did you know there's this in the area" you don't realise how good the networking situation you bring, even regardless of education.*

Parent focus group 1, May 2019, L 38, Holly: *We wouldn't have found any of that only for you and coming to BB and you know people "well I'm going here and I'm going there" you know you find out what's on in other places as well.*

Parents that were **choosing to engage** at a community level **shared** and collaborated with their peers. Participating parents **shared** information about other programmes and services and created opportunities to construct friendships with other parents in ways that that could potentially enhance their social and cultural capital.

Parents focus group 3, March 2021, L65, Emily: *For me, it was like word of mouth she'd gone to a couple of them and was like you'll pick up tips, and it's great to just get out in the community with like-minded people, and we're all learning together, and you can crack a joke, its great like I found it great anyway.*

Parent Focus group 3, March 2021, L56, Brigid: *If I knew say someone was going, I'd say "oh you're going to that, so I'll sit beside you" I suppose if you have a buddy going in with you.*

The data demonstrated how practitioners **shared** knowledge with parents on new practices that support children's learning and development, delivered in an informal fun-filled way, and supported parents to replicate the activities in the home learning environment.

Parents focus group 1, May 2019, L74, Sheila: *Bringing words to life they show ye the actions they ask you to get great fun out of it when you go home.*

Effective engagement encouraged word-of-mouth engagement between parents and their children. For example, children noticed the programme advertisement and asked their parents to attend the activity. For the children of parents who participated in the study, time spent in the home with their parents engaged in learning and development activities became a fun-filled activity.

Parents focus group 1, May 2019, L134, Brigid: *Our kids come in and as soon as they see the BB leaflet going up they're like "Ma are ye going are ye going Ma, are ye going to get a new book, what are ye going to learn today?". It's just like as soon as they know it's coming up it's like "right Mam you're going and we're going to get a new book and we're going to have fun".*

Practitioners recognised that word-of-mouth engagement from one parent to another was a powerful resource to enhance and ***share*** engagement. If parents were happy to

tell other parents to attend the programme, then the practitioner knew anecdotally that the programme and its facilitation was having a positive effect on parents.

> **Practitioners focus group 2, March 2021, L49, Rosemary**: *Like I have two parents who will literally go around the yard promoting it as well like parents will pull their own mates, like you know that's how successful it is, that's the only place or programme where I would see that the rest doesn't really happen.*

Sharing of knowledge supported parents to **share** new learning and development practices with their children. Evidenced in the data was the **sharing** through word-of-mouth from one parent to another about programmes/interventions to support their children's development.

> **Parents focus group 1, May 2019, L25, Enya:** *Word of mouth like I hear it from one of the mammy's like are you coming over its on like ah Yeah, I'm good to go.*

Providing free learning materials to parents and spending time coaching and modelling with parents how to use the learning materials, was viewed as facilitating engagement as it enabled parents to replicate the activities at home.

> **Parents focus group 3, March 2021, L12, Jackie:** *I suppose it was just an easier way of teaching her as opposed to being 'oh, this is what you do, say it like this' you're on their level, maybe? You know 'cause sometimes I come home and do homework with them, but I am stressing over what I have to do, so instead of spending an hour stressing doing homework it may only take you half an hour because you're doing it in a fun way rather than stressing over it because you're thinking about all the other things you have to do and I have the free book.*

> **Practitioners focus group 1, Mar 2019, L22, Caoimhe:** A*s teachers, we never get that engagement with parents ever. We sent home leaflets about it, but we never get that opportunity to show and tell 'this is how you do it'*

Data in this research suggested **Sharing** supported practitioners to develop empathy and understanding in their relationships with parents in a supportive, informal environment.

> **Practitioners focus group 2, March 2021, L21, Rosemary:** *I suppose it makes you very much aware of what people are going through themselves you know? They're not in the mood, their heads are full of trauma, not all of them now. But I do find if you continually say to someone 'morning, hi' and they're like 'oh what are you so perky about?' you just kinda have to model it and they do eventually come around… Some people come from awful situations and are just like 'I don't feel like being perky with you at that hour of the morning' sometimes I don't either but I have to tell them I put on a face but you just have to keep doing it and eventually it does rub off on them.*

Sharing occurred at programmes, community events and in the home learning environment. This sharing of knowledge supported parents to share new learning and

development practices with their children, share information with their peers about services in the community and community events and parenting practices, and share with practitioners the realities of living in an area of socio-economic need. Sharing supported practitioners to develop empathy and understanding in their relationships with parents in a supportive, informal environment. The data analysis illustrated for this theory that 'the dance of engagement' is an active alliance involving co-creation, collaboration, connection and **sharing** amongst a community of parents, practitioners, peers and children involved in 'the dance of engagement'.

The four dance steps taken together and SET as the foundation of 'the dance of engagement', created a vibrant free-flowing unique experience between the participants engaging in 'the dance of engagement'. This process created opportunities for parents and practitioners (dancers) to connect, to express fears and worries, but also to applaud successes and celebrations, to rejoice in the benefits of 'the dance of engagement'.

7.6 The dance of engagement: an explanation in the practice of engagement

Applying the CGT methods of coding, clustering, diagramming, and constant comparative analysis led to the ongoing development of categories from the data, which I am calling dance steps, as it aligns with 'the dance of engagement' analogy (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As previously alluded to, the dance of engagement is not a linear process: every step in the dance of engagement is unique to the person learning the dance steps and collaborating with others. Described below through the use of diagramming (Charmaz, 2014) is an explanation of the practice of engagement and how it may occur for practitioners and parents at multiple levels and times during their relationship. This explanation is designed to support the understanding of the CGT theory of 'the dance of engagement' and how it supports engagement practice for both parents and practitioners. Diagrams are often used to highlight the visual representation and application of theory (Charmaz, 2014). The different elements of the theory in Figure 7.5 and Figure 7.6 have been highlighted to support interpretation and to demonstrate the engagement process (Clarke, 2005). The connecting lines between the processes in the figures are to demonstrate the uniqueness involved in each relationship and represent the two-way interaction between parents and practitioners.

Due to the complex nature of engagement, participants can be at various points in the dance of engagement at any one time as each participant's engagement process is unique to them. For example, a practitioner, due to their engagement role in a service, may be in a continuous state of implementing the dance of engagement with parents. We can consider the practitioner as a leader in the dance of engagement. Practitioners set the pace, and guided through the dance of engagement by their previous unique experience with each parent, they collaborate with parents to support them as they **choose to engage**, ensuring the relationship is built on solid foundations (SET). The practitioner may have numerous different relationships with several different parents at any one time, supporting practitioners' understanding and experience as they practice the dance of engagement. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that a practitioner can be **choosing to engage, co-creating engagement, connecting to engage** and **sharing** (i.e., 4 steps of engagement) with several different parents at any one time (see Figure 7.5 for a representation of a practitioner engaging multiple parents at different stages of the dance of engagement).

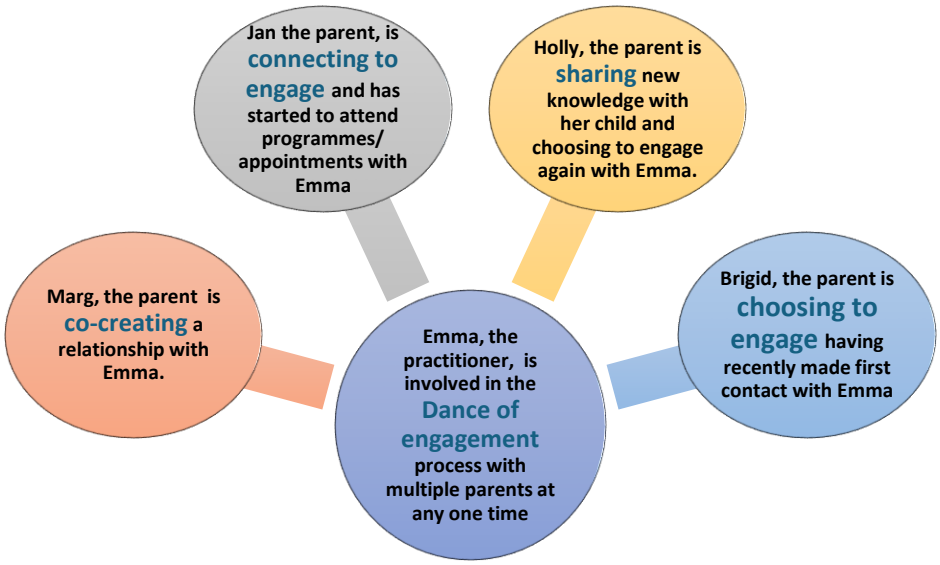

Figure 7.5: Practitioners at different stages of the dance of engagement process with multiple parents.

For example, Emma, the practitioner HCP, could be supporting the parent Brigid to **choose to engage** by discussing the best course of treatment for Brigid's son. Later, Emma may be meeting Marg the parent and her daughter at a therapy appointment for the first time and establishing a good relationship through SET. After lunch, Emma may have already met Jan the parent at a session and is now working on **connecting to engage** with Jan and supporting her to develop her understanding of how to address

her child's development difficulties. Later that day, Emma may also be in discussions with Holly the parent about reengaging for a second block of therapy with her daughter, having had great success ***sharing*** her already growing knowledge with her child and seeing improvements.

Similarly, a parent can be at multiple points in 'the dance of engagement' with multiple practitioners and may also be at different stages of the parental engagement process with different practitioners at any one time (see Figure 7.6). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that a parent can be **choosing to engage, co-creating engagement, connecting to engage** and **sharing** to engage with several different practitioners at any one time. The four dance steps represent an iterative process that reflects the unique journey of each participant in the dance of engagement. For example, Angela the teacher at Catherine's daughters' school may be **co-creating a relationship** with Catherine at a parent's coffee morning. Later, Catherine may meet Cora the teacher at her son's school, as they both **connect to engage** at a parent programme. After lunch Catherine may receive a phone call from Trudi, the Family Resource Centre practitioner, encouraging Catherine to **choose to engage** with the local FRC. And finally, later that day, Maureen the youth worker may contact Catherine to invite her to **share** and celebrate her son's achievements in the local youth club celebrating in the community and enhancing a family's cultural capital.

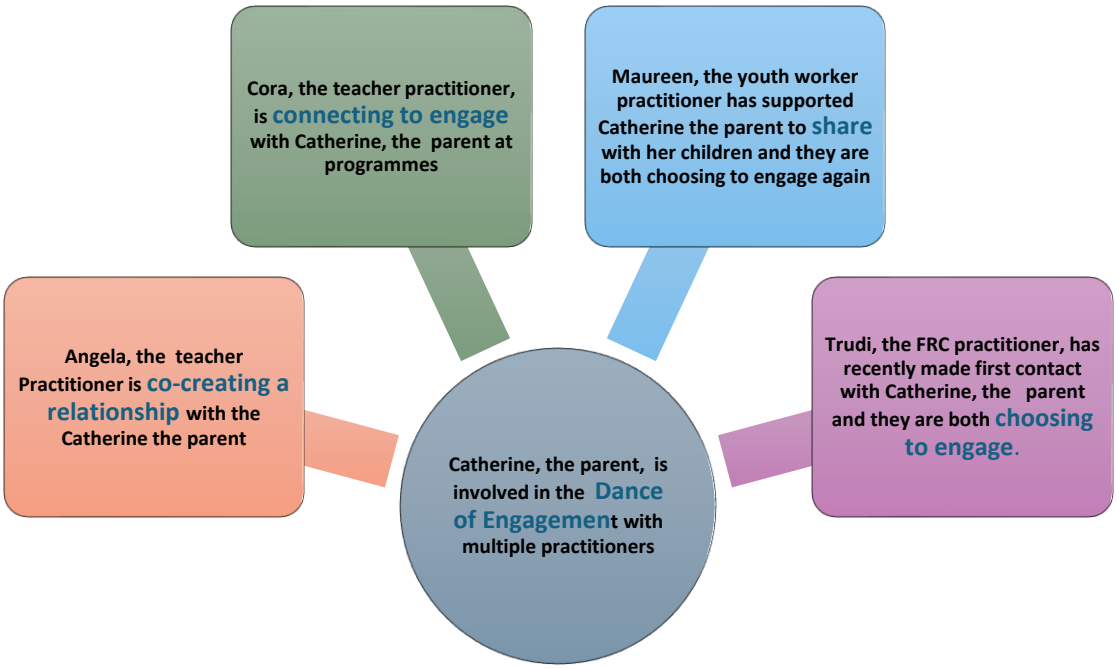

Figure 7.6: Parents at different stages of the dance of engagement process with multiple practitioners.

7.7 Conclusion

The theory described in this thesis, ‘the dance of engagement’, is the result of the application of a Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) approach to theory development: it is grounded in the data and represents a co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2021). The theory of ‘the dance of engagement’ holds within it three foundational tenets (i.e., the dancefloor) of safety, equality, and trust (SET) and four dance steps to support effective engagement. The four dance steps of **choosing to engage**, **co-creating engagement**, **connecting to engage,** and **sharing** illustrate the iterative steps to engagement. This theory showcases the potential impact of opportunities that participants of this study used to connect with each other, to express fears and worries and to applaud successes and celebrations, whilst they participated in ‘the dance of engagement’. Consequently, ‘the dance of engagement’ is not linear, and every step in the dance of engagement brings forth the uniqueness for each person learning the dance and collaborating with others.

Central to the benefits of ‘the dance of engagement’ and its underlying foundations of SET is the consideration and emphasis on the process of effective engagement. A process of engagement that could be dismissed as intuitive or tacit, now has a spotlight from participants’ accounts. The next chapter discusses how the key findings of the theory proposed here relate to the existing literature on parental engagement.

Chapter 8: Discussion

8. Introduction

This study explored the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners on parental engagement strategies employed in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. In this chapter the key findings are discussed in the context of existing literature on parental engagement.

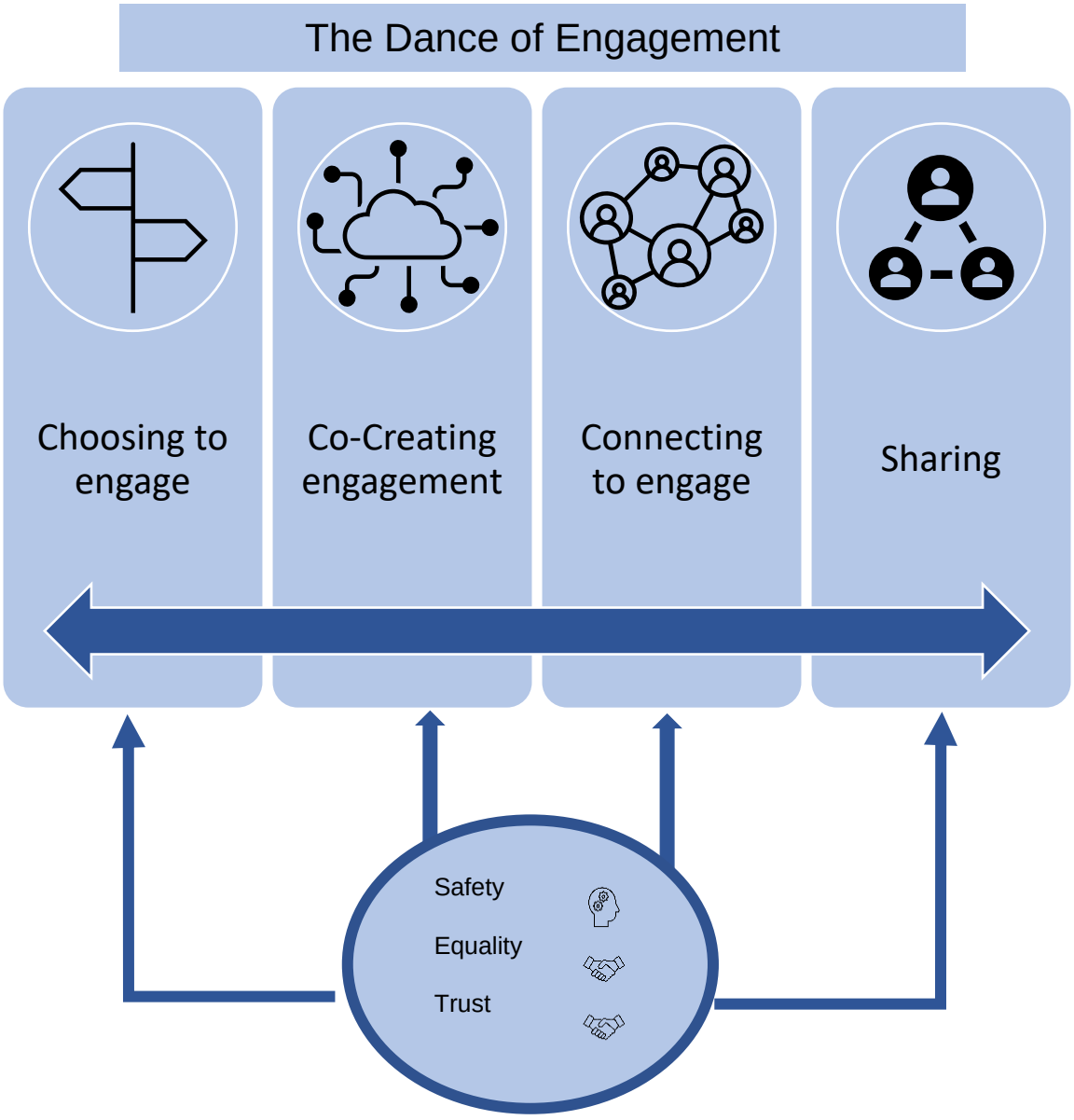

Figure 8.1: Model representation of the theory of parental engagement: The dance of engagement

Charmaz (2014) recommends that the categories of a theory and the findings of the analyses are used as headings to describe the theory and locate its value to research. Therefore, the theory of effective parental engagement ('the dance of engagement')

that has been developed will be discussed in the context of existing literature using the headings safety, equality, and trust (SET), choosing to engage, co-creating engagement, connecting to engage, and sharing (see Figure 8.1, previously used in chapter 5 and reproduced here for ease for the reader).

8.1 Significance of this study

The significance of this study reinforces, extends and creates new knowledge on what can be viewed as effective parental engagement in family literacy programmes in an area of socio-economic need. The theory 'the dance of engagement' provides a socio-cultural view of parental engagement that includes a collaborative, parallel process that occurs between a parent and a practitioner in a family literacy programme. This differs from many established concepts of parental engagement where the onus of successful engagement is levied primarily on one party only, typically the parent (Ishimaru, 2019).

In this study, parents highlighted the importance of encountering practitioners who were open, honest and non-judgemental. Subsequently, SET provides a new unified triad to understand what underpins effective parental engagement, promoting three core elements of safety, equality and trust. SET extends the foundational elements of Nguyen et al. (2021) who focused solely on safety as a prerequisite for parental engagement. Applying SET to any parental engagement programme could help extend opportunities to include parents' voices in the co-creation of shared engagement practices.

Furthermore, 'the dance of engagement' outlines four key, inter-related processes of parental engagement: "choosing to engage", "co-creating engagement", "connecting to engage" and "sharing". The category **choosing to engage** proposes that parents and practitioners **choose to engage** based upon their unique needs and circumstances on an individual, family and community level. This new understanding that practitioners and parents are **choosing to engage** strengthens the importance of maintaining communication and reflective practice when planning engagement strategies. For example, previous research on engagement has described parents' beliefs and motivations to engage but has ignored why practitioners choose to engage (McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Piotrowska et al., 2017).

Adding to this view, the category **co-creating engagement** places a new emphasis on balance and mutual creation, rather than a traditional expert role and hierarchical relationships that can be found in the models by Epstein et al. (2019); Piotrowska et al. (2017). For instance, describing the role of personalised invitations as a crucial element to engagement practices.

Connecting to engage, the third step within the 'dance of engagement', suggests that motivation to engage is enhanced if parents perceive that the programme is easy to engage with. Barriers to engagement are well documented highlighting that change is needed at a societal level (Baker, DeLuca Bishop, Stigall, & van Dulmen, 2018). **Connecting to engage** aligns with the application of SET to create an informal fun-filled environment in a neutral venue that enhances parents and practitioners to develop a productive and fruitful collaborative relationship. Explicit focus on relationships and their central role in parental engagement were recognised by King et al. (2021); Staudt (2007).

The final category of the engagement process in 'the dance of engagement', **sharing,** emphasises the dynamic process of engagement and describes an active collaboration between participants that brings into focus practical supports needed that can achieve a mutually agreed outcome. Sharing extends the theory by Eisner and Meidert (2011) who define technique utilisation as the ability of parents to share with their children any new practices learned. Similarly, Chacko et al. (2016) reinforce the impact of a collective, shared understanding of the 'how to' actively engage parents.

