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# **Developing Practice Guidance for Authenticity in Family Learning**

A Thesis Submitted for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy

*(in accordance with University of Cumbria procedures and in compliance with  
Lancaster University regulations)*

**Charlotte Hardacre, BA (Hons), PgCert, FHEA**

**March 2024**

## **Abstract**

This thesis contributes practice guidance for Family Learning courses. These courses typically aim to improve children's educational attainment, enhance parents' employability, and encourage parents and children to learn together. However, Family Learning can fall short of broader emancipatory ideals. Funders demands for specific forms of attainment evidence often conflict with parents' interests or motivations for attending the courses. As a family learning tutor navigating this challenging context, I experienced professional discomfort where practice norms diverged from my values. Specifically, it was difficult to deal with an emphasis on marketisation and datafication.

In response, at the beginning of this study, I developed a preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning, comprising Five Key Practices. This theory aimed to address the competing perspectives of funders, school, parents, and practitioners. The remainder of the study examines and reconstructs this theory. After engaging with wider literature, I incorporated the views of participants using The extended case method. Over two years, I conducted four 10-week family learning courses, employing visual maps, semi-structured interviews, and a research diary. The 51 participants, including parents, teachers, and Family Liaison Workers, provided valuable insights on their experiences of family learning.

Analysis of the data, later enriched with authenticity and Middle Way philosophy, led to the reconstruction of the preliminary theory, resulting in a praxis. This praxis, with three characteristics, focuses on the necessary conditions for Authentic Family Learning. The incorporation of Middle Way and authenticity equips practitioners with a framework to navigate the inherent structural contradictions of family learning based in primary schools. The development of the praxis was transformative for the researcher, suggesting others consider the extended case method to enhance practice. The Praxis of Authentic Family Learning provides an example for adopting practices that diverge from prevailing approaches and implementing core values in real-world settings.

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## Author's Declaration

An abridged version of Chapter 3 of this thesis has been published as a book chapter previously. See:

Hardacre, C. (2017) 'An Authentic Approach to Family Learning' in Stuart, K. and Maynard, L. (eds.) *Empowerment and Agency*. London: Routledge.

A portion of the literature review and the preliminary findings of this thesis have been published in a peer-reviewed journal article. See:

Hardacre, C. and Kinkead-Clark, Z. (2019) 'Authentic Family Learning. Reconceptualising Intergenerational Education Initiatives, in Jamaica and England, through Cross-Cultural Conversation', *Journal of Childhood Studies*, 44(5), pp. 85-102.

Beyond, these publications I declare that this thesis has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university and it is entirely my own work.

The word count is 77451.

Signed:



Charlotte Hardacre

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> March 2024

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The starting point for this thesis was my acute discomfort with aspects of my experience at work as a Family Learning Tutor. Family learning, as I saw practised, was at best dysfunctional and at worst harmful. As I reflected on this and my understanding grew, I became convinced that there was something to investigate. This thesis considers how to manage the competing and sometimes conflicting imperatives that play out in Family Learning practice. It provides justification for adopting practices that diverge from prevailing approaches and sets out practical guidance for implementing core values in real-world settings.

### **1.1 A Problem to be Solved**

#### ***1.1.1 Family Learning or Family Fixing***

Family Learning, over the past fifty years, has been pervaded by an ideological perception of the family as a key site for social policy interventions (Goodall, 2021; Wilson and McGuire, 2021). Family Learning, in this thesis, refers to Local Authority funded courses which take place in schools, where parents and children participate together. These programmes are deployed by the Government to tackle 'educational underachievement, encourage family members to learn together and lead adults and children to pursue further learning' (Wainwright and Marandet, 2017, p.214). These goals may or may not align with parents' own interests in taking part in a course and it is worth noting that the funding stream for Family Learning flows from the Education and Skills Funding Agency. This executive agency of the Government places significant emphasis on improving adults' employability by enhancing their basic skills (Robey, Penistone and Black, 2016).

Family Learning can therefore be viewed as a political tool utilised to meet the demands of the job market by improving the skills of adults, even if they initially did not join a family learning course for this purpose. This functional approach to education is limited and corrective, aimed at addressing specific shortcomings (Hamilton and Burgess, 2011; Papen, 2005). This contrasts with emancipatory ideals of education as liberatory and self-directed

(Friedman *et al.*, 2011). The conflict arising from these contrasting views was part of my daily experience as a Family Learning Tutor employed by a large city council in north-west England.

### **1.1.2 Dealing with Deficit Narratives**

Deficit views of parents are a recurring theme in the literature on family learning and parental engagement. Goodall (2021) critically examines how these views originate from, and manifest through, the discourse of a "culture of poverty," which suggests that groups experiencing poverty share a common set of deficient cultural traits. This notion has been perpetuated by the belief in a cycle of deprivation, where poverty is seen as an outcome of personal choices and attitudes passed down through generations. Such deficit discourses shift the blame for low educational outcomes and social challenges onto individual parents, absolving systemic structures from scrutiny.

Gorski (2008) points out that this narrative is problematic because it suggests we can achieve equity by ignoring inequity, focusing on changing parents rather than addressing broader systemic inequalities. Similarly, Gillies (2005) discusses how parenting programmes often serve as "re-education" efforts, providing alternative values and norms that parents are encouraged to adopt. These programmes tend to promote a narrow definition of 'good parenting', often rooted in middle-class values, and overlook the diverse experiences and strengths that different families bring to the learning environment.

This deficit-based perspective influences policy and practice in Family Learning, where interventions are frequently designed to "fix" parents or teach them how to conform to a prescribed set of behaviours. As a result, parents, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are often viewed through a lens of deficiency rather than as partners with valuable insights and contributions to their children's learning.

In the context of this thesis, such deficit views are directly relevant to the research question, which seeks to understand how to manage the competing and sometimes conflicting imperatives in Family Learning practice. Recognising the impact of deficit discourses on parental engagement has shaped the research's critical approach. This thesis challenges the dominant narrative that parents need to be "fixed" and instead explores practices that diverge from these prevailing approaches, aiming to empower parents as active participants in their children's education.

By acknowledging the existence and influence of deficit views, this study seeks to confront and address these harmful perceptions. It aims to offer an alternative model that emphasises the strengths and agency of parents, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive understanding of Family Learning. Taking into account the aforementioned, I now outline my individual path towards embarking on this doctoral research, after which I will set out a short overview of each chapter.

## **1.2 A Transformative Process Begins**

My first step on the journey towards Family Learning began in 2008 as I leaned against the door at the back of a hotel conference room. I was listening intently to the speaker, who was delivering a fascinating lecture, about the potential for using mosquitos to distribute malaria vaccines, when I was startled by a loud whisper 'excuse me, where are the toilets please'. I smiled weakly, pushed the door open for both of us and directed the delegate to the nearest facilities. I wandered back to the registration desk, where I should have been stationed in my role as Event Organiser for an academic publisher. I surveyed the leftover lanyards and laminated badges, the garishly patterned hotel carpet and the curling pastries from the morning coffee break and knew I no longer wanted a career where I would always be on the edge of the action, unable to join in the conversations that were lighting up the eyes of the conference attendees and speakers.

I emailed my resignation letter from my desk that day and within two months I was travelling north from my London home. Leaving behind a cosy flat near the Portobello Road, a close group of good friends and a secure job. To go home. To a tiny village in East Lancashire. Arriving home, I knew only one thing for certain, that I would try to become an adult literacy tutor. I was confident that this would be something meaningful, tangible and real; qualities that continue to fascinate and motivate me. It would be a 'proper' job where I could help people. The opposite of my events role, where success could mean saving the huge corporation a few pounds by negotiating a better deal on hors d'oeuvres for a sparsely attended conference cocktail hour. Instead, I would be making a difference. I would be giving back. I liked reading, had been good at English at school and thought that working with adults, who had missed out on qualifications earlier in life, would be fulfilling and manageable; I could do this.

After many frustrating phone calls, online searches and dead ends trying to work out the best way to qualify in the field, I signed up for a Certificate in Education, with literacy specialism, at a local college. I loved the course which introduced me to Freire's view that literacy involves learners' critically reflecting on their social environment and the position they take within it. During this period, I read *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* for the first time and was enthused and motivated by Freire's argument that 'what is important is that the person learning words be concomitantly engaged in a critical analysis of the social framework in which men exist' (Freire, 1970, p. 31). Armed with an emerging understanding of critical pedagogy, I completed voluntary work experience with Manchester Adult Education Service's (MAES) Family Learning team in the summer and in September I was offered a full-time post with MAES and was officially an adult literacy teacher dedicated to the values of emancipatory education.

I was placed in the Family Learning team and tasked with delivering Family Literacy classes in primary schools across Manchester. I was thrilled by this news because I would be based in the community, working in different primary schools. I learned that the aims of the ten-



week courses I would be teaching were to help parents improve their own literacy and support them to develop strategies for helping their child with reading and writing. The classes should have been joint, with parents and children learning together for part of the session. In practice, the children often did not attend at all, and I gradually came to understand that the implicit goal of the classes was to enrol as many adult learners onto literacy qualifications as possible.

I had entered the adult literacy field because I wanted to help people to achieve an ambition which I assumed learners would have autonomously and voluntarily sought out. The actual experience of working in the field differed entirely from my initial expectations. For example, I was repeatedly told that Family Literacy was learner-centred and yet my observations were in profound contradiction to this notion. My earliest recollections of Family Learning, when I was shadowing more experienced colleagues as part of my initial training, are summed up in the following vignette:

The setting is the community room of a primary school in North Manchester. It is supposed to be suitable for adult learners, but only child-size tables and chairs have been provided. The Family Learning tutor places her course folder on the only full-size table, pushing away the detritus of breakfast club. She flips through reams of paperwork to show me her lesson plan. It is a dense document packed with minute-by-minute activity, learning aims and outcomes, health and safety and inclusion information, 'learning style' mapping and a section on how ICT and numeracy will be embedded in the literacy session. It must have taken hours to complete. "I don't use this, it's too hard to follow whilst you're teaching, but you must write one for every class and always bring it in case Ofsted come" she explains.

The parents tentatively file in. They have signed in, donned visitor badges and been escorted to the room by a teaching assistant. Some parents have brought their below-school-age children and so are turned away at the door. 'Sorry, it's not suitable' they are told in clipped tones by the Family Learning tutor. 'This always happens' she explains to me 'but never let them in with little ones, you won't get anything done" The mothers leave, awkwardly negotiating pushchairs back out of the school. They seem variously irritated, disappointed, or confused.

The remaining parents balance on the tiny seats. The tutor distributes pens and an A3-size enrolment form that is covered in tiny text. 'OK, before we can start, we all need to fill in this form, it's council policy". She moves around the room ensuring the long document is completed in full. Asking loudly if parents have any qualifications or if they are in receipt of disability benefits or job seekers allowance before jabbing the corresponding part of the form to indicate where to add the information. Some parents have English as an additional language and struggle to understand the form, some lack the literacy skills to complete it, some object to the length and level of detail required and refuse to give the information. The small room is getting hot and tense as the tutor struggles to field all the questions about the form. Several parents have given up and started to chat, "Are the children coming in or what?" one asks loudly, cutting through the chatter. "Not today, there won't be time. We just have a bit of admin to do this week and then we can be up and running next time". The parent raises her eyebrows "I don't think I'm coming next time" she whispers to her neighbour.

The tutor calls everyone to attention and explains that they are now enrolled on a 10-week family literacy course, paid for by the council with a qualification for anyone who would like to complete a test at the end of the course. I glance at the recruitment flyer that is taped to the wall of the community room "Family Learning: Have Fun Sharing Books with Your Child" it proclaims in loud, colourful letters above today's date. "Right" says the tutor, calling the room to attention: "To get us started, we're going to complete our Initial Assessments and Individual Learning Plans, which should take about an hour...."

Repeatedly observing scenes such as this, made me question what had happened to the idea of adult-literacy as fundamentally emancipatory and what had happened to adult-literacy educators. I was particularly uneasy about the qualifications that were offered to parents, because they focused on a narrow set of technical skills, such as completing missing word exercises or copy-editing sentences for spelling errors and did not reflect the real life reading and writing that families were doing. These exams were borne out of the Skills for Life strategy that brought with it a "core national curriculum, national qualifications and national tests." (Papen, 2005, p. 96). The strategy aimed to improve the literacy skills of 7.4 million adult learners by 2020. Its purpose was to ensure that 'England has one of the best adult literacy rates in the world' (National Audit Office, 2008, online), an ambition which highlights

a politicised drive to compete successfully within a globalised economy and is the functional base on which English adult literacy policy rests. I soon observed how these forces contributed to tension between adult education providers, and their need to produce results in the form of examination passes, and parents, whose reasons for attending family learning courses were often broader and more varied than a national, standardised curriculum allows for.

After I had delivered a number of courses on my own, I was badly disillusioned. I did not want to rush through ten weeks of disheartening preparation for a test that the parents who attended Family Learning classes were not always interested in taking. I was close to completing my Certificate in Education and the final assignment was an action research project. I decided to adapt my teaching using the principles of Authentic Instruction and see if this improved the learning experience for myself and the families. I had been introduced to Authentic Instruction when an English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tutor had delivered a lecture on the approach to my class. She talked about the benefits of using real-life texts and language activities in her classroom, as opposed to relying on, often, dated textbooks or workbooks. She gave the example that her class might cook and share a meal together and use context clues, objects and body language to accomplish the task in the target language. I was fascinated by the approach and began to seek out more information.

I learned that the essential definition of Authentic Instruction is the use of real-life texts for real-life purposes (Jacobson, Degener and Purcell-Gates, 2003). In this approach, standard classroom materials such as worksheets, cloze exercises, past exam papers or comprehension activities are abandoned in favour of the reading and writing materials of everyday life. As explained in the handbook for Authentic Instruction practitioners:

‘Two key factors make texts in the classroom authentic: the type of text and the purposes for reading or writing that text. A text is considered authentic if it is one of a type that is used by people in the world outside of school. Further, the reading or writing of that text type is considered authentic if the purposes for reading or writing that text include the purpose for which it

would be read or written in out of school contexts.' (Jacobson, Degener and Purcell-Gates, 2003, p.43)

Therefore, in an Authentic Instruction approach the learners use real texts such as health-care pamphlets, apps, letters, emails, text-messages, websites, or books. All the reading and writing done in the classroom must also have an authentic purpose. It is not enough to read a newspaper in order to answer comprehension questions, because this is not a real-life purpose for reading a newspaper. Instead, a learner might search online for information about secondary schools in the area and then complete an e-form to sign up for an open day.

This would be a sea-change from the approach I had observed when shadowing colleagues. It was clear that because our funding was linked to learner outcomes in the form of exam passes the practice of teaching to the test had emerged; a process which involves drilling on test content, downplaying or eliminating teaching on subjects not covered by the test and repetitive practice using past papers (Segal, Snell and Lefstein, 2017). Whilst some parents certainly shared the aim of achieving the qualification with the adult learning organisation, I was concerned that learning should also emphasise critical thinking and practical ability not just 'declarative knowledge and basic skills' (Jones, 2004, p. 28). If passing a test is the sole outcome of literacy education and the knowledge required for that test is difficult to reproduce outside of a classroom context, then it is questionable how much learners' interests are really being served. I was certain that drilling learners to correctly identify errors in sentences via a multiple-choice test generated little or no progress towards authentic literacy. A concern echoed in the work of Ravitch (2011, p.74) when she talks about standardised tests 'distorting the educational process, narrowing the curriculum, and conflicting with the goals of meaningful education'. Engaging with scholars such as Ravitch and Freire bolstered my increasing unwillingness to participate in a system that used Family Learning, and the lure of spending time with children during the school day, as a coercive tool to recruit parents onto literacy qualifications they had not initially expressed an interest in and that, because of the test design, did not actually improve their literacy abilities.

As well as the prospect of completing the action research study, at this time, in 2010, a switch from the National Test in literacy to a Functional Skills curriculum had been proposed by the newly formed Coalition Government, which provided me with an opportunity. I would be able to pilot the new qualification for my department and develop a curriculum using Authentic Instruction that was not targeted solely at passing the final exam. I could present my co-workers with an alternative to teaching to the test. I hoped that the use of Authentic Instruction, which is directly associated with critical theory - through its positioning of the student, rather than the teacher, as the leader of learning – would go some way to balancing the economic agenda underpinning Functional Skills. I also wanted the action research study to provide me with evidence with which I might lobby my employer and colleagues to adopt the Authentic Instruction approach as a successful way of generating exam passes as well as empowering students by supporting them to develop a critical approach to their own learning.

I interviewed ten women at the start and end of their Family Learning course. All ten women talked about the real life reading and writing experiences in a positive way because it had allowed them to work alongside their child and to choose the literacy activities they wished to engage in. They very often explained their experiences in relation to earlier periods of education when they had felt isolated, unsupported and dismissed. Through the research process I began to recognise that my own educational experiences had been marked by huge support and guidance from teachers, friends, and family and that this was not the norm for many women involved in Family Learning. I was struck by the difference Authentic Instruction had made to the women and presented my findings to my employer. As a result, I was allowed to use the approach for the remainder of my time in the post. However, it was not codified formally or adopted by colleagues, and I often had a sense that my approach was seen as unorthodox, subversive, and even risky and was tolerated mainly because the literacy test results my groups achieved remained in line with targets set by the department.

### **1.3 The Importance of Reflection**

After working as a Family Learning tutor for seven years, transitioning into Higher Education provided me with both the time and opportunity to explore more deeply why I found Authentic Instruction to be so valuable, primarily through the practice of reflective writing. The importance of reflection in professional practice among educators has been well-established over time (Harvey, Coulson and McMaugh, 2016), due to its 'utility for extracting value from experience' (Fergusson, van der Laan and Baker, 2019, p.290). Reflection has also been a requirement of teacher training and Continual Professional Development for educators since the 1990s (Hargreaves, 1996) and has consistently featured in Government guidance and policy for the last three decades (DfEE, 2000; DfEE, 2001; Bevins, Jordan and Perry, 2011; DfE 2016, DfE, 2021).

I undertook reflective writing during my own teacher training and engaged in action research projects; seeking to improve my practice through a self-reflective series of cycles which include 'planning, implementing, observing, reflecting, and re-implementing' (Carr and Kemmis, 1986, p. 92). In the field of education, it is widely accepted that reflecting on practice is a key approach for all teachers to use as a way to gain a deeper understanding of their methods (Forde *et al.*, 2006).

My initial goal was to gain insights into the nature of my teaching practice, with a particular focus on understanding the value of Authentic Instruction. However, I soon came to appreciate the connection that Bruner draws between reflection and the construction and validation of self, as succinctly expressed by Dennison (2017, p. 253), 'our identities are bound up in the stories we tell ourselves, the way we explain ourselves to ourselves'

Cunningham (2018) underscores that it is through this process that the envisioned 'learning professional' described by Guile and Lucas (1999) ultimately emerges—a professional who continually examines, questions, and revises their assumptions. This goes beyond what is sometimes dismissively termed "navel-gazing," with the result that reflection not only

deepens our understanding of the challenges in our profession, by providing perspective, but also bolsters the professional resilience needed to address these challenges effectively. I experienced this firsthand as I wrote pieces such as the vignette above, where through the act of articulating and making sense of my experience I was able to build my sense of agency and clarify the issues at which I wanted to direct change. This aligns with Power's (2008, p, 157) point that:

'If professionals are to hold on to their sense of professionalism, they need creative and articulate responses...rather than feelings of hopelessness and/or defensive reactions'

This resilience and creativity are further bolstered by an awareness that the everyday challenges arising in our immediate professional environment are situated within an explanatory context encompassing local, regional, and global policies, practices, and procedures. In a complex social setting where individuals face multiple challenges derived from multiple sources, as described by Giddens (1991) in his concept of the 'runaway world'," reflection becomes particularly valuable. In such circumstances, the ability to make sense of one's own life history and present narrative within a broader frame of reference is strengthened through reflection.

The reflection undertaken prior to and during this thesis follow Schön's (1995) model of reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action. I am drawn to Schön's model as a helpful response to the limitations of 'technical rationality'" and the evidence-based practice movement that can limit educators to the role of mere implementers of research findings and theoretical constructs. Instead, Schön's model offers a more adaptable approach, that encourages the professional to develop the skills and judgement to bridge the gap between technical knowledge and theory (the 'high ground') and the practical demands we encounter daily in education (the 'swampy lowlands').

As noted above, one significant element of Schön's work that resonates with me is the distinction he made between 'reflection-in-action' the insights that occur during practice,

and 'reflection-on-action' where we critically review our experiences afterward. The ideal scenario is for these two forms of reflection to interconnect, forming a continuous cycle that seamlessly integrates theory and practice. I also appreciate the more recent recognition of the concept of 'reflection-for-action' which involves proactive planning and anticipating future challenges.

By undertaking reflection-on-action, prior to my doctoral studies, I produced a book chapter (Hardacre, 2017) that outlines a preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning. I stand in agreement with Schön's perspective that 'theory' is not confined to formal constructs. Instead, theory can be built from insights gained from experiences. These are the theories that help us make sense of our daily life and work.

This period of reflection-on-action was made possible because I had stepped out from under the professional customs of my Family Learning tutor job, which had inhibited this type of reflection. After my initial action research study, it had gradually become clear to me that my arguments for reducing the time spent on lesson planning, putting off the completion of enrolment paperwork till later in the course and including children in every single class were an unwelcome challenge to the status quo. I continued to practice in accordance with the values of critical pedagogy values but was inhibited into following the operational norms described by Mezirow (1991, p. 104) as:

'keep your view of sensitive issues private; protect yourself by avoiding interpersonal confrontation and public discussion of sensitive issues; protect others in the same way; control the situation and the task by making up your own mind and keeping it private'

By leaving the employment of the city council and my role as a Family Learning tutor, I was no longer subject to these operational norms and I could undertake reflection on the content, process and premise of what I came to call Authentic Family Learning.



## 1.4 Reflection-on-Action Leads to a Preliminary Theory

Through reflection-on-action, I conceptualised Authentic Family Learning by identifying Five Key Practices which encapsulate my approach to setting up and delivering Family Learning in a way that is congruent with my understanding of both critical pedagogy and Authentic Instruction. I name these below and explain each one in greater detail in Chapter Three.



Figure 1.1. The Five Key Practices of Authentic Family Learning (Hardacre, 2017)

These practices shape my approach to and understanding of Family Learning and therefore they are a useful set of guiding concepts for this study. Firstly, I conduct a scoping review of the literature using the search concepts of critical pedagogy, authentic learning and Family Learning and, interrogate relevant articles to identify where and in what way the five practices are evident in the work of other scholars. The purpose of this is to support, shape or reject the five practices. After this process was complete, I returned to the field as a Family Learning Tutor to seek out parent, family support worker and primary school teacher experiences of Authentic Family Learning and understand the competing priorities that influence how Authentic Family Learning is carried out in primary schools. These steps contribute to the ultimate aims of this thesis which are to develop my preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning and produce practice guidance for Authentic Family Learning.

## 1.5 Summary of Aims

1. Seek parent, family support worker and primary school teacher experiences of Authentic Family Learning.
2. Understand the competing priorities that influence how Authentic Family Learning is carried out in primary schools.

3. Improve the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning
4. Produce practice guidance for Authentic Family Learning.

### **1.6 A Note on Structure**

The decision to present fifteen chapters that vary in length, rather than the typical ten chapters of equal length, was intentional to enhance the clarity and coherence of the thesis. Some chapters are shorter because they function as standalone units of work, making it suitable to present them in their own discrete sections. For instance, the preliminary theory of family learning (Chapter 3), developed before research for this study began, is best articulated in its own chapter to provide a solid foundation. Further, the discussion chapter is focused solely on theory, allowing for a clear distinction between the practical findings (Chapters 9-12) and theoretical exploration (Chapter 13). This separation ensures that each component of the praxis - the main contribution to knowledge made in this study - is displayed individually before being operationalised in a concise practice guidance chapter at the thesis's conclusion.

This structural approach is advantageous for several reasons. Firstly, it breaks down a complex intellectual journey into more digestible sections, making it easier for the reader to follow the argument without being overwhelmed by too much detail in areas where brevity is more effective. By organising these elements into discrete chapters, the thesis emphasises their individual significance. Secondly, separating theory and practice ensures a clear presentation of the praxis and its practical application as distinct yet interconnected outputs of the research. This delineation strengthens the overall argument and aids in developing practical guidance that is informed by theory and applicable in real-world settings.

In summary, this structure supports the reader to navigate the complex and often conflicting imperatives in Family Learning practice. It presents theoretical underpinnings and practical findings in an accessible and logically organised manner, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of Family Learning and the development of an actionable praxis.

## **1.7 Introducing the Chapters**

In Chapter Two, I place the study in context by considering the history of Family Learning in England. Issues, such as the stigma associated with corrective parenting programmes, deficit understandings of families, a drive towards evidence-based practice and the dynamics of power, are brought to the forefront by setting out the historical evolution of Family Learning in England. This explanation provides rationale for my thesis, which seeks to confront and address these persistent problems.

In Chapter Three, I outline the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning that I developed in 2017 after leaving my role as a family learning tutor and starting work as a university lecturer. It is made up of Five Key Practices for Authentic Family Learning. This is the preliminary theory I intend to extend, update, and improve upon in this thesis. Setting it out here, captures how an evolving understanding of authenticity became significant for guiding my own approach and mitigating the professional unease I encountered during my practice. This provides context for my journey from a worker who was content to follow the instructions of my employer without openly questioning practices that felt oppressive to one who began to challenge injustice and seek out alternative approaches that were more inclusive and empowering for families.

In Chapter Four, I review sixty-one studies that emerged through a scoping search of literature relating to critical pedagogy, authentic learning and Family Learning in order to identify how resonant my preliminary theory is with extant literature. This acts as the first step in the reconstruction of the initial theory and allows me to clarify the aims of the study.

In Chapter Five, I make links between my research paradigm, epistemological and ontological standpoints, and methodology. I explain that I embrace a social constructionist epistemology and identify ontologically with critical realism. With these concepts set out I offer an initial justification for selecting the extended case method as the methodological approach. I explain why the extended case method is a suitable method for theory building

and outline its four phases and how they frame the findings chapters of this study. I also use the Everyday Ethics model to explore how I attend to regulatory aspects of ethical practice as well as the emergent, daily ethical considerations I made across all stages of the study.

In Chapter Six I outline the research design I devised, including gaining access to the primary schools in which I collected data and the selection and recruitment of participants.

In Chapter Seven I explain the influence of creative methods on my approach to generating data and set out my use of visual maps, semi-structured interviews and verbal field notes.

In Chapter Eight, I explain how I used the process of abductive analysis to refine my preliminary theory. Including how I created a codebook using AFL's five key practices. And then used abductive coding to synthesise and abstract data, organising it into categories. I then report on the final stage in the analysis. This involved the application of the different phases of extended case method – intervention, process and force - as a set of lenses for revisiting the data. I conclude by clarifying how this process allowed me to challenge and reconstruct the original Five Key Practices into the Three Characteristics of Authentic Family Learning.

In Chapter Nine, the first of four findings chapters, I summarise insights from the early stages of Authentic Family Learning classes such as the interactions that took place as part of settling into the course, identifying strengths and needs and making sense of the distinct approach to AFL. This chapter responds to the extended case method phase of intervention.

In Chapter Ten, the data is re-examined to capture the social processes that were prevalent during each course by summarising insights from interactions that occurred repeatedly at each site of inquiry across each ten-week course. This chapter responds to the extended case method phase of process.

In Chapter Eleven, I extend my analysis of the data beyond social processes, to consider the social forces that impacted each course in order to understand the competing priorities that influence how Authentic Family Learning is carried out in primary schools. This chapter responds to the extended case method phase of force.

In Chapter Twelve, the final findings chapter, I draw together the three Phases of Intervention, Process and Force to provide a Reconstruction of my preliminary theory which has now shifted from the Five Key Practices of Authentic Family Learning to become Three Characteristics.

In Chapter Thirteen, I reflect on the philosophies apparent within the findings; this reflection contributes to the creation of a praxis.

In Chapter Fourteen I present practice guidance for delivering the Praxis of Authentic Family Learning.

In Chapter Fifteen, I conclude my thesis by considering what it means to have a developed a Praxis of Authentic Family Learning. This includes setting out the contributions of the thesis and making recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 2. The Trajectory of Family Learning**

As discussed earlier, the motivation to develop my preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning stems from the challenges I encountered while working within the confines of Family Learning programmes funded by Local Authorities. Therefore, in this chapter I aim to chart some of the moments, in the history of Family Learning, which shape the contemporary practices I experienced. This establishes the current landscape and reveals some of the shared principles and assumptions that underpin existing forms of Family Learning, providing a basis for this values-driven inquiry.

I chart the emergence of these shared principles and assumptions from the post-war period to the current era of evidence-based practice and social investment. Noting a range of constructs including the following. Positioning the family as a nexus for societal change. Perceiving Family Learning as a form of critical pedagogy capable of challenging entrenched power dynamics and addressing social injustices. Lastly, framing Family Learning as a tool to combat social disadvantage, which in turn raises concerns about the potential stigmatisation of disadvantaged families and the prioritisation of neoliberal objectives. These objectives may include enhancing parents' employability through skills acquisition in Family Learning classes in primary schools and fostering individual responsibility for social and economic success.

Against this backdrop, the philosophy of authenticity became significant for guiding my own approach and mitigating the professional unease I encountered during my practice. Therefore, this chapter provides social, political, and historical context for my journey from a worker who was content to follow the instructions of my employer - without openly questioning structures and practices that felt oppressive or marginalising - to one who began to challenge injustice and seek out alternative approaches that I understood as more inclusive and empowering for families.

## 2.1 Definitions

### 2.1.1 Family Learning

I use "family learning" to refer to Government funded programmes delivered in community settings that facilitate parents learning alongside their children for mutual benefit. The objectives of family learning programmes include enhancing the English, maths and parenting skills of adults and equipping parents with the knowledge and ability to better support their children's learning. Funding for these programmes comes via the Adult Education Budget (AEB). Local Authorities allocate this budget following rules set by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA); an executive agency of the Government, sponsored by the Department for Education. In 2021 approximately £555 million of the £65 billion that ESFA distribute went to adult and community learning in England (ESFA, 2022).

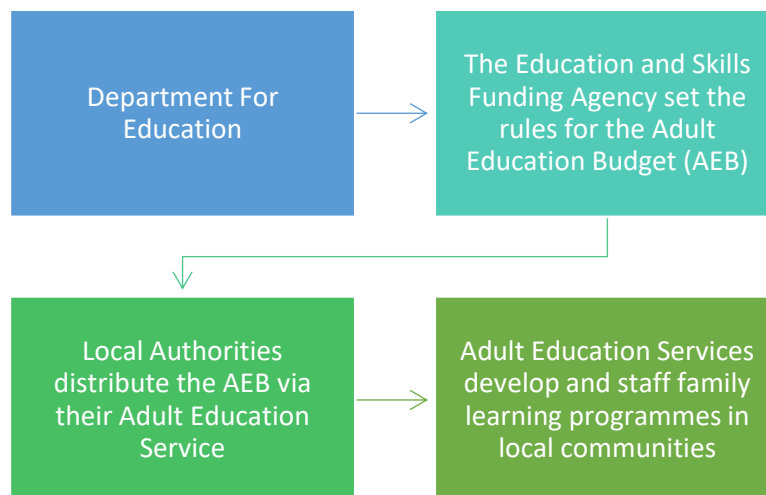


Figure 2.1. Funding Stream for Family Learning in England

### 2.1.2 Parents

In this study, an inclusive definition of 'parents' is employed to encompass all adults who play a caregiving role in the lives of children. This includes biological parents, adoptive parents, stepparents, foster parents, legal guardians, and other carers, as well as extended family members or individuals who take on significant caregiving responsibilities. In line with education law, this definition includes anyone who has care of a child — meaning that anyone with whom the child lives and who looks after the child, regardless of their

relationship to the child, is considered a parent (Department for Education, 2023). This comprehensive definition recognises the diversity of family structures and caregiving arrangements, ensuring the study reflects a broad range of experiences in Family Learning.

This approach is consistent with contemporary perspectives on family engagement, acknowledging that parental roles extend beyond traditional frameworks. It aligns with the inclusive definition used in discussions about family learning, which involves both the specific instances of parents and children learning together and the broader system of parental engagement, child educational outcomes, and adult learning (Campaign for Learning, 2022).

## **2.2 Key Points in the History of Family Learning**

In this section, I reflect on the evolution of family learning policy and research over the last 80 years by identifying four key points that have implications for current practice as I see it. This concise examination of the most significant events and developments in the history of the field draws on a more detailed historical overview of family learning (Appendix 1). I begin by establishing the roots of Family Learning in the child-centred education movements of the post-war period (Ranson and Rutledge, 2005; Mackenzie, 2010; Dishon, 2017; Tisdall, 2017). I then turn to the influence on adult education of the Russell Report in the 1970s (Russell Committee, 1973) which codified the idea that adult education should aim to meet the needs of adults in all the various roles they play in life, including that of parent. Subsequently, I examine the progression of Family Learning parallel to the inclusion agenda of the 1990s, a period marked by heightened attention and backing for Family Learning following the release of Excellence in Schools (Department for Education and Employment, 1997). Following this, I discuss Family Learning's position within the education standards era of the Blair administration, epitomised by the implementation of the 'Skills for Life' strategy at the start of the new millennium.



Subsequently, my focus moves towards the rising emphasis on evidence-based evaluation, a trend that gained prominence during the Coalition Government. This shift prompted inquiries into the effectiveness and quality of Family Learning programmes in England (DfBIS, 2012; DfBIS, 2013; See and Gorard, 2015). Lastly, I consider the nature of current Family Learning policy and practice with a particular focus on the idea of Family Learning as a tool which is enacted using the 'supportive power' of tutors (Wainwright and Marandet, 2013, p. 504). Engaging with these concepts over the course of this study has shifted my initial perception of the relationship between policy, practitioners, and participants as shaped entirely by oppressive Government agendas towards a more balanced understanding of the potential for mutual benefit and the exercise of agency at a range of levels.

### ***2.2.1 The Post-War Period: Child at the Centre***

The post-war period of 1945-1979 is meaningful to family learning because it is when both education and parenting became increasingly child-centred (Tisdall, 2017). This shift away from inflexible behaviourist approaches, though gradual and uneven, reflected an optimistic society that could start to invest in the future by attending to the wellbeing of its children. Consequently, parenting advice expanded beyond approaches that valued 'tidiness, precision, and other ritualistic pursuits associated with adult images of perfection' (Zimilies, 2008, p. 164) to recommend adapting care to the individual needs of children. This was a response to a period of grief, economic hardship and strict military control that caused many parents to consider a more child-centred family as an appealing option. (Roberts, 1995; Thane, 2010).