8.2 Safety, Equality and Trust: The foundations of effective engagement

Parental engagement is described as a complex, multifaceted state, happening across many stages, for example, the process of signing up, attending, participating, and implementing the learning at home (Coatsworth et al., 2017; Melvin, Meyer, & Scarinci, 2020). The findings of this study suggest that the **core tenets of engagement, safety, equality and trust (SET)** are necessary for the development of the foundation of engagement and may enhance the multifaceted concept of parental engagement. SET emerged as a necessary support to the process of engagement. This foundation may support the development of the relationship between the parent and practitioner dyad. In this study both parents and practitioners were cognisant of their need for safe spaces

to connect, and to be treated and respected equally, forming the foundation for the development of trusting relationships to enhance effective engagement with each other. This finding echoes the findings of previous studies and reinforces the importance of a two-way process of engagement: for example, the promotion of developing parent-school-community relationships to support teachers and parents to collaborate effectively in programmes through building trust, empathy and establishing good communication (McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Nguyen et al., 2021). Creating a safe environment for parents to engage is also a crucial factor to support effective engagement. Highlighted in the Adult Literacy for Life Strategy (Gov.ie, 2021, p. 29) stigma has been named as the most "critical" barrier that hinders parents to engage. Parents can experience anxiety about their engagement, with previous research reporting that parents feel judged, feel unwelcome in services and this stigma can be internalised (Cortis, 2012; Eaton et al., 2016). As posited by Mytton et al. (2014) parents want to feel safe to talk and receive support from their peers. The illumination of the importance of safety in this study supports the findings of Hornby and Blackwell (2018) who described the need for schools to have a positive attitude to parents when working with them. This perhaps stresses the importance of the role of practitioners in planning to ensure SET is present, to address potential barriers to parents' engaging.

The influence of SET on effective engagement reinforces the view that engagement is influenced by multiple factors, including the relationship process between the practitioner and parent (Bright et al., 2014; Staudt, 2007). Staudt (2007) acknowledges the skills and sensitivity needed by practitioners to navigate the socio-economic burdens that some parents may experience that may hinder their engagement (Staudt, 2007). The relationship process and the role the practitioner plays are crucially important (Gonzalez et al., 2021; Staudt, 2007). In this study, parents highlighted the importance of perceiving practitioners to be open, honest and non-judgemental. The central role of 'provider attributes' is described in the multi-dimensional construct of parental engagement as a factor that can support engagement (Coatsworth et al., 2017; McCurdy & Daro, 2001). Similarly, many researchers have suggested that practitioners who develop positive relationships with parents tend to enhance engagement (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Kazdin & Wassell, 2000; Staudt, 2007). Moreover, an understanding of the multidimensional constructs of engagement can be helpful for practitioners to create insights into the reason why a parent may/may not

attend an appointment/programme. This coupled with an understanding of ecological systems view of parental engagement (Bronfenbrenner, 1974) could support the effective engagement of parents and support the dismantling of barriers to participation. Continuous professional development (CPD) could enhance the knowledge and skills of practitioners to understand parents and their individual needs and preferences (Axford et al., 2012; Crozier & Davies, 2007), but any CPD needs to include voices of parents to inform its content. Others have identified trust as an important engagement factor, such as negative experiences that parents have encountered in school settings which lead to mistrust (Auerbach, 2011; Lareau, 2011). Perhaps CPD focused on these foundational aspects of engagement (i.e., SET) could address some of the challenges currently faced by services trying to engage parents.

In 'the dance of engagement' theory, SET is the foundation of the relationship that is developed between the parent and the practitioner to support parental engagement. SET provides a unified concept for understanding the underpinnings of effective parental engagement, promoting three core elements of safety, equality and trust. Participants shared that establishing safety in their relationships was important to allay any fears or mistrust. They also expressed a strong desire for equality in engagement, including a preference for being afforded equality in status, rights, opportunities, and power. For participants, equality needs to be embedded in the learning environment, and in the interactions between participants. Furthermore, a core part of engagement for participants was having trust and confidence in a service's ability to offer support, which supported participants to recognise the central role of honesty and sincerity in their relationships with each other.

SET in this study was translated from theory to practice through a number of tangible strategies implemented by practitioners. For example, personal invitations to enhance engagement and support relationship building. Effective engagement strategies could be shared amongst practitioners through the creation of practitioner networks as suggested by McCurdy and Daro (2001) and Axford et al. (2012), through increasing practitioners' understanding of the barriers parents face and enhancing their skills to engage with diverse parents with individual needs and preferences. Possibly, the application of SET to any ongoing personal and professional development, could help ensure attention to the value of the application of SET in effective engagement. In the

current literature on engagement, safety, equality and trust are mentioned, albeit separately, as ways practitioners can support engagement (Butler et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2021). In this study, I have built upon what is already known and reconfigured it to re-frame how the concepts of SET relate to each other and taken together underpin effective engagement. An understanding of the concepts of SET could support the engagement practices of practitioners, facilitating a shift in what is typically considered a parent's responsibility to engage to a shared parent-practitioner responsibility to successfully engage with each other.

8.3 Choosing to engage.

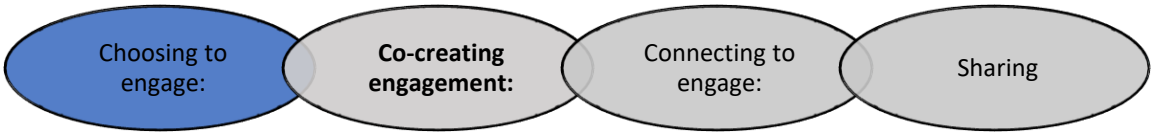

Figure 8.2: The four dance steps to effective engagement: Step 1: Choosing to engage.

The theory 'the dance of engagement' described in chapter 5 is a complex process with lots of energetic interactions happening across the community. The experience of each person engaging is unique to them. It was from this understanding that the category **choosing to engage** was constructed (see Figure 8.2). This concept considers parents' and practitioners' reasons for engaging across social structures and contributes to new understanding of engagement. This extends the previous research on engagement which described parents' beliefs and motivations to engage but often overlooked why practitioners may choose to engage in a collaborative process (McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Piotrowska et al., 2017). Participants involved in this study described their reasons for choosing to engage across three levels: individual, family and community. Parents engaging at an individual level described it as an act of self-care. Some parents discussed their difficulties with literacy, homelessness and mental health struggles. They reported that engaging with services supported them to address feelings of isolation and loneliness. Engaging at a family level was described as

supporting children's development and skills. Parents acknowledged that choosing to engage at a community level supported them to develop relationships with their peers and practitioners.

The importance of considering direct and indirect contexts on children's development has previously received prominence (Weiss et al., 2014), and ultimately relates to the central role parental engagement plays in supporting children's development. The concept of choosing to engage across three levels within 'the dance of engagement' aligns well with Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979, 2001), which stresses the impact of social, community and government contexts on children's development. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory is used frequently to explain family-school engagement (Beecher & Van Pay, 2021; Weiss et al., 2014; Yamauchi et al., 2017). Bronfenbrenner places children and parents at the centre of the engagement process through an ecological lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1974, 1979, 2001). For practitioners, understanding Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological theory coupled with an understanding of why parents may be **choosing to engage** from 'the dance of engagement' could support their engagement practices. Raising practitioners' awareness that barriers to engagement and motivations to engage may be affected by factors beyond the individual parent, such as socio-cultural practices, socio-economic circumstances, neighbourhood effects, programme factors and child needs (Eisner & Meidert, 2011; Matsumoto, Sofronoff, & Sanders, 2009; Nordstrom, Dumas, & Gitter, 2008; Piotrowska et al., 2017). For example, this study's data included accounts from parents who had experienced homelessness, a societal factor beyond the individual parent. There is evidence to suggest that homelessness can negatively impact parents' ability to attend children's medical appointments and children's participation in school due to distance of temporary dwellings from the school and costs associated with transport (Featherstone, 2016). A consideration of the concept of **choosing to engage** could support practitioners and service providers to take a broader, more holistic view of parents' circumstances and experiences, which could potentially enhance their engagement practices. **Choosing to engage** contributes to new knowledge creation in this study by proposing that parents **choose to engage** based upon their unique needs and circumstances on an individual, family and community level. Others too have highlighted the struggle some parents face to engage and the challenges they

may experience accessing services in areas of socio-economic disadvantage which need to be considered and factored in to practitioners' efforts to engage (Wilson, 2020). The idea for a Community-School collaboration could support relationship building between parents and practitioners (Ishimaru, 2019). This in turn, may support children's academic achievement and improve parent-teacher relationships (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Perhaps including the views of parents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and their experience with services is necessary to enhance parental engagement and support practitioners to deepen their understanding of the challenges parents may face to engage (Melvin, Meyer, & Scarinci, 2020). Conceivably, understanding parents' reasons for **choosing to engage** as it applies in their day-to-day life may support their engagement in services by creating a holistic picture for practitioners. This could support a change in social equity in engagement practices (Ishimaru, 2019). Viewing engagement as a process affected by multiple stressors can strengthen practitioners' understanding of parents' needs in relation to their engagement, and ensure appropriate steps are taken.

One potentially novel insight from the theory in this study is the inclusion of practitioners in the **choosing to engage** category. The consideration that practitioners in this study were also choosing to engage, similar to parents, across the three levels, albeit for different reasons, adds new knowledge to the theory of engagement. Practitioners engaged at an individual level to feel safe to engage and let go of the expert stance. Practitioners discussed how informal relationships with parents were difficult to establish and hard to reconcile with their understanding of their professional 'expert' role, their professional responsibilities, and their typical role-defined behaviours. Practitioners needed to feel safe to develop authentic relationships with parents. They chose to engage at a family level to create opportunities to address the barriers to engagement and support the parents' skills to enhance their child's development in a shared collaborative action with the parent. Practitioners chose to engage at a community level to become a reflective practitioner and discussed engagement strategies amongst peers. This was achieved through opportunities to network and meet other practitioners from different services across the community. Furthermore, the role of the practitioner in effective engagement is enhanced by being a reflective practitioner, which can be supported by another 'mentor' practitioner who has the experience and can model effective engagement. The ability of a practitioner to

network and develop good partnerships has been described by others (Barrett, 2008). In this study practitioners spoke about their reasons for **choosing to engage** at a community level, which were to become a reflective practitioner and to discuss with peers best practice for parental engagement.

This insight builds on the concept by Mapp and Kutner (2013) which described shared collaboration between parents and educators as being more effective for engagement. It would appear from a review of existing theories, models and frameworks of parental engagement that the multidimensional constructs of practitioners' behaviours, attitudes, values and expectations in the engagement process is currently often missing from parental engagement constructs (Epstein et al., 2019; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). 'The dance of engagement' theory incorporates practitioners' perspectives in **choosing to engage** and is new knowledge that perhaps could be viewed as a first step in creating more inclusive engagement practices that centre on dual roles of both parents and practitioners in the process of effective engagement. Understanding why both parents and practitioners choose to engage with each other could enhance the perspectives of practitioners and parents, supporting them to be empathic and cognisant of each other's circumstances and supporting necessary adaptations. The understanding that practitioners are **choosing to engage** just as much as parents strengthens the importance of practitioners maintaining reflective practice towards their engagement strategies (Barrett, 2008). In parallel, a process for parents and practitioners to share perspectives on optimal parental engagement strategies for **choosing to engage** may prove beneficial for both parties. The role of parents' voices in how effective engagement can be achieved in practice could support practitioners in their understanding of why parents choose to engage and could support the engagement practice of services. The 'dance of engagement' therefore contributes a new perspective through emphasising a parallel process occurring during the choosing to engage step.

8.4 Co-creating engagement.

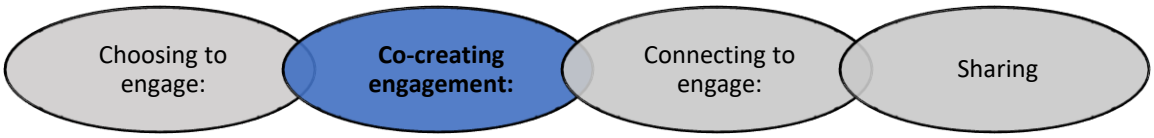

Figure 8.3: The four dance steps to effective engagement: Step 2: Co-creating engagement.

It has been reported that parents from areas of socio-economic disadvantage can find it hard to engage with schools, though, they still want to support their children's learning (Crozier & Davies, 2007; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Practitioners in this study discussed the shared development of relationship building. For example, participants discussed the importance of an informal greeting to parents in the school yard as a starting point to develop interpersonal relationships. For practitioners working in a clinical setting, relationship building commenced when they contacted the parent about setting up an appointment. Practitioners considered that building relationships or even starting to establish relationships with parents could be difficult and anxiety-inducing for the parent. Parents discussed a feeling of mistrust of practitioners and they indicated that they did not trust the school/service, and therefore were unlikely to attend programmes, even if the purpose was to support their children's learning and development. The literature on parental engagement tells us that the inclusion and welcoming of parents' views from complex backgrounds on their experience of engagement with services could support the engagement process (Melvin, Meyer, & Scarini, 2020). The development of the second category **co-creating engagement** within 'the dance of engagement' is achieved through building relationships between the practitioner and the parent that incorporate the three core tenets of parental engagement (SET) and will be discussed here.

The findings by Goodall and Montgomery (2014) who describe engagement as a continuum that evolves over time, this study found evidence that engagement changed, developed and fluctuated for each individual involved. Practitioners described leading the dance, needing to allay parents' mistrust in services, by trying to

develop trusting, safe, informal relationships with parents. Although this was seen as a difficult process that took time, there was evidence of a perspective change for both parents and practitioners. Their relationship was co-created and developed through 'the dance of engagement'.

> **Parents focus group 2, June 2019, L94, Saoirse:** *If you did have an issue inside the school that you needed to talk to them about…like when you see them at BB and they're helping out everyone and they're laughing, and everyone is having a good time it's like "ah yeah it's grand, I can just go and talk to them about that, that's fine, they're human beings. You know what I mean? They're not robots behind a desk".*

Similarly, Staudt (2007) reported that parents' attitudes and behaviours are influenced by practitioners' behaviours that support the engagement process through relationship-building strategies. For example, supporting parents to have a positive attitude towards engagement meant parents were more likely to attend and take part in sessions. Furthermore, research commissioned by the Irish Government reported that social embarrassment and stigma are the most significant barriers that parents face in accessing supports (Gov.ie, 2021). Descriptions of how barriers to engagement can arise from parents' negative experiences of school or negative experiences of services are also documented highlighting that change is needed at a societal level (Baker et al., 2018). This plethora of barriers to parental engagement, many of which are rooted in poverty and social disadvantage, need to be addressed through relationship building as part of **co-creating engagement.** Others too indicate that addressing barriers before interventions begin decreases the likelihood of parents dropping out and increases engagement (Kazdin et al., 1997). However, what is lacking in the current publications on parental engagement and Government policy documents are descriptions of *how* to develop positive relationships with parents to diminish barriers to engagement. Within 'the dance of engagement', practitioners who are a familiar face to parents are deemed to be well placed to create a safe space where parents can relax through the co-creation of a relationship with the practitioner. The concept of a familiar face is perhaps a novel addition to constructs of parental engagement. In this study, practitioners provided guidance on how to become a familiar face to parents to support relationship building, such as by attending events and casually meeting parents, and showing their human side alongside their practitioner role.

> **Practitioners focus group 2, March 2021, L8, Rosemary:** *Once you relax then you can find even the quietest parents will come out of their shell…they see the*

teachers as "oh they're not a real stereotypical teacher there's a bit of craic to her", so you see that everyone is a bit human.

Another practical suggestion from this study's participants to support **co-creating engagement** through relationship building was personalised invitations from practitioners. Personalised invitations were crucial to the engagement process. They recognised the dignity of the parent as a unique individual, of worth to the service and their child's learning and development, acknowledging the expertise and role of the parent. Parents reported feeling valued by the service having received a personal invitation. Likewise, D'Arrigo, Copley, Poulsen, and Zivani (2020) promoted a strengths-based approach to engagement. In addition the Funds of Knowledge Theory is based on supporting practitioners to value parents by recognising that all families have a wealth of knowledge and resources stemming from their cultural, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds (González et al., 2005). When an emotionally safe environment is created, participants may feel nurtured and encouraged to develop confidence and self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005), thereby bolstering their confidence in **co-creating engagement.**

Within 'the dance of engagement' **co-creating engagement** and the associated direct personal contact with parents is an important lever supporting parental engagement. This emphasis on the co-creation element of the theory provides a new perspective of balance and mutual creation, rather than a traditional expert role and hierarchical relationships where the home-school partnership is viewed with the school at the centre (Auerbach, 2011; Ishimaru, 2019).

8.5 Connecting to engage

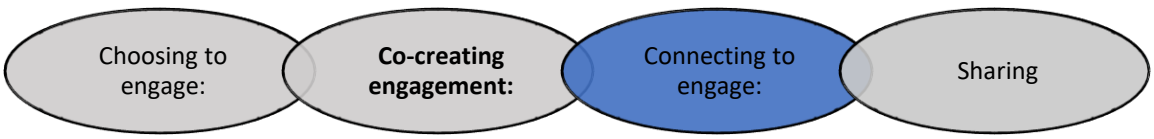

Figure 8.4: The four dance steps to effective engagement: Step 3: Connecting to engage.

The category **connecting to engage** focuses on what works to make programmes accessible to parents and support their engagement in interventions (see Figure 8.4 for the categories in the theory). Practitioners who participated in this research signaled practical ways of **connecting to engage**, for example, hosting a community event, a programme, and/or a clinic visit for parents to ensure parents know that the programme is welcoming for them, and where the tenets of engagement, SET, are ensured.

Within the existing literature base, parental engagement is frequently cited as important, but schools often struggle to implement successful home-school initiatives (Mapp & Kutner, 2013). Aligned with SET and the foundations of engagement, the participants in this research brought attention to the importance of a neutral venue and a welcoming environment. The concept of making it easier for parents and practitioners to engage by hosting a programme in a neutral, welcoming venue was suggested by participants in this study as a way to encourage interactions between practitioners and parents. The creation of an informal, fun-filled environment in a neutral venue supported both parents and practitioners to relax and develop relationships based on SET. Creating opportunities for practitioners and parents **connecting to engage** in a neutral venue enhanced 'the dance of engagement'. Previous research on addressing barriers to engagement highlighted that encouraging interactions between parents and practitioners created familiarity and fostered a sense of ownership for parents (Boyle et al., 2018; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Spoth & Redmond, 2000). Furthermore, a welcoming, supportive environment has been found to be more likely to facilitate parents to feel safe (Butler et al., 2020; Goodall et al., 2010) and promotes the role of the parent in children's academic success (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Epstein et al. (2019) also posited that teacher attitudes and school environment pay a huge role in parental engagement.

Motivating parents to engage and ensuring they stay and attend an intervention is a common theme across the existing research on engagement (King et al., 2014; McCurdy & Daro, 2001; Morrissey-Kane & Prinz, 1999; Piotrowska et al., 2017). **Connecting to engage** within the 'dance of engagement' suggests that motivation can be supported and enhanced if parents perceive that the intervention is easy to engage in. This finding echoes the systematic review by Finan et al. (2018) which found that

motivating parents to complete a programme was enhanced by the ease parents felt in the engagement process.

'The dance of engagement' promotes collaborative practice created between parents and practitioners as central to effective parental engagement. Research on engagement has identified the many potential barriers to engagement and addressing parents' needs (Boyle et al., 2018; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Spoth & Redmond, 2000) but perhaps frequently missing from constructs of parental engagement are the skills and knowledge a practitioner needs to enhance effective engagement through collaborative practice. This observation aligns with research by Klatte et al. (2020, p. 620) who suggested engagement requires a practitioner to have "knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence to collaborate effectively with parents". This proposition adds to a requirement put forward by (Melvin, Meyer, & Scarinci, 2020) to ensure services enhance engagement in line with parents' perspectives, promoting the role of parents' voices in engagement, and reinforcing the collaboration necessary.

Connecting to engage reinforces previous assertions that a good partnership and networking ability with other agencies supports the development of referral pathways and sharing of engagement strategies (Barrett, 2008). Aligning with **connecting to engage**, it has been advocated by multiple other researchers that a collective understanding is crucial to enhancing engagement practices (Chacko et al., 2016; Haine-Schlagel et al., 2016; Ingoldsby, 2010; Klatte et al., 2020). Furthermore, it is suggested that engagement can be enhanced if it aligns well with the community where it is being delivered and ensures practitioners' understanding of the community (Carpentier et al., 2007; Kumpfer et al., 2002). Designing interventions that are relevant to community needs enhances "flexibility, sensitivity and service user empowerment" (Barrett, 2008). Financial incentives have been promoted to support parents engagement, but numerous studies found that they made no significance difference in ongoing engagement and retention levels (Dumas et al., 2010; Gross et al., 2011; Heinrichs, 2006). The success of interventions relies on the ability of the service to enhance parents' motivations for attending and ensure their individual concerns about attending are addressed (Olds, Sadler, & Kitzman, 2007). In this study, **connecting to engage** was driven by descriptions of potential methods to tackle barriers to engagement. For instance, the provision of food, for example, tea, coffee, buns,

breakfast, was seen as a way to support parents to engage. Food and incentives to encourage participation was also identified elsewhere as worthwhile (Cortis et al., 2009). Parents' primary intrinsic motivation to enrol was previously recognised as a desire to be a better parent (Gross et al., 2011); perhaps this understanding emphasises the active collaborative process between parents and practitioners that is focusing on a mutually agreed outcome.

Aligned with SET and the foundations of engagement, **connecting to engage** provides new insight into the creation of an informal fun-filled environment in a neutral venue that enhances parents and practitioners to develop their collaborative relationship. In 'the dance of engagement', making it easier for parents and practitioners to engage with each other supported the ownership and participation of parents in a collaborative practice that built upon parents' motivations to engage with practitioners.

8.6 Sharing

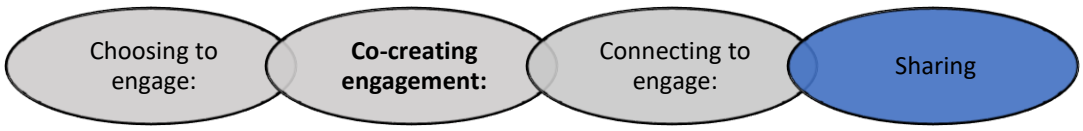

Figure 8.5: The four dance steps to effective engagement: Step 4: Sharing.

The category **sharing** captures the ripple effects of effective parental engagement. **Sharing** describes the positive effects of 'the dance of engagement' on a community of parents, practitioners and children (see Figure 8.5 for the categories in the theory). Within 'the dance of engagement', sharing encompasses coaching and modelling of activities by practitioners intended to be completed by parents with children. The practitioner supports the "how to" for parents and makes the activity easy to replicate at home. This aligns with Eisner and Meidert (2011) who describe technique utilisation, the ability of parents to share with their children the new practices learned. The knock-on impact of making information accessible to parents in a way they can use is that parents can then **share** their new knowledge and skills with their children, thereby enhancing the parent-child relationship and supporting children's development.

Sharing in ‘the dance of engagement’ is constructed from numerous examples in the data of how information modelled for and coached with parents to enhance their engagement practice with their children has positive ripple effects. A proactive practitioner who **shares** is one who can reflect on how they **share** information with parents in a format that parents can access and adapt into their home practice. This builds upon findings of others who reported that successfully engaging parents requires a practitioner to be someone who parents feel they can trust, coupled with parents’ motivation to engage (Finan et al., 2018; Morawska & Sanders, 2006; Spoth et al., 1996).

The importance of the role parents play in supporting their children’s development is undeniable and the effects of their support are well documented, including their influence on children’s language and literacy skills, cognitive skills, social, emotional and behavioural development (Carpentieri et al., 2011; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Khatib et al., 2020; Swain et al., 2014). The role of practitioners through their knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence to engage with parents is also an important factor to consider in any engagement practice (Klatte et al., 2020; Watts-Pappas et al., 2016). In ‘the dance of engagement’ category **sharing,** practitioners reported being energised and empowered in their engagement practices which enticed them to enhance their engagement practice even more. Harris and Goodall (2007, p. 5) assert that engaging parents in their children’s learning can be described as a “powerful lever for raising achievement in schools”. The category **sharing** extends this view and highlights that practitioners are an equally powerful influence in explicitly developing parents’ abilities to support children’s learning. The motivations of practitioners is missing from the research on parental engagement but is clearly demonstrated in the **sharing** category of ‘the dance of engagement’ adding to the current understanding of what works to enhance effective engagement. The category **sharing** emphasises the dynamic process of engagement and how it requires active collaboration with participants, bringing a clear focus to practical supports that can achieve a mutually agreed outcome.

In addition to practitioners’ sharing knowledge and skills with parents, **sharing** incorporates parents sharing information about other programmes and services to

other parents. In ‘the dance of engagement’, word-of-mouth (WOM) is seen as key to enhancing parental engagement, as evidenced in this extract from the analyses:

> **Parents focus group 3, March 2021, L65, Emily:** *For me, it was like word of mouth she'd gone to a couple of them and was like you'll pick up tips, and it's great to just get out in the community with like-minded people, and we're all learning together, and you can crack a joke, its great like I found it great anyway.*

This proposition substantiates the findings of Khavjou et al. (2018) who describe the impact of parents’ social network on parents’ intention to engage. **Sharing** suggests that WOM needs to be considered as an effective strategy for initial engagement. In this study, both parents and practitioners recognised the value of WOM when they were choosing to engage and sharing the value of their perceptions on their engagement. Likewise, word of mouth is considered one of the most common recruitment strategies, alongside referral agencies, face to face contact with practitioners, community events and information sharing at collaborative meetings (Khavjou et al., 2018). The actual participation in focus groups for this grounded theory study, whereby practitioners **shared** and collaborated with their peers on ways to enhance engagement, was impactful for creating a shared understanding of parental engagement. Similarly, Chacko et al. (2016) describes the impact of a collective, shared understanding of the ‘how to’ actively engage parents, which is crucial to enhancing engagement practices.

In this theory, the motivations of practitioners are clearly demonstrated, adding new understanding of effective parental engagement practices. The category **Sharing** brings a new emphasis on technique utilisation (Eisner & Meidert, 2011) and its influence on effective engagement in the teaching and learning environment of community-based family literacy programmes. Furthermore, in-class coaching and modelling by practitioners for parents was highlighted as supporting effective engagement. This modelling approach was reported by parents to support engagement with their children in literacy activities in the home learning environment. This is an interesting concept and one that could support evaluation of effective family literacy programmes. **Sharing** occurs from practitioner to parent, to parent to parent, parent to practitioner, and practitioner to practitioner, strengthening the perspective that parental engagement is multi-faceted and requires co-creation (Bright et al., 2014; Klatte et al., 2020).

8.7 Summary

In this chapter the theory of 'the dance of engagement' was discussed in the context of the existing literature in the area of parental engagement, highlighting its contribution to our knowledge and understanding of parental engagement. The influence of **SET** on effective engagement emphasises the practitioner's role in engagement. This unique extraction of three unified core foundational elements (safety, equality, trust) for practitioners and parents to remain cognisant of introduces a collaborative approach to effective engagement, whereby parents and practitioners share responsibility to successfully engage with each other. In the category **choosing to engage** the parent-practitioner dyad occurs across the three levels of individual, family and community, and this bolsters the notion that parental engagement is a two-way process and offers potential strategies for parents and practitioners (e.g., placing an emphasis on the reflective process and on the role of the practitioner and the service in the process). **Choosing to engage** supports a perspective change, broadening the focus to include parents and practitioners who choose to engage with each other. **Co-creating engagement** highlights the shared responsibilities of parents and practitioners to engage and interact with each other, and develop a supportive relationship based on SET. **Co-creating engagement** supports the inclusion of a new dimension, that is, the role of becoming a familiar face, whereby practitioners and parents recognise each other as fellow-members of the same community with common objectives and interests for supporting their child's development. The category **connecting to engage** focuses on what works to make a programme accessible for parents. A seldom-reported key contributing factor identified was the creation of a fun learning environment in a neutral venue, recognising the need for balance across formal and informal engagement environments. The category **sharing** captures the ripple effects of effective parental engagement and describes the potential positive effects of 'the dance of engagement' on a community of parents, practitioners and children.

The implications of this theory for theory, policy and practice will be described in chapter 9.

Chapter 9: 'The dance of engagement': implications for theory, practice, and policy.

In this chapter the implications for theory, policy and practice arising from this study are presented. The study's limitations are acknowledged and recommendations for further research are proposed.

9.1 Implications for theory

The implications for theory centre on effective engagement and how the theory 'the dance of engagement' is rooted in the CGT analysis of the parent-practitioner accounts of their experiences. The foundation of this theory at a theoretical, conceptual level begins in the data and demonstrates the dynamic outcome of effective engagement from multiple perspectives. It is clear that understanding that engagement happens inside (the programme) and outside (the home environment) across multiple stages and systems can inform how practitioners communicate with parents (Klatte et al., 2020).

The theory of 'the dance of engagement' supports the Bioecological Theory of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 2001) and the Funds of Knowledge Theory (González et al., 2005). Both theories place children and parents at the centre of engagement practice through an ecological lens, which brings a holistic strengths-based perspective that focuses on the socio-cultural aspects of engagement. The theory 'the dance of engagement' has implications for these theories by enhancing the understanding that engagement is co-constructed between parents and practitioners in parents' socio-cultural environments. This understanding supports a holistic strengths-based perspective on engagement. Actively considering *why* both parents and practitioners **choose to engage** with each other could also enhance the theoretical frameworks related to the individual, systemic and service barriers to engagement.

The theory 'the dance of engagement' differs from research on the Barriers to Treatment Model by Kazdin et al. (1997) and the CAPE model Piotrowska et al. (2017) by including the crucial role of the practitioner in the process of engagement. The role of the practitioner in co-creating the environment that enhances engagement is core

to ‘the dance of engagement’ and has implications for the theoretical construct of parental engagement, reinforcing a view that engagement is multi-dimensional and is influenced by multiple factors. Within ‘the dance of engagement’ the concept of a ‘familiar face’ is a new addition to existing published constructs of parental engagement. Contributions from participants in this study demonstrated that parents needed to feel they could trust the practitioner, that they were in a safe space and would be treated equally. Thus, future theoretical frameworks and models of parental engagement should ensure this facet of engagement is given particular attention. SET are three factors worthy of consideration and inclusion in future theoretical concepts of parental engagement. In addition, the category **co-creating engagement** adds to existing theory pertaining to the barriers and boundaries of engagement and recognises relationships as a fundamental component of enhancing parental engagement.

The responsibility of the practitioner to co-create engagement with the parent has been recognised previously in the theories by King et al. (2014) and Staudt (2007) and both of these theories suggest that training should be developed for practitioners to enhance their practice of engagement. A training module based on the theory of ‘the dance of engagement’ could potentially form the foundation of a new CPD model that could enhance effective parental engagement. Possibly, the application of SET to any ongoing personal and professional development, could help ensure attention to the value of the application of SET in effective engagement. Based on this theory, input and direction from parents and their unique voices would also be required to ensure engagement practices are made effective for them.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) describe engagement as a continuum, requiring a shift in the agency of the school, away from being focused on school-led activities to a school-parent partnership in relation to children’s learning. Similarly, the model for parental involvement by Epstein (2011) emphasises a collaborative partnership between schools and parents. However, the lack of parents’ voices in contribution to the creation of the theories by Goodall and Montgomery (2014) and Epstein (2011) is a missed opportunity to enhance the collaborative relationships needed for effective engagement. The ‘dance of engagement’ includes the voices of parents and practitioners through the CGT analysis. Harnessing parents’ voices to describe how

effective engagement can be attained supports practitioners to understand why parents choose to engage and this new knowledge could support the engagement practice of services. The ‘dance of engagement’ therefore contributes a new perspective to the theory of engagement by accentuating a parallel process occurring during the choosing to engage step. This theory adds to our current understanding of the concept of effective engagement as it has been equally driven by parents and practitioners through their experience of what works for them.

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) emphasized the importance of suggestions to enhance parental involvement at home and in school that include the role of the parent in children’s academic success. Parents’ understanding of their role construction is influenced by parents’ past and present experiences. For example, if a parent has had a bad experience in school as a child, they may not be happy to reengage with the school system (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The ‘dance of engagement’ has implications for this theory as it describes the positive effects on a community of parents, practitioners and children engaging together on a shared, mutually agreed goal. The findings of this study suggest that **sharing** and the concept of Word of Mouth (WOM) need to be considered as an effective strategy for theoretical constructs of initial parental engagement and adds to our current understanding of effective engagement.

9.2 Implications for policy

Currently in Irish governmental national policies (Gov.i.e, 2018), parent involvement is viewed as important in many ways but there is little agreement on what that involvement should look like, how much agency parents should have within it and what role(s) they should play. For example, the terms ‘partnership, participation and support’ are used to describe different elements that fall under the umbrella term ‘engagement’, but the term engagement is not used explicitly (see Table 9.1 for more on these terms and policies). For instance, *parent partnership* is currently used to describe the partnership between parents and professionals in early learning and care (NCCA, 2009, p. 7), while TUSLA (2015) uses the term *parental participation* to define parents’ involvement in decisions affecting their lives and the lives of their children. Meanwhile, the First Five Strategy (Gov.i.e, 2018) uses the term *parent support* to describe the information provided to parents to promote healthy behaviours and maintain strong

parent-child relationships. There is also a clear difference in the level of input and power parents have across the terms 'partnership, participation and support'. Engagement in services is often based on middle-class expectations which may inadvertently create disengagement in socio-economic areas of need (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013). Clearly, change for communities happens at the intersection between families' engagement in services and the understanding of practitioners of their role in engagement with parents. The significance of a collective understanding across disciplines is evidently crucial to enhancing engagement practices (Chacko et al., 2016; Haine-Schlagel et al., 2016; Ingoldsby, 2010; Klatte et al., 2020). The opportunity to include the voices of parents engaged in services to develop policies that impact them and their families, promotes the role of parents as an equal partner with the government and services in collaborating on the future development of their children. The application of the theory 'the dance of engagement' to the policies highlighted above could bring a socio-cultural view to parental engagement to include parents' voices in the creation of any engagement practice, an equality in a collaborative practice.

Engagement stands apart from partnership, participation and support. Engagement is a collaborative approach that requires a relationship that is built on the foundational tenets of engagement safety, equality and trust (SET). SET provides a unified concept for understanding the underpinnings of effective parental engagement, promoting three core elements of safety, equality and trust. Partnership, participation and support do not guarantee or infer parental engagement. While they may purport to encourage, advise and develop collaboration with parents, they fail to offer any suggestions as to *how* this can be accomplished for practitioners working in the coal face in SES communities of need. What is lacking in the current national policy documents are descriptions of *how* to comprehensively develop engagement and diminish barriers to engagement. The application of 'the dance of engagement' to these policies could add practical measures to support policy implementation. 'The dance of engagement' could support parental participation by supporting the effective engagement and positive participation of parents, for example, the inclusion of SET as the foundation of a collaborative relationship building approach. SET brings understanding and equality to the shared collaborative goal of engagement that enhances and supports the child's learning and development.

Table 9.1: Sample of current Irish policy terms used to describe parental engagement with services.

Term used	Definition	Action involved
Parental participation	Providing opportunities for all parents to have a say in decisions affecting their lives and the lives of their children (TUSLA, 2015)	Encouraging parents' positive participation in all aspects of their child's care and education. Examples in practice: parent toddler groups, parenting programmes.
Parent support example A	A new model of parenting support First 5 will streamline and improve existing parenting supports (Gov.i.e, 2018)	Develop advice, guidance and training for early learning and care settings to build effective working relationships with all parents, families and communities. Examples in practice: enhancing family leave, improving children health services in line with the Irish Government 10-year plan.
Parent support example B	Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033 pillar one offers parents support	Pillar one of this strategy states "further support parents in promoting and encouraging their children's literacy, numeracy and digital literacy learning" (Gov.ie, 2024, p. 38).
Parent partnership	Involving parents, families and educators 'working together to benefit children' (NCCA, 2009, p.7)	Partnership building between parents and professionals in early learning and care. Example in practice: The Aistear curriculum has plenty of examples on how adults can support children's learning.

As can be seen in Table 9.1 above, the TUSLA (2015) policy uses the term *parental participation* to advocate for parents' involvement in decisions affecting their lives and the lives of their children. This policy could be enhanced by using the 'the dance of engagement' theory to enhance parents' participation in an active collaborative process with practitioners to support the desired outcome for children. *Parental participation* could be viewed through the lens of equality that may support better outcomes for families and their communities.

The First 5 policy (Gov.i.e, 2018) purports to develop advice, guidance and training for early learning and care settings to build effective working relationships with all parents, families and communities. The application of the 'the dance of engagement' could

enhance this policy by supporting effective engagement and positive participation of parents to develop and enhance this advice, guidance and training from a collaborative perspective of effective engagement. For example, the inclusion of SET as the foundation of a collaborative relationship building approach could bring understanding and equality to the shared collaborative goal of engagement.

Similarly the Literacy, Numeracy and Digital Literacy Strategy 2024-2033 (Gov.ie, 2024) intends to support parents in promoting their children's literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills but offers no further information on how this is to be achieved. The relevance of the 'the dance of engagement' in areas of socio-economic disadvantage would include how the theory supports effective engagement in community- based family literacy programmes. The inclusion of 'the dance of engagement' could enhance this government policy by providing clear examples of how effective engagement works to promote family literacy programmes that can support the unmet literacy needs of parents and their children in areas of disadvantage. Furthermore, the inclusion of a CPD module for early years practitioners on 'the dance of engagement' and how it could be implemented in early years settings could enhance services working relationships with parents. The application of the theory 'the dance of engagement' to training for professionals using the Aistear curriculum (NCCA, 2009) would be important. 'The dance of engagement' provides signposts and clear elements that could be considered offering flexibility on what is required to create a partnership, a collaborative practice between parents and practitioners.

The use of different terms to describe facets of engagement, such as parent participation, parent support, and parent partnership may limit practitioners' understanding and hinder the agency and perspectives of families. Different terms used to describe engagement could signal to practitioners different expectations and world views perhaps at the expense of including parents own knowledge and sense of agency (Timmons & Pelletier, 2015). It is important for national policy to recognise that *'participation'* does not imply engagement; it is merely a small component of an overall effective engagement practice. Similarly, *'parent support'* does not guarantee engagement or develop effective working relationships with parents but it does imply a hierarchy of need and power over engagement. Lareau (2011) suggests some practitioners may privilege certain types of parents for their values and ability to

engage, with some parents “put off by feeling put down by schools and teachers”(Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003, p. 5). Providing ‘*support*’ requires a deeper understanding of the elements of engagement and a comprehensive plan on engagement practices, as proposed in the First 5 strategy (Gov.i.e, 2018). Partnership is a core element and outcome of engagement, to develop partnerships with parents would require a new concept of engagement that involves a partnership approach between parents and practitioners on engagement and how it could be applied in each setting. The theory of ‘the dance of engagement’ aligns with previous research in the use of the term *parental engagement* and defines it as a multi-faceted concept which could be applied to numerous diverse fields, including health, education and community sectors (Hayakawa, Englund, Warner-Richter, & Reynolds, 2013; Van Voorhis, Maier, Epstein, & Lloyd, 2013). It is clear that a method or process of how to engage parents with services is not clearly defined for practitioners in existing policies. To support the effective implementation of a policy on engagement the discrepancies in terminology and definitions on engagement need to be addressed. The application of the theory ‘the dance of engagement’ to the policies highlighted above could bring a socio-cultural view to parental engagement. This could enhance opportunities to include parents’ voices in the creation of any engagement practice through the application of ‘the dance of engagement’.

The theory, ‘the dance of engagement’ therefore has implications for current government policy on engagement interventions that seek to develop parental support to enhance their children’s language and literacy development, through its provision of a robust theoretical framework of parental engagement and identification of practical and tangible strategies that can support parental engagement in daily practice. Recognised in many national reports is the important role parents and communities play in activating children’s development and how working in partnership with parents is the optimal approach (DES, 2012; NCCA, 2009; TUSLA, 2015). However, it is also recognised that engagement by parents in interventions that support their children’s development is complicated. For example, continuous professional development for practitioners is highlighted as an important aspect of enhancing parental engagement, as are practitioner networks to support engagement in areas of high need. However, as Share and Kerrins (2013, p. 356) discuss in their study on childcare provision in Dublin’s Docklands, “despite policy and practice support for ‘parental involvement’

there is no agreement on what it comprises". Perhaps the addition of the theoretical and practical elements of 'the dance of engagement' theory to current government policy on engagement practices could help address the '*how to'* of engagement and ameliorate some of the challenges currently present (Gov.ie, 2021; Rochford et al., 2014).

A further implication and consideration for national policy, with regard to parental engagement, is to consider contributions and consultations with parents from complex backgrounds about their experiences with services. This study included both parents' and practitioners' perspectives to develop a theory of effective parental engagement. However, areas of disadvantage are often viewed solely as problem areas with high levels of unemployment and economic inactivity, low levels of educational attainment, and poor public services (Kintrea & Muir, 2009; Quigley, 2002). This view negates the autonomy of the community in areas of disadvantage and lessens their voice on issues that affect them. The addition of parents' voices to Irish national policy could ensure that the policies describe the '*how to'* for effective engagement as experienced by the parents that engage and validates the importance of parents' input into services from areas of socio-economic disadvantage that could promote engagement through a partnership and alliance on future service delivery.

An added consideration in relation to current government policy is the opportunity to collaborate with third level institutions on the possibility of embedding teaching and learning modules that centre on effective parental engagement practice in current undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Parental engagement needs to be recognised as being a complex interaction that occurs between parents and practitioners (Bright et al., 2014). Effective engagement needs support to thrive and requires specific skills on the part of the people involved (parents and practitioners both bring their knowledge to the collaboration) (Becker et al., 2018; Lindsey et al., 2014). Structured supports need to be implemented to ensure that practitioners have access to the supports that are needed and are prepared to support and enhance development opportunities to build the competencies required (Chacko et al., 2016; Klatte et al., 2020). This could have the effect of creating a cohort of practitioners who are entering the workplace with confidence and competence on effective engagement practices. Further to this, a policy initiative from the government to enhance parental

engagement knowledge and skills for current practitioners in line with the findings of this research could contribute to engagement practices that support the '*how to'* for services and support current government policies that seek to address socio-cultural and economic barriers for people accessing education and employment.