By 1967, the Plowden Report highlighted the significance of parents' involvement in their children's progress and development. As a result, schools were expected to actively engage and partner with parents through activities such as induction sessions, parents' evenings, and home visits. Progressive parenting also demanded more from parents, especially mothers, directing them to place their own needs after those of their children (Todd, 2009). These practical challenges and others - such as contesting the traditional authority of both

parents and teachers and a greater reliance on external experts - are due to the influence of developmental psychology on both child-centred education and parenting (Tisdall, 2017). The ideas of theorists such as Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson emphasised the child's individual needs and interests, requiring parents to promote a nurturing and active learning environment that would support children's individual growth and development.

An unintended consequence of placing these demands on, mainly, mothers was an increased public focus on, and criticism of, parenting skills. In turn laying the foundation for the social investment perspective of the family that abounds in current social policy (Bothfeld and Rouault, 2014; Wainwright and Marandet, 2017). The pressures of child-centred approaches as central to social improvement were also felt by teachers as Spencer's (2012, p. 66) feminist critique explains:

'The teacher must be lovingly responsible for meeting all of the individual needs of the children at every moment – her failures in this task are guiltily interpreted as barriers to the realization of the modernist project'

The shift towards a more child-centred society was not a seamless change. It required a reconsideration of traditional hierarchies and power structures within families and communities. Additionally, the pace and extent of the shift varied across different social and cultural groups, depending on factors such as education, income, and geography (Henward, Tuaaa, Turituri, 2019). Furthermore, the move was accompanied by ongoing debates and tensions around issues such as parental authority, discipline, and the role of the state in supporting families (Wyness, 2014). As such, the shift towards a more child-centred society was a complex process, with different groups and individuals experiencing it in different ways and at different speeds.

In summary, the emergence of child centred parenting and teaching is a meaningful moment in the history of family learning England. It prioritised the individual needs of children, recognised the important role of parents and emphasised the value of strong home-school connections. In turn, this led to more scrutiny of parenting skills and laid the foundation for

the family as a site for social change, placing demands on teachers and parents as responsible for the creation of productive members of society.

### ***2.2.2 Beyond the Russell Report***

The publication of the Russell Report in 1973 accelerated the development of family learning in England, uniting expansion in three areas: adult education, community education, and parent engagement. The report highlighted the importance of adult education in meeting the needs of adults in all their roles, including parents (Freedman, 2022). Despite underwhelming then education Secretary Margaret Thatcher it mobilised local authority funded community education for the next two decades (Layer and Tuckett, 2019). The report underscored the significance of adult education in supporting families and communities, advocating for an increase in learning opportunities, especially for individuals previously marginalised from formal education. Fuelled by initiatives like 'A Right to Read', community-based adult education experienced growth in parallel with the evolving needs and interests of adults.

During the same period, the critical pedagogy movement was bolstered by the publication of Freire's (1970) influential *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* which argued that traditional education reinforced the status quo and oppressed marginalised communities. Critical pedagogy advocated for a transformative education that would enable learners to become critical thinkers and agents of social change. This view was shared by many in the adult education community, who sought to create educational opportunities that challenged power structures and addressed social injustices. Although, there was limited acknowledgement that participation in potentially transformative lifelong education is itself 'a deeply unequal matter' (Boeren, 2016, p.47). This inequality is evident in the limited scope, scale and status of community learning programmes and the lack of a robust accreditation scheme that would have allowed cross-sector mobility between community, colleges, and universities for adult learners (Layer and Tuckett, 2019).

By 1980, governmental guidance and legislation began to formalise parental involvement in schools, laying the groundwork for a subsequent shift towards parental engagement and family learning (Freedman, 2022). The 1980 Education Act established the foundational framework for school choice, requiring parents to make active choices about their children's schooling. Subsequent developments, such as the national curriculum, the establishment of Ofsted as a national inspectorate, and the implementation of Key Stage tests, established publicly accessible national standards and data that parents could consider. However, these initiatives also highlighted significant disparities in parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997)

Throughout the 1990s, local authorities increasingly implemented structured interventions to support parents, drawing inspiration from successful models in the United States (Hannon and Bird, 2004). For instance, the INSPIRE programme offered family learning in 400 schools, reaching 100,000 parents between 1995 and 2003. Additionally, in 1993, the first national family literacy program was launched by the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit, aiming to enhance both children's academic achievement and adults' employability (NIACE, 2013). While these initiatives marked significant progress in adult education and parental involvement in schools, debates about the nature and quality of evaluation processes remained a contentious issue, hindering comprehensive assessments of programme effectiveness in complex social settings (Hopson and Cram, 2018).

### ***2.2.3 Education, Education, Education and Skills for Life***

The arrival of New Labour in 1997 expanded family learning's presence in national policy, further positioning it as a way to ameliorate social disadvantage. This can be seen in the Government white paper 'Excellence in Schools' which states:

'Family learning is a powerful tool for reaching some of the most disadvantaged in our society. It has the potential to reinforce the role of the family and change attitudes to education, helping build strong local communities and widening participation in learning.'

The document includes a section on Parental Support where the Government lays out strong backing for family literacy programmes created by The Basic Skills Agency. This support is an indication that by 1997 family learning was positioned at the nexus between education and employment policy. The white paper commits to extending this initiative, focusing on areas with the most significant levels of disadvantage, and pledges to deliver 265 demonstration courses across 64 Local Authorities.

This emphasis on the significance of family learning and home/school connections in policy mobilised the creation of novel initiatives like home/school contracts. These contracts, while not legally binding, asked schools to outline the services they would provide to parents and the behaviours and support they anticipated in return (Freedman, 2022). The drive to increase family learning and parental involvement took place against a research backdrop that recognised and explored factors that influence home/school connections. For example, Vincent (1996) described how a misalignment between the cultural frameworks of parents and schools, can lead teachers to interpret parents as detached or disinterested during efforts to draw them into the school. These misinterpretations are based on white, middle-class norms and occur despite clear evidence – contemporaneously summarised by Henderson and Mapp (2002) – that most parents, irrespective of their race or socioeconomic background, demonstrate genuine interest in their children's education.

Researchers called policy makers attention to broader influences on parental involvement in education such as the community characteristics identified by Eccles and Harold (1996). These include organisation, networks, and access to resources. Setting expectations rooted in white middle-class norms and overlooking the impact unequal access to resources had a deleterious impact on some parent's confidence to offer appropriate and effective support. This is captured in Reay's (1998) study of working-class mothers who expressed self-doubt about their ability to offer educational support and guidance. To this end, Reay (2005) later queried a prevailing policy context that failed to acknowledge that parental choices are contingent on the availability of resources, which are inequitably distributed among individuals and communities.

Whilst cautionary messages from the academy persisted, policies aimed at increasing participation in family learning as a way to upskill adults and support children's education continued apace. By the early 2000s, the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda and the Skills for Life strategy worked in tandem to shape the focus and nature of family learning in England by linking improving parental literacy and numeracy levels with better economic and social wellbeing across the generations. This positioning was never more evident than in the creation of The Family Learning Impact Fund (FLIF) Programme a joint venture between the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, the Learning and Skills Council, the Learning and Skills Improvement Service and the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education.

Established in 2006, the fund underwent evaluation spanning from 2008 to 2011, engaging 136 local authority providers. FLIF aimed to increase participation from both at-risk families and fathers in family learning, broaden the scope of provision, and enhance focus on qualifications and progression to further education or employment. Around 13,000 new learners enrolled in FLIF programmes in each of its three years. The Government evaluation reports positive outcomes for the programme, including 85% of a sampled 2643 learners progressing in some way or another after participating in a FLIF course (Freedman, 2022). As a family learning tutor at this time, the impact reported in this evaluation offers a salient example of how policy making can construct narratives of deficit and improvement that may not accurately reflect the experience of those involved.

#### ***2.2.4 Troubled Families and Evidence Based Practice***

The advent of the coalition Government in May 2010 signalled a departure from the broader perspective of children's services within education in England. This shift in focus was evident in the immediate renaming of the Department for Children, Schools and Families back to the Department for Education (DfE). Incoming ministers believed that efforts to expand the role of schools into the broader children's services arena had diverted attention from the necessary focus on school and learning. Indeed, some educators had grown disillusioned

with the bureaucratic demands of the "Every Child Matters" age (Harris and Allen, 2009), prompting some academics to question the influence of a therapeutic ethos throughout the educational system (Ecclestone and Hayes, 2008).

By 2015, England witnessed the emergence of the Troubled Families initiative, a significant policy approach aimed at addressing the specific challenges faced by vulnerable families. This initiative mirrored the Government's shifting priorities and the evolving landscape of children's services. The Troubled Families initiative adopted a results-driven approach, targeting various interconnected issues within families. Despite its intentions, the programme encountered criticism on multiple fronts (Wills *et al.*, 2017). Detractors raised concerns about data accuracy, suggesting that the Government's claims of success were based on unreliable or manipulated data, thus complicating accurate assessments of the programme's impact. Furthermore, the term "troubled families" itself faced scrutiny for potentially stigmatising and labelling disadvantaged households, potentially discouraging them from seeking assistance. In addition to these challenges, the initiative's short-term focus and emphasis on quick results led to questions about the sustainability of positive changes in the lives of these families (Bonell, McKee and Fletcher, 2016).

Furthermore, during this period, local authorities faced severe reductions in central funding due to wide ranging austerity measures, leading to the removal of many non-statutory services. Despite this, existing services for parents did not entirely disappear, as numerous schools retained family support workers and similar roles, and several local authorities continued to operate their own family learning courses. However, there was a lack of national coordination beyond the allocation of the Adult Education Budget to local authorities. To this day, central Government lacks a specific policy concerning family learning, and schools do not have statutory obligations in this regard. Consequently, the provision of such services remains inconsistent and challenging to monitor or assess. A 2019 survey conducted by the Education Endowment Foundation revealed that fewer than half of the sampled schools (n=250) reported having a designated staff member responsible for parental engagement

nor could they point to policies tailored to engaging parents from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

The types of evaluations undertaken by the EEF, and others like them, have been called for increasingly as part of an evidence-based practice movement in England's education system. The movement's focus on data, metrics, and measurable outcomes was characterised by some as a shift towards a market-driven, neoliberal approach to education (Wainwright and Marandet, 2011; Goodall, 2021). The emphasis on quantitative data and measurable outcomes devalues qualitative, experiential, and contextual knowledge for policy making despite many quantitative studies acknowledging the importance of this type of data. The support for interventions that could be evaluated along cause/effect lines led to standardised programmes with rigid parameters that could be rolled out nationwide and were explicitly presented as evidence-based gaining popularity (Education Endowment Foundation, 2018) For example, the "Families and Schools Together" (FAST) programme and the "Triple P" (Positive Parenting Programme).

Despite the growing popularity of standardised programmes, local authorities in England continue to offer Family English, Maths, Language, Numeracy, and Wider Family Learning programmes. However, in 2023, the Department for Education proposed discontinuing funding for non-qualification provision not directly tied to employment outcomes starting from 2024-25. This decision sparked protests from the sector, leading to the restoration of family learning, health, wellbeing, and community integration as acceptable outcomes. The establishment of the National Centre for Family Learning by the Campaign for Learning in 2023 seeks to support practitioners in the field, with over 1,000 members already serving an estimated 240,000 families annually (Hill, 2023). This underscores the continued significance of family learning initiatives amidst evolving policies and priorities.



### **2.3 Conclusion**

In summary, this chapter outlines the evolution of family learning in England from the post-war period to the present, demonstrating significant shifts in policy, practice, and societal attitudes. While there has been progress in recognising the importance of parental involvement and addressing social disadvantage, ongoing challenges persist. These challenges include issues such as targeting and stigmatising families, rigid measurement criteria, marketisation, deficit approaches, and unequal distribution of power. As a family learning tutor navigating this complex landscape I encountered significant professional discomfort. In response, I developed a preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning, comprising Five Key Practices that helped me to make sense of my daily life and work. Published as a book chapter (Hardacre, 2017), this theory serves as the foundation for this inquiry. An abridged version of the Five Key Practices is presented in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 3: Authenticity as a Form of Resistance in Family Learning**

### **3.1 Why Start with a Preliminary Theory?**

This chapter presents an abridged version of the preliminary theory I developed after reflecting on my eight years of experience delivering local authority funded family learning. It is made up of Five Key Practices for Authentic Family Learning. The remainder of this study will examine, reconstruct and improve upon this theory. As a practitioner researcher, I opted to revisit an established theory of practice rather than attempting to develop a completely new one. This decision provides a more grounded starting point, enabling me to build upon existing knowledge and draw insights from my extensive practical experience to deepen understanding and refine the working theory (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Written in 2017, these practices represent my understanding of authenticity in family learning as I saw it at that time. Setting them out here, captures how the philosophy of authenticity became significant for guiding my own approach and mitigating the professional unease I encountered during my practice. This provides context for my journey from a worker who was content to follow the instructions of my employer without openly questioning structures and practices that felt oppressive or marginalising to one who began to challenge injustice and seek out alternative approaches.

### **3.2 Introducing the Preliminary Theory**

I and other practitioners find themselves at the interface between policy discourses of 'troubled families' and the parents labelled as such. These agendas may or may not align with the hopes and expectations of the parents enrolling on family learning course. There is, of course, a wide range of parental motivations and attitudes to family learning. Some parents are active participants in the school, some appear passive, whilst others may be avoidant. Parents may be positive about the school and how it supports their child, or critical, fearful, and disrespectful of them due to past personal experiences. The same complexities may be true for practitioners. Recognising the potentially competing aims of the participants, stakeholders and funders involved in a family learning course is particularly salient for the

practitioner who may find that their teaching values conflict with the procedures and best practice models of the service they are operating within.

### **3.2.1 Authentic Lifeworlds**

In the family learning (FEML) environment there are generally four participants, the practitioner, the primary school teacher/staff, the parent, and the child. Each of these has different lifeworlds (Habermas, 1984) which the authentic practitioner would work to identify and understand to better support the interaction between the four. By lifeworld Habermas means the shared values that evolve over time in a range of social groups. The lifeworld encompasses a wide range of different conventions and suppositions about "who we are as people and what we value about ourselves: what we believe, what shocks and offends us, what we aspire to, what we desire and what we are willing to sacrifice." (Calgary, n.d)

In Authentic Family Learning none of these lifeworlds is privileged above another although power is disproportionately allocated and therefore always relevant and impactful. As a result, the actions of the authentic practitioner have to convey equal value to all four participants and tackle difficulties up front. The authentic practitioner has to be cognisant of their power to legitimise the beliefs, values, actions and judgements of all the other participants.

One way to legitimise the power of the parents is family learning participants to be unapologetically visible within the school. This is underpinned by having a meaningful and productive purpose which cannot be undermined by superficial attributes such as dress code, accent, or dialect. Celebrating the adults' identity as parents is an important step in understanding the lifeworld of the families involved in Family English Maths and Language (FEML) courses. The message of this is that the parent is so important as an 'expert by experience' (Scourfield, 2010, p. 1891) that the child can, with the school's blessing, leave the mandated learning environment to be educated within the family in a third space (Pahl and Kelly, 2005).

### **3.2.2 Authentic Space**

Many people have had previous negative experiences of classrooms and therefore entering a primary school, with its alarmed gates, intercom systems and gatekeepers, can be daunting. Simple things like small chairs, desks, floor polish or sand trays can trigger an evocative set, of often painful, memories. Given that this is where FEML takes place the authentic practitioner has to signify that this space is different. A first, practical step, that the authentic practitioner would take, is to request and insist upon adult sized furniture, pens, cups and other equipment. This relates to the authentic practitioner advocating for the participants and acting as a mediator between the school and parents. The physical space will be more reminiscent of an informal learning environment in that adult-size desks will be positioned in a u-shape or chairs placed in a circle.

Another way to welcome and engage participants, and limit the school-power dynamic, is to delay or minimise administrative activities in the initial weeks of a course. Emphasis is placed on them as people, rather than their demographic features. Seemingly small actions, such as this, disrupt the conventions of educational courses and set an authentic tone. The most important distinction family learning spaces have over a typical classroom is the inclusion of parents and children as partners in their learning. Creating a productive, focused and busy space where parent and child work together to achieve the overarching group goal. The active engagement of both the parent and child is essential to authentic practice as it provides the meaningful activity that is a key principle of Authentic Family Learning.

### **3.2.3 Authentic Agendas**

Establishing shared goals focused on real tasks is perhaps the most fundamental aspect of authentic learning. Many families have experienced a pathological, deficit-based approach where they are told what is wrong with them and what they need to do to 'get better'. It may therefore be a challenge, or a delight for families to experience truly shared goal setting.

The authentic practitioner will need to establish trust and build constructive relationships with families in order to agree a shared goal that works for everyone. This is facilitated by a slowing down of 'the business' of establishing a course and investing time in rapport building, natural interaction and the emergence parents' agendas. This is purposeful rather than aimless chat. It is time invested in the parents, rather than the schools', interests. Rigid and bureaucratic activities should be avoided during this time as they are barriers to relationship building.

It should be noted that enacting authenticity in practice requires careful self-management in which the professional role does not disappear, to be replaced with unfettered friendship. Rather, the practitioner seeks to retain professionalism but shed hierarchy. For example, first name terms are used for everyone, signifying equity, and difference to normal primary school practice. Another example of this is establishing shared leadership within the group and the practitioner often becoming part of the group.

### ***3.2.4 Authentic Actions***

The authentic practitioner will be deeply curious about the lives of the families in order to plan what 'meaningful' activities might look like. Not only do the materials need be authentic e.g., writing real invitations for an educational trip, not filling in worksheets, but the task also needs to be authentic e.g., looking for appropriate places to visit online (Jacobsen, Degener, and Purcell-Gates, 2003).

One of the most effective ways I have found to develop authenticity in practice, and one which is particularly suited to family learning, is devising and completing a shared task. In one setting this involved fundraising, planning, executing, and celebrating an educational visit to an indoor ski slope. The huge range of discrete literacy tasks within this shared activity were all real. This task included the parents' interests, a wide range of real choices and the parents carrying out the actions. Alongside the gains in literacy, it is questioning why they

are in these situations, why these tasks are meaningful to them that enables the families to develop a critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).

### ***3.2.5 Authentic Relating***

Family learning is special because of the relationship between child and parent. This bond provides a sense of legitimacy to nearly all parents who attend family learning. It gives them the 'right' to be in the class. Those who lack confidence in their parenting skills or literacy still have the moment in the class where the children come running in, looking for and then claiming their parent. This moment is important.

This 'legitimising' moment is built on through the shared goal approach within authentic learning. We decide to do some good within the school – a fundraising activity for example. This gives the family learning group a special status in the school as we are working toward our shared goal in a public manner – we put up posters, we bustle around the school in the official, purposeful manner that teachers often have, and word gets round that the children leave class to come to family learning group. We gain a special status that has a bolstering effect on the relationships between participants who share in this distinct experience.

It is often not long after this stage that interpersonal issues can arise, as parents and children adjust to the responsibilities and demands the group task may place on them, but the children's presence has a grounding effect that acts as a touchstone for refocusing energy towards the shared goal. The roles of trust and reciprocity are significant in this practice of Authentic Family Learning. The approach can be unsettling because it eschews the formal boundaries of typical courses that aim at improving and upskilling adults.

The rejection of inauthentic action by, for example, avoiding forms of initial assessment which emphasise the adult's lack of skills rather than uncovering their abilities, can in some instances create a vacuum where conflict might emerge. The lack of hierarchy and imposed activity can also create suspicion and confusion as the accepted role of teacher and student are not being taken up, creating a period of negotiation and in some cases boundary testing.

It is during this phase that the practitioner should maintain a focus on the shared goal, the enjoyment and engagement with the children.

### **3.3 Reflecting on Progress, Preparing for Praxis**

In conclusion, my attempt to integrate authenticity into Family Learning by developing The Five Key Practices was a form of resistance against oppressive structures and practices (Morley, 2008). The preliminary theory recognises the intricate web of policies, expectations, and motivations that intersect within family learning courses. It is an acknowledgment that practitioners are not passive conduits but active agents who can challenge injustice and promote empowerment for families. The practices emphasise the importance of understanding diverse lifeworlds, creating authentic spaces, setting shared agendas, engaging in meaningful actions, and fostering authentic relationships. However, they emerged from looking back at prior practice and are relatively disconnected from theory having been developed through reflection-on-action (Schön, 1995).

Now, my focus shifts towards a deeper exploration and evaluation of the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning. This exploration will be informed by the combined insights from a scoping literature review, presented in the next chapter, and a qualitative research approach, aiming to bridge the gap between theory and practice. This next phase of the research seeks to connect the theoretical framework of the Five Key Practices with real-world experiences and perspectives. Through this qualitative inquiry, I aspire to refine and enrich the preliminary theory, ensuring it aligns more closely with the lived experiences of those it seeks to empower. In doing so, the research not only contributes to the development of a more robust theoretical framework for Authentic Family Learning but also strives to make this theory more accessible and applicable for practitioners in the field. It represents a critical step in the journey towards praxis, where theory and practice are intimately intertwined, and where practitioners can become agents of change within the family learning context.

## **Chapter 4: Scoping Literature Review**

To develop the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning a scoping review (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005) of literature was undertaken to examine the extent, range, and nature of research activity relating to authentic learning, family learning and critical pedagogy. The aim is to explore relevant literature to see how others apply the concepts of authentic learning and critical pedagogy to provide new perspective on my initial framing of Authentic Family Learning. For this reason, I use the Five Key Practices as a set of themes to structure the review. This will shed light on areas that require more thought and begin the process of extending and reconceptualising the theory. A form of knowledge synthesis, the scoping review approach was selected because they are used to describe the breadth of an existent knowledge base and inform future research, practice, and policy (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005; Westphaln *et al.*, 2021).

To structure this chapter, I will first provide an overview of the concepts I used to scope the literature, I will then explain the method I used to conduct the search and complete the analysis of the literature, after this I will set out the findings of the review before ending the chapter by summarising the insights gained from completing the scoping review and how they have enriched the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning.

### **4.1 Overview of concepts**

To provide a clear foundation for the literature review, I start with a brief overview of the concepts used to scope the literature: authentic learning, family learning, and critical pedagogy. I offer a more detailed explanation of each of these concepts in [Appendix 2](#). This step serves multiple functions. It ensures that all readers, regardless of their familiarity with these terms, have a shared understanding, minimising potential confusion and enhancing the overall coherence of the review. Furthermore, this overview provides context and rationale for the review, making it clear why the intersection of authentic learning, family learning, and critical pedagogy is worth exploring and what readers can expect from my analysis of the existing literature. The summary also introduces the fundamental ideas



inherent to each concept, setting the scene for how they are applied in the literature. Essentially, this overview acts as a conceptual framework, providing a roadmap for readers to navigate the subsequent content.

To summarise, I selected critical pedagogy because my Family Learning practice is inspired by critical pedagogues, particularly Freire (1970) and his banking concept of education, Giroux's (2016) discussion of hidden curriculum and Kincheloe's (2008) thinking on post-formal learning. A common thread between each of these scholars' work is the value of experiential learning and the importance of considering the humanity, existing knowledge and identify of learners; this led me to the influence of Dewey (1938) and Habermas (1984) on the field of critical pedagogy. The next concept that was used in the systematic search was authentic learning. This is because, when I set out to develop teaching materials that were rooted in real-world, rather than classroom-only activity, I encountered instructive literature that often used the term authentic as part of defining their approach. In particular, I drew on Jacobsen, Degener, and Purcell-Gates' (2003) guide to authentic teaching, Newmann and Wehlage's (1993) five standards of authentic instruction and Lave and Wenger's (1991) discussion of situated learning. Finally, Family Learning was selected as a concept for the literature search as it is the central focus of my practice and this study.

#### **4.2 Using a Scoping Review to Connect Practice to Theory**

A scoping review of a body of literature can be of particular use when the topic is of a complex or heterogeneous nature (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005; Colquhoun *et al.*, 2014; Tricco *et al.*, 2018; Ritoša *et al.*, 2023) which is the case for studies that relate to authentic learning, critical pedagogy and family learning. I decided to scope the literature using the three concepts of family learning, critical pedagogy, and authentic learning because they play a central role in guiding my practice as an educator, providing the foundation for the preliminary theory. The aim of this review is to refine my preliminary theory by connecting it to extant knowledge, thus adding depth and detail to my working ideas about my practice. I will now explain the method used to review the literature, after which I will set out the

findings. Then, at the end of this chapter, I will summarise how this review has contributed to the refinement of my preliminary theory.

### **4.3 Method**

To conduct the review, I apply Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) scoping review framework, consisting of four primary stages: identifying a research question, searching and selecting relevant literature, charting data, and reporting findings. As noted above, I selected this framework because it offers a systematic method for comprehensively exploring a wide-ranging body of literature to consolidate knowledge within a broad topic area (Davis, Drey, & Gould, 2009; Pham et al., 2014). This serves the purpose of this review, which is to develop the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning by examining the nature of research relating to authentic learning, family learning and critical pedagogy.

#### ***4.3.1 Stage One: Identification of the research question***

The question for this scoping review was: What can literature relating to authentic learning, critical pedagogy, and family learning add to a preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning?

#### ***4.3.2 Stage Two: Identification and Selection of Relevant Literature***

Three online databases were utilised considering their subject coverage, date range, search capabilities, and reputation. The specific rationale for choosing each database is briefly summarised in Table 4.1 below.

<b>Database</b>	<b>Coverage and Size</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
Academic Search Complete	Varies according to the journal – earliest title = 1887. Over 5,500 journals including more than 4,600 peer reviewed titles, plus over 10,000 publications including monographs, reports and conference proceedings.	Chosen for multidisciplinary coverage Good for English practice

Education Source	Varies according to the journal - earliest title = 1929. Full text for 1,800+ titles. Full text for 550+ books and monographs.	Chosen for education specific content
Taylor and Francis Journals Online	Date Range: Varies with each journal title Size: 1,600+ journals and reference works	Chosen for education specific content

Table 4.1. Databases for Literature Search

Next, keywords were derived from the research question for input into the online databases as summarised in Table 4.2. Keywords were deliberately broad to capture a wide array of literature, which could later be refined through inclusion and exclusion criteria.

<b>Search 1 Concept:</b> <i>Authentic Learning</i>	<b>Search 2 Concept:</b> <i>Family Learning</i>	<b>Search 3 Concept:</b> <i>Critical Pedagogy</i>
<b>Keywords/phrases:</b>  "Authentic Learning" "Authentic Instruction"	<b>Keywords/phrases:</b>  "Family Learning" "Family Learn*" "Parental Involvement" "Parental Engagement" "FEML"	<b>Keywords/phrases:</b>  "Critical Pedagogy" "Radical Pedagogy" "Collaborative Learning" "Community Learning"

Table 4.2. Keywords for Literature Search

The keywords were used to run three separate, identical searches across the three databases. The results of each search were combined and de-duplicated for any items that were found in multiple databases. The inclusion criteria for this review were articles in papers relating to education that explored one or more of the three concepts of authentic learning, family learning and critical pedagogy and were published from 1970 up to 2023. Articles were excluded that did not include at least one of the three concepts or were published outside the specified timeframe. The outcome of each search is summarised in the table below and provided a total of 61 papers.

<b>Searches in Academic Search Complete using BOOLEAN (AND &amp; OR)</b>			
"critical pedagogy"] OR [All: "radical pedagogy"] OR [All: "community learning"] OR [[All: "collaborative learning"] AND [All: "family learning"]] OR [[All: "family learn*"] AND [All: "parental involvement"]] OR [All: "parental engagement"] OR [All: "family literacy"] AND [Publication Date: (01/01/2003 TO 30/09/2023)]			
<b>Concept #</b>	<b>Search #</b>	<b>Search terms</b>	<b>Results</b>
1	S1	"Authentic Learning"	361
1	S2	"Authentic Learn*"	365
<b>Set 1</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S1 OR S2</b>	<b>365</b>
2	S4	"Family Learning"	71
2	S5	"Family Learn*"	218
2	S6	"Parental Involvement"	6760
2	S7	"Parental Engagement"	206
2	S8	"Family Literacy"	4
<b>Set 2</b>	<b>S9</b>	<b>S4 OR S5 OR S6 OR S7 OR S8</b>	<b>7121</b>
3	S10	"Critical Pedagogy"	1373
3	S11	"Radical Pedagogy"	54
3	S12	"Collaborative Learning"	4122
3	S13	"Community Learning"	2038
<b>Set 3</b>	<b>S14</b>	<b>S10 OR S11 OR S12 OR S13</b>	<b>7533</b>
<b>Final set</b>	<b>S15</b>	<b>S3 AND S9 AND S14</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>S16</b>	<b>S3 AND S9</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>S17</b>	<b>S9 AND S14</b>	<b>13</b>
	<b>S18</b>	<b>S3 AND S14</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Searches in Education Source using BOOLEAN (AND &amp; OR)</b>			
"critical pedagogy"] OR [All: "radical pedagogy"] OR [All: "community learning"] OR [[All: "collaborative learning"] AND [All: "family learning"]] OR [[All: "family learn*"] AND [All: "parental involvement"]] OR [All: "parental engagement"] OR [All: "family literacy"] AND [Publication Date: (01/01/2003 TO 30/09/2023)]			
<b>Concept #</b>	<b>Search #</b>	<b>Search terms</b>	<b>Results</b>
1	S1	"Authentic Learning"	671

1	S2	"Authentic Learn*"	680
<b>Set 1</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S1 OR S2</b>	<b>680</b>
2	S4	"Family Learning"	105
2	S5	"Family Learn*"	111
2	S6	"Parental Involvement"	5595
2	S7	"Parental Engagement"	169
2	S8	"Family Literacy"	1
<b>Set 2</b>	<b>S9</b>	<b>S4 OR S5 OR S6 OR S7 OR S8</b>	<b>5802</b>
3	S10	"Critical Pedagogy"	2401
3	S11	"Radical Pedagogy"	839
3	S12	"Collaborative Learning"	6086
3	S13	"Community Learning"	785
<b>Set 3</b>	<b>S14</b>	<b>S10 OR S11 OR S12 OR S13</b>	<b>9382</b>
<b>Final set</b>	<b>S15</b>	<b>S3 AND S9 AND S14</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>S16</b>	<b>S3 AND S9</b>	<b>0</b>
	<b>S17</b>	<b>S9 AND S14</b>	<b>23</b>
	<b>S18</b>	<b>S3 AND S14</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Searches in Taylor and Francis Journals Online using BOOLEAN (AND &amp; OR)</b>			
"critical pedagogy"] OR [All: "radical pedagogy"] OR [All: "community learning"] OR [[All: "collaborative learning"] AND [All: "family learning"]] OR [[All: "family learn*"] AND [All: "parental involvement"]] OR [All: "parental engagement"] OR [All: "family literacy"] AND [Publication Date: (01/01/2003 TO 30/09/2023)]			
<b>Concept #</b>	<b>Search #</b>	<b>Search terms</b>	<b>Results</b>
1	S1	"Authentic Learning"	2104
1	S2	"Authentic Learn*"	1
<b>Set 1</b>	<b>S3</b>	<b>S1 OR S2</b>	<b>2105</b>
2	S4	"Family Learning"	633
2	S5	"Family Learn*"	77
2	S6	"Parental Involvement"	9120
2	S7	"Parental Engagement"	594

2	S8	"Family Literacy"	954
<b>Set 2</b>	<b>S9</b>	<b>S4 OR S5 OR S6 OR S7 OR S8</b>	<b>10819</b>
3	S10	"Critical Pedagogy"	5040
3	S11	"Radical Pedagogy"	467
3	S12	"Collaborative Learning"	9819
3	S13	"Community Learning"	1876
<b>Set 3</b>	<b>S14</b>	<b>S10 OR S11 OR S12 OR S13</b>	<b>16,640</b>
<b>Final set</b>	<b>S15</b>	<b>S3 AND S9 AND S14</b>	<b>8657</b>
		<b>Filtered by Last 20 Years AND Full Text Online</b>	<b>497</b>
		<b>Filtered by Abstract</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Searches cross-referenced from THREE databases</b>			
<b>Database Searches and number of Results</b>			
	Academic Search Complete	Education Source	Taylor and Francis Journals Online
<b>Search Concept Set 1:</b> combined with OR	365	680	2105
<b>Search Concept Set 2:</b> combined with OR	7121	5802	10819
<b>Search Concept Set 3</b> combined with OR	7533	9382	16640
Search Sets Combined with AND	S9 and S14: 13 S3 and S14: 21	S9 and S14: 23 S3 and S14: 38	8657
After Online Only and Published within 50 Years			497
After Abstract Sift			20
Total unfiltered results			115
Results after De-duplication			91
Relevant after abstract sift			68
Relevant after reading			61

Table 4.3. Outcome of Literature Search by Database

The initial screening involved reviewing the abstracts of the articles left after de-duplication to determine their relevance to the scoping review question and whether they met the

inclusion and exclusion criteria. The majority of articles removed at this stage either discussed one or more of the three concepts but lacked clear relevance to family learning, or they focused on a type of family learning, such as museum-based family learning, which was outside the scope of this thesis. As a result, 61 articles remained for further consideration in the scoping review. These 61 articles encompassed a variety of research types, including small-scale primary studies, discussion papers, and literature reviews. Though systematic reviews may focus on primary research, a scoping review is designed to 'provide an overview of the existing evidence base regardless of quality' (Peters *et al.*, 2015, p. 142). Therefore, primary and secondary articles of varying size and scope have been included in this review.

This inclusive approach aligns with the principles of critical pedagogy and knowledge democracy (Rowell and Feldman, 2019) which emphasise engaging with voices that have less influence or power. It is important to emphasise that the same rigorous analytical and evaluative criteria will be applied to all included studies, whether they are highly-cited and well-funded or small-scale studies by early career or practitioner-researchers. The goal is to minimise bias against the latter groups. Furthermore, the prevalence of small-scale primary research in the existing literature suggests a trend in family learning research. This trend underscores a potential need for increased investment in larger-scale studies in this field to gain a more comprehensive understanding of family learning.

#### **4.3.5 Stage Three: Charting the Data**

The 61 articles were reviewed, and key points charted in a spreadsheet to identify interconnected concepts (Figure 4.4). The Five Key Practices were used as an organising framework for this analysis. Through this iterative process, I discovered fresh perspectives on critical pedagogy, family learning, and authentic learning, which contribute to the initial theory of Authentic Family Learning and will be discussed in the findings.