9.3 Implications for practice

As previously discussed in this study, my definition of parental engagement is based within the context of family literacy community-based programmes, and positions engagement as a multi-factorial, dynamic process that requires active collaboration between participants and a focus on practical supports towards achieving a mutually agreed outcome. The theory, 'the dance of engagement', has many implications for the practice of effective engagement by supporting practitioners, services, and parents to evaluate and reflect on their understanding and knowledge of, and skills related to, effective engagement. The theory provides a comprehensive framework, rooted in the perspectives of both parents and practitioners, to support practitioners to plan effective parental engagement opportunities. Outlined in detail in the data analysis are numerous potential contributions for the practice of engagement (see Table 9.2 for a summary). Although this study focused on a specific community family literacy programme, it is likely that the model has relevance to other services and practitioners working in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. The model could be applied in many other contexts to ensure effective engagement and create an understanding of the mitigating barriers to engagement and how to overcome them to ensure effective engagement.

The theory supports practitioners to reflect on their understanding of effective engagement over multiple factors and stages. This could encourage a community of practice to support reflection on engagement (Wenger, 2009). Such a community of practice may help ensure a partnership approach between parents and practitioners to review, evaluate and reflect on their engagement practices, so that they can be enhanced or adapted in line with the needs of the community involved. For example, in **choosing to engage** a practitioner is encouraged to reflect on their understanding of cultural contexts and barriers to engagement. This reflection could support the dismantling of barriers for parents and ensure their engagement with the service.

Table 9.2: Implications of the theory 'the dance of engagement' for practice.

Practitioner Knowledge	Parent Knowledge	Practitioner Planning	Actions	Evaluation and reflection
Practitioners should create a community of practice in their areas to support each other (Wenger, 2009). Practitioners should then reflect on their knowledge of engagement practices with other practitioners in the community or service, for example, reflection on opportunities to become a familiar face.	Parents voices should be included in the community of practice to discuss effective engagement practices on what works, what did not and how effective engagement can be implemented.	Practitioners should build SET into service planning and delivery, for example, reflecting on the setting of interventions. Including parents' opinions and understanding of SET would enhance planning initiatives.	Acting on practitioners and parents' knowledge of effective engagement strategies, practitioners should seek first contact opportunities to begin the engagement process and address barriers to engagement for parents.	Practitioners should create a community of practice with other practitioners to reflect on their engagement practices with a view to enhancing them if needed (Wenger, 2009).
Practitioners should understand the importance of their role in the process of engagement. This role involves supporting and developing practices that enhance parental engagement with parents as partners.	Parents should understand the importance of their role in the creation of a collaborative shared practice of engagement.	Practitioner should take the lead in the dance of parental engagement through an informal practice guided by the inputs of peers and parents of what work in effective engagement.	Practitioners should create an informal learning environment for parents and creates a safe space where parents can relax and learn new methods to enhance their children's learning and development.	Practitioners should evaluate and reflect on their informal engagement practices and the learning environment in collaboration with parents and peers.
Practitioners should develop networks of support across a community of practitioners nationally. This represents opportunities to collaborate and reflect on engagement practices at a national level.	Parents should provide input to support the knowledge and implementation of what works to effectively engage, enhancing parents voice and representation at a national level.	Practitioners and parents should plan collaboratively to support the engagement of parents.	Practitioners and parents should take action to co-create a safe, equal trusting relationship with parents	Practitioners in collaboration with parents and peers should evaluate and reflect on their engagement practices.
Practitioners through their reflective practice, involvement with other practitioners and hearing parents' voices should understand the complexity of barriers to engagement and how to address them.	Parents should support and acknowledge the barriers to engagement that have existed for them and how they can be overcome.	Practitioners should plan and seek opportunities to address the barriers to access for parents by engaging and connecting with parents	A practitioner should join in at events in the community with parents to develop relationships and become a familiar face to parents.	Practitioners should actively seek opportunities to reflect on barriers to engagement for parents and how successful they have been addressed and reflect on any further changes needed.
Practitioners should reinforce parenting skills, self-efficacy and knowledge sharing amongst parents acknowledging parents' expertise.	Parents should engage in a collaborative process with practitioners to ensure the implementation of knowledge sharing	Practitioners should plan opportunities to model and coach activities to parents	A practitioner should create opportunities to share learning in the home learning environment by providing free resources.	Practitioners should reflect on their knowledge sharing activities with parents to evaluate and reflect on any enhancements that may be required.

Furthermore, the application of the 'the dance of engagement' may provide considerations for practitioners to include in planning effective engagement in other areas of practice: for instance, the application of SET to services currently engaging parents could guide services and practitioners to develop a collaborative relationship

with parents' and include parents' voice in service design. The theory also specifies clear directions on what actions could be taken when implementing effective engagement, for example, creating a safe, trusting space for parents at a neutral venue. The implications of the theory for practice are supported by the outcomes reflected in participants' accounts of the engagement process, for example, parents **sharing** their new knowledge with their children and other peers, and practitioners also **sharing** their parental engagement strategies with other practitioners through peer networks. The inclusion of parents' voices in service delivery at a local level could support the implementation of 'the dance of engagement' and effective engagement policies. Table 9.2 outlines the implications of 'the dance of engagement' for practice, providing opportunities for practitioners to focus on four key areas: (i) knowledge; (ii) planning; (iii) actions to support effective parental engagement' and (iv) evaluation and reflection.

To summarise, the theory of 'the dance of engagement' has implications for theory, practice, and policy for effective parental engagement. An understanding of the theory 'the dance of engagement', and an integration into policy and practice, could potentially support the engagement practices of practitioners to be more effective and beneficial for all, promoting a shift in what is typically considered a parents' responsibility to engage, to a shared parent-practitioner responsibility to successfully engage with each other. However, in order for these benefits to be contextualised it is important that limitations of this study are acknowledged and addressed, which may include further research on the important topic of parental engagement.

9.4 Limitations of this study

As with any research, this study is not without limitations. This study focused on the process of effective parental engagement through the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners on engagement strategies employed in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. This study stems from my experience as a literacy practitioner and a resident of an area of socio-economic disadvantage and represents my ongoing pursuit of maximising engagement practices for parents and practitioners to enhance our understanding of what works to create effective parental engagement. Therefore, my personal and professional experience presents both a strength and a limitation in this study. I have explicitly addressed this limitation by focusing on potential challenges

and limitations related to my positionality within this research in numerous ways throughout the study. For example, I wrote memos, practised strong reflexivity and developed my methodological self-consciousness. This supported my ability to bracket my prior knowledge and assumptions and ensured it did not influence the coding process and allowed the theory to develop grounded in the data (Charmaz, 2021; Urquhart, 2013).

A further limitation to this study relates to the theory developed, which reflects the voices of parents who had already engaged in a programme offered, so the voices of parents who chose not to enrol and who were not engaged with a service are not included in this study. My recruitment strategy reflected the aim of this study, which was to explore the multiple perspectives of parents and practitioners on engagement strategies employed in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. Therefore, by inviting participants to focus groups, the criteria for selection was based on inviting parents and practitioners who could share their knowledge and experience of engagement. The issues of the "hard to reach" have been highlighted as locating the problem of lack of engagement within the population of parents and not within the engagement strategies employed by services (Brackertz, 2007). Alternative recruitment strategies to include the voices of those parents who chose not to engage could have been useful to inform the theory on what works and what does not work in parental engagement strategies. However, based on many participating parents' reports, they had experiences of engaging and also experiences of not engaging, so it is hoped that voices of parents who do not engage were gathered indirectly. Nevertheless, failing to explictly include voices of parents who chose not to engage may have left some gaps in the theory which would be useful to explore further.

An additional limitation in this study relates to the demographic profile of participants. The data reflects the voices of people who are primarily parenting in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. In this study I have focused on the parenting role, not the gender, and have avoided essentialising the role as female/male which could distract from the importance of the categories. All of the respondents in this research, both parent and practitioner focus groups, were female except for one male participant. In current research, father involvement is often dichotomised by two themes, fathers who are absent or fathers who are present in children's lives. The involvement of

fathers is seen to be influenced by many factors, such as marital status, race, residency, co-parenting, and relationships between fathers and their children across generations (McLanahan, Tach, & Schneider, 2013). However, research emphasises that mainstream services often do not effectively engage fathers (Maxwell, Scourfield, Featherstone, Holland, & Tolman, 2012). Furthermore, it is reported that fathers do not see their engagement with programmes to be relevant to their parenting role (Katz, La Placa, & Hunter, 2007). Conversely, others indicate that fathers engagement has an influence on child outcomes between fathers and their children (Jeynes, 2015). This study focused on the parenting role in engagement practices rather than a gender role in. However, the lack of involvement of fathers in this research is a limitation and is a perspective that should be explored in future research related to parental engagement.

9.5 Recommendations for further research

The study highlights the opportunities for further investigation in a number of areas.

9.5.1 Inclusion of parents' voices in future research and national policy

The review of the literature completed found that parental engagement is often viewed in terms of their attendance or barriers to engage and very rarely includes parents' voices or the voices of the hard to reach. This study included both parents' and practitioners' perspectives to develop a theory of effective parental engagement. The benefits of this inclusive approach could be extended to future research related to parental engagement, to ensure a holistic perspective of parental engagement is consistently explored and documented. In addition, perhaps national policy and research initiatives could also draw on parent's voices, including consultations with parents from complex backgrounds and their experience of engaging or not engaging with services.

9.5.2 Communities of practice

The practitioners involved in this study were not surveyed on their reflective practices, which emerged as an important contributor to reviewing and improving parental engagement practices. While a strength of this study was that the practitioners who participated used the focus groups as a means to reflect on their engagement practices, factors that may support and enhance reflective practice as a strategy to support parental engagement was not explictly extrapolated. This is a topic that would

benefit from further attention and evaluation, to generate related theory and ways to translate that theory into practice through the use of communities of practice (Wenger, 2009).

9.5.3 Consider literacy in the research designs

In the systematic literature review I conducted, literacy skills were not seen to be a barrier to parental engagement. For the participants in this study, literacy difficulties were a barrier to parental engagement. It is reasonable to assume this is not an isolated incidence, and that parental engagement may be affected by participants' unmet literacy needs. Further research is recommended on investigating the unmet literacy needs of parents who fail to engage and how they can be addressed across multiple services. This could enhance opportunities to tackle inequalities in programme design and inform future policy and practice decisions.

9.5.4 Professional development on parental engagement

Included in the development of the theory of 'the dance of engagement' was the perception of practitioners across multiple levels of the engagement process. In this study, practitioners reported a lack of professional development on the area of parental engagement to optimise engagement with diverse parents with individual needs and preferences. Further research is warranted on comprehensively collecting practitioners' professional development needs and designing a professional development framework rooted in the evidence-base of what works. This may help to ensure that education and upskilling related to parental engagement becomes integrated into undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of diverse practitioners so that parental engagement is optimised in line with parents' perspectives and what the evidence suggests is effective. Further research on the role of communities of practice (Wenger, 2009) and the support they give to practitioners in areas of SES centred on engagement could support their implementation across services to enhance practitioner reflection.

9.5.5 Fathers' role in parental engagement

In this study I focused on the role of parents, and I avoided essentialising the role as female/male which could distract from the importance of the categories. However, further research is required on how fathers in particular are supported to engage in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, and whether the strategies employed should

be the same or differentiated. Additional research to collect fathers' perspectives on parental engagement would be beneficial to explore this hypothesis further.

9.5.6 Teaching and learning pedagogy for adults

Further research on how to create a learning environment that parents are happy to engage with is required. Parents in this study spoke about their teaching and learning experiences as they attended the programmes. Further research on the development of a community of practice focused on engagement could support reflective practice amongst practitioners working in a community. Similarly, in Irish schools, teachers can hold the position of Home School Liaison Teacher without any clear professional development on the difference in pedagogical approaches required for teaching children versus adults. Further research on how adult learning approaches, face-to face or on-line courses, can be fostered and applied to parent education courses is required as this could potentially enhance engagement. The addition of voices of parents who are not currently engaged could inform teaching and learning environments to include those who struggle to engage and how to address the barriers to engagement effectively.

9.6 Discussion on the use of CGT in this study

As I came to the end of this study, I reflected on the development of the theory through the use of the CGT methodology employed in this study. In the sections below, I first discuss the evaluation criteria for this CGT study and then include a personal reflection on using CGT.

9.6.1. Evaluating rigour in Constructivist Grounded Theory

Claims of reliability and validity are attached to a researcher's epistemological philosophy and their understanding of what comprises evidence in their research (Motulsky, 2021). Quantitative research is evaluated with the application of validity and reliability, standards that can also be applied to qualitative research (Spiers et al., 2018). Reliability is typically based on data sufficiency and supports the researcher's analysis, while validity is an opportunity to describe the accounts of participants in and out of the qualitative research context (Spiers et al., 2018). Rigour is required in all stages of the research process, from the epistemological and ontological assumptions, to the research question, research design, data collection strategies and analysis, with

verification strategies built in to the research process and continually checked by the researcher (Spiers et al., 2018) (See Figure 9.1 for an explanation of these criteria).

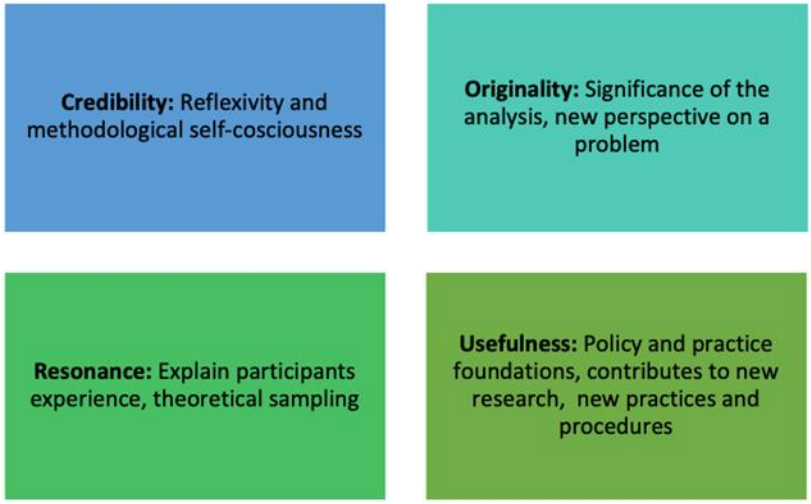

Figure 9.1: Four criteria for rigour in CGT

Currently within qualitative research methodologies such as CGT, there is no single agreed evaluation method to decide on what constitutes a “good” qualitative study (Bryman, 2016; Yadav, 2022). To effectively demonstrate rigour in GT, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 244) ask that researchers present “the actual strategies used for collecting, coding, analysing, and presenting data when generating theory”. For researchers ensuring rigour in CGT there are four main criteria to address: credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness (Charmaz, 2006, 2014).

First, credibility ensures the researcher has enough trustworthy data to make comparisons across the research process and can develop a full, detailed analysis (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). Authentic perspectives from parents and practitioners were collected in this study to ensure that I could fully explore the data through the lens of the participants’ worlds and helped me to interpret and make sense of the data. For example, during data collection I was privileged to meet parents and practitioners who were willing to describe their experiences of parental engagement. Although I played an active role in the direction and focus of this research, all the codes, concepts and categories are embedded in the data and lay the foundation for the theory that I developed. I highlighted the verbatim quotes from participants in the findings chapter that supported the theory development to support the rigour of this research. Credibility

involves the researcher's perspectives and position, requiring the researcher to use robust reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2017a). This process was completed in this study and documented through an autobiographical reflection and a description of my positionality in chapter 1. Credibility was also highlighted in chapter 4 as it includes extracts from my research journal to highlight my reflexivity and methodological self-consciousness. Member checking with participants was not completed in this study: this was due to the nature of the Covid-19 pandemic and how it was affecting the participants. However, I did get to discuss the theory with my PhD peers, and I considered this to contribute to the process of external validity. the use of the PhD seminar group was a brilliant addition initiated by my supervisor. The seminar group with my peers supported my ability to discuss my research with a group of critical friends that enhanced my thinking in a constructive manner. Perhaps this seminar group could be viewed as my community of practice, as described by Wenger (2009). This group supported my understanding, gave me new insights and enabled me share and engage on my research in a safe space.

Second, the criterion of originality in CGT is established through the significance of the analysis, offering new insights and providing a different perspective on a problem (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). Parental engagement is seen as a problem in areas of low SES and this study viewed the process of effective engagement through the multiple and authentic perspectives of parents and practitioners. The development of the theory of 'the dance of engagement' describes what works for participants in this study and provides a unique perspective of a collaborative approach to effective parental engagement.

The third rigour criterion of resonance in CGT refers to the researcher's capability to explain participants' experience, and to develop concepts that explain and capture the complexity of the research focus (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). I demonstrate resonance in this research through the development of a multi-faceted theory on effective parental engagement that is rooted in the diverse persepctives of both parents and practitioners. Furthermore, CGT supported triangulation in this research by facilitating me to combine my analysis of the data from participants with the field of literature on engagement. Through this process of triangulation, I contributed to resonance in this study.

The fourth rigour criterion of usefulness in CGT requires that the theory that is developed creates a foundation for policy and practice, contributes to new research and reveals new practices and procedures (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2020). To demonstrate rigour in this CGT study, I have highlighted in chapter 4 the strategies I used to collect, code, analyse and develop the theory as suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and I have outlined my positionality and my lived experience to ensure transparency in the study and analyses. Although describing my life experiences was not something I initially felt comfortable doing, I think it adds to rigour by enhancing credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness as recommended by Charmaz (2014). My analyses offer a new way of considering engagement between parents and practitioners as a joint process and this contributes to the originality of the study. The creation of a framework for practice developed from the theory highlights the usefulness of this research.

9.6.2 Personal reflection on Constructivist Grounded Theory

As I reflect back on this study, I can see how Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2021) methodology facilitated me to apply my privilege and epistemological perspective. As a woman I am very aware of my life experiences and how they continue to shape my personal growth. This understanding really supported me to comprehend how knowledge is constructed through our lived experiences - mine and that of the participants involved in this study. CGT and its iterative cycles of analysis assisted in the development of the theory 'the dance of engagement'. As I reflect on it now, I can see that the iterative CGT process suited my style of working: it gave me a structure and process of analysis. I could see through initial and focused coding the use of in-vivo codes and gerunds really kept me involved and grounded with the data that was embedded in participants' words and worlds. The memo writing process supported the analysis and category building as I developed the theory and enhanced my methodological self-consciousness (Charmaz, 2014). There were many points along the journey with CGT where I had thoughts on the analysis, but I couldn't quite explicate them. This was when the introduction of my memo tree supported my reflective process. I felt my post-it notes helped to capture every thought I had on the analysis and supported me in the memo writing process, and even if I didn't understand just yet how that thought would or would not affect my analyses, I ensured I had captured it. I used the post-it notes to double check my memo writing as I was sorting

for categories during the process of theoretical sorting and reassured myself that every thought I had was being described. Perhaps now as I reflect on my process, the use of a memo tree could help other novice researchers as they become engaged in the CGT process.

As I reflect now on the CGT process, I found it to be really helpful and gave clear and consistent guidelines on how to conduct the analysis. I found that as I completed each step of the iterative process to include the comparative analysis it brought me further and further into the research and data analysis until I arrived at the theory 'the dance of engagement', which I believe contributes to knowledge and theory on engagement and has much to offer practitioners and parents to enhance effective engagement practices.

9.7 Summary

This chapter has summarised implications of 'the dance of engagement' for theory, practice, and policy. Limitations of the study were acknowledged and clear directions for future research were outlined. This study contributes to the existing literature on effective engagement for parents and practitioners living/working in areas of socio-economic disadvantage. The theory developed through this study, 'the dance of engagement', includes both parents' and practitioners' voices which is a refreshing view of effective parental engagement. The findings suggest that both parents and practitioners working together in a **safe, equal, trusting (SET) environment** may support parents from areas of socio-economic disadvantage to engage. The co-constructed theory proposes that both parents and practitioners **choose to engage** across three areas, individual, family, and community. An understanding of parental engagement through the lens of 'the dance of engagement' may support engagement for both parents and practitioners in other areas. For example, understanding that **co-creating engagement** supports opportunities to **connect to engage** may support the relationship process between parents and practitioners. This 'dance of engagement' may also support practitioners to address barriers to engagement for parents before a programme starts through numerous practical strategies such as ensuring a warm, welcoming environment. The concept of **sharing** also evidenced the outcomes of effective engagement for parents and practitioners. The theory developed for this study 'the dance of engagement' has the potential to support diverse organisations across numerous sectors seeking to effectively engage parents. Limitations and areas of

further research have been identified to support ongoing development of effective parental engagement constructs and practices into the future. This research focused on a specific community family literacy programme, but it is likely that the model can be applied in many other contexts to ensure effective engagement in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

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Appendices

List of Appendices

Systematic review Appendix A

A.1 Why a systematic review?

A systematic review is designed to discover, evaluate, and synthesise the best available evidence concerning a specific research question that supports the establishment of evidence-based answers (Gough, Oliver, & Thomas, 2012). For this Systematic review I want to look at current research pertaining to how practitioners initially engage parents in various programmes and which methods, activities and/or practices are most effective remains nebulous. This is especially relevant for parents living in areas of socio-economic disadvantage where individual and systemic barriers to parental engagement have been repeatedly reported (Gross et al., 2001; Morawska & Sanders, 2006; Panter-Brick et al., 2014). The implications of low engagement rates are significant: public health services may have to cancel appointments if parents do not attend, leading to longer waiting lists and costly interventions, and limiting public health benefits (Ingoldsby, 2010; Melvin et al., 2019; Piotrowska et al., 2017; Rochford et al., 2014).

Although the multi-layered stages of parental engagement have been described in detail, the effectiveness of practices implemented in each stage of parental engagement is unclear (Chacko et al., 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2018). For example, data is available on the percentage of parents engaged (or not) from population, recruitment, enrolment and attrition rates (Piotrowska et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of initial engagement strategies is hindered by a lack of research and inconsistent reporting on the actual practices of parental engagement in enrolment and pre-treatment (Chacko et al., 2016). There are still gaps in our understanding of what supports parents to engage, online or in person, and the factors that facilitate those parents who are least likely to engage (La Placa & Hunter, 2007). Engagement methods largely remain misunderstood and have not been consistently utilised to transfer into improvements in services (Gonzalez et al., 2018; Nock & Ferriter, 2005; Snell-Johns et al., 2004). A systematic review to describe successful initial engagement strategies is therefore warranted.

This systematic review sought to address the question, “What initial engagement strategies are most successful in enhancing parental engagement in community-based parent programmes?”. It explored three questions:

1. What does current parental engagement research tell us are the most successful methods for initial engagement in community-based parent programmes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage?
2. What are the strengths and limitations of the current research on initial parental engagement? and
3. What are the implications for future research?

A.2 Systematic review conducted

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) (Liberati et al., 2009) were used and the inclusion and exclusion criteria are listed in Table A.1

Table A.1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria for inclusion and exclusion	
Inclusion criteria	• Any research which measures the success of initial parental engagement methods (first contact) with parents for interventions with professionals such as teachers, SLTs, community workers or youth workers. • Universal early interventions or community-based parenting programme with parents of children 0 – 8 years of age and whose children have no intellectual disability (as they need specific supports) • Parents and children must live in an area of socio-economic disadvantage or be at high risk of disadvantage (minority groups) • Parents with up to a secondary level of education • Research on engagement methods in a parent training community-based parenting programme or any kind of universal early intervention • Studies written in English
Exclusion criteria	• Research does not measure the success of initial engagement methods with parents. • Parents of children over 8 years of age • Parents and children not living in an area of socio-economic disadvantage and not at high risk of disadvantage. • Parents of children with an intellectual disability • Parents with tertiary levels of education • Not a parent training programme or a universal intervention with no research on engagement methods evident • A study not written in English

Table A.2 lists the keywords gathered in a hand search of papers found in the databases related to parental engagement.

Table A.2.: Logic grid with identified keywords

Population	Intervention	Context
parents, family role, parental role, low-income families, underrepresented parents.	parent engagement, programme access, programme efficacy, parental engagement, participant engagement, participation, parental involvement, engagement strategies, recruitment, family engagement techniques, motivational, enrolment, relational, involvement.	community-based parenting programmes, language and literacy programmes in areas of socio-economic disadvantage, educational placement, early childhood intervention programmes, learning, intervention, training, parenting support, parent-child interaction, parent training, prevention programme, intervention impact, multisystemic.

I used the PIO framework (Liberati et al., 2009) as a guide to help structure the review as outlined in Table A.2. I did not use comparison intervention.
Table A.3 is the research string used to conduct this review.

Table A.3: Research string

	Search Strategy
1.	*Parent* OR family* OR community*OR underrepresented parent**
2.	*Parent* prog* OR Parent* literacy* prog* OR parent training OR universal prevent* prog* OR family Literacy prog* Or Multisystemic community-based prog**
3.	*Initial parent* Engage* OR Initial Parent* participant* OR Initial Parent* involve* OR Initial Parent* OR empower* OR Initial Parent* Collaborate* OR initial family engagement techniques OR Initial Parent* Enrol* OR Initial Parent*retention.*
4.	*Parental engagement*
	*: Google Scholar and Grey literature searches.

The following nine databases were searched: Cinahl Complete, Education Full Text, ERIC, Medline, APA PsycInfo, Social Sciences Full text, UK & Ireland reference Centre, ProQuest, Scopus (see Table A.4 for information on databases searched and articles retrieved). I also searched Google Scholar and grey literature websites using the term “Parental Engagement”.

Table A.4: Databases searched, and articles retrieved

Database searched 20/7/2020 – 23/7/2020	Articles retrieved
CINAHL Complete	71 articles
Education Full Text (H.W. Wilson)	95 articles
ERIC	10 articles
MEDLINE	5 articles
APA PsycInfo	16 articles
Social Sciences Full Text (H.W. Wilson)	50 articles
UK & Ireland Reference Centre	3 articles
Proquest	59 articles
Scopus and not index (Medline)	37 articles
Handsearch/ Google scholar	7 articles
Grey literature: Opengrey.eu & Greylit.org	12 articles
Total	365 articles
Total after duplicates removed	361 articles
***Limits: Years 2000-2023 and papers written in English**	

I limited the years of the search to between 2000 and 2023 as there was a significant expansion of innovations in parental engagement in evidence-based practice over these years. Using the inclusion/exclusion criteria, thirty-nine papers met the inclusion criteria and were read in full. Following the full-text review, thirty-three studies were excluded: fifteen were excluded as they did not focus on initial parental engagement, seven were excluded as they related to teachers and not parents, nine were excluded as they were not focused on interventions and two were excluded as they were systematic reviews and did not focus on areas of socio-economic disadvantage (see Figure A.1).

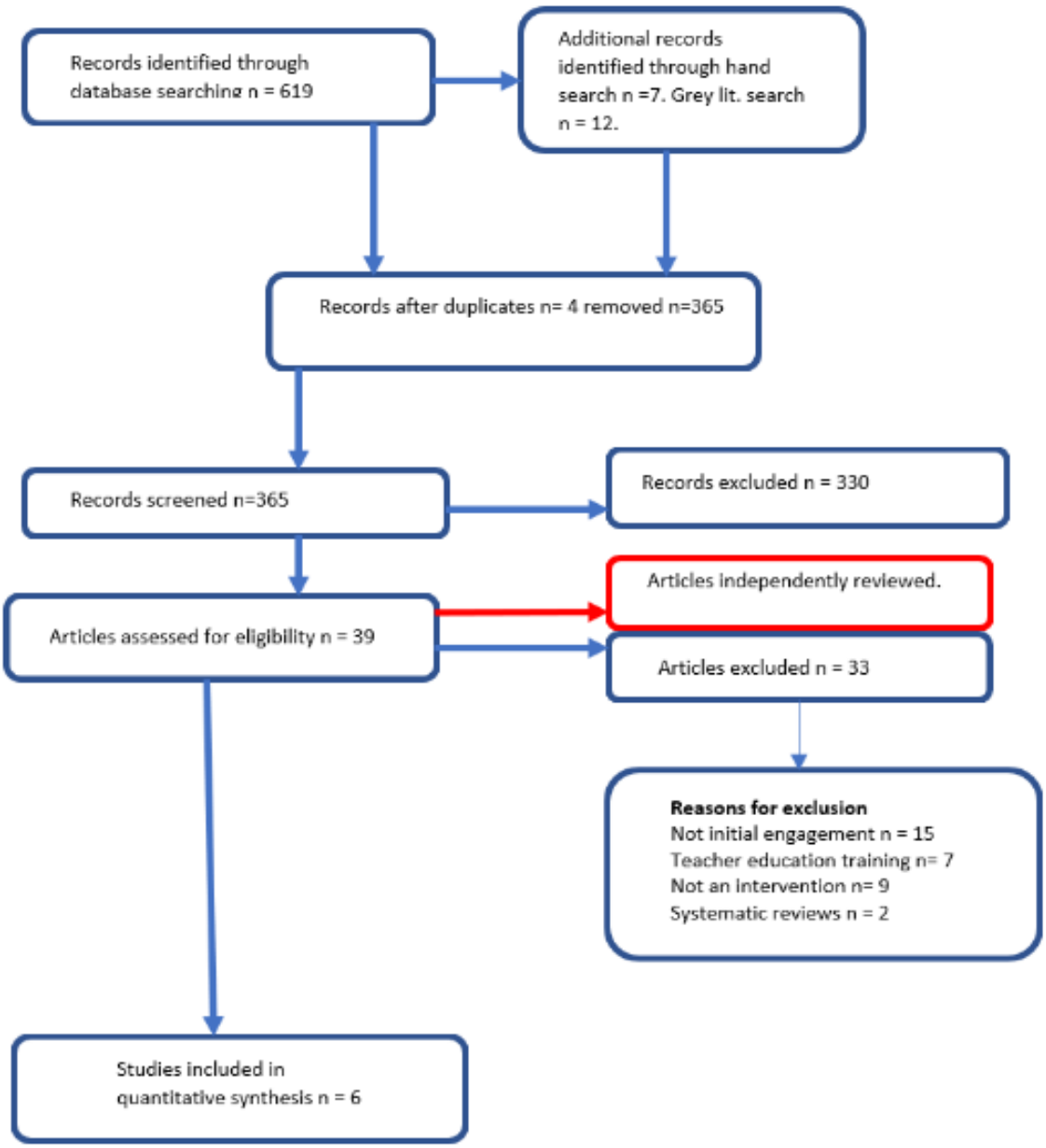

Figure A.1: Research Articles excluded and Included

A.2.1. Data Extraction

Table A.5 details the data extracted on setting, intervention and programme materials, the dosage for delivery and the outcomes that were measured.

Table A.5: Data extraction

Study	Setting	Intervention & programme materials	Dosage	Measured
Abraczinskas et al. (2020)	USA Elementary schools	**Triple P group level 4 program** Manualised programme Materials include a workbook for parents.	8 hours = Session 1-4 group sessions @ 2hours * Phone sessions not included	• Enrolment • Initiation • Attendance • Homework Completion • Quality Of Participation
Dumas et al. (2010)	USA Day care centres	**PACE – Parenting Our Children to Excellence** Manualised programme materials include videotapes, posters and handouts.	16 hours = 8 X 2 hrs	• Enrolment • Attendance, • Quality of Participation • Motivation
Eisner and Meidert (2011)	Swiss Primary schools	**Triple P group level 4 program** Manualised programme, Materials include a workbook for parents.	8 hours = Session 1-4 group sessions @ 2hours *Phone sessions not included	• Enrolment • Participation • Completion • Technique Utilisation
Gross et al. (2011)	USA Day care centres	**Chicago Parenting Programme** Manualised programme. Materials include videos, role play and homework.	24 hours = 12 X2 hrs.	• Intent To Enrol, • Enrolment, • Attendance • Quality Of Participation • Motivation For Enrolling
Heinrichs (2006)	German Preschools	**Triple P group level 4 program** Manualised programme, Materials include a workbook for parents.	8 hours = Session 1-4 group sessions @ 2hours *Phone sessions not included	• Monetary incentives to encourage engagement
Winslow et al. (2016)	USA Elementary school	**Triple P group level 4 program** Manualised programme. Materials include a workbook for parents.	11 hours total dosage: Session 1-4 @2hr Session 8 was a celebration @ 2hours. Three phone sessions @ 20 mins.	• Enrolment • Initiation • Attendance

Four of the six studies took place in the United States of America (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Dumas et al., 2010; Gross et al., 2011; Winslow et al., 2016) with one in

Germany (Heinrichs, 2006), and one in Switzerland (Eisner & Meidert, 2011). The six included studies were randomised control trials. Four studies, Dumas et al. (2010), Heinrichs (2006), Gross et al. (2011), and Eisner and Meidert (2011) compared day-care centres/schools to condition. Abraczinskas et al. (2020) and Winslow et al. (2016) compared families to conditions. The included studies had sample sizes ranging from 1,276 participants (Abraczinskas et al., 2020) to 122 participants (Winslow et al., 2016). All participants were parents of children ranging in age from 2 years to 8 years of age.

The six studies employed a universal parenting programme as the intervention. Four of the studies, Abraczinskas et al. (2020); Eisner and Meidert (2011); Heinrichs (2006); Winslow et al. (2016), were based on the Triple P Parenting Programme Level 4 (Sanders, 2008), a universal programme to improve positive parenting practices and prevent and treat early child behaviour problems. The PACE (Parenting our Children to Excellence) parenting programme (Dumas, Prinz, Smith, & Laughlin, 1999) was implemented by Dumas et al. (2010). This programme promotes parenting effectiveness and child coping competence. The Chicago Parent Programme, Gross et al. (2011), applied an evidence-based parenting programme that teaches parents a range of child management techniques. Dosage ranged from 8 hours to 24 hours with two interventions delivered in day care centres, one in preschools, and three in elementary/primary schools.

Participants were predominantly low-income families in four studies, with the highest income reported as less than $23,000, (Dumas et al., 2010; Gross et al., 2011; Winslow et al., 2016). Eisner and Meidert (2011); Heinrichs (2006) gave no information on participants' income levels. There were high rates of single-parent households across the studies: Dumas et al. (2010) reported 56% of parents described themselves as single parents and Gross et al. (2011) reported 71% single parent participants. See Table A.6 for more participant information.

Table A.6: Participant information

Study	Participants	Primary language	Ethnic origin	Marital status	Employment status	Annual family income/qualifies for free lunch/childcare
Abraczinskas et al. (2020)*	Parents of children in kindergarten and third grade	65.2%; English as primary language	55.8% Hispanic 27.4% White 49.2% Native American 6.5% African American	43 % single-parent households	NI predominantly low-income families.	84.8% free or reduced-price lunch eligibility
Dumas et al. (2010)	961 (92%) of mothers and 89 (8%) fathers of Kindergarten or third grade children	NI	549 (52%) participants African American, 438 (42%) as European American, 63 (6%) as Other (i.e., Hispanic, Asian, or of biracial heritage);	592 (56%) described themselves as single	710 (68%) reported that they were employed.	Parents reported a median annual family income of $22,500
Eisner and Meidert (2011)	Mothers (89%) of children in 1st grade	41.7% German speaking, 21.7% spoke one languages offered as part of the intervention, and 35.6% spoke Portuguese and Turkish	NI	17.1% households were classified as ‘‘single parent’’.	35.6% households both parents were employed	NI
Gross et al. (2011)	Parents of 2–4-year-old child	NI	97% African American or Latino.	71 % unmarried	71% employed	62% report annual incomes under $20,000.
Heinrichs (2006)	Participants were parents of children aged 2.6–6.0 years	NI	37% had an immigrant background	Single parenthood was high	NI	The majority were uneducated for German standards and living on welfare
(Winslow et al., 2016)	Parents of kindergarten and third grade students	NI	95% identified as Latina.	NI	NI	Average family income was $22,524 per year

NI: No information described in study.

*** Data for this study was provided by the schools’ demographic characteristics**

There was no information on marital status in the study by Winslow et al. (2016). Although not reported by all studies, participants were primarily female caregivers (89% in the study by Gross et al. (2011) and 92% in the study by Dumas et al. (2010)). There was also a high proportion of participants who came from an ethnic minority background. Dumas et al. (2010) reported that 52% of participants described their ethnic origin as African American, Gross et al. (2011) recorded 97% of participants as African American or Latino and Winslow et al. (2016) reported 95% of participants self-identifying as Latina.

A.2.2 Study descriptions

Each of the studies defined parental engagement differently. Abraczinskas et al. (2020) looked at three aspects of engagement: enrolment, initiation and attendance to support initial behavioural engagement. They also measured homework completion and parents' quality of participation.

Dumas et al. (2010) defined parental engagement across four stages: intent to enrol, enrolment, attendance and quality of participation in sessions (see Table 2.10 for definitions). This study differed from the other studies by measuring intent to enrol on the Brief Child Development Survey (Dumas et al., 1999) to calculate enrolment. Parents who returned a programme registration form or contacted PACE staff or the day-care centre were categorised as enrolled. Dumas et al. (2010) also focused on the quality of parents' participation in sessions. This was assessed by the facilitators after each session. Attendance was rated for each session parents attended on a scale of 0-8. Dumas et al. (2010) recorded the number of sessions attended, which enabled the researchers examine at which points parents dropped out of the programme.

Eisner and Meidert (2011) also distinguished four stages in the parental engagement process: enrolment, participation, completion and utilisation. They included technique utilisation to measure how the programme changed parenting practices. Recruitment for this Triple P parent programme was managed by the implementation team of the longitudinal study in Switzerland. The schools that participated received the Triple P parent programme information and parents were considered enrolled when forms were completed and returned. Eisner and Meidert (2011) described course completion as the completion of all units of the four-session programme.

Gross et al. (2011, p. 285) defined participation in three ways: enrolment, attendance and engagement. This study measured participants' motivation for enrolling at baseline

with a Participation Motivation form. Gross et al. (2011) measured enrolment as the number of parents agreeing to participate in the intervention and completing baseline assessments. Attendance was measured by the number of sessions parents attended from 0-12. Engagement in this study was understood as the quality of parents' participation in the intervention.

Heinrichs (2006, p. 352) considered participants enrolled if they had provided their name and address: however, if the participants never showed up to the course, they were categorised as "initial enrollers/subsequent decliners". Participants who participated in at least one hour of the intervention but then withdrew before the post-assessment were referred to as dropouts by Heinrichs (2006). The remaining participants were categorised as completers even if they did not attend all sessions. Attendance was assessed by dosage hours of the intervention received.

Winslow et al. (2016) defined three aspects of engagement: enrolment, initiation and attendance to support initial behavioural engagement. They considered enrolment as a parent filling in a recruitment form via any method attached to the engagement package. They looked at initiation (i.e., if a participant showed up to one session) and then subsequently tracked attendance across sessions. In this study, total dosage was 11 hours as they calculated attendance across the eight sessions, which included the three 20-minute phone calls and a final 2-hour celebration session.

A.2.3 Monetary enhancements

Monetary enhancements were provided for participating in the parenting programmes, completing surveys, interviews and completing post-course surveys in five of the studies (Abraczinskas et al. (2020) Dumas et al. (2010); Gross et al. (2011) Heinrichs (2006); Winslow et al. (2016) (see Table A.7 for a list of monetary enhancements across studies).

Table A.7: Monetary enhancements across studies

Study title	Explanation of monetary incentives & conditions
Abraczinskas et al. (2020)	• Compensated for their time completing surveys: • 1-hour pre-test $50 • 30-minute post-recruitment $25 • 40-minute post-Triple P $35
Dumas et al. (2010)	• Brief child development survey $15 • Interviews $35 • Attendance payments: one session $3; two sessions, $6; three sessions, $12; four sessions, $18; five sessions, $28; six sessions, $38; seven sessions, $53; and all eight sessions, $68
Eisner and Meidert (2011)	No information
Gross et al. (2011)	• $30 gift cards and a video recording of themselves with their child • The average weekly discount parents were eligible to receive $8.92
Heinrichs (2006)	• Each family received 12.50€ (approximately $15) upon returning the completed questionnaires. • Families in the payment condition received €15 (approximately $20) cash for attending each group session and €5 (approximately $7) for each completed phone contact. • A bonus of €30 (approximately $40) was offered when parents attended all four group sessions (i.e., eight group intervention hours). • In sum, parents could receive up to €110 (approximately $145).
Winslow et al. (2016)	• Mothers received $25 for participating in the engagement recruitment call in both conditions

A.2.4 Recruitment

Participants were recruited in several similar ways across the six studies (see Table A.8 for further details). To reduce barriers to engagement, the intervention was delivered at a time and location convenient to participants and free transport was offered. Free meals were provided to participants by Abraczinskas et al. (2020), Dumas et al. (2010), Gross et al. (2011) and Winslow et al. (2016). The interventions studied by Dumas et al. (2010) and Gross et al. (2011) provided transport costs to and from the centre.

Table A.8: Recruitment methods

	Efforts to reduce barriers to engagement				Information provided to support engagement			
Study title	**Convenient course location & time**	**Free childcare**	**Free meals at each session**	**Free transport costs**	**Confirmation Letters sent before course start**	**Session reminders**	**Posters advertising in different Languages**	**Registration tables At centres**
Abraczinskas et al. (2020)	Yes	Yes	Yes	NI	Yes	Yes	Yes	NI
Dumas et al. (2010)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NI	NI	Yes	Yes
Eisner and Meidert (2011)	Yes	Yes	NI	NI	NI	NI	Yes	NI
Gross et al. (2011)	Yes	Yes	Yes	NI	Yes	NI	Yes	Yes
Heinrichs (2006),	Yes	Yes	NI	NI	NI	NI	Yes	Yes
Winslow et al. (2016)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	NI

*NI = No Information

A.2.5 Initial parental engagement

This systematic review looked specifically for the most effective strategies for enhancing initial parental engagement. This diversity in definitions made it difficult to synthesise results of initial parental engagement in isolation, instead describing parental engagement across the distinct categories/stages that were employed by the researchers (see Table A.9 for definitions of engagement stages included in the studies).