Text	Authentic Place	Authentic Action	Authentic Relationship	Authentic Reflection	Family Learning	Literature Search/Concept Map
Agnes, K. (2007). Every child matters: Change for parents and families? Can schools work with families to promote knowledge and understanding of government expectations? <i>Education 3-7</i> , 28(3), pp. 295-303. doi: 10.1080/00420170701487137	extended schools and other flexi, in particular, as a means of reaching isolated and the engagement of parents, families and the community, by changing the perception of the school (MACE, 2006, p. 300).	the school is not seen as a means of ensuring that results are driven by the cohort of the people who would have access to relevant professional expertise. (Stevens and Gault (2002), p. 516)	the school is not seen as a means of ensuring that results are driven by the cohort of the people who would have access to relevant professional expertise. (Stevens and Gault (2002), p. 516)	the school is not seen as a means of ensuring that results are driven by the cohort of the people who would have access to relevant professional expertise. (Stevens and Gault (2002), p. 516)		
Adkinson, E. & Blaxell, T. (2010). Thinking Critically in the 21st Century Classroom: Promoting Social Justice and Encouraging Change? <i>Journal of Learning Theory</i> , 17(1), pp. 64-73.		critical involvement in our broad history of a sense of social responsibility, pushing for students to connect but not here for they are working during the period. (p. 65)	the most important aspect of the course design for effective implementation of a critical sense of learning pedagogy involves getting to know our students. (p. 70)	Many service-learning courses merely require that students complete a point-of-view reflection, in which they look back on the progression of their work about the program and the community partners with which they worked. However, we argue that it is just as important for students to spend time at the beginning of the course reflecting on the ways that they connect to the class before having engaged in any service-learning. In this way, both students and instructors are able to assess student progress throughout the course and adjust to which their area of focus has evolved.		
Amunson, K. A., Matthews, T., West, K., Belsky, N. and Dool, S. (2018). Evaluation of the Parenting/Adulthood of Learning/Adulthood? <i>Journal of Learning Theory</i> , London: DE	understand the role of the parent in a parenting intervention programme to have a shared goal.				history comes to context and history program and investment in evidence-based practice based on US models. This paper notes the slow endorsement of US approaches to evidence-based parenting intervention and also suggests settings as parenting practice in schools. (MPP) came to be in charge of US? (Mace, 2006, p. 300)	
Barlow, H. A. (2000). Literacy at home: home learning parent involvement. <i>Reading Research Quarterly</i> , 34(1), pp. 300-308.	The author acknowledges and children use their parents and noted that the response there was a preoccupation with social issues, discrimination, violence, education, and success in life. "Usually in class, when I give a sample of other writing, the students spend a lot of time talking back home to their parents to resist. There was the one who provided feedback on how to modify the piece. A few of the pieces that were finally submitted had changed significantly from their original ones." (p. 307)	The purpose of the assignment was to engage and involve parents in meaningful literacy activities that they could share with their children. This goal of these activities (involving writing in a shared language of parent/child) reflects the author's understanding of the parent's existing literacy practices and the importance of the parent's role in the child's literacy development. (p. 307)	that ongoing work is not possible because of reading the world, but a certain kind of strategy is working... For this reason, I have also reported that work on writing in a shared language of parent/child reflects the author's understanding of the parent's existing literacy practices and the importance of the parent's role in the child's literacy development. (p. 307)	parents' views were not possible because of reading the world, but a certain kind of strategy is working... For this reason, I have also reported that work on writing in a shared language of parent/child reflects the author's understanding of the parent's existing literacy practices and the importance of the parent's role in the child's literacy development. (p. 307)		
Barnett, Hugh, C. & Maloney, C. (2015). <i>Stronger Together: Designing an Evaluation of a Family Learning Program for Parents, Teachers, and Schools</i> . <i>Journal of Educational Research</i> , 20(4), pp. 264-280.					history comes to context and history program and investment in evidence-based practice based on US models. This paper notes the slow endorsement of US approaches to evidence-based parenting intervention and also suggests settings as parenting practice in schools. (MPP) came to be in charge of US? (Mace, 2006, p. 300)	
Dea, A. & Pridemore, J. (2005). Promoting Knowledge and Understanding of Government Expectations through Parenting Programs. <i>Journal of Educational Research</i> , 20(4), pp. 264-280.	The authors caution against confining the learners to literacy or literacy with the US university student writing practice as a way of getting a sense of what the real world has to offer. This speaks to understanding the essential role of the parent in the child's literacy development. The article states that "studies have shown that all	The authors caution against confining the learners to literacy or literacy with the US university student writing practice as a way of getting a sense of what the real world has to offer. This speaks to understanding the essential role of the parent in the child's literacy development. The article states that "studies have shown that all	The authors caution against confining the learners to literacy or literacy with the US university student writing practice as a way of getting a sense of what the real world has to offer. This speaks to understanding the essential role of the parent in the child's literacy development. The article states that "studies have shown that all	The authors caution against confining the learners to literacy or literacy with the US university student writing practice as a way of getting a sense of what the real world has to offer. This speaks to understanding the essential role of the parent in the child's literacy development. The article states that "studies have shown that all		

Figure 4.1: Spreadsheet Charting Key Points in Literature

#### 4.3.4 Stage Four: Reporting the Findings

To provide a meaningful framework for organising the insights from this review, the Five Key Practices of AFL are used as a set of subheadings for presenting the findings. The findings conclude by summarising novel perspectives in relation to the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning. It is important to recognise that this review is inevitably incomplete due to the expansive nature of the concepts it addresses and the inherent constraint of having a finite number of studies available for analysis. However, the primary purpose of this literature review is not to provide an exhaustive and comprehensive overview of all existing research on the topics in question. Instead, it serves as a starting point for the development of a preliminary theory. The emergence of novel perspectives emanating from literature on critical pedagogy, family learning, and authentic learning during the iterative analysis process is a testament to the review's strength.



## **4.4. Literature Review Findings**

### ***4.4.1 Authentic Lifeworlds in the Literature***

As noted above, in my preliminary theory of AFL valuing the existing lifeworlds of participants is essential. Whilst the term lifeworlds was not encountered in the scoping search, commensurate concepts such as 'identity', 'lived experience' and 'socio-cultural factors' appear frequently and are positioned as important when working with parents (Harris and Goodall, 2007; Goodall and Montgomery, 2014; Lexmond, Bazalgette, and Margo, 2011; Timmons and Pelletier, 2014; Brown, 1998; Carpentieri, 2013). For example, Harris and Goodall (2007, p.6) suggest that schools attend to parents lived experiences when seeking to engage them in their children's learning because dismissive attitudes to 'practical issues such as lack of time, language barriers, child care issues and practical skills such as literacy issues and the ability to understand and negotiate the school system' are likely to manufacture and reinforce barriers between schools and parents.

Timmons and Petellier (2014, p.513) relate rigid and uncompromising approaches, which privilege the needs of schools and marginalise the needs of families, to deficit models of family support that maintain 'a one-way transfer of knowledge, which often excludes parents' own knowledge and experiences'. They argue, in line with Dixon and Lewis (2008) and Rocha-Smidt (2008) that programmes would be more successful if they took the diverse perspectives and practices of families into account more fully. This is particularly out of concern for the disorienting impact different expectations and demands, at home and at school, can have on both children and parents. Suggestions for addressing this deficit approach abound across the sources under review here and, in accordance with the practice of Authentic Lifeworlds, point to the benefits of developing a socio-contextual approach which is family-relevant, as well as school-relevant (Brown, 1998).

Specific steps for moving towards a socio-contextual approach are articulated with much less frequency and detail in the extant literature under review here, although some guiding

principles are evidenced. For example, Goodall and Montgomery (2014) draw on Crozier and Reay (2005) to suggest that immediate relationships and personalised knowledge of the participants are a way to move toward more socially-situated practice with families. This corresponds to dialogic approaches which are characterised by an interchange of values, ideas and experiences in a two-way flow between stakeholders. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2004) places this sort of parental engagement, that is fluid, informal and dialogue-based, in contrast with the potentially superficial nature of highly-ritualised school activities such as parents' evenings. However, Elish-Piper's (2000) study, which analyses the social-contextual nature of adult education in urban family literacy programmes, cautions against tokenistic forms of parental-engagement. Whereby, programmes use a dialogic approach to collect information about family strengths, needs, and goals but do not use these details to inform the content or structure of courses.

A potential counter to this can be inferred from the work of Lexmond, Bazalgette, and Margo (2011) who discuss 'community parenting', wherein members of a group develop a network through which 'informal emotional or instrumental support' travels. This generates 'collective efficacy' whereby the community tacitly shapes agreed ways of acting. Potentially then, if a Family Learning practitioner takes conscious steps to join such a network and to share in the negotiation of norms and values it could lead to a more socially-contextualised approach where lifeworlds are revealed in a multi-directional manner, including participant to participant, as opposed to just tutor to participant. Shifting the development of socially-contextualised practice to a shared experience rather than a tutor-led obligation.

This approach has the potential to build what Bryk and Schneider (2002) call "relational trust" which may be lacking between educators and parents who have had poor prior experiences of education. Meaning it is hard for either party to understand the motivation or actions of the other. Arguably, emphasising the importance of learning the differences and similarities between each other's values and beliefs is a practical form of critical pedagogy. Which has the potential to prompt practitioners to 'consider their own identities and contexts, not just

those of the community members' (Ashworth and Bourelle, 2014, p.64). This is highly resonant with the Authentic Lifeworlds practice which requires practitioners to understand their own role and identity and how this intersects with the role and identities of the people with whom they work.

Alongside the concern, noted above, about superficial engagement with the lifeworlds of participants, unease is evident in the literature about identifying parenting approaches that do not conform to professional expectations, solely to apply normative ideals about appropriate ways of doing and being (Argent, 2007; Wainwright and Marendet, 2013). The consequences of which are apparent in Bryan and Henry's (2012, p.414) point that 'educator attitudes about families and partnerships determine how they treat families and partnerships'. Suggesting that programmes that seek to identify and then improve certain parents, may be rooted in patronising, pessimistic or disapproving attitudes which are unlikely to be explicit but will shape interactions between participant and practitioner. This makes the argument for consciously working to understand differing lifeworlds as opposed to assumptively rejecting practices and perceptions that differ from our own.

Wainwright and Maradet (2017, p. 214) draw on Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2014) to argue that judgemental attitudes about the way families function reflects and reinforces the "'professionalization of parenting" whereby parenting is redefined as a set of skills to be taught, understood and practised'. This when coupled with a dominant discourse of politicised notions of resilience, aspiration and self-determination (Raco, 2009; Bottrell, 2013) positions families as responsible for improving themselves in line with normative perceptions of parenting and supported by state-approved programmes such as Family English, Maths and Language which have employability as a central focus.

In summary, Authentic Lifeworlds is resonant with the literature, in the use of commensurate concepts such as engaging with participants lived experiences (Timmons and Petellier, 2014) and conducting 'socio-contextual' practice (Brown, 1998). There are also corresponding

principles for achieving this, such as forging direct relationships with, and gaining immediate knowledge of, the communities with whom programmes are delivered. Several papers were clear about the need to avoid tokenistic dialogue with parents and to be conscious about incorporating parent perspectives through collaborative and participatory methods, as opposed to consulting but ultimately ignoring or dismissing responses (Elish-Piper, 2000; Argent, 2007; Bryan and Henry, 2012). Additionally, the idea of targeting certain groups was linked to a politicised discourse of aspiration and professionalised parenting which could lead to normative impositions by practitioners delivering programmes such as FEML that are rooted in a social investment perspective (Wainwright and Marandet, 2017). Thus, working to consciously reveal and engage with the lifeworlds of parents carries with it the risk of exposing participants to oppressive measures that is not fully accounted for in the current description of Authentic Family Learning.

#### ***4.4.2 Authentic Place in the Literature***

A number of sources in the literature under review here also describe how a return to learning in a primary school setting can be a barrier for participants in Family Learning (Brasset-Grundy, 2001; Black, 2007; Bird, 2005; Demie and Lewis, 2011; West, 2005; Moriarty, 2001; Wainwright and Marandet, 2017; Lexmond, Bazalgette and Margo, 2011; Kwan and Wong, 2016; Lamb 2009). Brasset-Grundy (2001) surveyed non-participating parents to find out why they chose not to engage and found a common reason was previous bad experience of learning at school and concern about entering a formal educational space. Moriarity (2001, p.96) suggests that these prior experiences reinforce the gap between 'parents own cultural frameworks and those of the school' which results in families distancing themselves from the school. Similarly, a survey by Hannon and Bird (2004) found that low levels of confidence and comfort in educational settings were powerful barriers to engaging in Family Learning. As a result, they suggest moving Family Learning activities out of school spaces and into alternative venues such as health clinics, colleges and libraries.

Wainwright and Marandet (2017, p. 219) point out that schools are 'central to everyday geographies of parents' and that this positions them as a useful space for identifying families in need of additional support. This use of schools, as a space for enacting public policy is a matter of concern for some scholars who suggest that because 'schools are essentially a middle-class institution' (Kwan and Wong, 2016, p.92), with norms that may differ from other socio-economic groupings, it becomes a foregone conclusion that disadvantage and negative parenting practices are inextricably linked. A claim addressed by Lexmond, Bazalgette and Margo (2011, p.87) who undertook qualitative research in an area with high levels of deprivation, unemployment and crime in Glasgow. They found a key feature of daily life 'was the presence of familiar and trusted family friends and neighbours, and open communication and trust between parents and children'. Disrupting the idea that parenting problems are wide-spread in areas experiencing poverty, a stagnant labour market and criminality.

Tackling a disconnect between the broader community and the primary school where Family Learning classes take place is important because, as noted by Champan and Harris (2004) and Loughrey and Woods (2010, p.82), this divide can lead families to 'view schools with mistrust and suspicion and...not see education as having much to do with their everyday lives'. Creating a welcoming and comfortable environment is a facet of building trust and demonstrating the value a school places on the role of parents. Lamb (2009, p.8) documents a concerning disregard for the way Family Learning courses are delivered in primary schools in England noting:

'examples include classes taking place in corners of the staff room with constant interruptions; inappropriate furniture to meet the needs of adults; and courses cancelled because schools require children to be involved in an activity that is seen as a greater priority.'

McInerney, Smyth and Down 's (2011, p.5) work on place-based education is a useful lens through which to critique this sort of approach as it points out 'that how we see the world is profoundly influenced by the geographical, social and cultural attributes of the place(s) we inhabit'. Thus, the Family Learning space should communicate a high regard for parents

and children learning together in a manner that directly connects to the lives and interests of the families involved. McInerney, Smyth and Down (2011) suggest that place-based educators should work to diminish the remoteness of school from life by positioning 'place' as a guiding principle not only for classroom design but also for curriculum and teaching practice. This extends my articulation of Authentic Place beyond its current focus on the physical environment as an affective element of the learning experience and resonates with other Key Practices such as Authentic Lifeworlds which call for a socially and culturally-situated approach to learning. Indicating that the overlaps and links between the Six Key Practices of Authentic Family Learning require more attention.

As well as McInerney, Smyth and Down (2011), other scholars, such as Leander and Sheehy (2004, p.3), approach the role of place in learning through the idea that 'discursive practices actively produce space'. This concept, employed by Pahl (2005, p.92) contends that 'a space can be created by a discourse community, such as a street gang, or a temporary group within a specific setting such as a family literacy class'. Pahl (2005) suggests that the space created by Family Learning groups, discernible through its collaborative reading and writing practices, can be understood as a 'third space between home and school offering parents and children discursive opportunities drawing on both domains'. This is a hallmark of Family Learning space because it indicates how the 'material reality of the home or the school is superseded by the context, which draws on both discourses' (Pahl, 2005, p.92). A circumstance that allows the participants to co-create a space that is distinct from, but not untouched by, potentially poor experiences in educational settings, instrumental and corrective perceptions of establishment figures and their existing norms for behaviour and learning in the home.

Heydon and Reilly (2007, p.157) also use third space thinking to describe how Family Learning might increase 'the value attributed to home activity at school and school activity at home'. A suggestion reminiscent of Epstein's (2010) widely cited call for family-like schools and school-like families. Creating a bridging space between home and school where schools

take on a nurturing and inclusive nature and families reinforce the value of homework, classroom norms and high engagement with learning. This perspective leans more on the outcomes Family Learning offers to schools and an AFL framing would suggest balancing whose aims are being served by creating a space which bridges the home and school. McNamara *et al.*'s (2000) work relates this to a social policy agenda which positions parents and teachers as partners in educating children. Some, including Wainwright and Marandet (2011) characterise this as a neoliberal shift which is drawing increasing attention to the home-school dynamic. The home-school relationship has thus come into the spotlight and a more dynamic and interactive link is now expected, with Family Learning one way of encouraging this. Although, it should be noted that equitable intentions are evident in Heydon and Reilly's (2007, p.157) discussion of third space for example when they suggest that its effectiveness 'rests on using learners' own knowledge to inform the curriculum and in developing more flexible and equal partnerships between teachers and learners.'. This indicates the importance of including families in the design of Family Learning in order to foster a sense of belonging.

The relationship between belonging and place is picked up on by Wainwright and Marandet (2011, p.95) when they point out that the 'immediate site of learning is used to create, alter or expand aspirations of belonging to different spaces at different scales.'. Wainwright and Marandet (2011) select the term belonging in preference to 'inclusion', because they argue the latter has been, politicised and erroneously repurposed as a clear, objective destination. Whereas 'belonging' is a more fluid notion that is continually shifting according to 'what is possible at this time, in this place, with these people, things and ideas' (Probyn 1996, p. 156).

This allows for a continuum in which participants aspire towards a sense of belonging and achieve this through 'interaction and conversation with others in the social space of the Family Learning classes' (Wainwright and Marandet, 2011, p.100). This differs significantly from the current educational concept of inclusion which is usually seen as the responsibility of the practitioner and must be put in place from the outset. A nebulous and unwieldy task

that is monitored through equality and diversity tick boxes and comment spaces on lesson plans, individualised learning plans and schemes of work. A differentiation between the regulatory notion of 'inclusion' and the socio-spatial concept of belonging is not something that is explicitly addressed in Authentic Place but it is resonant in the call to action around limiting the bureaucratic business of the course in order to foster a more welcoming and less formal classroom environment.

Overall, the Key Practice of Authentic Place resonates with discussions in the literature about how the physical environment affects participants' experience of Family Learning by reconnecting them to poor prior experiences. This can be compounded if Family Learning courses are allocated to unsuitable spaces in the school, such as high-traffic areas and resourced with inappropriate materials, such as child-sized desks and chairs. Treatment which communicates a perception that Family Learning is a second-rate activity in the school. This treatment undermines families sense of belonging to the school community. This journey towards a sense of belonging can be understood through third space thinking, which suggests that participants in Family Learning form a discursive community who co-create a liminal space that is distinct from home and school. A notion which could reduce the isolation of school from home and vice versa but would still require appropriate physical space, sufficient time and for the practitioner to have an awareness of the process.

#### ***4.4.3 Authentic Agendas in the Literature***

There was extensive recognition, across the literature included in this scoping review, of the idea that Family Learning is often rooted in pathologised or deficit perceptions of families (Elish-Piper, 2000; Heydon and Reilly, 2007; Moriarty, 2001; Timmons and Pelletier, 2014; Harris and Goodall, 2008; Luguetti and Oliver, 2017; Hartas, 2011; Kumar, 2014; Lamb, 2009; Swain, Brooks and Bosley, 2013; Swain, Cara, Vorhous and Lister, 2015; Mapp, 2003). In fact, Elish-Piper (2000) called for a move from deficit models of family literacy programmes aimed at perceived weaknesses towards strengths-based approaches, nearly two decades ago and this call is still echoing in more recent work by Wainwright and Marandet in 2013 and 2017.



In the latter, concerns are raised about practitioners casting 'a web of inspection and judgement' (Wainwright and Marandet, 2013, p.20) in order to recruit parents, who are unemployed or have low levels of education, to Family Learning courses so that the social and economic policy interests of the Government can be served.

West (2005) and Swain, Brooks and Bosley (2013) both argue that targeted approaches, which position 'the family' as a site for tackling social issues, necessitate an assessment of the agendas that shape Family Learning programmes. This evaluation would enable practitioners, schools, and local authorities to challenge the reasoning that prioritises policy interests over those of parents.. Alternatively, such agendas could be revealed to parents through transparent invitations that are clear about the nature and purpose of the programme on offer. In turn, this can create space, as noted by Timmons and Pellettier (2014) and Kumar (2014) for programmes which build on parents existing knowledge and capabilities rather than focusing on shortfalls in their experience of parenting, education or employment. However, shifting to a Family Learning approach which incorporates the interests of parents was in no way unanimously supported in the literature. For example, Heydon and Reilly (2007, p.156) argues that 'given the extent of their existing responsibilities, it could be suggested that teachers should be wary of engaging in activities that do not have a direct outcome on the children's learning'.

A similar claim was made by Desforges and Abouchaar (2003, p.30) who acknowledge that Family Learning has the potential to strengthen school-community relations and may improve the openness and accountability of the school but caution that these 'potential benefits have yet to show themselves as making a salient contribution to children's attainment'. Thus, they suggest schools focus on 'evidence-based' Family Learning interventions which are often standardised and have corrective aims, such as improving children's literacy scores (Crozier *et al.*, 2010). This is an example of where a singular focus on addressing a specific problem, such as raising attainment, can have problematic

consequences for families who are then marshalled onto programmes that are directed at that problem regardless of their own strengths, needs or interests.

Whilst my preliminary theory of AFL acknowledges my concern about external interests shaping the nature and scope of Family Learning programmes and charts some of the sources of those interests, such as schools, local authorities and social policy, only glancing attention is paid to neoliberalism as an analytic frame for this dynamic. However, in a significant number of the papers under review here, such a framework is applied explicitly (West, 2005; Wainwright and Marandet, 2013; Wainwright and Marandet, 2017). Where neoliberalism is not discussed overtly, discussions relating to datification (Cara and Brooks, 2012), effect size (Carpentieri, 2013), instrumentalism (Wheeler-Bell; 2017) and marketisation (McInerney, Smyth and Down, 2011) indicate resonance with a neoliberal framing. This raises the question of whether more attention should be paid to neoliberalism and its associated demands when restructuring AFL, particularly in relation to Authentic Agendas.

As noted above, one such neoliberal demand, that appears in the literature, is the phenomenon of datafication whereby, the 'educational process is increasingly transformed into numbers that allow measurement, comparison, and the functioning of high-stakes accountability systems' (Stevenson, 2017, p.537). Whilst collecting data, as Carpentieri (2013) points out, is an essential part of planning and developing teaching and learning activities, what datafication describes is 'the use of data in a way that has become increasingly detached from supporting learning' (Stevenson, 2017, p.537). In this process, data becomes a managerial tool for monitoring policy implementations, evaluating performance and directing resources and, consequently, constraining the autonomy of tutors. Tutors who, as a result, are unable to adapt flexibly to the socially-situated needs of learners.

The implications of valorising data are evident in a scoping review commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Cara and Brooks, 2012), which discusses how the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) might be used to identify the wider benefits of Family

Learning. The ILR is a data set collected for every adult learner participating in local-authority funded Family Learning programmes. The authors focus on how information could be extracted more effectively to improve evaluations of the success and impact of Family Learning; with particular focus on the potential for this data being used as part of a randomised controlled trial or cohort study (Haynes *et al.*, 2012; Goldacre, 2013). They argue that it is difficult to assess programme effectiveness without collecting more in-depth data and using this to data to make decisions about which programmes to fund. This sort of call to action is concerning when a range of sources under review here suggest that the consequences of datafication are high stakes testing regimes (Webb, 2006; Gallagher, 2009), lack of faith in frontline practitioner experience (LeGrand, 2003) and a need to justify funding by providing quantitatively measurable improvements in a complex field and in a short period of time (Carpentieri, 2013).

However, the work of Carpentieri (2013) on evaluative realism and policy realism moves this argument down a productive avenue, that other more descriptive accounts of neoliberalism do not. Carpentieri's (2013) argument about evaluative realism starts with policy realism by suggesting that the pressure to demonstrate impact and effectiveness are inevitable and reasonable when the 'modern welfare state is characterised by a demanding public and competing claims for investment'. Although, he cannily suggests that whilst researchers must face up to the dominance of the evidence-based practice discourse they should also be judicious, in line with Perry *et al.* (2010), of the routine rejection of evidence by policymakers. A phenomenon that can be linked to political obstacles including 'policy inertia, which delays necessary changes; political ideologies, which blind stakeholders to valuable evidence; and reform churn, which hinders programme development and evaluation' (Carpentieri, 2013, p.544). Revealing the barriers to presenting evidence that will be acted upon is in line with the critical-realist foundations of this thesis as it situates the work in a real-life context that can be navigated in a pragmatic and practical manner.

The role of complexity, another foundational element of this thesis, is evident as Carpentieri (2013) shifts from policy realism to evaluative realism. Here he notes that, simplistic evaluation frameworks are imposed on complex Family Learning programmes usually through attempts to measure a singular outcome in the context of a programme that produces a broad range of inter-related outcomes. Essentially, Carpentieri (2013) argues that it is unrealistic to expect useful results when a simple, linear evaluation theory is applied to a complex, multi-valent intervention. He calls for, in line with Pawson *et al.* (2004), 'a logic of inquiry that generates distinctive research strategies and designs which are best suited to the problems and programmes being addressed'. Therefore, realist evaluations take into account the context in which the programme takes place and the mechanisms through which change takes place for participants. This perspective on the design and evaluation of programmes is sometimes referred to as 'theory of change' (SRDC, 2011; Stuart and Hillman, 2017) and is a practical approach to identifying 'the various processes and steps that are required before the desired programme benefits can be achieved' (Carpentieri, 2012). This bookend approach to the design, delivery and evaluation of services in complex settings could be a practical response to the neoliberal demands outlined above that could be incorporated into the call to action associated with Authentic Agendas.

#### **4.4.4 Authentic Relating in the Literature**

In my preliminary theory of AFL the role of children in Family Learning classes is of paramount importance and, whilst it was rarely given prominence, it was mentioned in a number of papers (Timmons and Pelletier, 2014; Cheng and Tsai, 2014; Wainright, 2017). In my experience, celebrating the relationship between the parent and child during classes encourages parents to feel confident and competent as a learner, which in turn is helpful for retention and engagement purposes. This was echoed by Timmons and Pelletier (2014, p.512) who note that discussing the parents existing reading practices during sessions had an empowering effect which they regarded as important to bring to the fore because, as also noted by Harris and Goodall (2007) and Topping and Wolfendale (1995), 'parents are not always aware of the important role they play in their children's education and learning'.

Therefore, incorporating reflective activities in which parents and children shared their home learning experiences was seen as impactful and useful across these studies.

These scholars' focus on parents varying levels of confidence, awareness and interest, in relating to their children's learning, is of real interest as I have observed these variations but I have never sought to assess, categorise or evaluate them. Therefore, I also find the work of Cheng and Tsai (2014) informative as they used a content analysis approach to delineate four behavioural patterns observed when parents were sharing books with their children. These are 'parent as dominator, child as dominator, communicative child-parent pair, and low communicative child-parent pair' (Cheng and Tsai, 2014, p. 308). This closer focus on the different ways parents and children relate whilst engaging in Family Learning activities adds texture to my existing understanding of parent-child relating. I do not deliver corrective parenting courses but a central aim of AFL is to celebrate and build on existing relationships. This is achieved more readily if practitioners understand the range of ways in which parents and children learn together.

It is worth noting however, that the group learning environment of an AFL classroom can make specific observations of 1:1 parent-child interactions challenging. This may be why, to date, I have instead focused on creating a learning environment or atmosphere in which fruitful shared learning can develop as opposed to prescribing specific ways parent-child dyads can improve their existing approaches to learning. This approach of developing an enabling environment for learning is in line with studies by Bus (2001) and Baker and Scher (2002) who note the importance of parents finding it entertaining and enjoyable to learn with their children. This is a process which is not natural or spontaneous for all adults and thus positions Family Learning classrooms as an important space for engendering positive learning experiences between parents and children. This concept will be considered in more detail in the Authentic Spaces section of this review, however it is worth mentioning the work of Pahl and Kelly (2005, p. 92) here. They use third space theory to explore how Family Learning classrooms offer a 'threshold space where parents can enter the school on different

terms and children can re-enter their parents' domain within a school setting, and the two very different discourses can mingle'. This speaks to relating in that the nature of parent-child interactions, practices and understandings shift as the parent and child co-create a new, liminal Family Learning space between home and school.

However, remarkably, the majority of papers reviewed here gave little credence to the role of children in Family Learning sessions. Indeed, Wainwright and Marandet (2017, p. 218), in their discussion of Family Learning as a way to reassure mothers of their ability to parent effectively, appear to note with a hint of surprise that 'Even Wider Family Learning classes, which involved joint activities by parents and children, were found useful in setting and understanding norms'. It is not clear why this is an unexpected finding, perhaps because Wider Family Learning classes do not involve direct instruction on parenting skills however, this may not place sufficient emphasis on the way joint Family Learning sessions can facilitate change. Wainwright and Marandet's (2017) study appears to characterise overt approaches that communicate normative understandings of correct or appropriate parenting (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014) as the most efficient way to support parents. Thus, relegating reported positive outcomes from joint-activity sessions to the position of unintended consequences or happy accidents.

The next aspect of authentic relating given more depth by the review process was the importance of the adult relationships in Family Learning. A number of articles (Ashworth and Bourelle, 2014; Argent, 2007; Barillas, 2000; Barratt-Pugh and Maloney, 2015) talked about the significance of tutors getting to know their students and several, including Ashworth and Bourelle (2014, p. 75), positioned this as the 'most important aspect' of their work. This is in line with my preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning which compels practitioners to be deeply curious about the lives of participants and to create personal connections with them. Black (2007) echoes this claim by recommending meaningful communication between Family Learning Tutors and parents, for example by inviting the parents to join a Family Learning course in person rather than through a standardised letter or online post. Brown

(1998) builds on this by commending a course in Scotland in which parents were encouraged to share stories of their own schooling and to outline how they currently support the child. Family Learning Tutors would then draw parallels between the participants existing approach and the work of their child's teacher; thus 'the act of teaching became less threatening' (Brown, 1998, p.3). This demonstrates the careful negotiation at work as practitioners develop their understanding of parents and parents make choices about what to share and when during sessions.

A factor which I only nod to in my preliminary theory of AFL, but that is a clear discourse within the literature is the distinctiveness of learners' relationships with each other (Wainwright and Marendet, 2017; Basu and Middendorf, 1995; Bird, 2005; Moriarty, 2001). I offer some acknowledgement of this in my discussion of shared goals and purposes and the creation of a visible, even conspicuous, Family Learning group within the school that has a clear identity and role, but I do not describe or discuss the features of the inter-personal relationships between the participants and thus potentially minimise their importance. Wainwright and Marandet (2017, p. 224) suggest these relationships are constructed through 'a discourse of sameness' whereby parents from various ethnic and religious backgrounds can establish mutual understanding through conversations rooted in their children's education. Interestingly, Basu and Middendorf (1995) explicitly outline the concept of collaboration between participants as central to generating authenticity because working together mirrors the 'real world'. This speaks to the role of relationships but does not aim to develop critical consciousness (Friere, 1970) about the negotiation and purpose of relationships. The focus is on building life and social skills rather than becoming cognisant of the power dynamics inherent in relationships.

Moriarty (2001) implicitly attends to the role of power by suggesting that participants in Family Learning gain and activate stocks of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through their relationships with one another. Moriarty (2001) goes on to suggest that this accumulated capital has the capacity to create social benefits; which he observed when parents reported

feeling more confident to approach their child's teacher after having discussed the issue of concern within the Family Learning group. This is notable in two ways, firstly it hints at a power imbalance between teachers and parents involved in Family Learning that is under-explored in the literature reviewed here and yet highly relevant to the practice of Authentic Relating. Secondly, Moriarty (2001) has an arguably idealised view of Family Learning, in that no space is given to the potential for Family Learning to have neutral or negative effects. Bryan and Henry (2012) however, do note that Family Learning courses could both enhance and diminish stocks of social capital depending on the nature of the relationships formed during the programme. Further, Wainwright and Marandet (2013, p.5) caution that drawing on Bourdieuan theories of social and cultural capital reduces conceptions of parenting and family to those associated with 'middle class norms and habitus' and assumes that these ideas of 'good' and 'appropriate' parenting will develop in participants, who previously did not hold those values, through an indistinct process of spontaneous transmission.

Wainwright and Marandet (2013, p.22) go on to explicitly tackle power in Family Learning by suggesting that the relational dimensions of Family Learning, such as the broadening of social networks or the rapport between tutor and parent, are not simply an outcome of participation but also 'an important strategy through which Family Learning is effectively mobilised'. This Foucauldian (1991) reading conceptualises the power that operates through Family Learning as positive, or 'supportive', in that it facilitates 'a subtle transformation of subjects and subject positions and the development of self-regulating aspirational individuals' (Wainwright and Marandet, 2013, p.13). This characterisation of 'supportive power' is resonant with my experience of the benefits of a relational approach to Family Learning. Such as improved retention rates and the continuation of Family Learning groups beyond the duration of the course itself. It also allows issues of control, influence, and authority to be recognised and held in tension with this more positive reading of the role of power. This is in line with Vincent and Warren's (1998, p. 191) point that parent education programmes are never entirely oppressive or entirely liberatory and 'it is only by recognising



and holding these opposing readings in tension, that an analysis can be formed which appreciates both...strengths and weaknesses’.

In summary, there were some points of real resonance with Authentic Relating in the literature, notably the importance of personal connections with parents which was considered extensively across a range of paper. The idea of a relational approach was given some engaging texture through Wainwright’s and Marandet’s (2017) discussion of ‘social power’ who also along with Basu and Middendorf (1995), Bird (2005) and Moriarty (2001) highlight the importance of students’ relationships with each other; a factor that is not acknowledged significantly in my current preliminary theory of AFL. Similarly, the nature and importance of parent-child relations was articulated in a way which will be helpful when reconstructing my existing theory of AFL. Firstly, through Pahl and Kelly’s notion of Family Learning environments as a third-space between home and school co-created through new types of parent-child discourse and secondly through Cheng and Tsai’s (2014) delineation of parent-child behaviours. Finally, the absence of discussion in the literature about the importance of children’s presence in the Family Learning classroom sits in opposition to my lived experience as a Family Learning tutor and it will therefore be interesting to note whether this feature of AFL is resonant for the participants of this study.

#### ***4.4.5 Authentic Actions in the Literature***

In my preliminary theory of AFL, I associate Authentic Actions with a need for the practitioner to be deeply curious about the lives of the families they are working with, in order to plan meaningful activities (Jacobsen, Degener, and Purcell-Gates, 2003; Scott and Matthews, 2011). This means that, in addition to the teaching and learning materials used in Family Learning being authentic, for example a real newspaper would be selected rather than a worksheet approximating a newspaper, the task itself also needs to be authentic. For example, reading about and then discussing a local issue that would impact on the family, reading and responding to job advertisements or writing and sending a real letter to the editor.

Therefore, I theorised that Authentic Actions, when teaching family literacy, were those which led to real life reading and writing. This could readily be achieved in the Family Learning classroom by participants collaborating to devise and complete a shared task that gave everyone in the group a reason to read and write in which they had both personal and common interest. In one setting this involved planning, raising funds for, executing and celebrating an educational visit to an indoor ski slope. The vast range of discrete literacy tasks within this shared activity were all real. This task included the parents' interests, a considerable number of meaningful choices and the parents carrying out the actions, with purpose, in order to complete the task. Having set out the essential roles of practitioner curiosity, participant involvement, meaningful activities and shared goals as part of my characterisation of Authentic Actions the term will now be used as a theme for reviewing literature in order to develop, reconstruct and extend my initial understanding of the concept.

A 1972 study by Buckland notes how the intention of Family Learning programmes had started to shift from primarily focusing on parenting skills, towards meeting the needs of both parents and children. This resonates with the idea of curious practitioners who support families in identifying their own needs, as opposed to imposing predetermined, corrective outcomes upon them. A concept also found in Holden and Cullingford (2003, p.42) who perceive these remedial outcomes as emanating from government perceptions of 'good parenting'. Buckland's (1972, p.153) work addresses this with a call for the 'value orientation' of Family Learning programmes to include: attending to the uniqueness of individuals involved, emphasising 'choice, creativity...and self-realization' and placing value on the ability of participants to define their own 'values, aspirations, and limitations...to develop his inherent potential'. Although a caveat about developing programmes which make assumptions about families' extant knowledge is evident in her claim that families often 'feel at the mercy of bureaucratic institutions without knowing how to utilize them to increase their options' (Buckland, 1972, p. 151). This point is developed by Simpson and Cieslik (2002),

whose research outlines how optimistic initiatives to include participant voice in the development of programmes can collapse in practice because of assumptions about parents' level of skill and confidence and the amount of trust they have in practitioners and programmes.

This perspective is advanced by Argent (2007) who discusses how the role of parents in collaborative projects is unintentionally diminished by practitioners who privilege professional knowledge through repeated reference to official processes that lack relevance to parents. A similar point is described by Black (2007) who underscores the importance of conversing with parents without using jargon because of its potential to push them away. Correspondingly, Bryan and Henry (2012, p. 410) call on practitioners who are working with families to:

'purposefully diminish their roles as the 'experts', respect families' knowledge and insight, regard each other as valuable resources and assets, involve family members in mutual and equitable decisions about partnerships goals, activities and outcomes, refuse to blame each other and encourage families and communities to define issues'

This sort of guidance is helpful, although the challenges inherent in effecting these actions, as well as the steering role of practitioners in developing and leading initiatives with families, appears to be generally unacknowledged; it often seems that successful interventions spring into being unproblematically and without the significant investment of practitioner time and energy. That said, setting out specific actions, such as removing jargon or refusing to place blame, is a practical way to reduce the gap between authentic intentions and Authentic Actions. This specificity could help develop a response to the range of studies that chart this disconnect between perception and performance. A catalogue of work captures the difference between practitioners' espoused theories about their behaviour in practice (Argyris and Schön, 1974; Crozier, 1999; Holden and Cullingford, 2003; Argent, 2007) and provides a cautionary backdrop for fieldwork that aims to identify Authentic Actions through both observation and interview.

Returning to practical guidance in relation to Authentic Actions, Argent (2007) offers some instructive discussion about the difference between parental involvement and parental participation. Her main claim being that practitioners often react to the task of including parents in Family Learning by 'encouraging tokenistic involvement' (p.301) and that a more effective approach is evident when participants take on meaningful tasks with measurable impact. However, methods for measuring the impact of participant involvement were not delineated in her paper, indicating that measurement is a component which merits further consideration in the theorisation of AFL. This is because, capturing the tangible benefits of Authentic Actions and privileging these specific and measurable factors above generalised rhetoric about best practice (See and Gorard, 2015) could contribute to closing the gap between espoused theories and theory-in-action. The difficulty of measuring impact is also articulated by Bird (2005a, p.62) who notes it 'is easier to measure reading scores than to measure changes in parents' perceptions of themselves as learners'. However, it is important that appropriate tools are developed and a useful starting point for this could be the clear delineation of a specific approach to Family Learning.

Another challenge practitioners face is developing truly, rather than tokenistically, meaningful activities (Barillas, 2000; Smith, 2005; Sangster, Stone and Anderson, 2013; Ashworth and Bourelle, 2014). Barillas (2000) tackled this by setting out the characteristics of meaningful activities prior to embarking on her intervention. These included the activity being reflective of the families' cultural practices, having a personal element and being shared beyond the classroom. In Barillas' study this led to activities in which the parent and child corresponded, in writing, to offer advice to one another. Their work was then published in booklets that were kept in the school library. Barillas' (2000) approach here is informative as she is able to demonstrate the value of clarifying key terms in advance and eschewing woolly rhetoric. Another useful definition appears in Auerbach (1989, p. 166) and draws on Freire's (1970) work by arguing that an activity is meaningful 'to the extent that it relates to daily realities and helps [people] to act on them'. This definition links meaning with context

and indicates that acting authentically requires practitioners to engage with the everyday life of learners.

Although from a different context, Basu and Middendorf (1995) acknowledge how they neglected the role of the personal when developing a meaningful activity in their study which used group learning during a geology course at a US university. They assigned the whole class to write a collaborative book review for publication in an academic journal. The authors were aware of the erroneous assumption that students will be 'naturally motivated to understand and accomplish goals if the learning tasks mimic what people do outside of school' (p. 317) but took no clear action to address this and went on to find that students did not engage with the task. It is notable that the task the authors selected was not 'real-world' for a geologist in the field, but was in fact more pertinent to the work of a professional academic. Additionally, book reviews are not written by large, collaborative groups for practical reasons and because finding consensus would necessitate the dilution of opinion. This study therefore highlights the need to clarify and evaluate the appropriateness of activities before utilising them in the classroom (Barillas, 2000; Jacobson, Degener and Purcell-Gates, 2003), as approximating a meaningful approach can be seen as a type of counterfeit authenticity which sits in diametric opposition to the intended approach.

As noted above, Basu and Middendorf (1995) acknowledge that they paid insufficient attention to the students' personal motivations when developing their authentic learning task. This invites the question of how practitioners identify personal motivations which may be difficult to articulate, hidden or private. Bird (2005b), in a study that set out a model for building parents literacy skills by developing home-school links, emphasises the incremental manner in which participant motivations are likely to be revealed. She notes that the actions of the practitioner are important in facilitating varied opportunities for parents to 'engage with written language and make use of it for their own purposes' (p. 63) until trust and confidence are built and a reciprocal relationship emerges in which the tasks become increasingly shaped by the participants' emerging personal motivations and interests.

This reciprocity between participant and practitioner, which focuses on developing an understanding of the families and developing teaching and learning activities accordingly, is evident in many of the papers uncovered for this review and is underpinned by the context-contingent approach of Auerbach's (1989). Similar to Bird's (2005b) point about incremental development, Griswold and Ullman (1997) argue that socially-situated practice, which draws upon the context of learning and the experiences of participants, increases their willingness to engage in new learning activities. Thus, in this view, learning which is meaningful has a generative potential which could be facilitated by the Authentic Actions of the practitioner.

In summary, what has emerged from this deductive theme are a number of factors which will inform the eventual reconstruction of AFL as a theory. Firstly, is the need to address Argyris and Schön's (1974) argument about the gap between espoused theory and theory-in-action. Because AFL is conceptualised as a set of Key Practices it is important that the theory can be applied in practice and does not simply offer an idealised or unrealistic model of best practice. Secondly, it is clear that involving participants in decision making has potential for creating meaning, but it is now evident that assumptions can easily be made about learners' level of skill, confidence and trust and that miscalculating these can lead to the breakdown of a programme. Thirdly, the need for clarity when defining key terms and recommended actions was uncovered; this has relevance to the overall research aims of this thesis and relates to increasing ease of programme evaluation. Finally, the steering role of practitioners appeared to be underplayed by the studies reviewed here, which is counterintuitive to the fact that vast amount of guidance is aimed at practitioners within the papers. Much is made of the need to create learning opportunities but terms with any hierarchical connotations such as 'lead', 'provide', 'teach' and 'deliver' are notably absent. This is not unexpected in a review of studies that are rooted in critical theory and thus concerned with structures of power, but this characterisation of the role of practitioners, risks minimising the extent to which they drive, develop and direct learning experiences in

practice. It will be useful, therefore, when identifying the extent to which Authentic Actions are apparent in the field, to pay attention to the way the various participants characterise the role of the practitioner.

#### 4.6 Summary of Literature Review Findings in Relation to the Preliminary Theory

The findings of this review contribute to enhancing the initial theory of Authentic Family Learning in several distinct manners, as outlined in the table below. By integrating these insights, I have initiated a process of moving towards praxis by bridging concepts derived from literature with my practice. Completing an initial version of this review prior to data generation equipped me with a more robust theory, enhancing my readiness to commence fieldwork.

<b>Authentic Lifeworlds</b>	<b>Authentic Place</b>	<b>Authentic Agendas</b>
<p>Avoiding tokenistic dialogue and using collaborative and participatory methods can be an effective way to honour parents' lifeworlds.</p> <p>Family Learning may expose parents to a politicised discourse of aspiration and to professionalised parenting.</p> <p>Balancing the social investment nature of Family Learning with the interests, strengths and needs of parents is necessary.</p>	<p>Discussions in the literature extend the role of place beyond the nature physical environment to consider how a sense of place can be infused into teaching and learning.</p> <p>The concept of belonging was suggested as an alternative to the term 'inclusion'. Emphasising the fluid nature of group membership.</p> <p>Third space concepts were encountered, whereby Family Learning groups co-create a liminal space that is distinct from home and school.</p>	<p>Realist approaches to evaluation, such as using a 'theory of change', have the potential to balance the needs of funders, school and parents.</p> <p>Many authors characterise demands such as datafication, managerialism, individualism etc. as part of a neoliberal agenda. Neoliberalism appears to be a central agenda that Authentic Agendas counters.</p> <p>Transparent approaches which readily reveal intentions to participants are central to an Authentic Agendas approach.</p>

<b>Authentic Action</b>	<b>Authentic Relating</b>
<p>A need to address the gap between espoused theory and theory-in-action so that AFL is not an idealised or unrealistic model of best practice.</p> <p>A need to avoid assumptions about learners' level of skill, confidence and trust.</p> <p>A need for clarity when defining key terms and recommended actions – which could also inform the evaluation of AFL programmes.</p> <p>A need to attend to the potential for minimising the extent to which practitioners' drive, develop and direct Family Learning programmes.</p>	<p>The importance of direct, personal connections with participants was underscored throughout the literature.</p> <p>The concept of social power which takes account of participants' relationships with each other was evident in the literature but is absent from AFL.</p> <p>There was limited discussion of children's role, in relation to parents' experience of Family Learning, across the literature</p>

Table 4.3. Summary of Insights from the Literature

#### 4.5 Conclusion

Having begun the process of refining the initial theory, I will next explain how I progressed this journey by resuming my role in family learning as a practitioner researcher. In the subsequent chapter, I offer readers an overview into my philosophical stance as a researcher by outlining the paradigm guiding this study, the chosen methodology, and the ethical considerations I adhered to, providing context for the decisions made in the research design.



## **Chapter 5: Knowing, Being and Discovering**

A central aim of this thesis is to thoroughly assess and then refine the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning. This process of refinement commenced in the previous chapter, involving a detailed examination of relevant literature, and resulting in the presentation of updates to the theory in [section 4.6](#). The current phase involves further refinement of the theory by connecting it to practice, employing the methodology of the extended case method. Before I set out the methodology, I will first provide readers with an insight into my philosophical orientation as a researcher by explaining the paradigm within which this study operates. This provides a lens through which to interpret the choices made in the research design, thereby enhancing the transparency and coherence of the study and its findings.

In line with Denzin and Lincoln (2003), a study's paradigm involves three crucial components: epistemology, ontology, and methodology. The specifics of each, as they relate to this study, are set out in this chapter. As outlined by Crotty (1998), epistemology is the theory of knowledge, exploring how we comprehend and explain what we understand; ontology investigates the nature of existence and reality; while methodology pertains to the plan, procedure, or framework guiding the selection and application of methods.

In simple terms, epistemology concerns itself with the concept of 'knowing,' ontology with the idea of 'being,' and methodology with the process of 'discovering'. As I elaborate below, this study aligns with a paradigm of pragmatism, with an epistemology rooted in social constructionism and an ontological position of critical realism.

### **5.1 A Pragmatic Paradigm**

A good starting point for designing research that considers the influences, negotiations, and interpretations of human experiences and interactions is the concept of paradigm. According to Khun (1974), who popularised the term, it refers to the beliefs, values, and methodologies that underpin, and contribute to, perceptions of the world in a given discipline. The definition

has since grown to encompass not only specific disciplines but also the fundamental worldviews and constructs that inform action in society (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

I accept that my paradigmatic perspective will influence what I notice, what I overlook, or what I consider implicit. This makes paradigms valuable because they provide structured conceptual frameworks that aid us in navigating the complexities of the world. They serve as models for understanding reality, allowing us to engage in purposeful actions within a defined set of principles. In essence, they shape our perception of the world through the stories we tell about our experiences. As a result, we inhabit a coherent and structured world that we have collectively constructed. There is, as Davis-Floyd and St John (1998) point out, potential to cultivate awareness of paradigmatic influence on our thoughts and experiences. This awareness empowers us to recognise the limitations of certain paradigms while discovering new possibilities, providing a unique form of liberation that encourages us to think beyond conventional boundaries (Davis-Floyd and St. John, 1998).

Identifying a paradigm can start by looking at its constituent parts. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) contend that a paradigm encompasses three core elements: epistemology, ontology, and methodology . As highlighted earlier, Crotty (1998) provides definitions:

- Epistemology pertains to knowing.
  - It deals with how we know what we know. It concerns the nature and limits of human knowledge
- Ontology pertains to being.
  - It is the study of what exists or what can be said to exist.
- Methodology pertains to discovering.
  - It refers to the systematic approach and set of methods used to conduct research in a particular field of study.

This study operates within a pragmatic paradigm, aligning the approach and findings with the idea that the usefulness and practicality of ideas and theories determine their legitimacy.

In a pragmatic worldview, the emphasis is on the practical consequences of adopting a particular perspective rather than solely on its abstract truth. This paradigm acknowledges that solutions to problems may vary depending on the context and that the effectiveness of a concept is contingent upon its practical application. By adopting a pragmatic paradigm, the focus is on what works and produces tangible results. This orientation is particularly valuable, considering that the study originated from professional discomfort experienced while working as a family tutor. The role, framed as emancipatory and liberatory by the employer, contradicted my actual experiences, causing frustration and dissonance. This incongruence affected my professional identity, strained communication with my employer, and required me to implement strategies that conflicted with practical realities. A pragmatic worldview is beneficial in addressing misalignments between stated ideals and real-world constraints, focusing on actionable insights that address the practical concerns identified in the field, ultimately contributing to a more effective and relevant approach to family learning.

As will be explained in the following section, within this pragmatic paradigm, my ontology leans towards critical realism, recognising that there is an external reality that exists independently of human perception, yet this reality is stratified, emergent, and open. Critical realism allows for an acknowledgment of the objective world while acknowledging the complexity and context-dependent nature of human experiences and interactions. It provides a nuanced understanding that reality is not solely mind created.

My epistemological stance within the pragmatic paradigm is social constructionism. This perspective acknowledges that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through interactions between individuals and their world. Within a social constructionist framework, reality is seen as co-constructed through shared meanings and cultural contexts. This approach embraces the idea that individuals actively shape their understanding of the world through social processes, emphasising the importance of intersubjectivity and shared cultural experiences.

In essence, the chosen pragmatic paradigm for this thesis incorporates critical realist ontology, recognising the existence of an external reality, and a social constructionist epistemology, emphasising the co-constructed nature of knowledge and meaning. This combination enables a comprehensive and contextually attuned examination of how human experiences and interactions are shaped, navigated, and comprehended within the practical limitations of real-life environments. I will expand on the knowing, being and discovering elements of the paradigm in the following sections.

## **5.2 Knowing and Being - Social Constructionism and Critical Realism**

The choice to engage in practitioner research, focusing on revisiting and evaluating my practice through dialogue with family learners and other stakeholders, is rooted in my epistemological and ontological beliefs. As noted above, I adopt a social constructionist epistemology, as described by Berger and Luckman (1966, p.33) in their influential work, *The Social Construction of Reality*. They specifically examine how individuals in their everyday lives perceive and experience reality. In this context, people construct meaning as they interact with the world. Crotty (1998, p.42) defines constructionism as the:

'View that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context...Meaning is not discovered but constructed'.

The term social constructionism has varied interpretations (Murphy *et al.*, 1998). I adhere to Crotty's viewpoint, which emphasises a difference between social constructionism and alternative epistemologies like post-structuralism and postmodernism. The key difference lies in how humans relate to the world. Social constructionism posits that human experiences are intertwined with the external, objective world. Conversely, some other approaches reject the inherent connection between humans and the world, emphasising a more detached perspective where subjective experiences are distinct from objective external reality. Berger

and Luckmann (1966, p.36) emphasise the direct link to the external world, highlighting that everyday reality revolves around the 'here' of our bodies and the 'now' of our present. There is also an emphasis on the collaborative creation of meaning and knowledge, prioritising shared experiences and underscoring the importance of intersubjectivity (Cochran-Smith *et al.*, 2014). As a family learning practitioner navigating the complex social dynamics of delivering courses in primary schools, I strongly identify with the emphasis on the collaborative construction of knowledge and meaning.

Some of the distinctions mentioned earlier pertain to the balance between relativity and realism in knowledge construction. Consequently, I have examined this issue concerning my ontological stance. I agree with Crotty (1998, p.64) that the social constructionist viewpoint is primarily relativistic in terms of epistemology. Acknowledging that our perceptions of 'the way things are essentially reflect 'the sense we make of them.' This perspective encourages us to approach our understandings with more openness and less rigidity, recognising them as interpretations influenced by history and culture. This suggests that descriptions and narratives do not simply mirror reality but are shaped by the context in which they are constructed.

However, social constructionism is simultaneously ontologically realist, acknowledging the existence of an external reality. It contends that while our interpretations and social constructions shape our experience, they still reflect a genuine reality for us. It opposes the idea of epistemological realism, which suggests that 'meaning exists in objects independently of any consciousness' (Crotty 1998, p.10). Additionally, it rejects the ontologically relativist view, which asserts that reality is solely a creation of the mind (Murphy *et al.*, 1998).

Balancing ontological realism with epistemological relativism helps avoid 'naive realism' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995, p.17). Naive realism suggests that conclusive knowledge is readily available for discovery, independent of interpretation. Taking a more balanced

perspective avoids extreme relativism, which suggests that human reality is solely a product of individual thought.

I accept that a purely subjective ontological lens is unhelpful for addressing my research aims because it would be difficult to develop practice guidance from a perspective that suggests 'reality does not exist apart from our perceptions and constructions of it' (Cochran-Smith *et al.*, 2014, p. 109). Instead, to develop praxis and associated guidelines which have explanatory power a realist, rather than relativist, ontological position is more appropriate. Therefore, critical realism is the concept that best describes my ontological perspective because I accept that there is a reality, which can be known, but that this reality is stratified, emergent and open (Bhaskar, 1978; Danermark, 2002).

### **5.3 Discovering - The Extended Case Method**

The purpose of this study is to extend an existing theory from a case by addressing four aims:

1. Seek parent, family support worker and primary school teacher experiences of Authentic Family Learning.
2. Understand the competing priorities that influence how Authentic Family Learning is carried out in primary schools.
3. Improve the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning
4. Produce practice guidance for Authentic Family Learning.

Achieving these aims will result in the development of practice guidance for the effective implementation of AFL. This research employs the extended case method as a framework to enrich my preliminary theory. Unlike grounded theory approaches, which entail deriving theory from data analysis, the extended case method revises and broadens extant theory about a specific case (Burawoy, 1991). The process of extending and constructing theory from cases is an engaging approach, because case studies highlight the intricate real-world settings in which phenomena unfold (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007).

Extended case method (Burawoy, 2009) is described by Tavory and Timmermans (2009, p.244) as a ‘theoretically driven ethnography in which research activities aim to modify, exemplify, and develop existing theories’. This privileging of the role of theory is part of my rationale for selecting the extended case method. Additionally, Burawoy (1998, p. 5) contends that some qualitative researchers build up a façade of neutrality and objectivity to minimise their involvement in the research setting ‘by adhering to a set of data collecting procedures that assure our distance’. I therefore intend to follow an alternative strategy in which, rather than presenting myself as a neutral actor, unshackled from previous theoretical influences, I will instead allow existing theory to inform and guide dialogue with participants, so that superficial notions of detachment are rejected in favour of a reflexive, rather than positive, model of science.

This has real utility for me as a researcher, as I enter the field already equipped with a preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning that is informed by critical pedagogy and authentic learning. The extended case method values this as a condition and compels me to apply, reconstruct and extend my theory. To do so, ECM offers a methodological road map through, what Burawoy (1998) describes as, four phases - Intervention, Process, Force and Reconstruction. For each phase of the method Burawoy has also described a reflexive limitation that can be examined and minimised. Using the phases as a structure for data generation and analysis creates boundaries for the study as each of them is associated with a research aim of the study. The final aim of creating practice guidance will be addressed after data analysis and findings are complete.

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Research Aim</b>	<b>Research Activity</b>	<b>Reflexive Limitation</b>
Intervention	1. Seek parent, family support worker and primary school teacher experiences of Authentic Family Learning.	Verbal Field Notes	Domination

Process	1. Seek parent, family support worker and primary school teacher experiences of Authentic Family Learning.	Verbal Field Notes  Semi-structured interviews	Silencing
Force	2. Understand the competing priorities that influence how Authentic Family Learning is carried out in primary schools.	Verbal Field Notes  Semi-structured interviews	Objectification
Reconstruction	3. Improve the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning	Data Analysis	Normalisation

Table 5.1. Research Aims in Relation to Phases

The extended case method facilitates the connection between theory and action by applying macro-level theory to a micro-level case in four phases (Burawoy 1998; Wadham & Warren 2014). The first phase involves identifying an appropriate theory and case and entering the field as a participant. The researcher undertakes participant observation and begins the process of immersion into the case. The second phase involves collecting data from daily life and identifying patterns, processes, and anomalies. This 'insider' approach allows for a nuanced understanding of AFL, challenging the chosen theory where necessary. The third phase involves locating the patterns and processes from phase two in the context of their external determination and the fourth phase involves rebuilding the theory to accommodate any anomalies, effectively integrating micro and macro levels of analysis. Within this process, provisional understandings are formed, revised, and further processed through an iterative movement between the data and the preliminary theory. In so doing, observations from practice are compared with the status of the theory.

### ***5.3.1 Navigating Overlapping and Iterative Phases in the Extended Case Method***

As mentioned above, the extended case method is structured around four distinct yet interrelated phases, each serving as a guide for both data generation and analysis. These



phases are not rigidly sequential instead being overlapping and iterative, where activities from one phase may coincide with activities from another. For example, during the Process (Phase 2) and Force (Phase 3) stages, taking verbal field notes and semi-structured interviews occurs concurrently. Overlapping phases enable a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the case under investigation by integrating different data sources and methods.

Also, there is a cyclical revisiting of phases, allowing for refinement, reevaluation, and the incorporation of new insights as the study progresses. This iterative process, allows me to return to previous phases based on emerging findings, enhancing the depth and richness of the study. For instance, while Phase 1, Intervention, is primarily focused on the initial weeks of each family learning course, the subsequent phases do not strictly adhere to a linear chronology. The Process (Phase 2) involves ongoing participant observation and semi-structured interviews, and this data generation phase overlaps with Phase 3, Force, which is not solely dedicated to data generation but also includes elements of analysis. This intertwining of phases allows for a continuous and dynamic flow of data generation and analysis, fostering a more responsive and adaptive research approach.

In the next four sub-sections I will explain the purpose of each phase of the extended case method. Then, in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 I will specify exactly how the research was conducted including details about the settings, participants, data generation tools, and approach to analysis.

### **5.3.2 Phase 1 - Intervention**

In Phase 1 of the extended case method, the researcher initiates a process akin to immersion in ethnography. Aiming to embed the researcher within the case under study, effectively adopting the role of an insider researcher. As outlined by Burawoy (1998, p.26), this phase involves participant observation, emphasising the 'extension of the observer into the world of the participant'. To fully grasp the nuances of the research context, the researcher is

required to step out of the 'safe confines of the university' and transcend the 'academic bubble.' The objective is to actively engage with the participants within their natural environment. This deliberate departure from the academic setting is crucial as it enables the researcher to establish a connection with the participants, gaining access to their authentic experiences and insights.

The significance of this immersion lies in the depth it adds to the research process. By becoming an integral part of the environment being studied, the researcher transcends the role of a mere observer and, instead, assumes the position closer to that of a participant. This insider perspective facilitates a more profound understanding of the dynamics at play, allowing the researcher to discern the subtle contextual nuances that may be overlooked in a more detached observational approach. As the researcher actively engages with the participants, forming relationships and navigating the intricacies of their daily lives, a richer and more comprehensive narrative of the case under study begins to unfold.

This was achieved through fieldwork carried out in four ten-week courses conducted in four different schools over the course of 12 months between 2017-18. The data from the intervention phase was generated during the first three weeks of each course from observing and talking to people about their experiences of the family learning course and capturing reflections about these in fieldnotes (Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater, 2012). This 'insider' approach enabled me to become socialised into each school and each family learning group. The tacit knowledge gained – particularly where it challenges the preliminary theory – is then reframed as theoretical insight (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007).

In relation to the first phase, Burawoy described the reflexive limitation of domination, noting that, becoming embedded in practitioner-research 'is often a prolonged and surreptitious power struggle between the intrusive outsider and the resisting insider' (Burawoy, 1998, p.23). Therefore, when entering the field there is potential for the social scientist to be both dominated and dominating. The resulting power dynamic could impact on the strength of

claims to knowledge. I addressed this by adhering to Van Maanen's (1988) cautionary point that naively realist tales privilege the participant and confessional tales privilege the observer. I therefore developed an impressionist tale, which highlights the interaction of the observer and participant – without claiming objective truth.

### **5.3.3 Phase 2 - Process**

In the second phase of the extended case method the researcher uses both participant observation and semi-structured interviews to make 'sequential approximations...until one's theory is in sync with the world one studies' (Burawoy, 1998, p. 18). This process is characterised by translating social situations into social processes. For me, this meant compiling situational knowledge from my field notes and from transcripts of semi-structured interviews with participants into an account of the social processes at work in Authentic Family Learning courses. These are the patterns of action and interaction that constitute processes such as cooperation, competition, or conflict in social situations (Bardis, 1979)

In relation to the second phase, Burawoy described the reflexive limitation of silencing. The role of the participant observer is to register the conflicting views and ideas of the people being studied which can expose the interests which are at work in reproducing a social system. However, offering a manageable explanation necessitates a distilling process, that can leave out, minimise, or alter other voices. This silencing is an inescapable pitfall and so it was imperative to seek out the voices that challenge accepted understandings and be ready to amend my preliminary theory.

### **5.3.4 Phase 3 - Force**

The third phase relates the social processes, uncovered during the second phase, to the forces of social structure. This is the idea of structuration and 'involves locating social processes in the context of their external determination' (Burawoy, 1998, p. 23). This involves relating the interactions I observed at the micro level to macro level forces. This establishes how wider political, social, and economic forces shape individual actions within Family

Learning. Burawoy describes this phase as the process of 'discovering reification within the factory, commodification within the family, bureaucratisation within the school' (2000, p.27).

In relation to the third phase, Burawoy described the reflexive limitation of objectification. Here, the researcher must be conscious of the potential for attributing a false sense of durability to external policies, or structures, that shape contemporary practices. Burawoy highlights that 'objectification can be a powerful source of mystification, since we often believe we are in the grip of forces beyond our control which turn out to be quite fluid and susceptible to influence' (2000 p. 27). So, whilst datafication, functionalism and bureaucratisation influenced my daily practice, as described in Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis, ECM is useful in helping me avoid the belief that these seemingly pervasive and persistent issues are static and immovable.

#### **5.3.5 Phase 4 - Reconstruction**

The fourth phase within the extended case method involves the 'extension of theory'. It is in this final step where the theory is rebuilt to accommodate any anomalies and effectively brings together micro and macro levels of analysis. In practical terms, this phase is where the analysed data from phases 1, 2 and 3 is synthesised and presented as an updated theory.

Here Burawoy (1998) reminds the researcher that instead of discovering grounded theory the intention of extended case method is to elaborate upon existing theory. It is worth noting that Burawoy distinguishes between a "progressive" rather than a "degenerate" reconstruction. Following Popper (1963) and Lakatos (1978) the extended case study researcher should seek reconstructions that leave core claims intact, that do as well as the existing theory upon which they are built but offer novel angles of vision. This approach will extend my preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning by delineating its characteristics against the backdrop of interrelated micro and macro processes and the competing structural forces which are at work in the complex educational context of primary schools.

In relation to the third phase, Burawoy described the reflexive limitation of normalisation. Burawoy points out that reconstructing theory is itself a coercive process of dual pressures. On the one side, complex situations are tailored to fit a theory and the site of inquiry is reduced to a case. On the other side, theory is then tailored to the case. This process of applying theory can lead to normalisation. By selecting a favoured theory, we can limit the discourse that emanates from the research process, reducing the output of the study to a disingenuously neat, overarching, all-encompassing answer. Burawoy explains that 'challenging or tempering normalisation requires embedding the analysis in perspectives from below, taking their ideas more seriously, and, in short, working more closely with those whose interests the study purported to serve'. This means that as I go through the process of addressing my research aims, I am more interested in advancing theory *with* my participants than applying it to my participants.

### **5.3.6 Connecting Knowing, Being and Discovering**

In summary, this study sits within a pragmatic paradigm that recognises the importance of context and the necessity of applying ideas in practice. This approach is particularly pertinent given the discomfort I experienced while working as a family tutor, prompting a need for practical solutions. Embracing a pragmatic standpoint allowed for a balance between ontological realism and epistemological relativism, avoiding the extremes of naive realism and extreme relativism. A desire to refine a preliminary theory, led to the adoption of the extended case method. This methodology prioritises existing theory to inform dialogue with participants, eschewing detachment in favour of reflexivity. The alignment of epistemological, theoretical, and methodological perspectives underscores a commitment to exploring family learning practices with relevance and depth.

### **5.4 Everyday Ethics**

The ethical foundation of this study is 'everyday ethics,' as defined by Banks and Armstrong in their work on Community Based Participatory Research (2013, p. 263). The approach emphasises ongoing and fluid responsibilities relating to context and relationships over a

singular 'articulation and implementation of abstract principles and rules' at the start of a study. This perspective aligns well with the relational nature of Authentic Family Learning. It also shares similarities with the reflexive approach of the extended case method because it involves 'particular attention to the ethical issues arising from the dynamics of power relations between different parties' (Banks and Armstrong, 2013, p. 264).

It should be noted that whilst a distinction is drawn between everyday ethics and regulatory ethics, and a compelling case is made for a turn to the former, this does not mean that the two are incompatible and thus a researcher is not prohibited from attending to codified rules of ethics. Indeed, I followed the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018) to guide the creation of a formal ethics application. I submitted this, along with accompanying documents, to the University of Cumbria's Ethics Advisory Panel, and obtained approval to proceed with the study outlined in this thesis.

The extensive preparation involved in this process proved invaluable, as I felt equipped to handle various potential eventualities during the research process. This ensured families were safeguarded from potential harm, and I was well-prepared to address any concerns that arose. Thus, applying an everyday ethics perspective expands the conventional ethical procedure, conducted at the start of an academic investigation, to encompass the 'daily practice of negotiating the ethical issues and challenges that arise through the life' of a research project (Banks *et al.*, 2013, p. 266).

Below I set out two of the ethical considerations I made in advance, informed consent and anonymity and confidentiality and then close with an example of how an everyday ethics stance helped me to manage one of the ethical dilemmas that arose during the study.

#### **5.4.1 Informed Consent**

Initially, the head teacher at each of the four schools received an invitation, information sheet, and consent form, with three weeks to review and ask questions. Once the school

agreed to participate, parents from that school were invited to join the research study. The courses were open to a maximum of 12 parents of Reception and Year 1 children, and following the usual protocol in family learning, the schools selected who would be invited to participate. Invited parents were each given an invitation letter and information sheet ([Appendix 3-5](#)), by either the organising teacher or the family liaison worker. This information was also explained verbally during each initial Family Learning class.

Maintaining informed consent involved ongoing dialogue about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Potential participants had one week to consider the information and could ask questions verbally or via email. If willing, they returned the consent form. An information session followed the first class, allowing for further inquiries. I also provided office hours, telephone numbers and email addresses so that potential participants could access further information in different settings. The process of consenting was ongoing, and it was made clear that participants had the right to withdraw, without consequences, from the study at any time, not just at the initial signing of paperwork.

Obtaining informed and voluntary consent was challenging because the study takes place in a school setting where parents may perceive a family learning tutor/researcher as an authority figure to whom they must defer (Bryan and Burstow, 2018). Furthermore, navigating the process of obtaining informed consent is complex in practitioner research settings, where individuals may respond differently to my dual role as both family learning tutor and researcher. This situation prompted the consideration of whether I should pursue unanimous consent from the entire group, which would essentially mean that even one or two dissenting views could halt the entire project. While I aimed to respect the rights of each parent, including the right not to participate, I also recognised that some individuals might be keen to engage in the research and should be afforded the same opportunity to participate as those who chose not to.

Hence, informed consent was sought at various levels of participation. I acknowledged that while a parent might be comfortable with research occurring in the classroom, they might

not consent to me gathering information specifically about them. As a result of this distinction, I offered a range of participation levels that parents could choose when providing consent. This is illustrated in Figure 5.1 (adapted from Ní Raghallaigh, 2010) which appeared in the information sheet presented to parents. This approach aimed to give power to parents by granting them autonomy, helping to ensure that participation was entirely voluntary. Based on this, all parents agreed to be observed and have their learning journey analysed and twenty-nine parents also agreed to be interviewed.

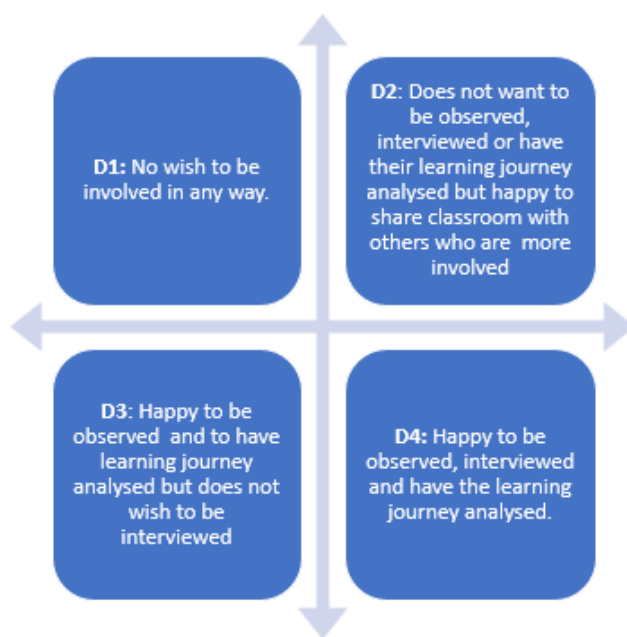


Figure 5.1. Degrees of Participation

Verbal and written consent to the research taking place was obtained from parents, and the degree to which they wished to be involved was recorded and is set out in the next chapter (Table 6.5). During every discussion regarding consent, it was emphasised that data would solely be collected where individuals had explicitly consented to being present and participating. Consent was reaffirmed at various intervals during the fieldwork process, such as during interview arrangements or when new individuals, like the librarian or school receptionist, were present in the classroom.