Table A.9: Definitions of parental engagement stages included in studies

Stage of engagement	Definition in study	Included in study
Intent to enroll*/ motivation to enroll+	Parents' motivations to enroll in programme. Assessed in surveys during enrolment.	Dumas et al. (2010)* Gross et al. (2011)+
Enrolment	Parents who returned a registration form were considered enrolled	Abraczinskas et al. (2020) Dumas et al. (2010) Gross et al. (2011) Winslow et al. (2016) Eisner and Meidert (2011) Heinrichs (2006)
Initial enrollers/ subsequent decliners	Parents who Initially expressed interest but then declined participation.	Heinrichs (2006)
Initiation	Parent attended at least one session.	Winslow et al. (2016) Abraczinskas et al. (2020)
Drop-outs	Parents who completed one hour of the intervention but then left.	Heinrichs (2006)
Attendance	Number of sessions attended by parents	Dumas et al. (2010) Gross et al. (2011) Winslow et al. (2016)
Quality of participation*/in session participation+	Completion by facilitators evaluation of parents' overall participation in sessions	Dumas et al. (2010)* Abraczinskas et al. (2020)+
Participation+	Attendance at sessions	Eisner and Meidert (2011)+
Engagement	Quality of in session participation	Gross et al. (2011)
Completers	Families were considered completers even if they did not attend all sessions.	Heinrichs (2006)
Completion	Completed all 4 sessions of programme	Eisner and Meidert (2011)
Technique Utilisation	The use of taught parenting concepts in daily use with children	Eisner and Meidert (2011)
Homework completion	Parents complete homework reports at the beginning of each session	Abraczinskas et al. (2020)

A.2.6 Study outcomes

Study outcomes are described by individual study.

Abraczinskas et al. (2020) had five conditions to which participants were randomly assigned: 1) EAU[4] informational flyer; 2) EAU + testimonial booklet; 3) EAU + teacher endorsement; 4) EAU + recruitment call, and 5) full package of all four recruitment strategies. They measured enrolment, attendance, homework completion and in session participation. The total number of parents randomised to engagement

[4] Engagement as Usual (EAU)

condition was 1,338. Following the recruitment strategies, 316 enrolled, 234 initiated enrolments, 211 attended, and 161 completed the programme. The full package (condition 5) increased behavioural engagement as measured by facilitator rating, as did the EAU and recruitment call (condition 4) compared to the other conditions. More parents who enrolled in these two conditions completed the programme. The full package increased initiation: however, parents who received the full package condition attended fewer sessions. There were no significant differences for any of the recruitment conditions on homework completion or in-session participation.
This finding highlights the need to conduct research on the most effective methods to engage parents in community-based programmes and supports this current study which focuses on parents who engaged and understanding why they stayed in the programme.

Dumas et al. (2010) randomly assigned participants to two conditions: the monetary incentive PACE-I or no monetary incentive PACE-NI. This study evaluated intent to enrol, enrolment, attendance and quality of participation. The total number of eligible participants was 4,098; the PACE sample who rated their intent to enrol was 1,050. From this sample of 1,050 parents, 610 enrolled in the parenting programme. This consisted of 319 parents from the incentive condition and 291 parents from the non-incentive condition. 127 participants enrolled but never attended any sessions (i.e., PACE I: n = 30, PACE-NI: n = 97). Attendance by condition could be compared across sessions for the 483 participants who attended. 63 participants attended one session only, 292 participants attended three-quarters of the sessions, and 122 participants participated in all sessions (Dumas et al., 2010, p. 309). The Quality of parent's participation was measured using socio-economic covariates, child and family measures; day care measures and quality of participation measures. Dumas et al. (2010) found very limited support for the use of financial incentives to enhance attendance however they did report that intent to enrol predicted enrolment with two-thirds of parents who said they would enrol doing so. This finding links with the motivational aspect of engagement practices and how parents can be motivated to engage (Dumas et al., 2010).

Eisner and Meidert (2011) measured enrolment, participation, completion and utilisation. The total population was 821. Out of this sample, 257 enrolled, 37 enrolled

but never attended, and 153 parents completed all four sessions. Family characteristics were associated with enrolment with socio-economic status significantly linked to enrolment. Parents with intensive networks with neighbours were more likely to enrol. Parents with large families were less likely to attend, as were dual-earner families. Parents of minority backgrounds were also less likely to attend. A 15-item questionnaire on course climate was completed by facilitators of the sessions. This questionnaire focused on parents' participation and attention levels in each session, as judged by the facilitator. Parents attending a class with high involvement were more likely to complete the four sessions. Parents' experience of the programme and completion was linked to technique utilisation which is described as "the sustained and competent application of taught parenting principles in daily interactions with the child" (Eisner & Meidert, 2011, p. 84).

Gross et al. (2011) defined participation in three ways: enrolment, attendance and engagement. This study measured participants' motivation for enrolling at baseline with a Participation Motivation form. Total eligible target population was 792, total sample of parents engaged was included N =174. The experimental discount condition (a discount on the childcare bill), had 93 parents enrolled, while 81 parents enrolled in the control condition. Parents in the discount condition attended 6.26 weekly sessions. Parents in the control condition attended 5.86 weekly sessions. Across both conditions 23% of parents did not attend. Parents who received the discount were as engaged in the programme as parents who did not receive the discount. This was measured as the number of parents who agreed to participate and completed the baseline assessments and attended the groups. Parents' motivations for attending were to learn better ways to communicate with their child; this was supported by 90% of parents attending across both conditions. Only 2.2% of parents that received the discount for childcare identified the childcare discount as the reason for attending.

Heinrichs (2006, p. 352) considered participants enrolled once they had provided their name and address (*n* =248). Of these, 51 parents were categorised as "initial enrollers/subsequent decliners" as they did not attend any session after providing their contact information. Ten participants were considered dropouts as they withdrew after only one hour of the intervention. The remaining 187 participants were considered completers even if they did not attend all sessions. The full 8 hours of the intervention

was completed by 136. A main effect of payment was reported, with 46% of families in the paid versus unpaid conditions (26%). There was no effect for the setting.

Winslow et al. (2016) tested the effects of an engagement package and looked at three aspects of engagement: enrolment, initiation and attendance across two conditions: experimental and controlled. Parents assigned to the experimental condition received a brochure, a family testimonial flyer, teacher endorsement and a group leader engagement call. Parents in the control condition only received the brochure. Enrolment was high in the experimental (74%) and control conditions (69%). Initiation rates differed across conditions: 64% initiated in the experimental condition and 36% in the control condition. The average number of sessions attended was 5 out of 8 across conditions. Parents in the experimental condition were more likely to initiate if their children had baseline concentration problems. The engagement package increased initiation and attendance for parents.

A.2.7 Cochrane risk of bias tool

To assess the risk of bias in the six papers included in this review, I used the Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool, the recently updated ROB2 tool (Sterne et al., 2019). I chose this tool as it applies to randomised control trials and all six studies fell under this category. This tool is structured into five areas that cover the types of bias that can affect the results of randomised trials:

1. Bias arising from the randomisation process.
2. Bias due to deviations from intended interventions
3. Bias due to missing outcome data
4. Bias in the measurement of the outcome
5. Bias in the selection of the reported results

(Sterne et al., 2019, p. 2).

The ROB2 tool is “conceived hierarchically” (Sterne et al., 2019, p. 3). Signalling questions for each of the five domains provide the basis or risk of bias judgements for the study being quality assessed. According to Sterne et al. (2019), concerns should only address issues affecting the author's ability to get reliable conclusions from the studies. Judgements of a high risk of bias in any one of the six domains assessed

results in the research being considered high risk overall (see Table A.10 for the criteria in the ROB2 tool).

Table A.10: Reaching an overall risk of bias judgement

Overall risk-of-bias Judgement	Criteria
Low risk of bias	The study is judged to be at low risk of bias for all domains for this result
Some concerns	The study is judged to rise some concerns in at least one domain for this result, but not to be at high risk of bias for any domain
High risk of bias	The study is judged to be at high risk of bias in at least one domain for this result Or The study is judged to have some concerns for multiple domains in a way that substantially lowers confidence in the result.

A.2.8 Bias arising from the randomisation process

Randomising participants in research requires a transparent allocation system and a clear statement of how participants will be randomised. “This process is called allocation sequence generation” (Sterne et al., 2019, p. 10). The next step is “allocation sequence concealment” (Sterne et al., 2019, p. 10) which is required to ensure participants and research staff do not know allocations until the randomisation process has been confirmed.

The ROB2 tool’s algorithms (Sterne et al., 2019) were used to judge the risk of bias from the randomisation process in each study. Winslow et al. (2016) was assessed to be at low risk of selection bias as this study described the randomisation process and highlighted how both participants and interviewers were blind to condition before the random assignment. I identified higher risks in the Abraczinskas et al. (2020) study due to the randomisation process using blocking, which could make it possible to predict participant assignment. I also identified higher risks in the randomisation process for Dumas et al. (2010), Gross et al. (2011), Heinrichs (2006) and Eisner and Meidert (2011) as they did not describe their randomisation process or how the allocation to the assignment was concealed (see Appendix B for further details on each study).

A.2.8.1 Bias due to deviations from intended interventions

This domain concerns biases that arise from deviations to the intended outcomes and is assessed by focusing on three signalling questions:

1. Were participants and people delivering interventions blinded to the conditions?
2. If some were not blinded, did it affect the outcome and likely to have biased the effect?
3. Was appropriate analysis used to estimate effects of assignment to intervention? (Sterne et al., 2019, p. 26)

Allocation concealment and blinding of participants and facilitators are essential when calculating effect sizes. Turner, Boutron, Hróbjartsson, Altman, and Moher (2013) emphasise how effect estimates can be overestimated by as much as 18% when concealment is judged to be unclear.

Winslow et al. (2016) was judged to be low risk due to the blinding of participants and personnel. Abraczinskas et al. (2020) was judged to be higher risk, mostly due to participants and facilitators being aware of the interventions ascribed. Dumas et al. (2010), Gross et al. (2011)and Eisner and Meidert (2011) were considered high risk because of a lack of information on blinding of participants or facilitators that could have affected the outcome. Heinrichs (2006, p. 349) was judged to be high risk because of the non-blinding of facilitators to conditions.

A.2.8.2 Bias due to missing outcome data

This domain focuses on the risk of bias due to missing data. The tool allows for the assumption that it is often impossible to measure outcomes for all participants: however, a judgement must be made on whether the missing data could have affected the outcome results (Sterne et al., 2019). Two studies were judged to be at low risk of bias due to missing outcome data: Abraczinskas et al. (2020) and Gross et al. (2011). This was due to outcome data being available for all, or nearly all, randomised participants. Both Dumas et al. (2010) and Eisner and Meidert (2011) were judged to have some concern around missing data. Winslow et al. (2016) and Heinrichs (2006) were judged to be at high risk for bias due to missing outcome data.

A.2.8.3 Bias in measurement of the outcome

In this domain, outcomes should be measured in a way that is comparable across groups and is suitable to evaluate the outcome. Only Abraczinskas et al. (2020) was judged to have some concerns for this domain: the remaining studies were judged to be at high risk of bias in the measurement of the outcome.

Abraczinskas et al. (2020) included a research survey condition that was randomised to participants. The research survey had an effect on the outcome and could have given participants knowledge of the intervention they received. Winslow et al. (2016) was judged to be at high risk of bias in the measurement of the outcome because the group leaders who did engagement calls and collected attendance were not blind to the condition. It is, therefore, likely that the assessment of the outcome was influenced by knowledge of the intervention received.

Dumas et al. (2010, p. 308) were judged to be at high risk of bias due to self-reporting measures by day care staff and PACE staff leading to non-blinding of participants and staff. Self-reporting measures could have produced biased outcomes. A similar issue occurred in Gross et al. (2011). Group leaders were reporting on engagement, and this may have influenced figures on attendance. It is highly likely that Heinrichs (2006) was influenced by the knowledge of recruiters to the intervention assignments, which could have influenced data collection and outcomes. There is also the question of the parent self-reporting survey, which was not analysed for this study: as a result, this study was judged to be high risk. Eisner and Meidert (2011) were judged to be high risk as there is very little known information about blinding of participants or facilitators, and some data were reported to have been left out. That data and the unknown blinding is a high-risk variable as it is likely that assessment of the outcome was influenced by knowledge of the intervention received.

A.2.8.4 Bias in selection of the reported results

This domain is concerned with bias that may occur due to the selected reporting of results. Selective reporting of a particular outcome measure can happen when a measurement is determined based on results from other estimates and multiple outcomes. Abraczinskas et al. (2020) reported using variables for accounting for the different conditions in their randomised trial. Winslow et al. (2016) indicated data was

collected at multiple time points in the study using three engagement variables: enrolment, attendance and programme initiation. Dumas et al. (2010) highlighted their two-level hierarchical model and Gross et al. (2011) described their analysis tool which was based on two conditions: parent participation and motivations for participating. Heinrichs (2006) reported their attendance sample was analysed twice and reported both results. Eisner and Meidert (2011) were not clear on reporting the randomisation process or the blinding of participants and facilitators. It was reasonable to assume some concerns about the outcomes due to the reported loss of information in the analyses. (see Table A.11 for the overall results for each domain for the six studies).

Table A.11: Overall results for each domain for the six studies using the ROB2 tool (Sterne et al., 2019)

	Bias arising from the randomisation process)	Bias due to deviations from intended interventions (effect of assignment to intervention)	Risk of bias due to deviations from the intended interventions (effect of adhering to intervention)	Bias due to missing outcome data	Bias in measurement of the outcome	Bias in selection of the reported result	Overall Judgement for Bias
Abraczinskas et al. (2020)	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns	Low risk	Some concerns	Some concerns	Some concerns
Dumas et al. (2010)	Some concerns	High risk	High risk	Some concerns	High Risk	Some concerns	High risk
Eisner and Meidert (2011)	Some concerns	High Risk	High risk	Some concerns	High risk	Some concerns	High risk
Gross et al. (2011	Some concerns	High risk	High risk	Low risk	High Risk	Some concerns	High risk
Heinrichs (2006)	Some concerns	High risk	High risk	High risk	High risk	Some concerns	High risk
Winslow et al. (2016)	Low risk	Some concerns	Low risk	High risk	High risk	Some concerns	High risk

I applied the ROB2 tool (Sterne et al., 2019) to the six studies in this systematic review to assess the risk of bias. Overall, five papers were evaluated to be at high risk of bias: Winslow et al. (2016), Dumas et al. (2010); Gross et al. (2011), and Eisner and Meidert (2011), with one paper assessed as having some concerns: Abraczinskas et al. (2020)

A.2.9 Systematic review summary

This review aimed to identify the most effective methods for initial parental engagement in community-based parenting programmes in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

Six studies met the inclusion criteria and were focused on a variety of initial parental engagement methods, such as engagement packages (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Winslow et al., 2016), financial incentives (Dumas et al., 2010; Gross et al., 2011; Heinrichs, 2006) and motivations to enrol (Dumas et al., 2010; Gross et al., 2011). In addition, a new underdeveloped area of parental engagement outcomes was highlighted with the addition of technique utilisation (Eisner & Meidert, 2011). The following discussion will outline the findings from the systematic review and their relevance and contribution to the current understanding of initial parental engagement methods.

A.2.9.1 Engagement packages and their elements

It was apparent that most studies introduced parental engagement packages, rather than relying on one method to support parental engagement. These packages typically had a number of elements and reported varying degrees of success. The outcome from the study by Winslow et al. (2016) showed that their full engagement package increased initiation for parents in the experimental condition if their children had baseline concentration problems. Abraczinskas et al. (2020) dismantled the engagement package introduced in the study by Winslow et al. (2016) and assigned parents to one of five conditions. The full package also increased initiation. However, parents who received the full engagement package condition attended fewer sessions. By examining each element of the engagement package separately, Abraczinskas et al. (2020) identified the recruitment call as the most effective method of initial engagement from the original research by Winslow et al. (2016). The recruitment call consisted of a manualised twenty-minute telephone call by the facilitator to the parent, supporting the identification of barriers to engagement, identifying ways to address the barriers and motivate the parent to enrol in the programme. The costs and time implications for the facilitators were not considered in the study. It is possible that this direct personal contact with parents is an important lever supporting subsequent parental engagement.

Addressing parents' practical barriers has also been identified by others as one of the factors supporting initial parental engagement (Ingoldsby, 2010; Miller & Prinz, 2003). Kazdin and Wassell (2000) report that methods employed to mitigate barriers for participants to enhance recruitment and improve parent participation. Similarly, Eisner and Meidert (2011) found barriers to participation influence the initial stages of engagement. Their study revealed interesting findings concerning potential barriers related to limited neighbourhood networks and low levels of social capital. Parents who had concentrated links with their neighbours were more likely to sign up for the course and complete it than parents who had limited contacts with neighbours. Research has suggested that the source of a referral is a predictor of engagement (Breland-Noble et al., 2012) and perhaps this highlights the facilitator's role in the recruitment call. Relationships are an important aspect of engagement, retention and intrinsic motivation, and therefore the recruitment call (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Winslow et al., 2016) could be added to a pre-treatment strategy (Chacko et al., 2016; Ingoldsby, 2010; Miller & Prinz, 2003). However, while we can say that the recruitment call increased enrolment in the research by Abraczinskas et al. (2020), parents receiving the recruitment call attended fewer sessions, and it had no effect on homework completion or in-session participation. Conceivably, this stresses the point made by Morawska and Sanders (2006), calling for providers to have an assortment of responsive strategies to enhance engagement and completion, and supports the need for a package of parental engagement strategies rather than a single approach across the different stages of engagement.

A.2.9.2 Financial incentives

Financial incentives for increasing participation rates in parenting programmes featured in three studies included in this review: Dumas et al. (2010); Gross et al. (2011) and (Heinrichs, 2006). Financial incentives may seem attractive as a practical recommendation to overcome economic barriers for parents. However, both Dumas et al. (2010) and Gross et al. (2011) found financial incentives made no significant difference in engagement or attendance. Conversely, Heinrichs (2006) reported that offering financial incentives increased enrolment in the incentive condition by 20%. However, this difference faded when attendance data was analysed, and the initial enrollers/subsequent decliners were removed from the data analysis. The results reported by Heinrichs (2006) support the theory that financial incentives may support enrolment but have little or no impact on retention (Dumas et al., 2010).

Financial incentives have been the subject of previous studies with Guyll et al. (2003) suggesting that financial incentives significantly affect parents with limited education. Possibly, financial incentives offered to engage in a programme could help alleviate some of the impact of living in poverty (Gross et al., 2011). The stimulus might support initial parental engagement but does not support attendance or engagement in programme outcomes (Dumas et al., 2010). It is important to consider that external motivation in monetary incentives may undermine intrinsic motivation (Frey & Jegen, 2000). As previously mentioned, Staudt (2007) suggests that to be successful, parents need to be emotionally invested and committed to the programme. This emotional investment was found by Gross et al. (2011): parents' primary intrinsic motivation to enrol was to be a better parent, irrespective of the payment condition. Financial incentives are costly and perhaps an added expense to community organisations with limited budgets if the organisation is already addressing expensive structural barriers by providing childcare, a meal and transport costs. These findings suggest that monetary incentives for parental engagement are not as effective as initially thought and may even reduce intrinsic motivations.

A.2.9.3 Technique utilisation

Eisner and Meidert (2011) introduce technique utilisation as a measure of evaluating parental engagement. Technique utilisation is described as "… the sustained and competent application of taught parenting principles in daily interactions with the child" (Eisner & Meidert, 2011, p. 84). Technique utilisation adds to the research on parenting programmes by focusing on parents as change agents. This component of the engagement process can be seen in the CAPE model of engagement by Piotrowska et al. (2017), although described in the model as enactment. Including technique utilisation as a component of the parental engagement process could ensure practitioners and programme designers develop research and recruitment strategies that focus on the teaching-learning environment. The relationship-building process, including course climate, could be seen to support parents to act as change agents in their home practice. Engagement is complex, and the importance of relationships within the engagement process could inform the engagement between families and services (D'Arrigo, Zivani, Poulsen, Copley, & King, 2017).

A.2.9.4 Understanding low rates of completion

Low attendance rates were a frequent characteristic of included studies and often undermined programme effectiveness through reduced parental engagement, failures to initiate and high rates of attrition. For example, from Eisner and Meidert (2011) total population sample of 821, the enrolment rate was 31.3% (*n*=257), 26.8%, initiated (*n*=220*)*, and 18.6% (*n* = 153) completed the intervention. Between enrolment and course completion, over 104 participants dropped out of the intervention. Abraczinskas et al. (2020) reported similar enrolment to completion drop-out rates: 23.6% enrolment (*n*=316), 17.5% (*n*=234) initiation and 12% (*n*=161) completion. That is, nearly half of the participants who enrolled who did not complete the programme. The challenges of engaging and retaining parents in programmes should be examined (Snell-Johns et al., 2004) but may require a shift in perceptions of the "hard to reach" or "seldom heard" by organisations and practitioners (Cortis et al., 2009). According to Hjörne et al. (2010), organisations classify people and events to make sense of their worlds, blaming sections of society for failing to engage without any reflection on what they could do better. Perhaps, as suggested by Gross et al. (2001, p. 246), the problem of attrition lies when "programme goals do not complement participant goals". Conceivably, to resolve this issue, further research representing families' views from complex backgrounds and their experience with services is required (Melvin, Meyer, & Scarinci, 2020).

A.2.9.5 Unmet literacy needs

The study interventions included the Triple P Parenting Programme, the PACE Parenting Programme and the Chicago Parenting Programme. These interventions have literacy demands inherent in all of them. For example, the Triple P programme involves parents completing a written workbook (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Eisner & Meidert, 2011; Heinrichs, 2006; Winslow et al., 2016). The PACE programme requires parents to read handouts and posters (Dumas et al., 2010), and the Chicago Parent Programme requires written homework completion (Gross et al., 2011). These studies also required participants to fill in a vast array of written surveys, for example, for the PACE programme (Dumas et al., 2010, p. 305): participants had to complete a pre-intervention survey and a brief Child Development Survey. Despite these form-filling requirements across studies, only Dumas et al. (2010) and Winslow et al. (2016) reported supporting participants who may have had literacy difficulties. Dumas et al. (2010, p. 305) provided "trained staff to assist" for form filling and Winslow et al. (2016,

p. 1098) reported that “consent forms and interview questions were read aloud to minimise potential reading difficulties”.