#### **5.4.1.1 Consent of Children in the Study**

The children involved in each family learning class were not the subjects of the research but, as noted in the British Educational Research Association’s (BERA) guidance, their presence



forms part of the 'context of the research' (BERA, 2011, p. 5). As a result, my own and the parents' reflections about the children feature in the data collected for the study. Therefore, the children were informed that the study was taking place during the initial class at each school. They were given a Children's Information Sheet and Consent Form ([Appendix 6](#)) to take home and discuss as a family. In the following session the children were verbally consulted about whether they wished to take part, as a family. If they were happy to take part, then they used a stamp and wrote their name to indicate that they understood the research, proportionate to their age, and that they consented to being part of the study (Billett, 2020).

Throughout the fieldwork, I verbally communicated to the children that they were valued and important members of the family learning class, and that it was acceptable to choose not to participate in the research. My background and expertise as a family learning practitioner, along with the involvement of other professionals such as Family Liaison Workers, teachers, and head teachers, ensured there was a support network of responsible adults overseeing the well-being and comfort of the children during classes.

#### ***5.4.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality***

Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld throughout the entire process. Transcripts underwent anonymisation, removing all real names and replacing them with pseudonyms. Electronic audio files were kept on a password protected university server. Signed consent forms were securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office. Field and reflective notes were documented using pseudonyms. Participants were informed via information sheets that research findings would be used for the researcher's PhD and in publications. The BERA (2018) guidelines emphasise the importance of maintaining privacy and confidentiality unless there are clear ethical imperatives not to do so, such as instances of serious professional misconduct or child abuse. Discussions were held with headteachers about this, and safeguarding procedures were clarified before fieldwork commenced.

### **5.4.3 Exploring an Ethical Dilemma**

Following a research interview, a parent unexpectedly requested £2 for bus fare to get home, despite no prior agreement for travel costs or incentives. We had scheduled the interview in a room at the school immediately after morning drop-off to align with the parent's daily routine. In addressing this situation, I considered 'everyday ethics' as my guiding framework. Firstly, I acknowledged the importance of treating the participant with fairness and respect, recognising their basic needs and dignity. Providing the small amount for bus fare appeared reasonable to ensure the participant's comfort and convenience in returning home given they had spent an extra hour in the school taking part in the interview.

Furthermore, I value the ethical significance of trust and relationship building in research with families experiencing marginalisation. By accommodating the participant's request, I aimed to establish trust and foster a positive rapport, potentially enhancing cooperation and openness in future interactions. Additionally, the inconvenience of arranging alternative transportation for the participant and the inappropriateness of driving them myself also influenced my decision-making process.

Ethically, I adhered to the principle of beneficence, guiding me to act in the participant's best interest and promote their welfare. Providing the bus fare aligned with this principle, mitigating any potential bias or resentment that could arise from denying the participant's request without valid reason. Especially given that I was personally benefiting from their willingness to give their time and share their opinions. It was also appropriate considering the 'power hierarchies between researchers and participants which have led to research historically being a site of exploitation, symbolic violence, (re)traumatization, and misrepresentation' that Smith, Mansfield and Wainwright (2022, p.438) describe in relation to refugee communities. These factors are resonant to my research site in an area of high deprivation where people's daily lives are shaped by poverty (Reay, 2005; Tyler, 2021; Tardieu *et al.*, 2023).

In managing this situation with other participants, I consulted with my supervisors to consider covering travel costs going forward. Ultimately, we decided against this because most interviews had been completed at this stage and all the remaining parents lived in walking distance to the school.

To sum up, for me, embracing 'everyday ethics' means confronting unforeseen challenges with empathy, fairness, and flexibility. I chose not to remain distant and neutral about how my research activities impact people. I recognise the importance of rigour and honesty but, following Banks *et al.* (2013) see compassion as similarly imperative. This doesn't diminish the importance of following clear ethical rules – fairness and justice are still crucial. However, as the example above shows, my ethical stance aims to strike a balance between strict rules and my responsibility to foster trusting relationships, do no harm and show care for others. This approach contributes to establishing a research environment that is truthful, compassionate, and built on integrity.

## **Chapter 6: Participants and Procedure**

In the upcoming three chapters, I explain the conduct of the study. In this chapter, I focus on the process of gaining access to the four schools and the selection and recruitment of participants. Moving forward to Chapter 7, I explain how I generated data through observations and interviews. Lastly, in Chapter 8, I detail the methods used for data analysis.

For this study, I employed theoretical sampling (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Conlon *et al.*, 2020), which aims to recruit a group of participants who have experienced the process of interest and can contribute to a well-rounded theory. This approach aligns with the extended case method, as emphasised by Ridder (2016, p. 86) where the researcher's primary focus should 'not lie in the representativeness of a case, but rather in its possible contribution to reconstruct theory'.

To implement the method, I engaged with four primary schools in a large north-west town, offering each of them a 10-week family learning course. The study adopts a holistic design (Yin, 2014), treating the four Family Learning groups as sub-units within a single case that is used to reconstruct the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning. Ridder (2016) suggests that this holistic case study design, using theoretical sampling, is appropriate when testing an established theory because the case can confirm, challenge, or extend the theory by questioning propositions and delivering alternative or additional explanations.'.

### **6.1 Gaining Access**

I selected four primary schools, known hereafter by their pseudonym or number. Each in the same town in the North of England, within reasonable distance from my home. I decided not to conduct the research in the city in which I had previously worked as a family learning tutor as I was known too well. Therefore, at the selected sites, I was not a familiar 'face'. One 10-week course was delivered per school, comprising a total of 40 sessions. Sessions took place once per week and each session was two hours long.



Figure 6.1. Schools by number and pseudonym

The sites were different, as I discuss under settings, but the research was not set up as a comparative study. Rather the four sites were selected to give depth to the study.

## **6.2 Setting: The Town and Schools**

### **6.2.1 The Town**

The town, situated in East Lancashire, has a population of 96,000 and spans 111 square kilometres. Its population density is twice the England and Wales average. The town ranks as the 11th most deprived area, with around 21.4% of children living in low-income families. There are 30 primary and 5 secondary schools. At Key stage 4, 41% of pupils meet the Achievement 8 measure for maths and English. This is the lowest of the 12 districts in the county. At Key Stage 1 level, results for pupils achieving the expected standards in reading, writing, maths, and science are the lowest three in Lancashire.

Ethnically, the town is mainly white, akin to other East Lancashire areas. The largest minority ethnic group is Pakistani. Housing statistics reveal around 41,000 dwellings, predominantly in council tax band A. Challenges include overcrowding as well as a notable number of vacant properties. The median house price to earnings ratio is the third lowest among 309 authorities. Economically, the town has shifted from manufacturing to the service sector, with a 4.9% unemployment rate, higher than the national average of 3.8%. Recent ONS (2023) figures show that around 28.6% of the town's population aged 16 to 64 is economically inactive, compared to 21.4% in Great Britain.

The town's crime rate is 54% higher than the Lancashire average, with violence and sexual offenses being the most common. In terms of health, the town ranks 18th lowest among English local authorities, with life expectancy 3 years below the England average. Hospital stays for alcohol-related issues, self-harm, and violence are worse than regional and national averages. To conclude, the town faces a complex socio-economic landscape. While demographic factors, educational challenges, and economic hardship pose significant challenges.

### **6.2.2 School 1 - Lee Road**

Lee Road is a larger than average-sized community primary school with 416 pupils aged 4 to 11. The majority of pupils are of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage and a much larger than average proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL). The proportion of pupils supported by the pupil premium is much higher than the national average. Overall school attendance for the year that the study took place was 95.28% compared to the school's target of 97%. In 2018, 67% of pupils achieved 'expected and above' in SATs for reading, writing and maths. Compared to the national averages of 65%. The school employs 56 staff including 1 family support worker, 1 outreach worker and 1 EAL support worker. In terms of parental engagement, the school has a Friends of Lee Road Association for parents to join and offers a regular coffee morning for families. There are also ad-hoc sessions for parents, for example, to help them understand the school's phonics scheme. The school offered the IT classroom as a family learning space, there was no dedicated community or family room. The family support worker helped recruit parents and was present for part of some sessions and for the celebration assembly at the end of the course.

### **6.2.3 School 2 - Gloucester Place**

Gloucester Place is an average-sized primary school with 211 pupils aged 4 to 11. Almost all pupils are from white British backgrounds. Nearly half of the pupils are supported by the pupil premium, which is much higher than the national average. Overall school attendance

for the year that the study took place was 93.9% compared to the school's target of 97%. In 2018, 60% of pupils achieved 'expected and above' in SATs for reading, writing and maths. Compared to the national average of 65%. The school employs 38 staff including 1 family support worker. In terms of parental engagement, the school invites parents in for celebration assemblies three times per week. The school offered the library as a family learning space, there was no dedicated community or family room. The family support worker helped recruit parents and was present for the whole of some sessions and for the celebration assembly at the end of the course.

#### **6.2.4 School 3 - Roundswell**

Roundswell is a larger than average-sized primary school with 436 pupils aged 3 to 11. Almost all pupils are from white British backgrounds. An above average proportion of pupils are eligible for the pupil premium and 37.5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average. Overall school attendance for the year that the study took place was 95.7% compared to the school's target of 97%. In 2018, 42% of pupils achieved 'expected and above' in SATs for reading, writing and maths. Compared to the national average of 65%. The school employs 43 staff including 1 family support worker and 1 pupil support manager. In terms of parental engagement, the school invites parents in for celebration assemblies at least once every week. The school offered an art room as a family learning space, there was no dedicated community or family room. The family support worker helped recruit parents and was present for part of some sessions and for the celebration assembly at the end of the course.

#### **6.2.5 School 4 - Chestnut Road**

Cherry Fold is larger than the average-sized primary school with 384 pupils. Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. There is a small number from minority ethnic backgrounds and of these a few speak English as an additional language. A well above average proportion of pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding and 61.6% of pupils are eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is above the national

average. An above average proportion of pupils join or leave the school at times other than is usual. The school provides additional support during the school day for pupils in need of specialist help for emotional and behavioural difficulties through a 'nurture room' facility. Overall school attendance for the year that the study took place was 93.7% compared to the school's target of 97%. In 2018, 37% of pupils achieved 'expected and above' in SATs for reading, writing and maths. Compared to the national average of 65%. The school employs 49 staff including 1 family support worker, 1 attendance and pastoral manager/nurture lead. In terms of parental engagement, the school invites parents in for celebration assemblies at least once every week. The school also works with Lancashire Adult Learning service to offer local authority funded family learning each term including Cooking Meals on a Budget, Lego Robotics and Having Fun Sharing Books. The school provided a dedicated community and family room for sessions and the family support worker was present and offered support during each class.

### **6.3 Sampling Procedure**

In qualitative research, sampling is not about attaining statistical significance or relying on sample size to determine significance. Instead, it entails strategically selecting participants whose perspectives enrich, illuminate, and explain the phenomenon under study. In this instance, parents and practitioners engaged in the family learning courses I conducted. Theoretical sampling is not constrained by predetermined selection criteria (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). Rather, it is guided by theory, aiming to include participants who can contribute insights that advance and refine theoretical understanding (Glaser & Strauss, 2012).

In this study, data generation at each site began with observing the Family Liaison Workers and parents involved in the course. As my time in each site progressed and I developed relationships with participants and other actors within the school, I sought consent to conduct interviews. I always invited the parents, the Family Liaison Workers, and the head teacher. At some schools, I also invited teachers who had shown an interest in the course. I



made these invitations where I noticed that these individuals appeared in my fieldnotes and so I approached them to gather their perspectives on my observations or to offer an opportunity for them to expand on any ad-hoc comments they had made to me during the course of my fieldwork.

#### 6.4 Participants

Fifty-one individuals participated in the study having provided written consent. This included thirty-seven mothers, two grandmothers and one father. During the process of gaining informed consent, individuals could agree to take part in the study to different degrees of participation as indicated in the diagram below.

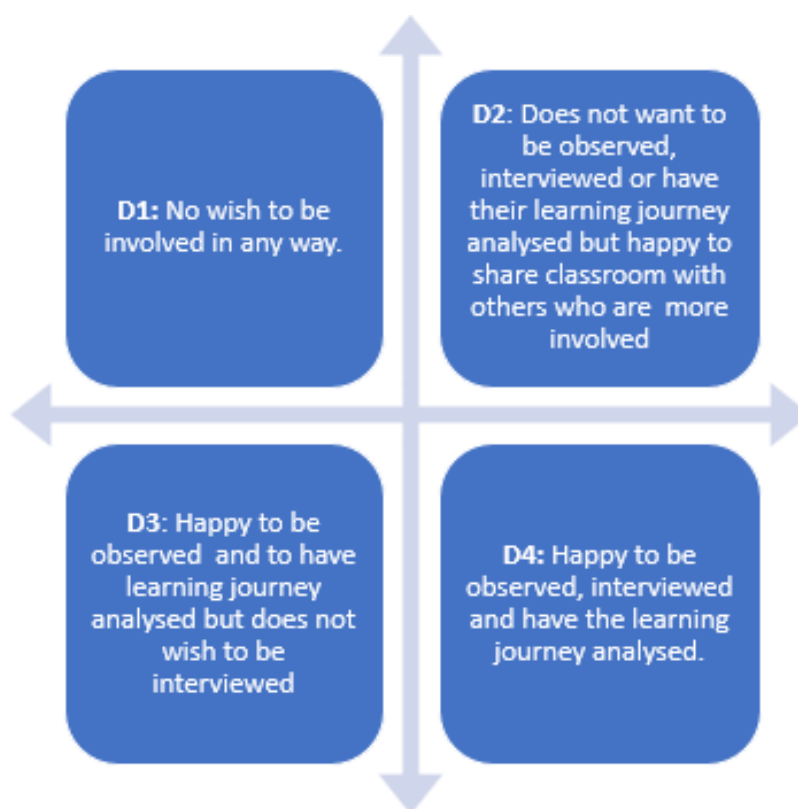


Figure 6.2. Degrees of Participation

Based on this, all parents agreed to be observed and have their learning journey analysed and twenty-nine parents also agreed to be interviewed. Carers were invited to take part in the family learning programme if they had a child in reception or year one at the school. Places were allocated by the school. The maximum number of participants that could be

accommodated on each course was twelve. All four courses retained all parents for the 10-week duration, although not every parent attended every session.

	<b>Parent/Carer</b>	<b>FLW</b>	<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Head Teacher</b>
<b>School One</b>	10	1	1	1
<b>School Two</b>	8	1	1	0
<b>School Three</b>	10	1	1	1
<b>School Four</b>	12	1	1	1
<b>Sum</b>	40	4	4	3
<b>TOTAL SAMPLE</b>	<b>51</b>			

Table 6.1. Top Level Summary of Participants

<b>Site Pseudonym</b>	<b>Term/Year</b>	<b>Degree of Participation</b>	<b>Participant Pseudonym</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Unique Identifier</b>
School 1. Lee Road Primary School	Winter 2017		Jolene	Head Teacher	LR17. Jolene. HT
			Pauline	Family Liaison Worker	LR17. Pauline. FLW
			Wendy	Teacher	LR17. Wendy. T
		D4	Fatima	Mother	LR17. Fatima. M
		D4	Nusrat	Mother	LR17. Nusrat. M
		D4	Yasmin	Mother	LR17. Yasmin. M
		D4	Saima	Mother	LR17. Saima. M
		D4	Ushna	Mother	LR17. Ushna. M
		D3	Ruqaya	Mother	LR17. Ruqaya. M
		D3	Aminah	Mother	LR17. Aminah. M
		D3	Zenab	Mother	LR17. Zenab. M
		D3	Mahira	Mother	LR17. Mahira. M
		D3	Iffat	Mother	LR17. Iffat. M
School 2. Gloucester Place Primary School	Winter 2017		Emma	Family Liaison Worker	GP17. Emma. FLW
			Gail	Teacher	GP17. Gail. T
		D4	Chelsey (Mason)	Mother	GP17. Chelsey. M
		D4	Samantha (Molly-Mae)	Mother	GP17. Samantha. M
		D4	Megan (Harrison)	Mother	GP17. Megan. M
		D4	Kimberley	Mother	GP17. Kimberley. M
		D4	Alison	Mother	GP17. Alison. M
		D4	Donna	Mother	GP17. Donna. M
		D3	Vanessa	Mother	GP17. Vanessa. M
		D3	Denise	Mother	GP17. Denise. M
School 3. Roundswell	Spring 2018		Tanya	Family Liaison Worker	RW18. Tanya. FLW
			Felicity	Head Teacher	RW18. Felicity. HT
			Ella	Teacher	RW18. Ella. T
		D4	Emma	Mother	RW18. Emma. M

Primary School		D4	Amy (Kai)	Mother	RW18. Amy. M
		D4	Melissa (Sammi)	Mother	RW18. Melissa. M
		D4	Dawn	Grandmother	RW18. Dawn. GM
		D4	Cheryl (pregnant)	Mother	RW18. Cheryl. M
		D4	Gemma	Mother	RW18. Gemma. M
		D4	Kara	Mother	RW18. Kara. M
		D4	Dean	Father	RW18. Dean. F
		D3	Ola	Mother	RW18. Ola. M
		D3	Paula	Mother	RW18. Paula. M
School 4 Chestnut Road Primary School	Spring 2018		Jane	Family Liaison Worker	CR18. Jane. FLW
			Beth	Head Teacher	CR18. Beth. HT
			Nicole	Teacher	CR18. Nicole. T
		D4	Chrissie	Mother	CR18. Chrissie. M
		D4	Cat (Myla)	Mother	CR18. Cat. M
		D4	Haley (Daniel, Tyler)	Mother	CR18. Haley. M
		D4	Zara (Zane)	Mother	CR18. Zara. M
		D4	Lindsay	Mother	CR18. Lindsay. M
		D4	Ivy	Grandmother	CR18. Ivy. GM
		D4	Rebecca	Mother	CR18. Rebecca. M
		D4	Sharon	Mother	CR18. Sharon. M
		D4	Tina	Mother	CR18. Tina. M
		D4	Vicky	Mother	CR18. Vicky. M
		D3	Amanda	Mother	CR18. Amanda. M
		D3	Faye	Mother	CR18. Faye. M

Table 6.2. Detailed Summary of Participants

## **Chapter 7: Data Generation**

### **7.1 Connecting Methodology to Data Generation**

The extended case method draws on established ethnographic tools including field notes, semi-structured interviews, and the collection of artefacts (Samuels, 2009; Thompson, 2016; Fabbre, 2015). These methods have similar relevance to this study, because to reconstruct my preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning I need to immerse myself in the field as a participant-researcher. This methodological obligation is clearly outlined in the first phase of ECM, where Burawoy (1998) calls for an extension of the researcher into the world of the participant to understand the 'the culture as an insider' (Aull Davis, 2012, p. 71). Therefore, the choice of data generation tools is crucial because they mediate the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and experiences between the researcher and participant.

In this chapter, I describe how I generated data via verbal field notes based on the observations I made whilst delivering family learning classes in the four schools. I also explain how I explored my observations further by undertaking semi-structured interviews and visual mapping. I used visual mapping for its potential 'to surface tacit knowing and enrich discussions' (Carlsen, Rudningen and Mortensen, 2014, p. 298). I provide more details about each of the three data generation tools below.

### **7.2 Verbal Field Notes**

Working as a Family Learning tutor in four different schools, over the course of two academic years, provided an extended period in the field to internalise the 'basic beliefs, fears, hopes, and expectations of the people under study' (Fetterman, 1998, p. 35). This was facilitated by recording verbal fieldnotes, using a digital voice recorder, immediately after each Family Learning class. This decision draws on the premise that verbal, as opposed to written, accounts are less likely to be mediated by a desire to use precise terms and careful wording (Gall, Borg and Gall, 1996). As shown in the [Inventory of Data](#) below, 53 verbal field note

entries were recorded over the duration of the study ranging in length from 8 to 14 minutes. At the end of the data generation period, these audio notes were professionally transcribed.

Each field note entry starts with contextual details including location, who was present, timing and circumstances. Then to add structure and depth, I followed the prompts ([Appendix 12](#)) developed by Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997). These prompts are in the format of a) description b) reflection and c) analysis and include questions such as: 'How does what you did and what you saw relate to your research question?' and 'What factors or conditions led to what you did and saw?'

This approach encouraged critical reflection and provided a framework for the entries. In the subsequent data analysis phase, the verbal field notes emerged as invaluable. They not only offered a detailed description of the schools but also played a crucial role in contextualising the observed interactions and the interview data. As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p.176) state they had the 'power to evoke the times and places of the field and call to mind the sights, sounds and smells of *elsewhere* when read and reread at home'.

### **7.3 Visual Maps – Learning Journeys**

Visual mapping 'provides the opportunity to create a tangible display of people, places and experiences' (Fang *et al.* 2016, p.224) and is a way of capturing 'the similarities and differences in the ways various actors...conceptualize the value and role of various system elements' (Cochran-Smith *et al.*, 2014, p. 115). In this study, this process began in the second session of each Family Learning course when every parent was invited to draw a map visualising their learning journey across the course of their life. The learning journey could be depicted in a variety of ways and learners were not directed on what to choose. Representations included a path, a staircase, and a timeline. Examples of learning journeys produced during the course can be seen in Figures 7.1 and 7.2.

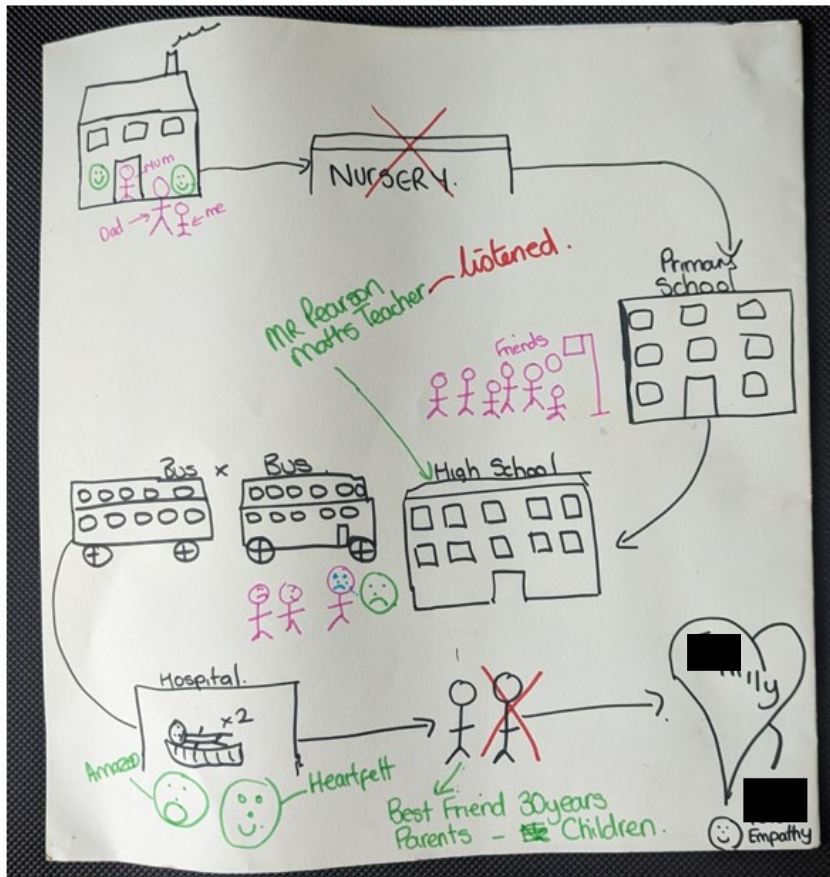


Figure 7.1. Learning Journey A. GP17. Samantha. M



Figure 7.2. Learning Journey A. RW18. Amy. M

Emmel (2008, p. 2) notes that visual and participatory maps allow informants 'to move from description to depiction to theorising' and to explore the interplay between various features simultaneously (Pathways through Participation, 2010). To encourage this, participants were prompted to add the places and people who have been involved in their learning and to ascribe an emotion about how they felt about the person, the place, and the learning.

In the final session of the ten-week course, each parent went on to complete their map with reflections on their personal learning journey during the family learning course (Figures 7.3 and 7.4). This is impactful because, as they 'define and represent places and relationships that are important to them...[it] can become a rich social encounter between research participants and research facilitators' (Pathways through Participation, 2010, p. 1). Therefore, through a visual mapping technique, and associated interviews about the maps, there is potential for theorising and reconstructing Authentic Family Learning in collaboration with the family learners.

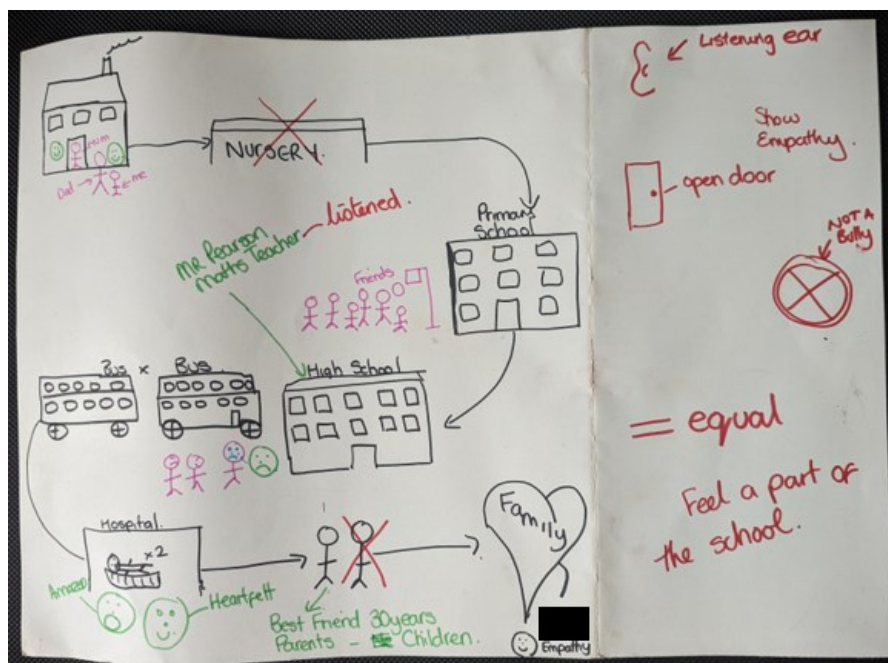


Figure 7.3. Learning Journey B. GP17. Samantha. M



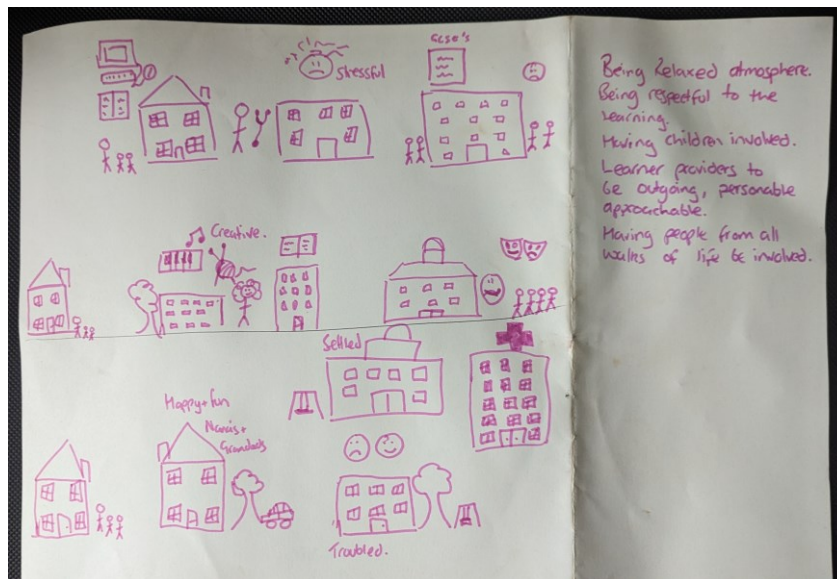


Figure 7.4. Learning Journey B. RW18. Amy. M

One advantage of visual mapping is its potential for minimising the researcher's influence on the data, because the participant works autonomously, often with minimal prompts or direction, to create a personal representation of their experience (Umoquit *et al.*, 2011). I observed this in practice when participants drew their learning journeys in unexpected ways or included types of learning that I did not foresee and thus I feel aligned with and inspired by Banks' (2007, p.22) view that 'image-based research often encourages investigative serendipity, the following of a line of inquiry that could not have been predicted in the original research design'.

I also noticed that, whilst some participants feel confident to embark upon a visual interpretation of their learning journey others find the request to document their thoughts and feelings diagrammatically inhibiting, preferring to jot words and sentences onto their maps. I therefore second Polkinghorne's (2005) assertion that visual literacy has a role to play in the degree to which the participant feels comfortable with drawing and sketching their experiences.

I would add that the way in which the researcher introduces and facilitates the task is paramount in terms of reducing barriers around confidence, competence and participants' understanding of the process. I did not expect the creation of the maps to be intuitive or



unproblematic for the participants and I expected this, as well as my role in facilitating the process, to be relevant to the findings of the study. By consciously including process, and not treating the maps as found objects, I am foregrounding the distinction between 'the depicted (or content) and the depiction (the stylistic choices at the level of the execution and the characteristics of the medium)' (Pauwels, 2010, p.560). In recognition of this I documented my observations about the process, in my fieldnotes and created space for discussion of the process during the interviews with participants.

I continue to recognise the challenge of accurately interpreting visual data and the issue of assigning a particular meaning to an image that could be perceived in a range of different ways (Wheeldon and Faubert, 2009). I address this problem, to some degree, by following Willig (2009) by interrogating my 'personal and epistemological reflexivity' to uncover and set out my own biases.

I also returned to the field to gain feedback on how I represented participants' experience in the research findings which helps ensure 'that the participants' own meanings and perspectives are represented and not curtailed by the researchers' own agenda and knowledge" (Tong *et al.*, 2007, p. 356). This approach, variously known as member checking or participant validation (Birt *et al.*, 2016) is one way of incorporating quality measures such as dependability and confirmability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989) into the study.

#### **7.4 Semi-structured interviews**

Numerous qualitative researchers report that referring to participant-generated diagrams, maps, or photographs during interviews alleviates the pressure on respondents to find the right words (Collier and Collier, 1986, Bergbom and Lepp, 2022). For this study I use learning journeys as the foundation for a semi-structured interview with parents about their experiences of Authentic Family Learning. The value of using visual stimuli during interviews is supported by studies and meta-reviews (Umoquit *et al.*, 2011; Banks, 2007; Margolis and Pauwels, 2011; Onwuegbuzie, Leech, and Collings, 2010; Wheeldon and Faubert, 2009), which note the emergence of spontaneous, unique, unsolicited, and alternative lines of

inquiry when visual data is used. In fact, the possibilities for producing deep, rich and thick data is a common motivating factor for using visual methods in concert with interviews. Banks (2007, p79) notes that images can become the 'basis for a discussion of broader abstractions and generalities; conversely, vague memories can be given sharpness and focus, unleashing a flood of detail'.

I conducted 40 semi-structured interviews with participants including mothers (n=29), Family Liaison Workers (n=4), head teachers (n=3) and teachers (n=4). Interviews lasted between 31 and 36 minutes and were audio recorded using a laptop. These audio recordings were then sent away for professional transcription. I used Jacob and Ferguson's (2012) guidance for developing semi-structured interview protocols.

The first step in developing the protocol was to revisit my literature review and to identify areas I wished to explore further with participants. This ensures the protocol is grounded in existing knowledge and increases the potential for meaningful data generation. For instance, based on the preliminary theory of AFL and the extant literature, I was interested in participants perspectives on the impact of their prior learning experiences on their sense of belonging in the school.

Next, I created a script for the beginning and end of each interview. This script includes essential details about the study, clarifies the purpose, and explains informed consent. It was a useful prompt for addressing any participant concerns about confidentiality and facilitated rapport-building by giving a chance to explain my dual role as a researcher and family learning tutor. The script also ensured I provided contact information and communicated the possibility of subsequent contact for clarification, additional questions, or member checking (Schwandt, 1997, p. 88). I did not always read directly from the script and over time became less reliant on it, but I found it helpful for shifting into the role of interviewer and for ensuring that all participants had a similar experience.

The protocol then diverged for school staff and parents. For mothers, I focused on open questions about their learning journey and experiences of family learning in the school. I used open questions including 'Tell me about what you have drawn?' and 'Tell me why that this was important to you?'. For school staff, who did not complete learning journeys, I proceeded directly to open questions about interactions, associated issues, and general feedback on the family learning course along with capturing their thoughts about working with and providing support to families at the school. Following Jacob and Ferguson (2012), I developed expansive questions that participants could take in several directions. For example, 'tell me how you feel when you are in the school'. I also wrote prompts to use where needed. The aim of this was to maintain a focus on the research aims but also allow unexpected data to emerge. For instance, the expansive question was, 'Tell me your thoughts on the parents at this school' and the prompts were 'academic support, parenting support, social support, belonging, relationships and discrimination'. Essentially, I developed open questions, let the interviewee express themselves freely, and then used prompts to uncover specific details that may not have been mentioned. I also met with my supervisors to discuss the relevance of my questions to the research aims and made updates following the discussion.

Using the interview protocol, including the learning journeys, to guide the dialogue sensitised me to the importance of creating space for 'immediacy, personal relevance, rich stories, serendipity, improvisation, an open agenda, permissiveness, and risk-taking' (Haigh, 2005, p. 14). These features may be found less often in other interactions for research such as structured interviews or oral surveys. This creative approach to interviewing is particularly congruent with the ECM methodology because it invites the family learners to collaborate in refining the preliminary theory, so that they cease to solely be subjects of research. This is impactful because, as they 'define and represent places and relationships that are important to them...[it] can become a rich social encounter between research participants and research facilitators' (Pathways through Participation, 2010, p. 1). Therefore, through the visual mapping technique, and the associated interviews, I could theorise and reconstruct AFL in collaboration with the participants.

## 7.5 Inventory of Data

<b>Data Type</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Number Collected</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Verbal Field Note Entries	Lee Road	14	53
	Gloucester Place	13	
	Roundswell	12	
	Chestnut Road	14	
Learning Journeys	Lee Road	3	18
	Gloucester Place	4	
	Roundswell	5	
	Chestnut Road	6	
Semi-structured interviews	Lee Road	8	40
	Gloucester Place	8	
	Roundswell	11	
	Chestnut Road	13	

Table 7.1. Inventory of Data

## Chapter 8: Abductive Data Analysis

Wide-ranging data needs to be made sense of and the 'making sense' needs to be carried out both systematically and in a way that is open to scrutiny. Abductive analysis allowed me to both 'listen to' the data and bring existing theory to bear on the fieldwork observations. Abductive analysis is a hybrid method that combines elements from both inductive and deductive approaches. It allows researchers to use established theory as a starting point while simultaneously identifying novel insights and perspectives directly from the data. Also, the use of two different methods of analysis contributes to a richer understanding of the phenomena under study (Kara *et al.*, 2021). This approach not only enriches the analytical process but also provides transparency to the reader, allowing the method and findings to be subject to scrutiny, enhancing the credibility of the research findings (Golafashani, 2003). In this chapter, I define abductive analysis and set out the step-by-step process I followed.

### **What is abductive analysis?**

Data analysis in the social sciences employs three main approaches: deductive, inductive, and abductive (Reichert, 2013). Deduction, often linked to theory-driven positivism, emphasises objective testing (Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013). Complementarily, inductive research explores, constructing insights without preconceived notions (Gioia *et al.*, 2012; Hurley *et al.*, 2021). Abductive analysis, a hybrid method, blends deductive and inductive elements. It allows researchers to leverage established theories and concepts, resembling deductive analysis, while simultaneously identifying novel insights and perspectives directly from the data, akin to inductive analysis.

This integrates existing knowledge with novel insights directly from data, challenging the separation of induction and deduction (Vila-Henninger *et al.*, 2022). Rooted in pragmatism, abductive research engages with data and existing theory concurrently (Thompson, 2022), using prior theory to establish parameters and creatively adjusting the theory based on unexpected findings (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2007; Tavory and Timmermans, 2009).

Because abduction prioritises theory development and offers new explanations for unexpected findings (Dubois and Gadde, 2014) it is ideal for addressing my research aim of extending the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning.

### 8.1 Inductive Coding, Deductive Coding and Abductive Coding

In summary:

- Inductive coding: Derives codes from the data, focusing on observations.
- Deductive coding: Applies predetermined codes to the data based on existing theories.
- Abductive coding: Makes inferences about the data using existing theories and concepts, while also creating new codes in response to anomalies. This facilitates critical examination preventing confirmation bias.

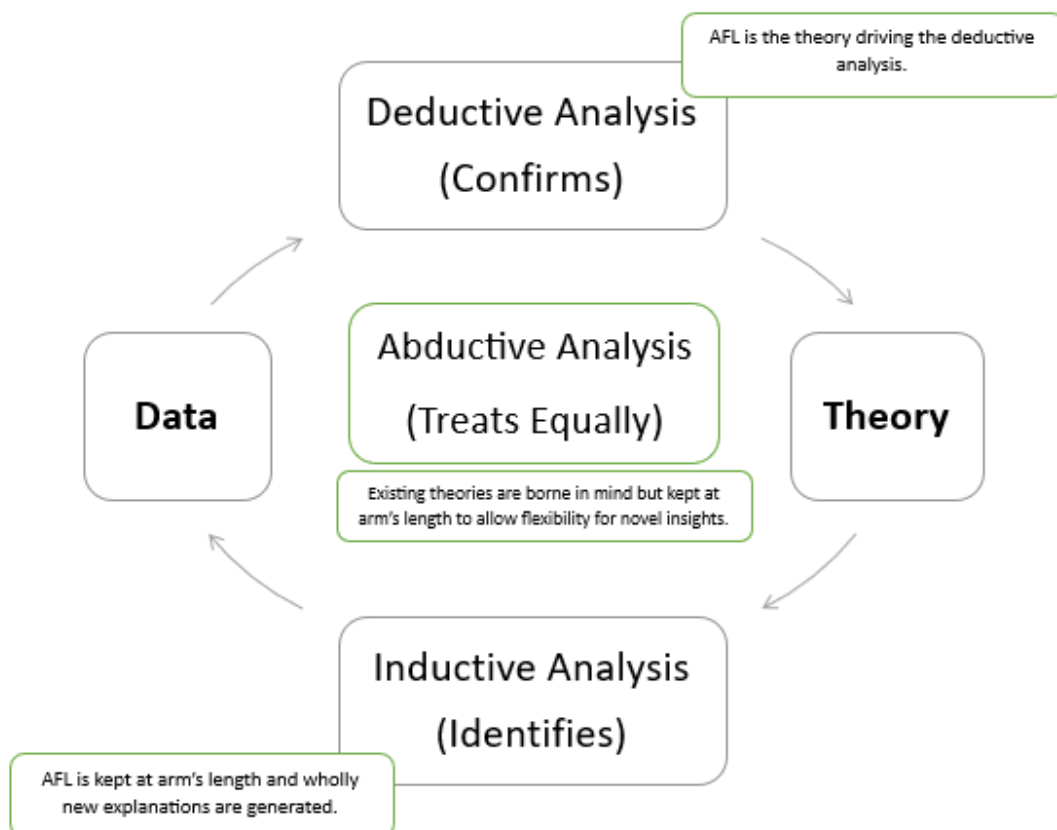


Figure 8.1. Schematic of Abductive Analysis

## **8.2 Problematising Abductive Analysis**

I suggest above that abductive analysis makes inferences about the data using existing theories and concepts, while also creating new codes in response to anomalies. This brought two questions to mind:

1. How can these inferences or the steps that lead to them be opened to scrutiny?
2. How can *my* logical conclusions be weighed against *another's* logical conclusions?

For the first question, I propose that scrutiny is possible through the transparent process detailed in this thesis. This allows readers to inspect by evaluating underlying assumptions, methods, and evidence. Addressing the second question, it is crucial to acknowledge the provisional nature of conclusions in abductive analysis. These inferences are rooted in my subjective interpretation of a specific context and are not broadly generalisable. The quality of my conclusions is assessed based on their fit in the specific situation and their relevance to family learning (Nowell, Norris, White and Moules, 2017). This aligns with the pragmatic paradigm where the emphasis is on the practical consequences of ideas, recognising that solutions may vary based on context and that effectiveness depends on practical application.

## **8.3 Step by Step Process of Analysis**

The abductive process was operationalised using codes and abductive categories as the hierarchy of analysis. I approached the analysis in the following way.

### **8.3.1 Preparation**

To ensure a focused analysis, a deductive code wall was created, using the revised theory of AFL as a foundation. I represent this below, in Figure 9.2, using bright colours intentionally so that later, following analysis it is possible to see – at a glance – which codes have been substantiated.

The intention of creating the deductive code wall was to establish clear boundaries and maintain focus during the analysis. To develop the code wall, each of the five key practices in the revised theory of AFL was revisited, and relevant deductive codes were specified. This set of codes provided a systematic and structured way to assess data in relation to the five practices and a way to assess how well the data aligned with each one.

Authentic Lifeworlds	Authentic Places	Authentic Agendas	Authentic Actions	Authentic Relating
Custom	Facility	Meaning	Meaning	Vulnerability
Perspective	Belonging	Goal	Values	Collusion
Experience	Exclusion	Participation	Interests	Alignment
Attitude	Comfort	Consciousness	Congruence	Intention
Conforming	Ownership	Hidden	Social Trust	Tension Management
Values	Status	Power Relations	Curiosity	Normative Reference Groups

Figure 8.2 The Deductive Code Wall

### 8.3.2 Transcription and familiarisation

Audio recordings of interviews and verbal field notes were transcribed in full after the data generation phase of the research. Naturalised transcription was used to capture participants' mode of speaking. Whilst transcription was outsourced to a third-party, recordings were kept on hand to check for accuracy and to enhance familiarisation whilst making reflective notes and highlighting areas of interest. Once a transcribed data set was received, it was actively read to search for the meaning behind narratives and to understand the context in which things occur (Boyatzis, 1998). I regularly listened back to the recordings during the familiarisation process. At this stage, notes were taken to outline and interpret potential patterns within the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). For example, noting where the same phenomena were discussed at different schools. This note taking phase was helpful for getting an over-arching sense of the wide-ranging data set.



Following the data generation phase of the research, interviews and verbal field notes were fully transcribed from audio recordings. Naturalised transcription was utilised to capture the participants' speech patterns. Although transcription was outsourced to a third party, recordings were retained for accuracy checks and to aid in familiarisation while making reflective notes and identifying areas of interest. Upon receiving the transcribed dataset, active reading was undertaken to discern meaning and grasp the context (Boyatzis, 1998). I regularly reviewed recordings during the familiarisation process, and took notes to outline insights relevant to the research aims (Braun and Clarke, 2022). This also helped identify patterns across the dataset. For instance, noting where the same issues were discussed in different schools. This note-taking phase facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the extensive dataset.

### ***8.3.3 Abductive Coding***

Next, I organised the data using abductive coding, so that it was manageable and relevant to the research aims. An open coding process was undertaken, using the deductive code wall whilst also recording new codes inductively when I encountered unexpected, non-conformist data. This introduced what Strauss and Corbin (1998) call meaningful codes that 'open up' the data. The analysis consisted of a close reading of each transcript and application of the deductive and inductive codes, first in the margins of each transcript and then into tables using a Word document. These tables facilitated the identification of data segments corresponding to each code as suggested by Attride-Stirling (2001). I would also add memos to this framework to capture additional reflections from listening back to the recording or to clarify why this unit of meaning was relevant to the code (Figure 8.3).

rather than just drumming them with information, they've got to make it fun. If it's not fun, they're just gonna be disinterested... I really enjoyed the family learning time, it was really good	RW18. Amy. M
I prefer to talk to them rather than just get it on a piece of paper.	RW18. Amy. M
If you have a question about something you don't get, like the phonics which none of us have a clue about they don't want to know. You ask a question and they're just itching to get away from you. If you've given me a lot more information than the teachers, to be fair'	RW18. Amy. M
But, I also, that one teacher, made life so much better. And that's why Jane. I think she is one of the most amazing people I have every met in my life. The way she speaks to the children -. She doesn't speak to them like she's a teacher. She doesn't speak to them -. My [redacted] calls her Auntie [redacted] and she's from the school.	CR18. Haley. M

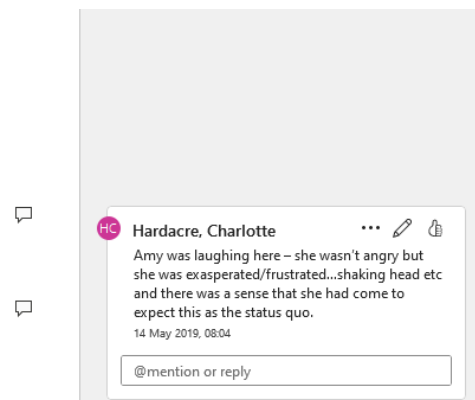


Figure 8.3. Example of a memo during the coding process

At the end of this process there were 44 codes. These were a combination of 31 newly identified inductive codes and 13 of the original deductive codes. To incorporate the voices of the participants in-vivo coding has been used to rename 3 of the 13 deductive codes. Where this took place, consent was gained from the participants and the code names are placed inside speech marks. The substantiated deductive codes and newly identified inductive codes are presented below.

Authentic Lifeworlds	Authentic Places	Authentic Agendas	Authentic Actions	Authentic Relating
				Collusion
	"Sore subject"		"Say it how it is"	Intention
	"Make a brew"	Hidden	Social Trust	Tension Management
Values	Status	Power Relations	Curiosity	Normative Reference Groups

Figure 8.4. Substantiated deductive codes

"On their Level"	"Learned Helplessness"	"Well Thick Me"
"Like a Chav"	"Acronym Fatigue"	Experiences
"Out of my Shell"	Supportive Power	"Make a Brew"
"Intervention Churn"	Employability	"Say it how it is"
"Sore Subject" (Exclusion)	High Deprivation	Status Anxiety
"What you're about"	Critical Consciousness	"Out of my Shell"
"Comfortable with Control"	Asset Balanced	"Down to Family"
Collusion	Finance and Facilities	Workload
"In it with them"	Family Centred?	High-stakes Testing
Resilience	Teach to the Test	Scrutiny
"What curriculum?"		

Table 8.1 Inductive codes

### **8.3.4 Development of Categories**

Next, I began to filter the data to identify Abductive Categories. This involved, sorting through the analysed data to identify cross sections between multiple codes. For example, looking at which text excerpts appeared across two codes and which codes were underpinned by few excerpts. This resulted in data reduction as codes were combined and removed until the final categories were confirmed.

Codes are specific and short, categories are broader groupings of related codes (Guest *et al.*, 2012; Saldaña, 2015). To create categories, I considered how different codes related to each other and grouped them based on how well they explain the story in the data (Aronson, 1995; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Over the duration of the analysis, categories were frequently readjusted, renamed, collapsed, and merged.

While there is no specific rule specifying how frequently a code must appear to become a category, it is essential that all categories contribute to a meaningful and coherent narrative within the data (Aronson, 1995; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Frequently, a single code became a

category emphasising its critical role in shaping the emerging explanation (Braun *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, as at the coding stage, certain categories were labelled using salient quotes from participants. This use of 'in vivo' category names employed participants' exact words or phrases to capture their lived experiences and perspectives. Examples include, "like a chav", "well thick me" and "make a brew". By retaining verbatim representations of participants' language preserves the authenticity and richness of their expression.

The abductive categories resulting from the analysis are presented in Figure 9.6. This diagram visually represents the degree to which certain practices in Authentic Family Learning have been substantiated.

Authentic Lifeworlds	Authentic Places	Authentic Agendas	Authentic Actions	Authentic Relating	Emergent Categories
"Out of my Shell"		Family Centred?		"What you're about"	
"Well thick me"	Finance and Facilities	"Learned Helplessness"	Supportive Power	Collusion	
"Like a chav"	"Sore subject"	"Comfortable with Control"	"Say it how it is"	Intention	Accountability
Conforming	"Make a brew"	Hidden	Social Trust	Tension Management	Status Anxiety
Values	Status	Power Relations	Curiosity	Normative Reference Groups	Asset Balanced

Figure 8.5. Final Abductive Categories after Data Analysis

Authentic Lifeworlds	Authentic Places	Authentic Agendas	Authentic Actions	Authentic Relating	Emergent Categories
Custom	Facility	Meaning	Meaning	Vulnerability	
Perspective	Belonging	Goal	Values	Collusion	
Experience	Exclusion	Participation	Interests	Alignment	
Attitude	Comfort	Consciousness	Congruence	Intention	
Conforming	Ownership	Hidden	Social Trust	Tension Management	Status Anxiety
Values	Status	Power Relations	Curiosity	Normative Reference Groups	Asset Balanced

Figure 8.6. Moving from Deductive Codes to Abductive Categories

### **8.3.5 Organising the Categories using Intervention, Process and Force**

Identifying the abductive categories was a satisfactory staging point, but I wanted to go further and use them to challenge and scrutinise my original theory. Therefore, the next step involved using the different phases of extended case method – intervention, process and force - as a set of lenses for revisiting the data. This offered a way to fulfil the methodological imperative of identifying the social processes and external forces evident in the data.

Starting with 'intervention', I closely examined the categories in relation to the research aims associated with each phase of ECM. This provided an opportunity to reflect on my interpretations and consider alternative explanations. For each of the four phases of ECM, I identified common groupings of categories. Engaging in this organising process prompted significant reflection on the nature of the categories (Campbell *et al.*, 2021). It allowed me to connect the micro-level issues observed in the data with macro perspectives, considering the categories within the context of the phases of ECM.

This approach proves essential for simplifying the inherent complexity of qualitative data, providing a means to condense diverse data points into overarching organising groups. Helping readers to navigate through the data more efficiently and uncovering meaningful connections that may be elusive when examining individual categories in isolation. Furthermore, the use of colour when presenting the categories in relation to the phases of ECM serves to visually highlight areas where aspects of the preliminary theory were strongly supported (evident in the bright colours of Intervention and Process) and where nuance and detail were incorporated (evident in the paler colours of Force). This approach aids communication by providing a visual language that simplifies the presentation of intricate research findings, making them more understandable and accessible.

ECM Phase	Abductive Categories
<b>Intervention</b>  <b>Chapter 9</b>	Status
	"Make a Brew"
	"Sore Subject"
	Social Trust
	Power Relations
	Normative Reference Groups
	Curiosity
	"Well thick me"
	"Like a chav"
	Values
ECM Phase	Abductive Categories
<b>Process</b>  <b>Chapter 10</b>	Intention
	Hidden
	"What you're about"
	Tension Management
	Conforming
	"Comfortable with Control"
	"Out of my shell"
	Collusion
	"Say it how it is"
ECM Phase	Abductive Categories

<b>Force</b>  <b>Chapter 11</b>	"Learned helplessness"
	Status Anxiety
	Asset Balanced
	Family Centred?
	Finance and Facilities
	Accountability

Figure 8.7. ECM Phases and Abductive Categories

Subsequently, adhering to the ECM methodology, the final phase, Reconstruction, will be addressed in Chapter 12. In this phase, I draw together the insights derived from the Intervention, Process, and Force phases. This involves incorporating anomalies, unexpected insights, and new understandings from the analysed data. Ultimately, I arrive at a reconstruction of the Five Key Practices into the Three Characteristics of Authentic Family Learning.

#### **8.4 Summary**

In summary the analysis in this study involved a systematic examination of qualitative data within the context of Authentic Family Learning (AFL) theory. I commenced with the creation of a deductive code wall, using AFL's five key practices as a foundation to ensure focused analysis. Transcription and familiarisation followed. After which, abductive coding facilitated data reduction by selecting, simplifying, and abstracting relevant information. The development of categories involved filtering and combining codes. The extended case method (ECM) was then applied to challenge the original theory, organising the abductive categories across the ECM phases. In the following chapters, the findings of this analysis will be presented. The process will conclude in Chapter 12 where I reconstruct the preliminary theory based on the process of analysis described here.

## **Chapter 9: Findings - Intervention**

### **9.1 Extension of Observer to Participant**

This findings chapter is my response to Burawoy's (1998) call for 'intervention of the observer in the life of the participant'. Table 9.1 sets out the Abductive Categories that appear in this chapter due to their relevance to the ECM phase of Intervention. The focus of this Phase is the data gathered during the early weeks of each Authentic Family Learning course, as I entered the field and intervened in the lives of participants and assimilated into my role as family learning tutor and researcher. This was a starker, more jarring process in the first sites, as I returned to the field for the first time in several years. Yet, even as I became more comfortable inhabiting the role of researcher there was always a move from outsider, and observer, towards insider and participant as both I and the parents cohered as a group and as I worked to balance the dual role of researcher and participant.

This chapter presents a close consideration of the first three weeks of the four courses. The early weeks are a time when interactions, for all participants, are heightened by the novelty and pressures of starting a new course. In this way, for me as a researcher the impact of entering the field may be a useful way to capture how 'a social order reveals itself in the way it responds to pressure' (Burawoy, 1998, p. 17). For example, the pressure of coming together as a group, talking about personal goals and parenting in a visible way in an institutional space. Thus, there will be a focus on the micro-processes at work during the early stages of Authentic Family Learning classes such as the interactions that took place as part of settling into the course, identifying strengths and needs and making sense of the distinct approach to AFL.

### **9.2 Advance Organiser: Findings Relating to the Phase of Intervention**

This chapter explores the experience of being in Authentic Family Learning spaces, including navigating fortified schools and suboptimal classrooms. It examines how these spaces create feelings of subordinate, outsider, and disruptor status for both parents and AFL practitioners. The data highlights how relational activities during the initial stages of AFL can counteract



the negative effects of unpleasant spaces, as seen in in vivo categories such as ‘making a brew’. Data presented here also sheds light on parents' beliefs about school, revealing how past negative experiences shape their perceptions of returning to school as learners, mothers, and adults. Additionally, the chapter discusses material and cultural barriers to equitable participation in the school environment. The relational aspects of AFL, involving key figures like Family Liaison Workers and head teachers, are crucial for establishing social trust and reinforcing norms, which can affect communication and educational goals. Furthermore, the findings show how AFL courses can reveal parents’ strengths, needs, and entrenched beliefs. Finally, I discuss the alignment and divergence of values between AFL participants and school-based values, highlighting the importance of engaging with parents' strengths, needs, identity, and values as a motivating starting point for AFL.

ECM Phase	Abductive Categories
<b>Intervention</b>	Status
	"Make a Brew"
	"Sore Subject"
	Social Trust
	Power Relations
	Normative Reference Groups
	Curiosity
	"Well thick me"
	"Like a chav"
	Values

Table 9.1 Phase One Abductive Categories

### 9.3 Abductive Categories Relating to the Phase of Intervention

#### **Status**

Entering each of the five schools for the first time was a similar experience, shaped by buzzers, holding areas, processing and gatekeepers. The feeling of being an interloper, who must be processed before being deemed acceptable to enter a fortified institution, was present at each site. This contributed to a perception of my presence, and the parents’ presence, as disruptive to the efficient running of the normal school day and our status as

subordinate to the recognisable residents of the school space. Each site had electronic entry-systems to control access to the school. All four sites had one main entrance with a door that opened into a vestibule, where a button needed to be pressed in order to gain entry to a holding space with a reception desk. This desk was always behind glass – sometimes with a sliding window and sometimes with holes through which to speak and a gap through which to pass things. Two sites also had electronic entry systems on the gates to the school grounds.

I was inevitably wheeling a trolley of resources and carrying one or two bags when attempting to gain access to the site and would need to place all the items down to push the buttons and open the gates and doors to enter the space. This features in my fieldnotes at the first school:

*'Need to arrive earlier...I forgot how long it takes to get into schools, especially with all my stuff. It's actually a bit of an ordeal. Definitely makes me feel like I'm not part of the fabric of the space. The school staff move about seamlessly – by whipping out swipe cards or having a familiar face that gets the buzzer pressed faster. I don't enjoy the experience of standing outside the school trying to smile pleasantly at the unblinking camera by the main gate, hoping to motivate the human being behind it to swiftly press the buzzer. I feel unwelcome – as though I am seeking approval to access a suspicious, guarded space'*

LR17, Field Notes, Week 3

This experience was echoed by parents who often indicated a sense of outsider status in relation to entering the school space:

*'It's like Fort Knox this school. We're gonna get the kids to start propping the fire door open so we can go round the back and just get in our room. Come on, they make you wait for fun here'*

RW18. Cheryl. M

Despite the obvious legitimate reasons for a school having secure entry-systems, their use contributed to a sense that our presence in the school was inconvenient and disrupted the normal running of the school. The buzzers were a part of this because running the course meant around 10 parents arriving at a similar time, each pressing the button to be let in and

then signing in and being placed in a holding space. Parents commonly referred back to the issues with entering the school during the semi-structured interviews. This enhanced the sense for me that they noticed its contribution to a subordinate and outsider status for Family Learners in the school. Some accepted this designation and others resisted it. An example of the perception and rejection of this status was highlighted by Haley, who was not the only parent to invoke prison metaphors when describing entering and being in school spaces:

*'Only thing I don't like is dealing with them in the office. They leave us standing there and we're going 'buzz, buzz, buzz'. They hate us! I give it another buzz for good measure, I do. I think 'hello love, here to see my child who's not banged up thank you very much, so, let me in!''*

CR18. Haley. M

Once inside, all four schools chose to gather the parents in one space rather than letting them straight through to the Family Learning room. Once all the parents arrived, I would collect them and bring them to our learning space. This was often a fraught time because there were never enough seats in these vestibules and so parents stood around the edges of the room, trying to stay out of the way of deliveries, visitors and staff. These individuals often received greetings because they were familiar faces or because they were able to adopt the 'appropriate' demeanour; professional, efficient, smartly presented and/or deferential. My concern about the impact of holding spaces is captured in my field notes:

*I am not sure why the parents always have to be held in the reception area. Every school has required it so far. They sign in (electronically) and have Visitor Badges so I feel it would be reasonable for them to walk to the classroom as they arrive. Stacking them up in the reception feels like they are in a holding pen. There is never enough room and it doesn't feel welcoming. It could easily put people off because it suggests that being inside the school during the school day is 'out of the norm' and even unwanted.*

CR18, Field Notes, Week 2b

There was also limited interaction between the office staff and the parents in the holding area. Partly because they were busy with their duties, partly because of the glass window separating parents from the office and partly because of the introduction of electronic visitor management systems (VMS). Each school had a touch screen display in the vestibule area

which visitors used to input their name, reason for visiting and car registration. After these inputs, the VMS would take a photograph of the visitor and this image, along with the visitor's name and visitor number would be automatically printed to a sticky label which the office administrator would pass through the window to the visitor.

For me, this automated process would mostly be initiated without any greeting from the administrator and I would often have to wave or tap on the window and point at the printer to get my visitor badge and enter the school. On several occasions it was passed to me with one hand whilst the other hand was used to press the door release buzzer. Leaving me the ungainly task of trying to juggle the sticky visitor label, my resource trolley and my bags at the same time as grabbing the door handle before the release timer expired. This repeatedly occurred without any spoken communication. In my field notes I reflect my own role in these interactions, remembering the lengths to which I once went to become a part of the school community and avoid these sorts of frustrating and impersonal encounters:

*'Having to ingratiate myself with office/reception staff used to be a fun challenge when I was a Family Learning tutor 10 years ago. Bringing them onside was a point of personal pride. Now, I feel less willing to spend time on these activities. I notice that instead I am spending a lot longer with the head teacher explaining what commitments the school should offer to the Family Learning course - such as being welcoming to parents. I feel comfortable encouraging her to stress the importance of Family Learning to her staff team in a way I did not previously. That said, I did buy the office staff at School 3 chocolate oranges to thank them for distributing certificates to parents - and predictably, it made a difference to our encounters.'*

GP17, Field Notes, Week 6

There were several parents who recounted positive experiences of being in the school space, for example members of the PTA, parents who visited the school as a volunteer to read to children and parents who attended assemblies regularly. Some of these parents explained that they had overcome initial difficulties to become comfortable in the space. Others attributed their comfort to having had positive prior experiences with school or good relationships with Family Liaison Workers or fellow parents. These disconfirming cases do not diminish the role of fortified schools and suboptimal learning spaces in generating

subordinate, outsider or disruptive status for many parents, rather they indicate the significant stocks of capital required to overcome the unnecessary barriers parents face when wishing to spend time in the space where their children learn.

### ***“Make a Brew”***

The notion of generative space was further evident in the rooms provided for the Family Learning classes in each of the five schools. The allocation of ill-equipped and inappropriate spaces occurred, despite advance discussion with headteachers about the format and requirements of the course. This did not go unnoticed by parents:

*‘It’d be nice to have somewhere for the parents in here. I mean, what were we like at the beginning...I kept nearly falling off that baby stool. We need somewhere we can make a brew and have a chat. They don’t want that though. It’s like when you have someone knocking on, who you don’t want to bother with. No brew for you. No sitting on the settee. Cos, you don’t let em get too comfy in case they stick around’*

RW18. Cheryl. M

The tacit message of poor provision of space is that parents feel unwelcome. Yet, all of the head teachers involved in setting up each course, expressed an understanding of the benefits of engaging parents and an interest in improving parental engagement within their school. However, consistent actions to support this aim were not always taken. This was despite all of the schools hosting several ‘parental engagement’ activities a term, including parent briefings, parent evenings and parents assemblies, and two schools (Southfield and Chestnut Road) having Parent Teacher Associations. Only one school (Lee Road) had hosted Local Authority funded Family Learning Courses in the past and all schools indicated that the ad hoc sessions delivered by teachers and/or Family Liaison Workers had low attendance and retention. As noted in an interview with the headteacher at Roundswell:

*‘Well, as you know we bit your hand off when you emailed about this course and I mean, we’re delighted with attendance. We’ve tried lots of different things in the past, I mean honestly you name it, but never quite got them to stick it out like this’*

RW18. Felicity. HT

This was a common refrain from head teachers once the course was in its latter stages and also at the celebration assemblies I organised after each course. Head teachers were surprised at the attendance and retention levels and often inquired as to how it was achieved. One school (Chestnut Road) invited me to deliver a training session on parental engagement. Thus, the schools' overt message to me was one of real interest in improving school-home relationships but the tacit message to parents, implicit in the poor provision of space, was one of decided disinterest. My field notes indicate a sense of frustration at these mixed messages:

*'Visited Roundswell today to deliver staff training on parental engagement. Feel conflicted as the head teacher was keen for me to talk about what we do so parents see the course through. Wanted to say, you don't need whole-staff training yet. First make practical changes – like letting us use the community space instead of squeezing us into the impractical art room'*

RW18, Field Notes, Week 8

The disconnect between schools attempts to engage parents, and parents' willingness to enter the school space, was observed by Ella, an active member of the Parent Teacher Association at Roundswell. She had established good relationships with the school and was contemplating why parents were unable to respond positively to invitations from the school. Her comments indicate that whilst not all parents felt disregarded by schools, the fact that disconnection was a common phenomenon was well known:

*'I find it really hard that the school is trying to involve families but then they're not going to come. I know on OFSTED it was an issue, people feel like they're not wanted in the school, that there's not enough communication – but I think there is'*

RW18, Ella, M

The division between school and parents often came up in the semi-structured interviews both in relation to immediate practicalities – such as the level of comfort or the space available for the children to join the group - and in connection to prior educational experiences.

*'I didn't think I'd like it, cos we're all on top of each other and you can't get past to get the glue or whatever and the dragons [office staff] don't like us*

*rocking up every week. But, we've made it our own haven't we. It's like, our room now'.*

RW18. Melissa. M

*'I found it a bit stressful at first, coming into school. I dunno, I just get worked up about it because school was a horrible place for me and then, now I just feel judged or something'*

GP17. Chelsey. M

A range of influences mediated the impact of suboptimal learning spaces. These include, minimising course administration activities, ensuring the children are a significant part of the session, incorporating meaningful content relevant to the school and fostering a warm and friendly atmosphere that is distinct from formal classroom environments. A range of indicative quotes from across several sites speak to these commonly raised influences:

*'They did another course and I came to two but then I stopped. The children didn't come in for it and the tutor is nice but it was a lot talking and I did not enjoy those tests. I like it better when children are coming'*

LR17. Fatima. M

*'What I liked about this course was there weren't too much rigamarole. I don't mean to be rude but in the past we've spent more time filling in forms and listening to them waffling on and then there's five minutes for the class and hardly any time with the kids. Lego Robots was like that and we'd been well up for that one'*

GP17. Samantha. M

*I didn't know phonics till I were in Story Sacks, I'll be honest. So things like this helps a parent as well [as their child], because I never did phonics at school...Just to have a little idea of what your child would be doing, instead of coming home with homework and going, "Ooh, I an't got a clue. I never did that." Because that's that one thing you don't want to say to your child.'*

CR18, Haley, M

*'...I enjoy coming to your class. It was a friendly atmosphere ...you wouldn't see me there if it was like school!'*

CR18. Zara. M

### ***“Sore Subject”***

The previous Abductive Category of ‘Make me a brew’ emerged from the range of relational activities, evident in the data, that go some way to ameliorating the obstacles of suboptimal Family Learning spaces and fortified schools. These obstacles are the material entities, that contribute to the institutionalisation of the educational space and are produced by a culture that prioritises safety and efficiency in ways that can be counterproductive to espoused aims such as creating a welcoming environment for parents. Alongside, these external influences, the data also captures how parents’ inner lives – informed by their prior educational experiences - shape their assimilation into the Authentic Family Learning group. For example, during the semi-structured interviews, most parents would repeatedly refer to their school days in highly negative terms. The repeated framing of school as a contentious topic with unpleasant connotations, to the degree that it was a difficult matter to broach, is neatly summed up by Zara:

*‘I didn’t really like school...it’s a very sore subject for me’*

CR18, Zara, M

The notion of school as a ‘Sore subject’ occurred repeatedly in the semi-structured interviews at all of the schools, with parents variously referring to bullying, isolation on the basis of social class, an absence of trusted adults and mistreatment by teachers as contributing to their perceptions of school as a rebarbative experience. The following comments are indicative of such experiences:

*‘High school...It wasn’t great, again...Definitely knew I was different then. A lot of bullying. Ended up in hospital then because I used to internalise stress. They thought I had appendicitis. I wasn’t, I was just very stressed.’*

CR18, Cat, M

*‘I didn’t have the right stuff, trainers and whatever. So they called me scruffy and horrible things, worser things than that. The teachers, I dunno they never stopped it and they just thought the same thing I think really’*

GP17. Chelsey. M



In contrast, parents often positioned their experience of AFL as positive by stating that it is 'not like school'. This is notable considering AFL takes place in schools and, in part, aims to help support parents with the education of their children. For some, these strongly held beliefs – in which schooling is analogous with negativity - were in fact part of their drive to attend AFL. Parents wanted to ensure their own children had better experiences than they had themselves. This came up during my semi-structured interview with Cat who was reflecting on her interest in creating and delivering parent empowerment classes at the school:

*'Well, I find that a lot of parents when they're doing the learning, they then get reminded of the bad things they'd been through before. So, if they've had issues with learning, it's almost like they want their child to do better'*

CR18, Cat, M

Other parents acknowledged poor prior experiences but did not perceive these as affecting their engagement with the schools. These parents were often those who had joined Parent Teacher Associations or who had good relationships with teaching assistants or Family Liaison Workers.

*'if they've not had a very good experience, maybe that's why they think teachers aren't very nice. If you've had bad experiences with certain teachers as a child, it's gonna stay with you and make you think that all teachers are the same. I felt that way myself but then I got to know people at this school – like [teaching assistant].'*

RW18, Ella, M

Thus, the data suggests that negative prior educational experiences can have various influences on parents. Including, contributing to disaffection with school or acting as a catalyst for seeking positive experiences for their own children. Additionally, some parents, such as Ella, described integrating negative events, in their own education, into a broader understanding where schools are in fact populated by people who may also have had negative educational experiences. As opposed to schools being staffed by adversaries with inherently negative intentions towards parents and pupils. This latter understanding dismantles the destructive 'them and us' construct that impinges on productive home-school relationships. The convergence of external and internal factors was challenging and

accentuates my desire to insist that the visible, material carriers of institutionalisation should be tackled upfront rather than accepted as part of the norms of the school.