Literacy difficulties were not mentioned in the included studies as a barrier to engagement, and yet most parent training programmes require homework completion and involve parent workbooks. Children of adults with poor literacy skills are more likely to struggle with literacy, less likely to do well in school and more susceptible to behavioural problems (E.U., 2012; Maughan, Rowe, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2003; Morgan, Farkas, Tufis, & Sperling, 2008). Participants in the included studies were at high risk of unmet literacy needs: they were predominantly low-income families with the highest income reported as less than $23,000 per annum. There were high rates of single-parent households across the studies, participants were primarily female caregivers, and there was also a high proportion of participants who had an ethnic minority background where English may have been an additional language. Four of the included studies were conducted in America, with two conducted in Europe, where the current rates of estimated literacy difficulties are alarmingly high. UNESCO (2017) estimate there are over 750 million people worldwide, two-thirds women, with literacy difficulties. It is estimated that 73 million people lack qualifications above secondary school level in Europe because of poor literacy skills. PISA, the OECD’s Programme for International Assessment, shows that one in five fifteen-year-olds has poor reading skills (OECD, 2022). If a parent has unmet literacy difficulties, their perceived control over their participation may be compromised (Ajzen, 1991). It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that parental engagement and enrolment into programmes will be affected by participants’ unmet literacy needs and so it is surprising that only two of the studies included in this review reported providing literacy supports for parents to fill in the application and evaluation forms.

A.2.9.6 Parental engagement definitions

Aspects of the inter-dependent stages of parental engagement were defined differently across the included studies. This difference in the definitions of stages of engagement make the research challenging to interpret, constraining the ability to make comparisons across studies (Chacko et al., 2016; Ingoldsby, 2010). For example, amongst the studies in this review, there are thirteen different definitions used to describe stages of the parental engagement process (see Table A.9). Gross et al. (2011) described engagement in three phases: enrolment, attendance and

engagement. Conversely Dumas et al. (2010), described parental engagement as four stages involving participants' intent to enrol, enrolment, attendance and quality of participation in sessions. Eisner and Meidert (2011) distinguished four stages in the parental engagement process: however, their stages are enrolment, participation, completion and utilisation. Heinrichs (2006, p. 357) describes parents who attended more than one session as "completers", while Eisner and Meidert (2011, p. 85) calculated parents' "completion" if they participated at the four sessions. Engaging parents in services can be a challenging process: being clear about what engagement is and how it occurs across the different components of engagement is therefore vital. Defining the component stages of engagement differently across studies could lead to misunderstandings with the reported outcomes and prevents meta-analyses.

A.2.10. Conclusion and recommendations

This systematic review aimed to identify the most effective methods for fostering initial engagement of parents in community-based parenting programmes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage. Children's language, literacy, social, emotional and behavioural development is contingent on parents' abilities to support them. Parent support in these contexts can facilitate parents in their capacity to develop these skills of their children. Robust evidence is needed to enhance evidence-based programmes with strategies that are effective in engaging parents to maximise the potential benefits.

The studies included in this review were not considered high quality when applying the ROB2 tool (Sterne et al., 2019), and this should be deliberated when considering the applicability of the findings. However, evidence emerged in support of a number of strategies that enhanced parental engagement, and these findings supported five recommendations.

A.2.10.1 Recommendation 1: Include a recruitment call as part of the parental engagement package

Abraczinskas et al. (2020) suggested that a recruitment call to eligible parents increased enrolment, aligning with previous research on the impact of parents' relationships to services and how these relationships can enhance engagement. This pre-treatment strategy (Chacko et al., 2016; Ingoldsby, 2010; Miller & Prinz, 2003) could be a valuable tool in an overall engagement strategy. Although the costs and

time needed to implement the recruitment call might be high, it could form part of a strategy to enhance engagement (Morawska & Sanders, 2006).

A.2.10.2 Recommendation 2: Address practical barriers rather than providing financial incentives

There was no evidence to suggest that financial incentives to increase participation rates in parenting programmes were a worthwhile investment. Spending resources on addressing practical barriers to participation seemed to be more effective at supporting engagement (Ingoldsby, 2010; Miller & Prinz, 2003).

A.2.10.3 Recommendation 3: Evaluate technique utilisation.

Technique utilisation is the parent's application of the learning principles in interactions with their children (Eisner & Meidert, 2011). Technique utilisation is a result of effective engagement practices and ensures parents act as change agents in their own homes. Evaluating technique utilisation and how it occurs in the home learning environment could improve the process of engagement by bringing an understanding to methods that work to embed new practices for parents inside and outside the programme.

A.2.10.4 Recommendation 4: Focus on the teaching-learning environment

Practitioners and programme designers should develop research and recruitment strategies that include a focus on the teaching-learning environment. This focus should include methods for creating a supportive course environment that would enhance the relationship-building process between services and parents, from initial engagement to course completion. As highlighted by Gross et al. (2001), programme goals and aims may not be what parents want. Is it time to include the voices of the seldom heard/hard to reach in programme design, engagement strategies and policy decision making? This could radically change how parents experience the service, how the service impacts their needs and at a policy level, how funding is spent to address their needs. Focusing on the family's needs is placing the family at the centre of a collaborative practice (Klatte et al., 2020; Melvin, Meyer, & Scarinci, 2020) and could support engagement.

A.2.10.5 Recommendation 5: Consider potential literacy demands of programmes.

Although this finding did not come directly from the systematic review, as the researcher on this study I think it warrants inclusion due to it arising indirectly (e.g., need to complete written homework in Triple-P and PACE programmes). Therefore, omission of literacy as a barrier to parental engagement is an issue that should be examined. This lack of evidence hinders programme development and evaluation. Understanding that unmet literacy needs are an issue that can hamper engagement across multiple services enhances opportunities to tackle inequalities in programme designs and future policy decisions. Parents' engagement in universal training programmes can potentially mitigate any future childhood challenges. However, engaging parents in services can be a challenging process: being clear about what engagement is and how it occurs across the different engagement components is vital. Children's language, literacy, social, emotional and behavioural development is contingent on parents' abilities to support them. Parent support in these contexts can facilitate parents in their capacity to develop these skills of their children. Robust evidence is needed to enhance evidence-based programmes with strategies that are effective in engaging parents to maximise the potential benefits. The positivist approach taken in some studies perhaps add to the need to seek a collaborative perspective of what is effective engagement from both a parent and practitioner perspective.

A.2.11 Limitations of this systematic review

As with all studies there are limitations to this review which will be highlighted here:

- Five papers were evaluated to be at high risk of bias: Winslow et al. (2016), Dumas et al. (2010); Gross et al. (2011), and Eisner and Meidert (2011), with one paper assessed as having some concerns: Abraczinskas et al. (2020).
- I limited the years of the search to between 2000 and 2023 and excluded studies earlier than 2000. This perhaps excluded studies that had significant innovations in parental engagement.
- Four of the six studies took place in the United States of America (Abraczinskas et al., 2020; Dumas et al., 2010; Gross et al., 2011; Winslow et al., 2016) bringing questions to the context of the studies which may be quite different if applied in an Irish setting and may not be as relevant.

- Participants were primarily female caregivers 89% in the study by Gross et al. (2011) and 92% in the study by Dumas et al. (2010)), although this review focused on parents and their engagement, the lack of fathers' participation across the studies is a limitation of the findings.
- The effectiveness of initial engagement strategies is hindered by a lack of research and inconsistent reporting in the actual practices of parental engagement, as well as in the differing definitions of the component stages of engagement which make it difficult to compare effective practices across studies. This limits research effectiveness that could inform services and practitioners on methods that work to enhance parental engagement.

Appendix B - Copy of Ethics Committees approval letters 1-5.

Appendix B - Copy of Ethics Committees approval letter 1: MTO6.

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Application: Academic Year 2018/19
Application code: MT06 (minor revisions received)
Applicant: L. Mc Carthy **(PG Student)** Dr. M. Smith, **(Supervisor)**
Title of Research: How can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage?

Date of this letter: 20.12.18

Dear Lána,

Your resubmission of your application (with minor revisions) for ethics approval for the research project above was considered by the Research Ethics Committee, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin, on 20th December, and has been approved in full.

Please note (i) that on completion of research projects, applicants should complete the End of Project Report Form and submit one signed hard copy to the School Office as well as an electronic copy (slcsc@tcd.ie) and (ii) the REC requests that you attend in particular to your commitments as regards the storage and destruction of data arising from this research, in keeping with REC policy and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines.

We wish you the very best in your research activities.
Best wishes,

Professor Irene P. Walsh

Chair, Research Ethics Committee,
School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences

Scoil na nEolaíochtaí Teangeolaíochta,
Urlabhra agus Cumarsáide,
Coláiste na Tríonóide,
Baile Átha Cliath 2, Éire

School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences,
Trinity College,
Dublin 2, Ireland

T 353 (0)1 896 1560
slscs@tcd.ie
www.tcd.ie/slscs

Appendix B- Copy of Ethics Committees approval letter 2: MTO6.

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Application: Academic Year 2018/19
Application code: MT06
Applicant: L. Mc Carthy **(PG Student)** Dr. M. Smith, **(Supervisor)**
Title of Research: How can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage?

Date of this letter: 16.04.19

Dear Lána,

I note from your supervisor, Dr Martine Smith, that there is a minor amendment to your data collection start date to a revised date of May, 2019. The Research Ethics Committee of the School of Linguistic Speech & Communication Sciences is happy to approve this amendment.

Please note (i) that on completion of research projects, applicants should complete the End of Project Report Form and submit one signed hard copy to the School Office as well as an electronic copy (slcsc@tcd.ie) and (ii) the REC requests that you attend in particular to your commitments as regards the storage and destruction of data arising from this research, in keeping with REC policy and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines.

We wish you the very best in your research activities.
Best wishes,

Professor Irene P. Walsh

Chair, Research Ethics Committee,
School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences

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Coláiste na Tríonóide,
Baile Átha Cliath 2, Éire

School of Linguistic, Speech &
Communication Sciences,
Trinity College,
Dublin 2, Ireland

T 353 (0)1 896 1560
slscs@tcd.ie
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Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Application: Academic Year 2018/19
Application code: MT06
Applicant: L. Mc Carthy **(PG Student)** Dr. M. Smith, **(Supervisor)**
Title of Research: How can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage?

Date of this letter: 16.04.19

Dear Lána,

I note from your supervisor, Dr Martine Smith, that there is a minor amendment to your data collection start date to a revised date of May, 2019. The Research Ethics Committee of the School of Linguistic Speech & Communication Sciences is happy to approve this amendment.

Please note (i) that on completion of research projects, applicants should complete the End of Project Report Form and submit one signed hard copy to the School Office as well as an electronic copy (slcsc@tcd.ie) and (ii) the REC requests that you attend in particular to your commitments as regards the storage and destruction of data arising from this research, in keeping with REC policy and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines.

We wish you the very best in your research activities.
Best wishes,

Professor Irene P. Walsh

Chair, Research Ethics Committee,
School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences

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Urlabhra agus Cumarsáide,
Coláiste na Tríonóide,
Baile Átha Cliath 2, Éire

School of Linguistic, Speech &
Communication Sciences,
Trinity College,
Dublin 2, Ireland

T 353 (0)1 896 1560
slscs@tcd.ie
www.tcd.ie/slscs

Appendix B - Copy of Ethics Committees approval letter 3:HT30.

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Application	Academic Year 2019/20
Applicant Code	HT30
Applicant/Supervisor Name	Lána McCarthy / Prof Martine Smith
Title of Research	Leveraging Parental Engagement
Date of this letter	04/06/2020

Dear ,

Your amended submission (dated 29/05/20) for ethical approval for the research project above was considered by the Research Ethics Committee, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin and has been approved in full.

Please note:
(i) On completion of research projects, applicants should complete the *End of Project Report Form* (which can be found at: https://www.tcd.ie/slscs/research/ethics/) and submit one signed hard copy to the School Office (Room 4091, Arts Building) as well as an electronic copy (to slscs@tcd.ie)
(ii) The REC requests, in particular, that you attend to your commitments regarding the storage and destruction of data arising from this research, in keeping with REC policy and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines.

We wish you every luck with your research.

Best wishes,

Ciarán Kenny

Dr Ciarán Kenny
Chair, Research Ethics Committee
School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences

Scoil na nEolaíochtaí Teangeolaíochta,
Urlabhra agus Cumarsáide,
Coláiste na Tríonóide,
Baile Átha Cliath 2, Éire

School of Linguistic, Speech &
Communication Sciences,
Trinity College,
Dublin 2, Ireland

T 353 (0)1 896 1560
slscs@tcd.ie
www.tcd.ie/slscs

Appendix B- Copy of Ethics Committees approval letter 4: HT30.

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Application	Academic Year 2020/21
Applicant Code	HT30 (2019-20)
Applicant/Supervisor Name	Lána McCarthy / Prof Martine Smith
Title of Research	Leveraging Parental Engagement
Date of this letter	07/12/2020

Dear Lána,

Your submission for ethical approval for the research project above was considered by the Research Ethics Committee, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin on 07/12/2020 and has been approved in full.

Please note:
(i) On completion of research projects, applicants should complete the *End of Project Report Form* (which can be found at: https://www.tcd.ie/slscs/research/ethics/) and submit one signed hard copy to the School Office (Room 4091, Arts Building) as well as an electronic copy (to slscs@tcd.ie)
(ii) The REC requests, in particular, that you attend to your commitments regarding the storage and destruction of data arising from this research, in keeping with REC policy and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines.

We wish you every luck with your research.

Best wishes,

Ciarán Kenny

Dr Ciarán Kenny
Chair, Research Ethics Committee
School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences

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Urlabhra agus Cumarsáide,
Coláiste na Tríonóide,
Baile Átha Cliath 2, Éire

School of Linguistic, Speech &
Communication Sciences,
Trinity College,
Dublin 2, Ireland

T 353 (0)1 896 1560
slscs@tcd.ie
www.tcd.ie/slscs

Appendix B- Copy of Ethics Committees approval letter 5: MT5.

Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Application	Academic Year 2021/22
Applicant Code	MT5
Applicant/Supervisor Name	Lána McCarthy / Prof Martine Smith, Dr Duana Quigley
Title of Research	Leveraging Parental Engagement
Date of this letter	09/11/2021

Dear Lána,

Your amended submission (received 28/10/2021) for ethical approval for the research project above was considered by the Research Ethics Committee, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Trinity College Dublin and has been approved in full.

Please note:
(i) On completion of research projects, applicants should complete the *End of Project Report Form* (which can be found at: https://www.tcd.ie/slscs/research/ethics/) and submit one electronic copy (to slscs@tcd.ie)
(ii) The REC requests, in particular, that you attend to your commitments regarding the storage and destruction of data arising from this research, in keeping with REC policy and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) guidelines.

We wish you every luck with your research.

Best wishes,

Ciarán Kenny

Dr Ciarán Kenny
Chair, Research Ethics Committee
School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences

Scoil na nEolaíochtaí Teangeolaíochta, Urlabhra agus Cumarsáide, Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath 2, Éire
School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences, Trinity College, Dublin 2, Ireland
T 353 (0)1 896 1560
slscs@tcd.ie
www.tcd.ie/slscs

Appendix C: Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) for this study

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC, SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

Participant Information Leaflet

How can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage?

Principal Investigator(s) and Co-Investigator(s) (insert names, titles and contact details. Where relevant, give the name of academic supervisor.	Principal Investigator: Lána McCarthy, B.A. Ed, M.A. Academic supervisor: Professor Martine Smith
Study Organiser/ Funder (if applicable – remove row if not applicable)	Irish Research Council
Data Controllers	**Trinity College Dublin (for research data)**
Data Protection Officer	**Data Protection Officer Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2**

You are being invited to take part in a research study that is being carried out by Lána McCarthy at Youngballymun. Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, please read this information sheet carefully. You should understand the risks and benefits of taking part in this study so that you can make a decision that is right for you. You may wish to discuss it with others. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

This leaflet has five main parts:
Part 1 – Information about the Study
Part 2 – Information on how your data will be used and stored.
Part 3 – Information about Costs, Funding and Approval
Part 4 – Future Research
Part 5 – Further Information

Part 1 – Information about the Study

Why is this study being done?

I am doing this study to find out about your experience at Breakfast Buddies, to support links between services and parents better. This project is being carried out as part of Lána McCarthy's college study.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part because you have participated in Breakfast Buddies as a parent or as a practitioner. This experience can help to better understand engagement between parents and practitioners. We aim to have *21* people involved in this study.

Appendix C: Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) for this study continued.

Do I have to take part? Can I withdraw?
You don't have to take part in this study. It is up to you to decide whether to take part. If you decide not to take part, it won't affect your current or future involvement in any of Youngballymun's programmes either as a parent or a practitioner.

You can change your mind about taking part in the study and opt out at any time, even if the study has started. If you decide to opt out, it won't affect your current or future involvement in any of Youngballymun's programmes, either as a parent or a practitioner. You don't have to give a reason for not taking part or for opting out.
If you wish to opt out, please contact Lána McCarthy, researcher, lana@youngballymun.org or Professor Martine Smith, Research Supervisor, mmsmith@tcd.ie who will be able to organise this for you.

What happens if I change my mind?
You can change your mind at any time by contacting:
Lána McCarthy, lana@youngballymun.org., or Professor Martine Smith mmsmith@tcd.ie .
If you choose not to continue to take part, this will not affect your current or future involvement in any of Youngballymun's programmes, either as a parent or a practitioner. If you wish, you can ask for your data to be destroyed. If you request this, we will no longer use or share your data for research from this point onwards and the researcher Lana McCarthy will destroy it. However, it will not be possible to destroy data already used in research studies prior to this time.

What will happen to me if I decide to take part? What will I need to do?
- The study will take place one time only for approximately one hour.
- If you decide to participate you will be interviewed in the Arts Centre.
- This is a focus group interview which means you will be answering questions in a group alongside other parents or practitioners.
- The questions are based on your experience of participating in Breakfast Buddies as a parent or a practitioner.
- The researcher Lána McCarthy will be asking the questions.
- Your answers will be recorded on a digital Dictaphone, a device that records voices only.
- Your name will never be used to identify you with this research.

Are there any benefits to taking part in this research?

Taking part in this study will not directly benefit you. However, research using your data and information may help us to better understand parental engagement and may result in a better understanding of how to engage parents in programmes. This is a long-term research project, so the benefits of the research may not be seen for several years.

Are there any risks to me or others if I take part? What will happen if something goes wrong?
We don't think there are any risks. Coming to a focus group might be inconvenient. Slight inconvenience of attending a focus group or planning session will be reduced by negotiating

the most opportune time for these meetings to occur.
There is a risk that a connection to your identity could be made. Great care will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of all data and the risk to participants of a breach of confidentiality is considered very low.

Will I be told the results of any assessments performed as part of this study that relate to me?
Appendix C: Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) for this study continued.

There is no assessment or test for this research, it requires your opinion only.

Part 2 – Information on how your data will be used and stored

How will my data be used?

Data from this research project may be published in future in academic journals. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications unless you have given your explicit consent for this. The original recording and all copies will be available only to the present investigators. You will never be identified, all data, including direct quotes will be anonymized.

What information about me (personal data) will be used as part of this study?
The only personal information we will have is your signed consent form which will be stored in a locked cabinet in Lána McCarthy's locked office. No one will have access to this locked cabinet only the researcher Lána McCarthy. The locked cabinet is on the third floor of the Arts Centre, in the researcher's locked office. Any information or data which is obtained during this research which identifies you will be treated confidentially. Paper copies of your consent form will be kept securely in the Youngballymun Offices in a locked cabinet that only Lána McCarthy has access to.

All the data collected during the focus groups, the recorded conversations, will be stored on the researcher's laptop in an encrypted and password protected file. The data will be made anonymous to hide your identity. This will be stored on Lána McCarthy's laptop at her home office. The laptop is password protected with facial recognition software installed.

All files will accessible only by Lána McCarthy and Professor Martine Smith. Paper copies of your consent form will be kept securely in the Youngballymun Offices in a locked cabinet that only Lána McCarthy has access to.

Who will have access my personal data? What will happen to my personal data?

The only paper personal data we will have is your signed consent form which will be stored in a locked cabinet in Lána McCarthy's locked office.

Your consent form, which is the only personal data that we collect, will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team: Lána McCarthy, researcher. All of your personal data will be stored in Ireland. Personal data will only be disclosed to Professor Martine Smith if a request is made to see the informed consent forms.

Data that can identify you, your consent form, will be kept for seven years to allow us to complete the research.

The transcribed encrypted and anonymized conversations will be kept for seven years to allow us to complete the research. After this time period your personal data will be destroyed – Lana

McCarthy will be responsible for this.

Will my personal data be kept confidential? How will my data be kept safe?
Your privacy is important to us. We take many steps to make sure that we protect your confidentiality and keep your data safe. Here are some examples of how we do this:
Appendix C: Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) for this study continued.