### **Social Trust**

During the semi-structured interviews, we discussed the people who featured in parents' learning journeys. In doing so, the notion of trust was raised frequently as parents reflected on the quality of their relationships with teachers, teaching assistants and Family Liaison Workers. This is a type of 'social trust', in that it is understood in terms of the social connections between parents and staff as well as the way in which parents feel they are treated. Perceptions of poor treatment, dismissiveness and judgement contributed to a lack of social trust towards teachers and arose in almost all the semi-structured interviews with parents:

*'There was a thing here with Facebook where a teacher had done statuses calling parents. Not saying their names or anything but just like calling people – saying things about how they talk to their kids. She's still here. They didn't sack her, they just sent a letter round.'*

RW18. Cheryl. M

*'If you have a question about something you don't get, like the phonics which none of us have a clue about, they don't want to know. You ask a question and they're just itching to get away from you. You've given me a lot more information than the teachers, to be fair'*

RW18. Amy. M

*'The one thing that people, I think parents hate, is judging you. You don't want to – I'll be honest, I went into Parents' Evening, walked in and the first thing she said, "Blah-blah-blah, this is how you should do it." Hold on a minute, back off a little bit, let me explain...'*

CR18. Haley. M

The notion of social trust was also evident during the shared goal setting activities that take place in the early stages of each course. In my field notes I observe that parents who feel welcome and valued are quicker to suggest and/or support activities that were highly visible in the school – such as putting up a display or creating a 'Parent Guide to Phonics'. Whereas

parents who felt excluded or under-valued supported activities that involved leaving the school space – such as educational visits to museums or outdoor learning sessions – or activities that could involve minimal engagement with school staff such as writing letters to authors or making story sacks:

*'Also, during goal setting today, there was a lot of resistance – from the majority of parents – to the suggestion of putting up a display in the school. The justification was that teachers would not want parents creating a display and if we did that it would be judged negatively by teachers. Challenging this fixed thinking was difficult as feelings were strong. Planning a library visit off-site was seen as a much better goal with the main reason being that we could organise it without engaging with teachers. Them and Us thinking is so strong here – it shapes every discussion we have!*

RW18. Field Notes. Week 2b

The notion of social trust also emerged during the semi-structured interviews with the head teacher, who acknowledged the existence of mistrust on the part of parents and identified an interest in developing home-school relationships. However, there was limited acknowledgement of the role of the whole school in these activities, rather the onus for building trust was placed on individual class teachers:

*'We want parents to feel welcome but it's also a balancing act because there was a time when we were...perhaps doing too much. Washing clothes and so on. The ideal is when parents do things for themselves and are confident going out in the world, you know rather than turning to the school. Really, it's communication we need to get right. To avoid misunderstandings and offence being caused over minor things'*

CR18. Felicity. HT.

*'We are keen for parents to get involved but we do see a lot of unwillingness to join in. Perhaps because for quite a number, particularly the ones we most need to engage, well..., when they are called into school it's to raise concerns and so...they can be quite defensive, and conversations get tense. Though, I think our teachers are aware of the need to tackle parent-teacher meetings sensitively – we have worked on it extensively to try to improve their approach'*

CR18. Beth. HT

It should be noted that whilst social trust was lacking towards class teachers and the school as an institution, there were often high levels of social trust reported towards Family Liaison

Workers and teaching assistants. Interestingly, this was often framed in contrast to relations with class teachers and will be explored in more detail in the following Abductive Category which suggests that power relations underpin these different stocks of social trust.

### **Power Relations**

The notion of establishing 'who we are' within the family learning space is shaped by the power-laden nature of relationships within the ecology of the school. This was evident in semi-structured interviews when parents made a clear distinction between the quality of their relationships with teachers, on the one hand, and with teaching assistants and Family Liaison Workers on the other:

*'Yeah. Well, with Kai's teacher, I go to the teaching assistant more than the teacher. I have a lot more conversation and find out a lot more things from her.'*

RW18. Amy. M

*'...when I come out of school and I see Jane [FLW], the first thing she does. "You going home for a coffee, now?" So, she talks to you, not like a teacher. Talks to you as a friend.'*

CR18. Haley. M

This alignment toward teaching assistants and Family Learning Workers, and away from teachers, reveals the complex ecology of schools, where strata of power within the faculty are interpreted by parents in ways that affect attachments forming and bolster feelings of alienation and powerlessness on both sides.

*'One thing we want to tackle, and we have tried various things already, is developing links with the hard to reach parents. There is a significant group who just don't want to engage at all'*

CR18. Beth. HT

*'I think some parents feel quite – I can't think of the word...Lower than the school. Inferior, almost.'*

CR18. Cat. M

Notably, concern was raised about parents' lack of alignment with teachers but the asset of excellent relationships on the part of both teaching assistants and Family Liaison Workers

was overlooked by head teachers and even Family Liaison Workers themselves. This suggests some missed opportunities to capitalise on the positive alignment between parents and support or pastoral staff members. Although tackling the disconnect between teachers and parents is an understandable focus for a head teacher as parents' disaffection can mean teachers perceive parents as a 'lost cause', who they are powerless to connect with or support. A problem exacerbated by differing feelings between parents and teachers about what should be the educational priorities for children, schools and families.

Adding to this complex picture, the data suggests that parents' feelings of alienation have a range of drivers including assumptions about teachers' level of interest, availability and intentions. As can be seen in the indicative quotes below, parents articulated their disaffection in concrete terms, suggesting an acceptance of a status quo that they do not have the power to disrupt:

*'What it is, is that, Emma is interested in me and all mine, more than any of the teachers...and I've got kids in three classes here...She's just more like us, it's not nice to say, because I don't like calling teachers, but they can be very snotty I think'*

GP17. Chelsey. M

*'I just find that they are all rushed off their feet every minute and they don't have two seconds to talk to you at the door. You have to make an appointment and I'm not one for all that messing about'*

GP17. Samantha. M

*'Things were very different when I was at school, so maybe I don't know what's what but I do think the teachers here seem stressed and they just care about tests and work, work, work, work, work. I don't think that's childhood myself but you can't say because it's their way or forget it isn't it'*

RW18. Dawn. GM

Asking parents to reflect on the individuals who are important to their learning, and their children's learning, inevitably led to discussions about staff at the school. The intention of this was not to simply air grievances about teachers. So, when concerns were raised, I used

this as an opportunity to try and generate critical consciousness by highlighting the chance to challenge the status quo in positive ways. This is reminiscent of AFL work more broadly, as parents are encouraged to appreciate their own agency within the ecology of the school. My field notes reflect the Family Learning tutor's role in flattening hierarchies by challenging parents' perceptions of teachers and teachers' perceptions of parents:

*'Had an appointment with [teacher] to discuss the phonics scheme used in the school. Not a positive meeting. She was unenthusiastic about parents' willingness to support their children with phonics and said that reading books and reading records were rarely kept up with. I empathised and acknowledged the challenge she faced. It was difficult to bring up the positive work parents are doing in AFL without putting the teacher into a defensive stance. She wanted to have a shared moan – noting that several of the parents in the AFL group are 'hard work'. As ever bridging the gap between teacher and parents is hard to manage without appearing sanctimonious. Need to work on being alongside both, rather than moralising and asking either group to 'do better' as totally counter-productive. Minimises the real challenges faced by either side and is shaming.'*

GP17, Field Notes, Week 3

As the fieldwork progressed, I developed a stronger and stronger sense that because the social trust between parents and Family Liaison Workers is less impeded by relations of power, there is potential for Family Liaison Workers to take on a more significant leadership role in the school in relation to parental involvement and Authentic Family Learning. This type of activity may appear to already be part of the job description for Family Liaison Workers. However, my data indicates that whilst Family Liaison Workers were briefed to develop parental engagement, their status in the school hierarchy hindered them from training other staff, setting agendas or sharing their success.

Additionally, the subtle relational elements of their approach may be challenging to articulate in a concrete manner and the role of factors such as shared social class and similar educational experiences cannot be constructed. Thus, the hallmark of some Family Liaison Workers might be the aspects of shared identity they have with parents and the more

professionalised the role becomes the more distance may grow. However, an awareness of the role these factors play would be helpful in avoiding the use of normative reference groups as a starting point for the critique of parents, a phenomenon which is tackled in the following abductive category.

### ***Normative Reference Groups***

As is usual in my Authentic Family Learning practice, getting to know each new group of parents, at each of the four schools, involved creating learning journeys that mapped the places, people and feelings that shaped parents' learning experiences. This process surfaced experiences that were very different to my own and despite having worked with parents for many years, I would still find myself making sense of their experience through comparison to the normative reference group - of white, suburban middle-class children – that matched my own lived experience. I noticed this comparative approach in my own practice, and I explore it here through an indicative encounter with one learner, Zara.

Zara and I were discussing her learning journey at Chestnut Road, when it became clear that she had not sat her GCSEs. We had been talking for some time about the fact that Zara had not enjoyed school and that she had been bullied. She included the information that she had not sat her exams as a throwaway comment:

*'...like GCSEs and everything. I never did them...'*

CR18. Zara. M

This comment stopped our conversation in its tracks for me. It was not the fact that she had not completed her GCSEs, rather, I was taken aback by the casual manner that Zara dropped missing these important exams into a broader discussion of her recollections of school. Not completing her GCSEs was not the first thing that came to mind when she looked back at her secondary school education. We clearly placed different value on these examinations and had different conceptions of the impact missing them would have. I was keen to identify why they had been missed and abandoned my usual approach, of allowing the parent to

lead the discussion, in order to find out more. I then found it difficult to accept Zara's uncertain explanation because of a sense of concern that no one had helped ensure she sat her exams at the time or helped her return to study to take equivalent qualifications as an adult:

*'I moved, like, six times. So probably missed them between that time and the letters coming out saying, "You've got your GCSEs". I never got a letter saying, like, you've got GCSEs to do...'*

CR18. Zara. M

My field notes indicate that I wanted to spend more time unpacking and understanding this moment in Zara's learning journey despite her demeanour and manner indicating that it was not a significant concern to her. I reluctantly dropped the subject and returned my focus to the meaningful moments she was highlighting in her learning journey:

*'Found out Zara missed all her GCSEs today – which isn't that unusual – except that she didn't really know why or what had happened. For some reason, this was frustrating for me. Couldn't help asking her to think back, to remember why she didn't know when they were taking place and if there had been efforts to support her. I suppose I want her to feel as let down as I feel on her behalf. Is this patronising? Am I imposing my expectations of school and parenting on to her? She didn't appear to be concerned about missing her GCSEs – she wasn't interested in figuring out what happened, and she seemed calm and relaxed about it.'*

CR18. Field Notes. Week 2a

Encountering different social norms around education is a common experience for me as a Family Learning tutor. This interaction with Zara captures how such encounters can lead to an imposition of normative values around education on to family learners. This suggests a need to carefully consider the purpose of uncovering these norms and my role in facilitating this process. This is not to say that Family Learning should not support parents to value education but rather that such values should be allowed to evolve through positive learning experiences and that judgement about prior educational experiences should be seen as potentially norming middle class values and therefore withheld or critiqued.



## **Curiosity**

The early weeks of Authentic Family Learning are suffused with curiosity as parents, children and tutor acclimatise to the setting and the course. Actively adopting a curious stance is a small act that can support parents' assimilation into AFL as is evident across my field notes.

*'Found myself a little stuck today when we were setting shared goals. Lots of voices, lots of ideas. I used an 'experience sorting' activity as a reset. We paused and took time to explore our values, skills and interests and then looked at each other's to help identify commonalities. Taking time to care and be interested in who we are and what we offer really reset the mood'*

RW18. Field Notes. Week 2a

It appears that fostering curiosity between parents, as well as between tutor and parent, is valuable to some of the core activities in AFL, such as developing shared goals. The value I place on participants spending time getting to know one another, not just tutors and parents, also reveals the importance of the various multi-directional relationships that contribute to successful Authentic Family Learning including parent-parent, parent-tutor, teacher-parent and parent-child. Thus, being curious is a small action that contributes to socially situated learning.

Additionally, adopting a curious stance from the outset of the course, allowed me to engage with the lifeworlds of learners and to challenge assumptions I had developed:

*'Enjoyed discussing Amy's learning journey today. Turns out she's worked in the supermarket since she was 17 – she's now 27 and a team leader. I knew she worked there, as she is often in uniform during our class, but listening to her talk about hitting targets and working across different sites helped me get a much better sense of her life experience. It's interesting to me that she often reports finding it much easier to engage with Kai's teaching assistant rather than the class teacher. She feels the teachers don't give their time freely and are 'snooty'. I asked how she would tackle a colleague at work who wasn't giving her time and she said that it doesn't happen as she's respected there. Her tone was open rather than defensive. The semi-structured interviews really reveal the complexity of parent-teacher relationships...as well as my assumptions about factors that might correlate with parents having more agency - such as having a job with lots of responsibility.'*

Notably, this freedom to spend time using tools such as 'learning journeys' to engage with the lifeworlds of learners was inhibited at Lee Road by the bureaucratic demands the family liaison worker saw as important, based on the certificate in adult education qualification she was studying for alongside her professional role. In fact, tasks which involved being curious were often positioned as a distraction from tasks such as completing individual learning plans and initial assessments:

*'Today's session was a little tense. Pauline [Family Liaison Worker] was very keen to complete initial assessments and ILPs but last week's session was only enrolment and course overview – a big compromise for me as it just feels like we are taking, taking, taking. The parents get nothing out of filling in form after form, sharing their information and more than one asked when the course would be 'starting'. I want to chat with them and get to know them rather than stand at the front handing out pens in a silent room. Pauline even suggested not bringing the children in in order to assess the parents. Where is the awareness that these parents signed up for Family Learning to be with their children!'*

LR17. Field Notes. Week 2

The absence of a curious approach in the co-taught course at Lee Road exposed how integral showing an interest in learners' lives is to the early stages of an Authentic Family Learning approach. Parents do not experience completing forms such as the 'individual learning plan' as beneficial to them or as aligned to the course. They are aware of the bureaucratic function and see it as a necessary step to gain entry to a course that will give them access to spending time with their children, but our semi-structured interviews revealed that it could be an off-putting experience:

*'We have liked to have you here. At first it was like the other courses and then the children started to come for longer and longer and we could see you cared about what we like to come here for'*

LR17. Nusrat. M

The fact that these forms are purposefully designed to capture the 'individuality' of the learners but lack meaning for the learners themselves is a concern. It also highlights why small actions, such as ensuring the children are included in a course that parents have signed up for on that basis, are often gratefully received by parents.

### ***"Well thick me"***

In the early stages of each course, the strengths and needs of Authentic Family Learning participants would emerge through semi-structured interviews, the creation of learning journeys and through the activities during sessions. In terms of strengths, the skills family learners have already acquired through their parenting, hobbies, interests and work are varied:

*'Creating learning journeys today shows how much the parents here have going for them. One mum is a supervisor in a call centre, another has amazing craft skills (she brought in samples of sewing and is going to help the mums with their story sacks), another does intricate nail art and plaits her daughter's hair in all sorts of beautiful designs each week. Lots of them are quick witted and funny and make each other roar with laughter. Not sure how the school or Local Authority would interpret, harness or build on these skills.'*

GP17. Field Notes. Week 2

Parents often identified and shared skills and abilities they wished to develop during sessions or semi-structured interviews. For example, the desire to gain qualifications in maths, English or ICT or a drive to improve their ability to support their children's learning. However, a significant barrier to addressing such aims was the negative self-concept many parents appeared to hold. This perspective was exposed through the process of entering and settling into a learning space often for the first time in many years:

*'Zara: Yeah, I liked doing that phonics. I dunno. I thought I wouldn't get it cos I'm well thick me.*

*Charlotte: Mmm, you say that quite often in class, I've noticed.*

*Zara: Yeah, well I am. I'm proper thick (laughs)*

*Charlotte: You picked up the sounds and actions really quickly.*

*Zara: Well, I wanted Zane to see me doing it. He can't get over me knowing them. He's like 'why do **you** know that?'*

Zara, CR18, M.

*'I'm not clever. You know for helpin' him. I were no good at school and like the stuff they send home, I haven't got a clue.'*

Chelsey, GP17. M.

These sort of bluntly stated, negative personal comments were so commonplace during sessions, that discussions about how best to respond to them came up several times during my semi-structured interviews with Family Liaison Workers:

*'It's hard to know what to say when they're putting themselves down. Like Kara, saying that she's thick today. She's bubbly, she's lively, she seems to be a fantastic parent. Do you know what I mean? And then she turns round and says that.'*

Jane, CR18, FLW

These comments, such as the one referred to by Jane in the quote above, were often said with either a flat affect, as straightforward statements of fact, or with wry humour. They were also often made in public spaces, within earshot of the whole group. Our approach to managing these pronouncements was to avoid endorsing the claim and to refocus the discussion on positive aspects of the work we were undertaking that day. Notably, these statements were most common in the earliest weeks of the courses, becoming less frequent as the group bonded and the tasks and expectations became more familiar and comfortable. This suggests that parents making strongly worded, negative statements about themselves, in a public setting, may have been a protective measure. A way to pre-empt and mitigate judgement from others.

### ***“Like a chav”***

Alongside the emergence of strengths and needs, the early stages of the course also brought issues of identity to the fore. Parents often drew links between how they were treated and who they are perceived to be. These were variously statements of acceptance or resistance:

*‘I don’t want them to tell me what I already know, so don’t judge me by looking at me. ‘Cause I may look like a chav or whatever, but it’s what’s in here...I’ve got my Level 1 [in English] and I did that to help these two.’*

CR18. Hayley. M

*‘They think we’re rough. They think we’re rough and loud and some days that makes me right, I dunno, right mad or upset or like, sometimes, like when someone’s kicking off in front of the kids out front, I think – yeah some of us are a disgrace here’*

RW18. Cheryl. M

*‘I come to a lot of the stuff that’s put on. I just join in. I know they think we’re a load of lairy, chavvy mums. But I just march up to the desk, give em a smile and sign up. Some don’t do that. They keep their heads down but I do it to be with Molly-Mae. That’s what matters to me’*

GP18. Samantha. M

Family learners strongly identified with the role of mother during semi-structured interviews. Many told stories of the life-changing and even life-saving experience of being a parent. Others, when discussing themselves, focused on the responsibility of being a parent and their central role in the family’s domestic life. The role of work, leisure or learning were, in the main, a secondary consideration. This emphasis may be due to the semi-structured interviews taking place in relation to Authentic Family Learning classes, which are oriented around the notion of parenting. This may have induced some learners to lean in to their identify as a mother and, present idealised or aspirational narratives of motherhood. This is notable because, at times the strong self-identification with motherhood was in contrast to parents lived experience, which for several family learners included involvement with social services directly in relation to their parenting skills and practices. Also, during early sessions

I regularly observed parents who found managing their child difficult or engaged with their child in limited or limiting ways:

*'During the three joint sessions so far, I have observed some harsh parenting practices, mainly from three different parents. I had to discuss this with Tanya [FLW] after class. Ranges from whispered threats to manage behaviour, insults and derogatory comments directed towards - or stated in front of - children to, the pinching and dragging of a child.*

RW18. Field Notes. Week 3b

*'Oh, they drive me mad doing the work for the children. We always make a point to say not to do it for them and to support and then I'll glance round and they'll be so focused on colouring in or gluing or whatever and totally ignoring the child. It's like they're lost in it almost – you know back to being kids'*

RW18. Tanya. FLW

Therefore, the identity of mother as described during semi-structured interviews, is often an idealised rather than authentic concept that is not grounded in daily realities. This is because, in Authentic Family Learning, normative narratives of motherhood emerge as parents and tutor share knowledge and skills about 'good parenting'. This could mean that parents have corrective and instructive notions of what it means to be a mother unintentionally imposed upon them. It could also mean that other aspects of Family Learners' identities may remain hidden due to parents believing the course should solely concentrate on parenting. However, this perception is somewhat alleviated when the tutor takes a curious approach and there is an emphasis on shared goals and activities that extend beyond just parenting.

### **Values**

Closely connected to participants' identities were the values that shaped their belief systems, parenting practices and engagement in Authentic Family Learning. These values often emerged during the completion of learning journeys as parents reflected on the life experiences that contributed to their current beliefs about themselves and the things they

want for their children. This is a useful exercise in AFL as it helps to surface the ideals that will motivate parents to engage in activities with their children. Common values that emerged included, firstly, a belief in the importance of family:

*'I went round to my grandma's and did cooking and we spoke about how things were back in the day and how she lived and what she'd had and what she didn't have. That's important, to know where you come from and what it means, and I want my kids to have those sort of memories'*

RW18. Amy. M

*'Going downtown with my nanna she'd say, "I just need to change my books." So then obviously they had a children's bit there and I just used to sit there by myself and just read while nanna picked her books. You don't think anything of it at the time but its special'*

CR18. Nicole. M

Secondly, belief in the importance of a well-rounded childhood, that is not singularly focused on academic learning:

*'School is just the academic side of what you have to do. I would prefer him to learn more life skills and how the world actually works'*

RW18. Melissa. M.

*'I worry about the pressure on kids. SATs and all that. I think they need to be out enjoying the world and not worrying about tests'*

RW18. Cheryl. M

Lastly, a belief in the importance of parental well-being appeared across the data:

*I think it's important to look at how the parent feels about themselves, because I know when I've lost my head it's had an impact on my kids in a lot of ways.*

CR18. Cat. M

*'I don't really like mixing with people but I like to try and get Zane to mix with people. I don't want him to be in the background, same as me because my problems shouldn't affect him you know, I don't want that'*

Working to understand the factors that either impinge or build upon parents' fundamental beliefs helps to mitigate the imposition of normative values upon parents. For example, several mothers who articulated the importance of parental wellbeing also related the ongoing impact of traumatic experiences with addiction, domestic violence or debt. This highlights the complexity of families' lived experience and explains why meeting school or state-approved parenting practices is not straightforward. A compassionate approach which acknowledges that parents have good intentions often proved effective as evidenced by the high levels of retention for the AFL courses that took place during this study.

*'To be honest we were amazed how many stuck out the whole course. I mean, parents we've not been able to get through the door for anything. When Melissa came back every week and then she was there in assembly, just wonderful'*

RW18. Felicity. HT

Here a headteacher expresses surprise, bordering on disbelief, that a parent completed the AFL course. Melissa's perspective speaks to the benefit of uncovering and acknowledging parents' values as a way to support them in entering the school and completing the course.

*'I've loved this course because I was with Kai the whole time, every week. He loved it. I've booked off work to be here and it's weird, now I'm not as put off coming into school. Like I said, I always just spoke to the TAs and proper avoided teachers, but I was chatting away to Mrs Howarth [head teacher] at assembly last week. I feel more comfortable now because this course has been more about us doing something together – you know rather than sitting and listening like school kids. Ha! Guess I just don't like doing as I'm told!'*

RW18. Amy. M.

That said, this approach does not mean that the tutor holds all of the parents' separate value systems in their mind and then plans sessions that cater to a variety of beliefs. Rather, AFL participants are encouraged to identify what is important to them individually and then work collectively to agree a shared learning goal. Additionally, the school's concern about parents



is what results in the parent being put forward for one of the limited spaces available on the AFL course. Activities such as not completing reading books and other home tasks, children being regularly late to school or parents missing meetings about behaviour are common triggers for parents being nominated for family learning. Engaging with parents' values as a way to start addressing some of these issues can lead to reconciliation between school and parent. Parents are often less resistant to AFL which is non-punitive in comparison to meeting with teachers that approach concerns from a deficit perspective.

#### **9.4 Taking Note of Domination**

A hallmark of the extended case method is the acknowledgement of four 'power effects' that act upon each of the four phases of reflexive science, the goal being to examine these limitations in order to account for or even reduce them. In relation to intervention, Burawoy (1998, p. 22) calls attention to 'domination' as an unavoidable consequence of entering fields that are 'invested with hierarchies, competing ideologies and struggles over resources. As a result, all participants – including the researcher - are trapped in networks of power and automatically implicated in relations of domination. An additional layer of power exists for the researcher who, despite noble aims, is ultimately there to serve his/her own interests and as such there must be a discrepancy between my interests as a researcher and the interests of the family learners and schools. This tension, no matter how subtle, will leave the knowledge gathered incomplete.

#### **9.5 Conclusion**

This findings chapter presents insights gathered as I moved from observer to participant in Authentic Family Learning and assimilated to researching and delivering courses in four schools across the north-west. Over the course of two academic years, I found that place, identity, and agency shape Authentic Family Learning. Several points of practice guidance, explored in more detail in Chapter 14, can be developed from these findings. These include how a relational approach can mitigate the negative ways that space can generate status, the importance of support and pastoral staff in creating a welcoming atmosphere for parents

and how engaging with the strengths, needs, identity, and values of parents can be a motivating starting point for Authentic Family Learning. The ways in which these factors manifest are shaped by the interplay of place, identity, and agency. Therefore, practice guidance must consider how these elements affect family learning, encompassing both the school context and the role of the family learning practitioner. Part of the practitioner's responsibility involves (re)educating schools about the significance of these carriers of status in shaping family learning experiences.

## Chapter 10: Findings - Process

### 10.1 Extension of Observations over Time and Space

In this findings chapter, I identify interactions that occurred repeatedly at each site of inquiry across each ten-week course. I aggregate this situational knowledge into a range of social processes, that constitute the distinct nature of Authentic Family Learning. This chapter progresses from the previous one which shared my initial intervention into the lives of participants, to 'extend my observations over time and space' (Burawoy, 1998, p.17). Exploring social processes captures the dynamic ways in which a social system functions and is thus a useful way to understand and articulate the characteristics of Authentic Family Learning (Loomis,1960). As in the previous chapters, the structure of this chapter is articulated in a table that sets out the relevant Abductive Categories for this phase of ECM.

Phase	Abductive Categories
<b>Process</b>	Intention
	Hidden
	"What you're about"
	Tension Management
	Conforming
	"Comfortable with Control"
	"Out of my shell"
	Collusion
	"Say it how it is"

Table 10.1. Phase Two Abductive Categories

### 10.2 Advance Organiser: Findings Relating to the Phase of Process

The social processes, that operate in the early weeks of AFL, as participants make sense of and assimilate into the courses, are captured in the data presented here. They are described under nine Abductive Categories. Firstly, 'Intention' which presents data indicating the ways the participatory nature of Authentic Family Learning is established. The data explored in the next Abductive Category considers how 'Hidden' agendas can be uncovered and contravened through equitable approaches to decision making and the subversion of

hierarchies. Lastly, the process of acculturation to AFL is further delineated by considering not only some of the customs, values and expectations that are central to AFL but also participants meta-cognitive awareness of these factors. A notion encapsulated by the in vivo phrase "What you're about".

This chapter also considers some of the social processes that emerge during the middle weeks of an AFL course. These are the sessions which occur after the group identify a shared course-goal and start work towards that goal ([Appendix 7](#)). For example, the goal of arranging a class visit by an animal handler and the associated activity of creating an animal fact file with the children. Identifying and embarking on goal-directed activities requires continual co-operation and compromise to generate and maintain group functionality, positive sentiment and motivation.

This surfaces a range of activities associated with the social process of 'negotiation'. These are captured in several Abductive Categories including, 'Tension Management' which considers actions which can prevent sentiments from obstructing goal-directed activity whilst also harnessing sentiment as motivating force for achieving goals. Next, 'Conforming' addresses the notion of role performance in AFL and the ways in which parents' behaviours converged with or diverged from group norms and expectations. In another Abductive Category, the social processes of sanctioning and boundary maintenance appear as part of working productively towards the shared goal. Participants express different levels of ease with these behaviours; a concern signified by the in-vivo phrase 'Comfortable with Control'.

The findings also demonstrate the fortification of social bonds between participants, children, FLWs and tutor and the importance of being alongside each other. The social processes that contribute to this sense of alignment are described under four Abductive Categories. Firstly, "Out of my shell" explores participants belief in the transformative power of operating outside of one's current comfort zone as well as the importance of being aligned with their child, the tutor, and their peers during this time. Secondly, 'Collusion'

explores participants concern that alignment with one another should also be balanced enough to resist the pressure of social norms. For example, the pressure to endorse anti-social behaviour or to collude with one group, such as the teachers, to critique or discredit another, such as the parents. Finally, "Say it how it is" outlines the value participants placed on open and honest communication and congruence between espoused values and the enacting of these values during the course.

### **10.3 Abductive Categories Relating to the Phase of Process**

#### ***Intention***

As data generation progressed through each of the five sites, I noticed my drive to set out the intentions of the course early. In particular, communicating my intention that the course be participatory, meaningful, and linked to real-life experiences. This was not an esoteric exercise in sharing my educational values, rather I made intention-setting a priority because of its practical utility for engagement and retention, as expressed in my field notes:

*'Making sure parents know what AFL is about, as soon as possible, helps us bond as a group and definitely keeps parents coming back – lots of them have made a point of saying the course is 'different' and that that has been a part of them wanting to keep coming. When I ask what they mean by 'different' they talk about having a say in what we'll be learning. They also refer to the absence of formalities. Seems this contributes to a judgement-free space that is easier to join in with for parents.'*

CR18. Field Notes. Week 1.

Setting intentions early is valuable to discerning family learners needs and interests because it positions their role as important and impactful to the course. This contrasted with some parents' existing relationship with the schools and also with their previous educational experiences. Additionally, setting the intention that an informal approach to learning was the norm disrupts expectations about structure and hierarchy. These factors encouraged parents to share their own experiences and engage meaningfully with the direction and content of the course.

The data indicates some of the ways in which intentions were set as well as the impact of parents having a meta-cognitive awareness of the nature of the course. For example, Chelsey shared how she noticed the distinct participatory nature of the course from an early stage and how this awareness affected her relationship with AFL:

*'I didn't want to speak up at first, so you know, doing votes for, you know, the booklet and that, was good, cos we got to pick what to do and that's what kept me coming really. It's been us picking what we like best and the children too...we let them vote as well didn't we, seeing them excited, it just gets you buzzing about coming in on Tuesdays'*

GP18. Chelsey. M

Elsewhere in the data, parents acknowledged an active, intentional drive to invest the AFL courses with meaning. Additionally, they indicated the features of AFL which generated a sense of meaning and thus increased their investment and engagement with the course. This included, for example, parents acknowledging the inclusion of their children in every session as driving their engagement with the course:

*'The big thing for me has been the fact we've had the children in every week. Just coming and being with Alice, that's been lovely. We talk about it at home and she always reminds me that it's Family Learning day. She loves me coming inside and I think her reaction, yeah, that's made me want to be a bit more part of things at the school'*

CR18. Nicole. M

Additionally, parents commented on being able to engage with their child about the actual topics and tests they were learning at that time:

*'I was not understanding the nonsense words Zahib brought home each week. I am happy that you ask us about what we want to learn and that other parents said same, the nonsense words! After we made games here in class, I feel like, 'yes of course, makes sense'. So this is good, you know. To ask parents, 'what do you need?' and then have a go at it together.'*

LR17. Nusrat. M

Lastly, parents described their sense of accomplishment in being given a sticker, attaining a certificate or being part of a school assembly:

*'Well, it's right nice that you gave us out stickers. Little things like that have made it for me, because we both go out with our stickers on and Kai wants to show his teacher, you know, that we both have them and it's just lovely and it makes you keep coming back that does'*

RW18. Amy. FLW

Setting intentions appears to have a clear organisational function because it allows the parents and I to share a set of beliefs specific to the domain of Authentic Family Learning, what some call a shared cognitive map. This collective cognitive structure acts as a frame of reference for action and interaction that is suitable for AFL and for ordering and allocating value to experiences – for example, as the course progressed parents work together and identify activities that would be a) be acceptable to most group members b) involve the children c) have some link to the curriculum. This activity derived from setting intentions early.

### **Hidden**

Numerous times during the period of data generation, at each site, family learners' behaviour shifted to reveal a previously 'Hidden' facet of themselves to me or to the whole group. This Abductive Category captures how the patterns of behaviour that parents initially presented would evolve to present a more complex role-set than the one ascribed to them by me or performed, consciously or unconsciously, by them at the start of the course. These reciprocal shifts and revelations recurred throughout the four courses and were at times attributed, during semi-structured interviews, to the equitable approaches to decision making and the subversion of hierarchies that are central to AFL and are particularly prevalent when identifying shared goals during the early stages of the course. Two of the revelation types that commonly occurred are captured within this Abductive Category.

The first revelation type was when parents, who initially showed disinterest or mistrust of such ideals, began to share academic, creative or career ambitions for themselves or their child. This appeared in my fieldnotes on several occasions including an encounter with

Michelle who, I note, was initially aloof and showed some cynicism about group decision making but, in the third week, revealed a different part of her character by taking on the role of organiser and campaigner during a collective decision-making activity. Melissa made oblique reference to this shift during our semi-structured interview at the end of the course allowing me to follow up on her perception of what underpinned this change.

*'Melissa: I didn't feel comfortable at first, just being in school and in a group and that. It's not sort of what I normally do – so I've drawn me with a frown but then an arrow and me with a smile*

*Charlotte: What made you end up with a smile?*

*Melissa: Well, the kids, obviously. That's been great. I also think this has been very different than other times they've got us in or the, if the teachers run something. Because we've had a say and, you know you're all around the kids so. I dunno we started showing our softer side! I also, like, you've not bossed me and so that's helped me talk and I, you know, pipe up for people.*

*Charlotte: I noticed that first, when you sorted out all the voting that day. Do you remember?*

*Melissa: Yeah. I just went for it. Because, I wanted everyone to have a say not just the loud ones. I told my other half about that. I told him I'd taken charge and he didn't believe me. Didn't believe me one bit!'*

*Charlotte: You were keen for it to be the phonics booklet.*

*Melissa: Yes, well that's for Sammi. I wanted it to be something more education not like day out having a jolly. Something she would use and I would learn and other parents too. That's important. Like I've put on her map [learning journey]. I want her to do well. Better than how I've done.*

RW18. Melissa. M

Melissa attributes her willingness to speak up and reveal her values around education and equity, to the flattened hierarchy within the Authentic Family Learning space. This indicative example, of a recurrent phenomenon across the data, suggests that to accurately discern the needs, interests and values of some parents, a disruption of traditional classroom status-roles is required.



The second revelation type was when parents, who at first presented as confident and capable, disclosed hidden vulnerabilities relating to a range of factors including drug and alcohol misuse, learning and behavioural needs or their ability to parent effectively. This arose in my field notes at all the sites and is evident in a particularly salient example from Gloucester Place where Chelsey, whose son has a suspected conduct disorder, opened up about the difficulties she faced with supporting her son's needs.

This was notable, because at the outset of the course, Chelsey avoided acknowledging Mason's challenging behaviour. Often, she would carry on everyday conversation with me or other parents, whilst physically restraining him from hurting her or other children. I had spotty and incomplete information about the situation, as there was limited time for discussion with the FLW about the children's needs. Joining the Family Learning course gave the issue more visibility in the school and attuned the FLW to the needs of Chelsey as well as Mason and meant more resources and time were directed to them by the school. Chelsey allowed the façade that she was coping to drop and revealed what she perceived as a vulnerability to me and the FLW. We discussed the impetus for this revelation during our semi-structured interview at the end of the course.