- Any information or data which is obtained during this research which identifies you will be treated confidentially.
- All the data collected during the focus groups, will be stored on the researcher's laptop in an encrypted and password protected file.
- The data will be made anonymous to hide your identity.
- All files will accessible only by Lána McCarthy and Professor Martine Smith.
- Paper copies of your consent form will be kept securely in the Youngballymun Offices in a locked cabinet that only Lána McCarthy has access to.
- All individual researchers involved in this project have been trained in data protection law and are bound by professional code to maintain confidentiality.
- A risk assessment and / or data protection impact assessment has been carried out, indicating a low level of risk.
- If something did go wrong, we would contact you immediately to explain the circumstances and any resulting consequences/ action needed on your part and action taken on behalf of the researcher.

What is the lawful basis to use my personal data?

The legal basis is informed consent. We can only legally use your data if you give us informed consent.

What are my rights?
You are entitled to:

- The right to access to your data and receive a copy of it.
- The right to have your data transferred to another organisation or 'data controller.'
- The right to restrict or object to processing of your data.
- The right to object to any further processing of the information we hold about you (except where it is de-identified)
- The right to have inaccurate information about you corrected or deleted.
- The right to request deletion of your data.

By law you can exercise these rights in relation to your personal data, unless the request would make it impossible or very difficult to conduct the research. You can exercise these rights by contacting Lána McCarthy, lana@youngballymun.org, Professor Martine Smith, mmsmith@tcd.ie |or the Trinity College Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. Email: dataprotection@tcd.ie Website: www.tcd.ie/privacy

Part 3 – Information about Costs, Funding and Approval

Has this study been approved by a research ethics committee?
Yes, this study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences.

Who is organising and funding this study?
The Irish Research Council is providing funding for this study.

Is there any payment for taking part? Will it cost me anything if I agree to take part?

No, we are not paying participants to take part in the study.

Appendix C: Participant Information Leaflet (PIL) for this study continued.

Part 4 – Future Research

Due to the nature of this research, it is very likely that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions about parental engagement. We will ask for your explicit consent for your data to be used in this way. You do not have to agree to have your data available for future research. Future research will only take place if it has research ethics approval.

Part 5 – Further Information

Who should I contact for information or complaints?

If you have any concerns or questions, you can contact:

- *Principal Investigator: Lána McCarthy lana@youngballymun.org*
- *Professor Martine Smith, mmsmith@tcd.ie*
- *Data Protection Officer, Trinity College Dublin: Data Protection Officer, Secretary's Office, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin 2, Ireland. Email: dataprotection@tcd.ie Website: www.tcd.ie/privacy*
- *Under GDPR, if you are not satisfied with how your data is being processed, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Office of the Data Protection Commission, 21 Fitzwilliam Square South, Dublin 2, Ireland. Website: www.dataprotection.ie*

Will I be contacted again?

If you would like to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign the Consent Form on the next page. You will be given a copy of this information leaflet and the signed Consent Form to keep. If you consent, we will conduct the focus group. Other than arrangements for the study described, we will only contact you if there was an issue with data storage as explained in section 2 of this information leaflet.

Appendix D: Consent Forms for this study 1 -3.

Appendix D: Consent Forms for this study 1 – consent form for gatekeeper

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

Consent Form for gatekeeper.

How can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage?

Principal Investigator: Lána McCarthy, B.A. Ed, M.A. lana@youngballymun.org

Academic supervisor: Professor Martine Smith, mmsmith@tcd.ie

Dear
I would like to invite you to be a gatekeeper for my research project. If you agree this would require you to contact practitioners involved in Breakfast Buddies on my behalf to invite them to attend a focus group. I will supply you with all the contact details for the practitioners and information on the focus group. The focus group will take place in the Arts Centre for one hour at a time most convenient to participants.
I would also like to invite you support the researcher on the morning of the focus group by reading aloud the participant information leaflet and the informed consent form and answering any questions the parents might have in relation to the research. This will ensure parents who may have a literacy difficulty can participate and understand the process. The focus group will take place in the Arts Centre for one hour at a time most convenient to participants.

The study is designed to investigate how can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage?

This research may benefit teachers, youth workers and speech and language therapists by increasing parental participation in relation to children's language and literacy outcomes. There may be an improvement in parent and practitioner relationships and in the mutual understanding of each other's role. Participation supports continuous professional development in a community setting for teachers, youth workers and speech and language therapists by creating and developing confidence in parental engagement strategies.

Any information or data which is obtained during this research and can be identified will be treated confidentially. The data provided at the focus groups will be kept in the Youngballymun office in a locked cabinet and only Lána McCarthy will have access to it. Portions of the recording may be played during conference presentations, or written transcriptions may be made for teaching purposes. Data and direct quotes from this research project may be published in future. The original recording and all copies will be available only to the present investigator Lána McCarthy.

If you have any questions about this research, you can ask Lána McCarthy: lana@youngballymun.org.
You are also free, to contact any of the other people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information. Professor Martine Smith: mmsmith@tcd.ie

TRINITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
SCHOOL OF LINGUISTIC SPEECH AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES
Consent to facilitate research form.

How can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage?

Principal Investigator: Lána McCarthy, B.A. Ed, M.A.

Academic supervisor: Professor Martine Smith

General information	**Tick box**
I, , voluntarily agree to help facilitate this research study.	
I understand that even if I agree to help now, I can withdraw at any time without any consequences of any kind.	
I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I understand that I will act as gatekeeper to contact practitioners involved in Breakfast Buddies and invite them to a focus group.	
I understand that all data collected in this study is confidential and anonymous.	
I understand that I will support parents understanding of the research and the informed consent form at the parent focus group by reading aloud the forms of consent and answering any questions related to the research.	
I understand that I am free to contact Lána McCarthy or Professor Martine Smith to seek further clarification and information.	

Signature of gate keeper

Date

Signature of researcher

Date

Academic supervisor: Professor Martine Smith, mmsmith@tcd.ie

Appendix D: Consent Forms for this study 2 – consent form for parents.

Consent to facilitate research form for parents**.**

Dear parent
I would like to invite you to be a participant in a focus group for my research project. The study is designed to investigate how can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage.
You have been invited to take part because you have participated in Breakfast Buddies as a parent. This experience can help to better understand engagement between parents and practitioners. Taking part in this study will not directly benefit you. However, research using your data and information may help us to better understand parental engagement and may result in a better understanding of how to engage parents in programmes like Breakfast Buddies. This is a long-term research project, so the benefits of the research may not be seen for several years.

Any information or data which is obtained during this research and can be identified will be treated confidentially. The only personal data I will collect is this consent form with your signature on it if you agree to participate. This consent form will be stored in a locked cabinet in Lána McCarthy's office in the Art's Centre. Only Lána McCarthy, the researcher, will have access. The only other person who may be allowed see the consent forms is the research supervisor Professor Martine Smith. The recording of the focus group interview will be stored on the researcher, Lána McCarthy's laptop, this recording will be encrypted, so nobody can access it only the researcher Lána McCarthy. The laptop is stored in the researcher's home office and is password protected and uses facial recognition software. Data and direct quotes from this research project may be published in future. The original recording and all copies will be available only to the present investigator Lána McCarthy. Any transcription of the interview will be anonymised and the only people who will see it are the researcher, Lána McCarthy and the research supervisor Professor Martine Smith.

If you have any questions about this research, you can ask Lána McCarthy: lana@youngballymun.org.
You are also free, to contact any of the other people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information, Professor Martine Smith: mmsmith@tcd.ie

General Information	**Tick box**
I confirm I have read and understood the parent/practitioner Information Leaflet for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I understand that this study **is entirely voluntary, and if I decide that I do not want to take part, I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason.** I understand that deciding not to take part will not affect my current or future participation in any Youngballymun courses as a parent.	
I agree to being contacted by researchers by email or phone as part of this research study	
I understand that all information will be kept private and confidential and that my name will not be disclosed.	
I understand that I will not be paid for taking part in this study.	
I agree to take part in this research study having been fully informed of the risks, benefits and alternatives which are set out in full in the information leaflet which I have been provided with.	

Data processing	
I understand that any information or data which is obtained during this research and can be identified will be treated confidentially. I understand my name and anything else that might identify me will be changed	
I understand that data from this research project may be published in future in academic publications for example direct quotes from the transcripts which will be anonymized. I will never be identified.	
I understand this consent form, will be kept in the Youngballymun office in a locked cabinet that only the researcher Lána McCarthy has access to.	
I understand the recording of the focus group will be stored on Lána McCarthy's laptop and that this recording will be encrypted and anonymised and the laptop is password protected. I understand this laptop is stored in the researcher's home office.	
I understand the anonymised recording and transcription of the focus group and my consent form will be available only to the present investigator Lána McCarthy and her supervisor Professor Martine Smith should she request to see it.	
Risk Assessment	
I understand that if during the focus group discussion, I disclose information about poor practice from service providers the researcher will be obliged to inform the service provider about the failure of their service.	
I understand that if during the focus group discussion, I disclose unmet health or social care needs the researcher will provide me with information of where to get support.	

Signature of parent

Date

Signature of researcher

Date

Researcher: Lána McCarthy, B.A. Ed, M.A. lana@youngballymun.org

Academic supervisor: Professor Martine Smith, mmsmith@tcd.ie

Appendix D: Consent Forms for this study 3 – consent form for practitioners

Consent to facilitate research form for Practitioners.

Dear practitioner

I would like to invite you to be a participant in a focus group for my research project. The study is designed to investigate how can parental engagement be maximized as a lever for change in enhancing children's language and literacy outcomes in an area of socio-economic disadvantage.

You have been invited to take part because you have participated in Breakfast Buddies as a practitioner. This experience can help to better understand engagement between parents and practitioners. Taking part in this study will not directly benefit you. However, research using your data and information may help us to better understand parental engagement and may result in a better understanding of how to engage parents in programmes like Breakfast Buddies. This is a long-term research project, so the benefits of the research may not be seen for several years.

Any information or data which is obtained during this research and can be identified will be treated confidentially. The only personal data I will collect is this consent form with your signature on it, if you agree to participate. This consent form will be stored in a locked cabinet in Lána McCarthy's office in the Art's Centre. Only Lána McCarthy, the researcher will have access. The only other person who may be allowed see the consent forms is the research supervisor Professor Martine Smith. The recording of the focus group interview will be stored on the researcher, Lána McCarthy's laptop, this recording will be encrypted, so nobody can access it only the researcher Lána McCarthy. The laptop is stored in the researcher's home office and is password protected and uses facial recognition software. Data and direct quotes from this research project may be published in future. The original recording and all copies will be available only to the present investigator Lána McCarthy. Any transcription of the interview will be anonymised and the only people who will see it are the researcher, Lána McCarthy and the research supervisor Professor Martine Smith.

If you have any questions about this research, you can ask Lána McCarthy: lana@youngballymun.org.
You are also free, to contact any of the other people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information, Professor Martine Smith: mmsmith@tcd.ie

Consent to facilitate research form for practitioner.

General Information	**Tick box**
I confirm I have read and understood the parent/practitioner Information Leaflet for the above study. The information has been fully explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	
I understand that this study **is entirely voluntary, and if I decide that I do not want to take part, I can stop taking part in this study at any time without giving a reason.** I understand that deciding not to take part will not affect my current or future participation in any Youngballymun courses as a practitioner.	
I agree to being contacted by researchers by email or phone as part of this research study	
I understand that all information will be kept private and confidential and that my name will not be disclosed.	
I understand that I will not be paid for taking part in this study.	
I agree to take part in this research study having been fully informed of the risks, benefits and alternatives which are set out in full in the information leaflet which I have been provided with.	
Data processing	
I understand that any information or data which is obtained during this research and can be identified will be treated confidentially. I understand my name and anything else that might identify me will be changed	
I understand that data from this research project may be published in future in academic publications for example direct quotes from the transcripts which will be anonymized. I will never be identified.	
I understand this consent form, will be kept in the Youngballymun office in a locked cabinet that only the researcher Lána McCarthy has access to.	
I understand the recording of the focus group will be stored on Lána McCarthy's laptop and that this recording will be encrypted and anonymised and the laptop is password protected. I understand this laptop is stored in the researcher's home office.	
I understand the anonymised recording and transcription of the focus group and my consent form will be available only to the present investigator Lána McCarthy and her supervisor Professor Martine Smith should she request to see it.	
Risk Assessment	
I understand that if during the focus group discussion, I disclose information about poor practice from service providers the researcher will be obliged to inform the service provider about the failure of their service.	
I understand that if during the focus group discussion, I disclose unmet health or social care needs the researcher will provide me with information of where to get support.	

Signature of practitioner

Date

Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix E: Poster advertising focus group to parents After Covid-19.

Appendix F: Interview guides

Sample of Interview guide for parents at initial sampling.

Interview guide for parents' initial focus group May/June 2019

1. Why do you attend Breakfast Buddies*?*
2. How are you contacted to attend?
3. Have you attended any other programmes? What are they? Is Breakfast Buddies different from them?
4. If you have not attended other programmes what made you come to Breakfast Buddies? What was it that attracted you to it?
5. How does Breakfast Buddies support your children's learning?
6. How do you use the resources you receive at Breakfast Buddies to spend time with your child?
7. What (if anything) about your family learning practice changed because of Breakfast Buddies? What do you do differently?
8. How important do you think it is to support your child's learning by attending programmes like Breakfast Buddies?
9. Do you like the mix of presenters at Breakfast Buddies? (HCP, E, YW)
10. In what way does that presence of HCP, E, YW in the room change things? Has that helped you build relationships with them?
11. How would you feel if a parent from the community was facilitating Breakfast Buddies?

Sample of Interview guide for Youngballymun, theoretical sampling.

Interview guide for Youngballymun focus group June 2020

1. What does the term parental engagement mean to you?
2. How do you feel the process of engagement happens?
3. Can you tell me about any obstacles or barriers that we might face in parental engagement?
4. What are the benefits of a partnership approach with other organisations in relation to parental engagement?
5. What does good parental engagement look like?
6. How could practitioners support more parents to get involved and engage in programmes?
7. Are there any risks associated with strong parental engagement? For Youngballymun as an organisation and for practitioners?

Sample of Interview guide for practitioners and parents

Interview guide for practitioner and parents focus groups March 2021

1. What supports your own engagement in any *programmes/courses/hobbies/clubs*?
   How did your engagement in the *programmes/courses/hobbies/clubs* support you?
2. Reflecting on your own experience of engagement what happens when people really are engaged? What are the benefits of being engaged?
3. How do you feel the process of engagement happens? What are the most important parts/elements of the engagement process?
4. Can you think of any instance where you started out engaged, but gradually disengaged? Why did that happen?
   Can you tell me about any challenges/obstacles you can see to engagement?
5. How could practitioners support more parents to get involved and engage in programmes? What would they need to do for that to happen? How could we be more proactive in our approach to engagement?
6. How do you feel about parents supporting other parents to engage? What would that look like? Can you describe what it might look like in practice? How would we achieve it?
7. What would you like Parents, HCP, E, YW to know about you?
8. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share?

Appendix G: Sample of the progression and purpose of memos

Memo: Sample of the progression and purpose of memos	
Participant data 1: inspiration for Memo 1.	Parents focus group 3, March 2021, L87, Emily: *Yeah, it's just that you are so welcoming, really personable and easy to talk to, it's easy to get in.*
Memo 1: Making it easy to get in.	**Memo 1: Making it easy to get in.** *Parents and practitioners highlighted that parents feel ownership of the space at BB and that they also attend to seek advice. Now, if these are the reasons they may attend and also the why then they re-attend is it the equality of practice that is important? Why do parents feel ownership of this space? How is that created? Is it because "it's easy to get in"? Is it the fun atmosphere? Is it their ability to see they can participate on their own terms? Is it how they are initially engaged? What are the practices that enhanced parents' engagement with the programme, the methods used to engage them and also their motivations for attending? It would be important now to start pulling those bits out, I think this is an important step, it would clearly be a step towards a conceptual understanding of the engagement process.*
Participant data 2: inspiration for Memo 2.	Parents focus group 3, March 2021, L84, Brigid: *I hate being in the school, I'm not being funny or smart, and I don't know about anyone else, but I just hate school. At BB we're out having a laugh and a joke people can still have a smoke come back, we have the banter, different schools and we all know someone from a different school, we went to school with them, their brothers or sisters whatever it's great to catch up with everyone it doesn't matter who it is, I'd rather be out than in the school. I just don't like the schools. You know you could be saying something you don't want them to repeat back to someone. Whereas at BB, we all talk shite and we all banter with each other "ah Lána I need a Valium I can't deal with these here"*
Memo 2: Creating the atmosphere at BB.	**Memo 2: Creating the atmosphere at BB.** *The atmosphere is a crucial component of BB. I can see from the quotes how parents are participating on their own terms and that supports their participation. In this quote a parent talks about going outside for a cigarette, chatting, and enjoying having fun and banter at BB. Is this how parents are relieving their stress levels? The facilitator's energy and interaction and relationship with parents also seems to be important creating confidence and a sense of trust. Equality in participation, that is why they come, they don't feel judged or excluded. I keep coming back to that quote: "easy-to-get in". Making it easy for parents to get in enhances their participation, and they definitely have the freedom to come and go as they please. It would be interesting to compare some of the parents' quotes about the school with practitioners' quotes about their expectations of parents. Also, important to look at how that atmosphere is created.*
Participant data 3: inspiration for Memo 3.	Practitioners focus group 2, March 2021, L 51, Emma: *I know what you're saying Lána, what have we done, what have you done for someone to recreate it. I do think there's something in what Angela is saying there that it's the parents' space. I would hear parents say are you going to BB? I'm going if you're going. I don't think it's professionals and parents, like there's no barrier, like there's teachers sitting at the table making cards the same as everybody else like …but the experience they have when they are there has made them come back.*
Memo 3: Creating a level playing field.	**Memo 3: Creating a level playing field.** *This has come up a few times from both parents and practitioners. Looking at it from the point of view of parents I thought of it as more to do with the environment, friendly, welcoming etc. Having just completed focused coding on the practitioner interview I can see it is more than that. This creating of a level playing field is what is creating the environment that parents love, the warmth, the atmosphere the welcome etc. But there are things that happen to support its creation hidden in the data. For example, there is a sense of equality amongst/between parents and practitioners. For example, sitting at tables with parents, chatting, engaging in the activities together is creating a bond to the relationships between practitioners and parents. Also, the food and the queue for the food was mentioned as a way to have lots of chats with parents for practitioners. There is no special queue for practitioners and parents everyone is treated equally. Another addition to that is that whilst sitting with parents doing the activities together parents and practitioners get to see the fun sides of each other, a side perhaps that some might say is not always visible. Lastly and I think this is also key, is the practitioners being open enough to say that they are learning from parents and that it is most definitely a two-way process. So that is definitely a benefit of engaging for practitioners too if they are open to it. So, are there motivations for both parents and practitioners to engage? Is the creation of the atmosphere and level playing field a crucial process in the in-session engagement practice?*
Memo 4: My reflections on data sorting process.	*Sorting through the memos from both parents and practitioners I can see there are similar processes going on. Both parents and practitioners are choosing to engage, yes for different reasons but there is an act of choosing. Captured in these memos are the ingredients for a good programme, the atmosphere, making it easy to get in. Practitioners have already spoken about the importance of the invitation to parents. Does that make it easy to get in? There are also underlying concepts that keep occurring across the data, that equality piece. I need to really nail them down now.*

Appendix H: Sample of constant comparative analysis: coding incident with incident

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Comparing incident with incident codes: Familiar faces – Making connections</th></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Parent focus group 1, May 2019 L51, L53 and L55, Holly. Parent discussing approaching HCP for appointment</th><th colspan="2">Practitioners focus group 2, March 2021 L5, Emma: practitioner discussing the benefits of being a familiar face for engagement</th></tr>
<tr><td>You get to talk to HCP like I was trying to swindle a faster appointment…
I was actually trying to get the HCP that works in BB you know because there's 2 of them there I wanted specifically HCP 'because I told my child about her and I said when we go to the HCP there's a lady there I meet her, and her name is (HCP) so I think she thinks now that she's going to (HCP) like and I said to myself I will see if I can get you</td><td>Seeking support from HCP service
Motivation to engage.

Approaching practitioner for an appointment

Allaying child's fears of service and parents

Knowing a familiar face

Using social capital</td><td>I would really feel that the parents that attend BB are some of the parents that I have the most meaningful relationship with at the clinic like I think the parents see me in a non-clinical role and then sometimes you're talking about sounds with their children and actually they've got loads going on in their lives and I find that sometimes parents won't go there with me clinically but I would find parents I see in BB are more open to have those conversations and those things are actually getting in the way of their intervention in the clinic but they kind of see me as someone who's actually involved in their lives and their day to day and it makes a huge difference to the therapeutic relationship we have.</td><td>Making connections with parents

Being a familiar face

Changing parents' perceptions by participating

Noticing benefits to engagement for service

Starting to attend from connections made at BB.

Becoming a familiar face

Changing parents' perceptions by participating

Change in the relationship</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Properties of:
1. Benefits of a familiar face: Parents and practitioner benefits/ engagement
2. Motivations to engage: For parents seeking support/ motivated to attend BB.
3. What about practitioners? What are the benefits of engaging for them?
4. Allaying service fears: familiar face of service supports engagement in BB and other services, is this a part of the benefits?</td></tr>
</table>