*'Charlotte: I can see here, on your Learning Journey, you've put a little angel and a little devil and then what've we got here, people..*

*Chelsey: That's us linked up – that's me, you, Emma and Gail and how, like it shows how, we've got through it – you know when he's been difficult and yeah, when it was hard. It feels different now. Less devil, more angel!*

*Charlotte: What's happened to get you there do you think?*

*Chelsey: I just think you know maybe. Because, well. I've always just wanted to downplay it and like I'd get embarrassed if he played up in front of people. I ended up telling you that I was struggling in the end and you know, just taking the pressure off. Like instead of making him get up, you were more like let's change it, let's not make him.*

*Charlotte: Oh, I was following your lead with that. When you're working just you two I noticed he was calmer so I honestly was just copying your style of 'no pressure'. You know?*

*Chelsey: I was copying you! You know. Calm voice and all that. I get proper riled up when other people are around and he's kicking off and there's are all perfect and quiet. But, yeah you're right like just me and him, we're fine. Well, we're better!*

GP17. Chelsey. M

The semi-structured interview indicates that by both of us engaging in meaningful action to support Mason we created shared understanding of the challenge and co-created strategies to address the challenge. Chelsey's awareness of this shared experience allowed her to reveal some of the difficulties she was facing as she felt safe and supported by other members of the group.

### ***"What you're about"***

The process of joining and engaging with an AFL courses accorded with two social processes, both of which are associated with group formation. These two patterns of behaviour can broadly be described as 'evaluating' and 'communicating sentiment'. The former entailed participants evaluating the habits, actions, and values of other group members. The second involved the communication of sentiment relating to these evaluations. The nature and value of these social processes is captured in the following semi-structured interview with Cat:

*'Cat: All of us here, we need to know what you're about before we give you the time of day. That's why at first we shut up talking when you came in the room, you know stuff like that. Cos, we thought you weren't from round here and then for me it was seeing you with the kids that's when I was like, right I know what she's about*

*Charlotte: You told me that. During the course I remember. After we did the Room on the Broom song that day, with the puppets*

*Cat: Yeah, I was letting you know that I thought you were alright cos you weren't leaving people out and were making sure everyone had a puppet. I told the other girls as well. I said she's alright'*

Here, Cat indicates how participants evaluated my role and status within the group and how behaviours such as halting conversation when I entered the room served as a way to communicate sentiment about my role. As time passed, I exhibited further behaviours, such as an inclusive disposition, which were evaluated and resulted in new sentiments about my role. In the example above, Cat chose to openly communicate these sentiments to me during a class, and in our semi-structured interview. She also explains how she shared her new evaluation with the rest of the group. The importance of transparent agendas emerges here as Cat emphasises the importance of understanding my intentions and approach by twice using the phrase 'what you're about'. The opportunity to discern intentions, by evaluating behaviours, and for those evaluations to be openly communicated contributes to authentic relationships based on reciprocal understanding. The data indicates that this understanding operates at the interpersonal level and, whilst it is inevitably shaped by external forces, the relational and affective aspects of the processes described in this Category are central to participants descriptions of their AFL experience.

Additionally, evaluative behaviours between group members are depicted in my field notes, often in ways that work to establish a degree of conformity to the norms or standards of the groups' approach to Authentic Family Learning. For example, at Chestnut Road were unhappy about one parent allowing her child to wander around the room during the joint session. They used a group discussion to approach the topic with compassion whilst still achieving the desired degree of conformity:

*'...parents opened up about the difficulties they have in supporting their child during group sessions, instead of 'taking over'. Prompted by other parents sharing vulnerability about this Tina expressed her own challenges. Several parents responded back with ideas that might help her. This included the idea that each family would move further apart for the joint session, to minimise distraction and that parents would send other people's children back to their own space if they were approached by them during group time. This was a wholly positive discussion about what could have been a contentious topic. I had noticed parents exhibiting irritation during previous joint sessions when*

*Tina's son repeatedly left his table. It now feels like everyone's feelings have been aired and a standard has been set. It will be interesting to see if Tina feels happy to adjust to this standard in future sessions'*

CR18. Field Notes. Week 4

The indicative example above articulates the type of evaluation parents would make around the expected roles associated with Authentic Family Learning. Also captured, is one of the ways parents might communicate their sentiment about the preferred behaviours associated with the role. Sharing personal challenges, as described in the field notes, could prompt the communication of sentiment in functional and productive ways. Parallel to this there were also dysfunctional ways in which sentiment might be communicated. For example, eye rolling and other non-verbal communication to indicate frustration. These cues were not always unhelpful – as they could act as a sanction and therefore curb unwanted behaviour however, they were more likely to breed resentment in the group than open and active forms of communication around group norms and preferred behaviours.

### ***Tension Management***

The functionality of Authentic Family Learning rests on collaboration and interdependence, with the participants of each group relying on each other in order to attain their course and personal goals. Consequently, actions which help to manage the tensions, that emerge from the risk and uncertainty associated with collaboration, are evident throughout the data for this study. An indicative example of way tension management operated across the sites – particularly during the mid-course period – is evident in the field notes and semi-structured interviews from that phase of the course at Gloucester Place. Thus, this site will be used as the indicative example throughout this Abductive Category.

At Gloucester Place, the parents were working towards the goal of creating a phonics booklet for Key Stage One parents. The shared goal of creating the booklet, as a family learning group, had been identified in the second week of the course. In week three, the parents decided that the booklet would be reminiscent of a recipe book that would allow parents to make and enjoy the phonics activities at home, without spending money on expensive

resources. Tensions emerged around which activities should be included in the booklet and which family would represent each one in the photographs. One mother began directing the discussion and imposing her ideas about who should do what upon the group. Justifying her claims by stating that boys might be more suited to physical activities, such as throwing a ball into a bucket marked with a sound and girls to seated activities such as card sorting.

This created discord amongst the group, with parents who had not had a say in the discussion about activities, raising concern about gender being used as justification. Several parents later commented that they focused on the issue of gender rather than directly tackling their concern at feeling marginalised in the decision-making process. This was expressed by Megan in our semi-structured interview:

*'When we were first doing the book that were stressful cos one person in particular was taking over and I'm not really keen on chipping in, but she started saying it had to be boys doing the buckets. I thought, yeah right, that's cos you have a boy and you just like the buckets. So, I said no, girls like buckets too. Even though I have a boy. Cos, y'know it's not even about that – boys, girls and whatever - it's about deciding together. So, that's more why I said, no – it's like you don't decide everything. That's why I've drawn the buckets here cos I remembered that. I feel like that was y'know a moment . I've put here how, it was different after. Like I would speak up more.*

GP17. Megan. M

I also noticed that tensions were not always dealt with upfront, commenting in my fieldnotes that week:

*'Making the phonics book is a complex task and I'm feeling the pressure. The big decisions seem to take place relatively easily – where to go on a trip, what topic to use for a display etc. because they can be put to a vote and it's usually an either/or. When it comes to implementing the group task, points of contention pop up by the dozen. Who will do what, what font to use, how many activities to include?*

*So, the actual business of cooperating and working together all comes into play at this stage. What's particularly hard is getting people to discuss these things directly. Usually, passive forms of communication are used – defensive body language, eye rolling. Alternatively, the contention is projected onto something else, like the gender-roles debate that happened in today's session.*

*I think the way to go now is to have a slightly less blank slate, so parents feel clear about what to focus on and to get them focused on decision making with their child. Rather than agreeing all things as a whole group'*

GP17. Field Notes. Week 3b

The fieldnotes above demonstrate that whilst open communication channels may allow for disagreement, such as the gender-roles debate, this does not automatically surface the actual grievance participants are feeling. This may remain hidden for a range of reasons including shielding perceived-vulnerabilities or responding in line with assumed status-roles. To manage tensions which are evident but unaired in the group setting, I noticed that reducing ambiguity around roles was helpful. This reduced uncertainty and allowed parents to approach a task independently without consulting other group members and creating space for critique, conflict or confusion. For example, to help parents identify which activities to include in the book, I set up a carousel of example activities during the parents-only session of Week 4. Parents could move from activity to activity and then either choose a preferred activity and think of ways to adapt it for the book or use the experience as inspiration for creating their own activity. This sort of pre-emptive action is an important part of managing tensions and is a reminder that the role of the tutor can be directive and involve some elements of control that are not always captured in the concept of facilitation that is often applied to community teachers' work.

During this task, I emphasised the importance of parent/child interaction to the success of the task. For example, I encouraged parents to seek their children's opinions on their preferred activity and to take time to prepare for including their child by identifying tasks to which their child could meaningfully contribute. The benefits of working in this way came up in my semi-structured interview with Samantha:

*'I've always liked to do things with Molly-Mae, but seeing how much you do for them has been a big thing here. You could see we got the hang of that after a few weeks and I think other parents should learn it too. Because school is hard and you know, you've no time so you don't do it or you do it for 'em. In here, once we'd figured out that you'd always say "and how will the children join in with this?" to every idea, well, yeah, that's when it got more chill and it wasn't like how can we - like the mums - make the best book. Cos that just*

*starts all the mums rowing over it. It was more, can we do it chilled and get the kids doing it. I honestly wanted to go get [headteacher] and show her. You know that we were like properly on it, like really getting the kids to do it themselves. Cos it's never really like that is it.'*

GP17. Samantha. M

This discussion indicates how parents could see their own success and their child's success in a goal-directed task as interdependent. This was repeatedly reported as more motivating than when they saw success was as solely bound up with other parents because when this was the case, competition and comparison were inhibiting. Whereas task interdependency with their child appeared to provide encouragement and inspiration, minimising the social processes of competition and conflict by refocusing attention on cooperation with their children. My fieldnotes capture some discomfort with steering the group in this way, for example by providing limited choices or options as opposed to an open forum for all decisions and this concern is discussed later in this chapter in the Abductive Category "Comfortable with control".

### **Conforming**

A clear negotiation that was always at work in AFL, were the continual adjustments all participants, including myself, made in relation to their perceptions of each other and their perceptions of the programme. Norms and expectations were set early on (see Phase One) and by the mid-course period conformance and non-conformance with these norms was at work. One of the processes through which conformity operated was social comparison, which several parents brought up during semi-structured interviews. For example, Fatima's comments about regular attendance and being prepared for class.

*'Fatima: We are using WhatsApp for this group. Saima will say class is tomorrow and we need this or that. I see the messages and I talk to my daughter about what are bringing to Family class. I want to be there each week like the other mums*

*Charlotte: Do you send messages too. To the WhatsApp group?*

*Fatima: No, not really. I just read and see what other mums are saying and think I need do same like, we need bring in food or we need finish pillowcase or take picture*

*Charlotte: Did you have a WhatsApp for the other family learning course?*

*Fatima: No. We did not chat and share numbers and things in that group. It was more listening.'*

LR17. Fatima. M

The process of parents comparing their level of engagement and participation with others had pro-social outcomes, such as in Fatima's example of the use of WhatsApp groups or social media to offer reciprocal and mutual support. The creation of such groups was a common occurrence across each site of inquiry. This extended the role of social comparison from parents observing one another during class to a broader process that operated in a separate, online, space created autonomously created by the parents. Parents engaged in these online spaces to differing degrees with some actively updating and reminding others about course activities and others taking a more passive role such as in Fatima's case.

However, the potential for social comparison being experienced as an unwelcome and demotivating pressure cannot be discounted and was observed in another process relating to conformity. Namely, the adherence to, or flouting of, the routines of AFL. My fieldnotes capture my sensitivity to the routines that parents were more, or less, willing to engage with and some of the negotiations and adaptations that stemmed from this sensitivity.

*'A lot of parents aren't completing the weekly home task at the moment and it's getting a bit tricky because it means we are not prepared for the joint session and we're getting behind with working towards the phonics booklet. I approached Donna – who hasn't completed any home tasks - to check in about this last week. She explained that other mums have fewer children or don't work and so have time to complete tasks. She also felt these mum's 'showed off' about how much they were getting done. Her tone was quite defensive.*

GP17. Field Notes. Week 5



Seeking a practical solution, I asked the school if the parents could use the room before class to complete home tasks. Upon hearing that the room was not available, Donna gave an open-invite all the group to her home for an hour and a half before each class to have a coffee and complete home-tasks. Samantha commented on Donna opening her home to the other parents and how they both became accepting of the weekly home task routine during our semi-structured interview.

*'Samantha: I mean we're weekly fixtures at Donna's now. Me, Kim and Alison – the drop-outs! I'm just kidding but we'd be the ones who never had our stuff done. You were fine. Like you didn't have a go about it which to be fair you could've done cos we were a bit stroppy about having to do them weren't we. Then Donna invited us all to hers and now we swan in well sorted don't we!*

*Charlotte: It's great. What does that mean for you in class – being sorted?*

*Samantha: Well it means we're more sorted for the kids coming in, also, when you started giving us the sheet where you can tick off the steps and that, we used that every week at Donna's. Like "make the letters please Kim, pass the cardboard Ali, give us the scissors". It's been a laugh'*

GP17. Samantha. M

Both field notes and semi-structured interviews, suggest that when some parents found social comparison or the routines of AFL demoralising, open discussion about their disposition towards such expectations followed by small adjustments to make the expectation easier to meet is a way to help participants move along a continuum from defensive toward accepting.

### ***"Comfortable with Control"***

In the Abductive Categories of Tension Management and Conforming I outlined some of the processes involved in creating conformity to expectations in AFL. Both categories describe some level of comfort with taking control and leading a group, for example by providing choice in a selective manner or by setting up and negotiating adherence to routines. Control is also at work in a wide range of implicit processes that do not require expectations about

conduct and participation to be set out but still serve to steer participants towards preferred behaviours and actions such as arriving on time or supporting their child to work independently. The data suggests that attuning to these implicit processes, for example the process of social comparison, is central to the way in which AFL functions. Concomitantly, the data also captures some level of discomfort with channelling power in this way and a drive to temper this through open communication and a relational approach.

Therefore, in this Abductive category I explore how the *explicit* setting of expectations is balanced with *implicit* forms of control, including making it as easy as possible to meet expectations, taking a relational approach and benefiting from social norms, cues, and comparison. It also charts my reflection on my level of comfort with control and my growing recognition that the learner-centred approach valued in many areas of education is not paramount in AFL.

Setting ground rules as a group is not part of my approach to AFL. In fact, the idea of being on ‘best behaviour’ is avoided in favour of creating an atmosphere where it is easy to engage in the process of learning. However, part of developing this atmosphere, is some level of conformity to understood, but un-codified, expectations of the course. In Table 7.5, presented below, I draw on my field notes and semi-structured interviews to provide illustrative examples of the implicit expectations of AFL and the processes involved in creating conformity. These processes shape, or control, participants’ experiences, and it is therefore appropriate to acknowledge their existence and effect.

<b>Expectation</b>	<b>Make it Easier</b>	<b>Relational</b>	<b>Social</b>
Regular attendance.	Ran courses just after drop-off or just before collection of children.	Ensured head teacher, class teachers, TAs and/or FLW personally asked parents about the course each week, from the outset.	Missing a session was a cause for concern amongst the group and parents developed reciprocal and mutual support to help each other attend regularly including outside of

		Included the children in every session to develop a shared interest in attending as a family.	course communication via WhatsApp and social media.
Contribute ideas to the group.	Offered a range of communication channels including plenary time, online votes, suggestion box, small group discussions, one to one check-ins.	Talked personally with parents, using learning journey, about their preferred communication style and adapted to this to help them feel comfortable to contribute.	Parents observe others' contributions and how these directly impact the course.
Support child to complete tasks independently during joint sessions.	Provide as much space as possible for parent child dyads. Provide time to prepare for children's arrival. Demonstrate the task and what involvement looks like	Provide time for parents and children to talk about the task together.  Express appreciation of the effort and time spent by the parent on supporting their child to join in independently	Parents observe other parent/child dyads working intently.  Parents share tips for on best ways to support children to join in.  Parents offer praise and comment on success

Table 10.2. The Processes involved in Conforming to Expectations

The discussion and table above, capture the ways that a considered approach to control is enacted through implicit channels rather than stated as a set of rules and standards. Additionally, more explicit forms of control were also captured in the semi-structured interviews and field notes. In particular, in relation to my performance of professional status and the realities of course leadership. A salient reflection on these phenomena is captured in the following entry which was written towards the end of the fieldwork period.

*'My teacher training, my wider reading, social media, my colleagues and managers all reinforce the importance of 'learner-centred' practice. It's been an important part of my own teaching philosophy. But, at this stage of the fieldwork I question how authentic it is to say I take a learner-centred approach. In fact, I feel that I am highly in control of much of what takes place in my classroom. Not that I'm comfortable with control. I find it hard to even write that I 'taught', 'delivered' or 'led' a class – feeling the need to say facilitated or participated in or worked alongside. However, I now feel avoiding these terms diminishes the significant role I have in explicitly leading an AFL course.*

*For example, structuring the course so it fits in with the school calendar and with the course goal, carefully planning each taught session to fit the time available, providing appropriate materials, managing classroom discussions, teaching phonics, demonstrating how to make educational activities and adapting and adjusting routines to meet the needs of the group. All of these actions connote my status and role in the group and affect how parents perceive and interact with me. Their perception of me as a professional is important in terms of maintaining boundaries, gaining trust and establishing and achieving expectations. This does not remove agency from parents as falsely claiming to be wholly learner-centred is more damaging than to have a transparent approach that acknowledges the forms of power and control held by the AFL tutor'*

*CR18. Field Notes. Week 7*

This passage brings role performance and course leadership into the discussion of control and acknowledges some of the power an AFL tutor has to direct the experience parents have during an AFL course. When coupled with the harnessing of more implicit forms of control such as making choices easy, using relational approach and the role of social norms, cues, and comparison it becomes clear why power and control should be acknowledged and negotiated. Thus, the data suggests that becoming comfortable with control could lead to more, not less, transparency, equity, and agency. This does not mean that implicit forms of power are revealed but more that the AFL practitioner is critically conscious of the locus of power and is not perpetuating inauthentic forms of 'learner-centred' practice.

### ***"Out of my shell"***

The data indicates that feeling settled and comfortable with the nature and purpose of AFL, often followed a period of discomfort that involved trying new things, forming new

connections, and sharing vulnerabilities. Participants' reflections included comments about how things 'clicked' or 'fell into place' towards the end of the AFL course; suggesting they had become more aligned with the norms, routines principles and practices of AFL. Parents attributed this increased alignment to AFL with, what one participant called, the process of 'coming out of my shell', in the sense of revealing more of their authentic selves to the group. Often, placing an emphasis on the supportive and accommodating role played by the tutor, the FLW, their peers and/or their child. An indicative example of this social process emerged during a semi-structured interview with Megan.

*'Charlotte: You've drawn a little snail well, a little snail's shell here on your learning journey and it says "hiding". Do you want to tell me a little bit about that?*

*Megan: 'Well, that's me not wanting to get too involved in things and that, and then the arrow here shows me and Harrison at the front for parents' assembly. So, it's me coming out of my shell and you know just being me and not worrying as much'*

*Charlotte: Right, yeah and what sorts of things did you not get involved with or worry about?*

*Megan: Well, coming into school, like I said before, and speaking to teachers or you know, even coming to assemblies and also talking to mums after school. You know. I did speak but I just wanted to get away.*

*Charlotte: Yes, mm, yes and what do you think has helped you come out of the shell?*

*Megan: I honestly think Harrison [Megan's son] has been a big part of it. You know being here with him and he doesn't care. He marches up to teachers and he's just like, he's very happy here and he has confidence. I feel like I've been soaking that all up every week.'*

GP17. Megan. M

When Megan talks about 'coming of out my shell' she attributes this to being alongside her son Harrison, who is comfortable in the school environment. She assimilated to his way of being during AFL classes. As a result, she felt able to engage in new experiences, such as standing up in front of a large audience at the family assembly.

Another indicative example of the social processes associated with 'coming out of my shell' surfaced during a semi-structured interview with Cheryl. She described becoming more able to advocate for herself, and her children, in ways that yielded more productive results than methods she had tried in the past. (phonics)

*' Charlotte: So, we've got a frowny face here and then a smiley one here. What were you thinking about with that?*

*Cheryl: That's me dealing with the school before and being pretty, scuse me, peed off all the time. Then, here, here I'm smiling because I'm more clued up now and I can talk to them more on a level. Which I'm happy about*

*Charlotte: What sort of things have you spoken to the school about and it's been more on a level?*

*Cheryl: Well, phonics. I go to [class teacher] and say "she's learned her phase 3 sounds now" and you know they know what I'm talking about.*

*Charlotte: You do. You were teaching me the together sounds last week. We didn't even do those in class.*

*Cheryl: Yeah, I know. I watch all videos of phonics and I've got the books. Also, you know I put happy because I'm not kicking off as much now which is a lot because of Tanya, who I've drawn here, there.*

*Charlotte: When do you think you've not kicked off when you might have done before?*

*Cheryl: Like, getting my chair so I can join in here and not be breaking my back. Normally, I'd of kicked off at the office but now I just talk to Tanya and you know she gets me and it's someone to go to who is alright.*

*Charlotte: Did you not know Tanya before our group?*

*Cheryl: Oh yeah! I knew who she was and I'd run a mile cos I thought she was the one sending like 'you're child is late' or you know uniform texts. Those messages. So if she came toward me, zip, round the corner and gone. Cos, I don't need to hear it.*

*Charlotte: Oh, so you saw her as the rule enforcer before...right, and that's changed?*

*Cheryl: Yeah, she's someone now, I just come in and stand in her doorway and she takes one look and goes to put the kettle on. She's helped me a lot. You should put that down. That she's helped me a lot'*

RW18. Cheryl. M

In this indicative example, by spending time alongside the Family Liaison Worker Cheryl became more aligned with accepted norms of communication in the school. She came to this by revealing more of her authentic self to Tanya, by working to complete the shared project in AFL. Coming out of her shell took place by sharing a space with a member of school staff who she had previously assumed would judge or sanction her. Finding acceptance allowed her to actively seek Tanya out, beyond AFL, in order to reveal further personal details and to seek guidance and support.

A range of other examples of 'coming out of my shell' appeared during semi-structured interviews. For example, participants described being able to be creative when working with their child, being able to lead learning activities with their child, being able to make decision and advocate for their ideas during AFL sessions, being more confident and comfortable in their approach to guiding and disciplining their child and being able to speak to other parents about the activities completed during AFL. Parents framed these experiences not as the development a brand-new characteristic or ability but rather an awakening or a return to a part of themselves that they had not accessed in some time because of lack of opportunity to do so or limited stocks of confidence. The role of a manageable, meaningful, and purposeful activity alongside the social connections were two of the key elements of AFL that were commonly pointed to as important to 'coming out of my shell'.

### ***Collusion***

Becoming a cohesive group, that is generally aligned with the essential values of AFL is not analogous with wholly harmonious relationships or only virtuous action during AFL courses. Difficulties emerged at each site that could, in fact, be complicated by positive rapport and good working relationships between stakeholders. This is apparent in the data in two particular ways, firstly in pressure to overlook, endorse or accept undesired behaviour such as moving through the school in a disruptive manner or misusing school property. Secondly,

through implicit or explicit cues to collude with Family Learners in critiquing teachers, administrators, support staff or other parents or, alternatively, to collude with school staff to critique Family Learners. Resisting these pressures involved a resolute commitment to the values of AFL that was enhanced by open restatement of the values in order to create clarity and transparency around decision making. The following set of fieldnotes and semi-structured interview depict an indicative instance of the pressure to collude with staff in negative characterisation of Family Learners.

*'A challenging staffroom moment today when I popped in after class to ask about using the library during next week's joint session. The school literacy lead (who was part of setting up this course) explained she was uncomfortable with parents "roaming round" the library. She said they had had bad experiences with groups of parents before and that it was better for the parents to be in the hall or in our usual room. This is a fairly typical push-back about parents being in school spaces. I felt able to show empathy for her point of view whilst making the case for our group. I don't want to invalidate her experiences as I'm sure her claim that "things have been broken or gone missing" are true however it is a fine line because her suggestion that this is inevitable is false. As I pursued my request, the tone of our chat changed from friendly to firm. I felt that by advocating for the parents I was marking myself as either difficult or idealistic. Ultimately, it was a no and I am concerned I have damaged our rapport'*

GP17. Field Notes. Week 7

This incident came up in my semi-structured interview with the Family Liaison Worker at Gloucester Place.

*'Emma: Oh, one of the difficult moments was that we had made such a lot of progress and [the headteacher] was popping in and there was a buzz about what we've been doing and then things like using the library are just shut down.*

*Charlotte: Mmm, yes. Why do you think that didn't happen?*

*Emma: Well, look, of course parents in the past have caused an issue [the literacy lead] was right, but I don't think we should get fixed on that – we wouldn't with the children. You know I went to follow up and ask again, basically to do a bit of a grovel, but it was a no.*

*Charlotte: Why do you say grovel there?*



*Emma: Well, it does feel a bit like you either get stroppy and bring in school policy or Ofsted or you don't rock the boat and well, suck up a bit. You know show we understand and promise the parents won't wreck the joint! It's a bit grim. Imagine if the parents knew that's how they were seen? So, really, we should take the "but Ofsted says" route but you know that'll just get backs up.*

GP17. Emma. FLW

Here, the Family Liaison Worker articulates the tension between asserting the espoused values of the school and acquiescing to the fixed thinking of a staff member. A tension that is complicated further by an awareness of how parents might perceive their portrayal in these negotiations, as acknowledged by Emma. This semi-structured interview was pivotal in a recommitment to openly restating the values of AFL as a way to navigate cues to collude in negative interpretations of parents. As seen in the following excerpt from my field notes where I reflect on the news that the end-of-course celebration assembly at Chestnut Road would not be accommodated by the school. The teacher who passed on this news was staunch about the matter and I initially accepted the change of plans and felt sympathetic for the busy teacher and hectic schedule I knew she was faced. Only in writing my field notes did I realise the implicit message of cancelling the parent event:

*'... I have learned at previous sites that visibility in the school is important and fitting into nooks and crannies and not disturbing anyone diminishes the hard work of the families. Accepting the idea that a celebration assembly is not workable feels like engaging in a narrative about parents being "hard work" or "hassle" as well as less worthy of inclusion. ...the parents have attended for 10 weeks and the repeated message from staff has been that this is astounding – so surely a proper celebration in order? Also, celebrating the families' efforts lines up with the community and family-inclusive values of the school.. Plus, a celebration assembly has been an agreed element of the course from the outset.*

CR18. Field Notes. Week 9

A solution emerged when I booked a meeting between the teacher, two parent representatives and the head teacher. The focus of the meeting was to discuss the impact of the course. During the meeting, the celebration assembly was raised, and the head teacher was able to offer a mutually convenient time and the allocation of support staff to help it

run smoothly. This encounter indicates that a useful way to avoid colluding with one group or another is to bring everyone into open discussions that focus on the values and assets of the course. This is particularly important when seeking to fit into the busy context of a primary school where apparent resistance to activities such as AFL may have less to do with discordant values or beliefs and more to do with workload and decision-making structures.

### ***“Say it how it is”***

In a range of semi-structured interviews parents and Family Liaison Workers frequently remarked on the importance of congruence between espoused values and the enacting of these values during the course. They suggested that this congruence contributed to a sense of safety and trust that made the course more meaningful to participants. A point articulated by Lindsay and Amy in the following semi-structured interviews.

*‘Lindsay: You came in here and you said we could do whatever. We were like “could we do a school fair”, and you were like “yes”, and then we were like “could we go on a trip” and you were like “yes”. I thought - sorry - but I thought, no way that’s happening.*

*Charlotte: What made you feel that way?*

*Lindsay: I just thought no one will come or the school will say no or we’ll all fall out. Cos that’s basically what happens at these courses. But, it’s actually happened. Like, we went on the trip, had assembly, certificates and everyone’s stuck it out.*

*Charlotte: Why do you think that’s happened – people sticking it out?*

*Lindsay: It’s cos you just say it how it is. Like, no waffle. No nonsense. I like that. You know, we can trust you to be real. Cos, you’re very lovely with the kids, but with the adults you’re quite straight about stuff and yeah, that’s important. You and Jane [FLW] are the same.*

*Charlotte: Why does that make a difference?*

*Lindsay: It’s respect isn’t it. Like you know you’re not gonna pretend everything is ok. Like when Vicky was swearing in front of the children that first day or when Zara’s son was drawing on his book. You sort it by like a look or a quiet word and that gets respect. Like I said, you say it how it is. As in you can’t*

*swear, you can't wreck stuff and you need to join in and help us sort this trip - cos that's how we do it in here!*

CR18. Lindsay. M

Similar sentiments were expressed by Amy who also referred to how congruence between espoused and enacted values helped her to feel a sense of trust and belonging to the group that indicates a growing alignment with the nature and purpose of AFL.

*'Doing what you say you're going to do goes a long way for parents. I was quite on guard at first because sometimes things get promised and don't happen. With this, either you didn't make a promise or we would actually do it. It sounds like a very small thing but it's what makes you believe in the whole thing really.'*

RW18. Amy. M

The Family Liaison Worker at Roundswell also commented on the importance of congruence in her semi-structured interview. Seeing it as a shift in her prior practice and helpful in developing her relationships with parents.

*'Tanya: The thing with schools is we over-promise and under-deliver. Parents can get the brunt of that, because they'll be invited to the launch of a new scheme or plan. Then, nothing. You know there'll be announcements on social media and texts of whatever 'language school' or anti-bullying and then things just sort of quietly go away.*

*Charlotte: Right, and how do you feel we've done with that?*

*Tanya: Oh, it's a different world. I mean I feel that's the whole idea – you know don't oversell, don't over promise. Small wins sort of thing. I think in the past I've wanted to be all singing, all dancing. You know running myself ragged trying to deliver something special. With this group, yes we've had a lot of set up and planning but the parents aren't you know 'the audience', they're actually involved.*

*Charlotte: Mmm, yes. What are things like now the course is over?*

*Tanya: Well, it's made a mockery of 'hard to reach' hasn't it. I mean Dean. Dean is a big part of my week now. I'm not saying he isn't a challenge, because there's a lot going in that house but he's now popping in and talking to me. Someone people said, no chance, write-off.*

*Charlotte: Mmm, yes. Do you have any plans for more family learning?*

*Tanya: Yes, but no more just doing briefings or demonstrations – even fun ones, because it just doesn't get the engagement over time like this. So, it'll be longer courses with a practical aim. I was thinking to call it Parent Power maybe or Family Action – or is that taken! I've been brainstorming because we're gonna keep it going.'*

RW18. Tanya. FLW

Tanya highlights the negative impact of intervention churn in schools. This phenomenon, of continually introducing novel fixes and moving on before they have had a chance to take effect, is in direct opposition to the idea of consistency, congruence and follow through that are central to this Abductive Category. Tanya's interview suggests that the negative outcomes associated with intervention churn can be addressed by shifting to family learning programmes that are participatory, practical and at least 10 weeks long. This would be in addition to activities such as coffee mornings, briefings on phonics or science demonstrations that position parents as an audience rather than active members of the school community.

#### **10.4 Taking Note of Silencing**

The second limitation of the extended case method that Burawoy described is silencing. As a participant observer in several schools, I captured the conflicting perspectives of parents, teachers, Family Liaison Workers and head teacher. When compiling my extensive observations these voices were distilled and solidified into distinct categories. This process allowed me to reveal the specific and conflicting interests that underpin Authentic Family Learning, however, this new crystallisation of perspectives inevitably sidelined, marginalised, and distorted some voices. Given the inevitability of silencing, I aimed to be vigilant for repressed or emerging voices that might dislodge and challenge my artificially fixed perspective. An awareness of the potential for silencing is a reminder to remain open to reframing the preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning to accommodate new voices, without descending into a chaotic smorgasbord of ideas that lacks a cohering perspective.

## **10.5 Conclusion**

This Findings chapter is associated with Burawoy's (1998) phase of Process. A period of fieldwork during which the researcher extends their observations over time and space until their 'theory is in sync with the world one studies' (Burawoy,1998, p. 17). To do so, I have identified interactions that occurred repeatedly at the four sites of inquiry, over the course each ten-week programme. This situational knowledge has been aggregated into a range of social processes, that constitute the distinct nature of Authentic Family Learning. The exploration of these processes captures the dynamic ways in which AFL functions and is thus a useful way to understand and articulate the characteristics of the approach.

Initially I consider the social processes which operate in the early weeks of AFL, as participants make sense of and assimilate into the courses. These social processes include, for example, developing cognitive maps for AFL, determining the various roles that operate within AFL and recognising sentiments associated with AFL. Later, I explore some of the social processes that emerge during the middle weeks of an AFL course. A time when identifying and embarking on goal-directed activities requires continual compromise to generate and maintain group functionality, positive sentiment, and motivation. The last three categories speak to participants describing a sense that things are 'falling into place'. That they better understand and feel growing affiliation with the nature and purpose of AFL and, more broadly, their role and presence in the school through the social processes of co-operation, communication, and accommodation.

## Chapter 11: Findings - Force

### 11.1 Extension from Process to Force

In this Findings chapter I extend my analysis beyond social processes, to consider the social forces that impact upon Authentic Family Learning. As in the previous chapters, the structure of this analysis is articulated in the table below by setting out the Abductive Categories associated with this phase. The findings set out in this phase are rooted in Burawoy's (1998, p. 20) understanding of 'structuration' because links are drawn between the social processes of AFL and a mutually determining external field of social forces. Thus, this phase offers a way to understand the everyday world of AFL in light of its structural conditions and extralocal context. This is a bridging of micro-level actions to macro-level context by relating social processes to social forces.

Phase	Abductive Categories
<b>Phase Three:</b> Force	"Learned helplessness"
	Status Anxiety
	Asset Balanced
	Family Centred?
	Finance and Facilities
	Accountability
	Supportive Power

**Table 11.1 Phase Three Abductive Categories**

### 11.2 Advance Organiser: Findings Relating to the Phase of Force

This chapter explores the forces which shape the beliefs and values of members of the school community in which AFL takes place, specifically head teacher, Family Liaison Workers, Family Learning Tutors and parents. These social forces are described under three Abductive Categories. Firstly, "Learned helplessness" presents data on the ways staff members involved in AFL described the needs of parents as well as their perception of appropriate ways to respond to such needs. These descriptions of perception and action around what is best for parents illuminate links to the force of social abjection. The data explored in the next Abductive Category 'Status Anxiety', recounts staff and parents' concern about failure and

the pressure they feel to succeed, which I connect to the social force of meritocracy. Next, responses to the social force of knowledge democracy appear in the Abductive Category of 'Critical Consciousness' which captures the value AFL places on including parents in decision making and pursuing shared goals through participatory activity. Lastly, the social force of positive social psychology is evident in the Abductive Category 'Asset Balanced' which describes how Family Liaison Workers sought to acknowledge the difficult realities faced by parents whilst concomitantly identifying and building on the variety of assets the same parents possess.

Additionally, the findings explore the social forces that shape the conditions and ethos of the schools in which AFL takes place. These social forces are described under four Abductive Categories, the first of which is 'Family Centred?' which queries how parents are located in the discourse of schools and the ways this discourse is driven by the social force of early intervention. The data presented in the next Abductive Category, 'Finance and Facilities' reveals some of the pressures felt by staff and parents in relation to the allocation of resources and space, a process which signals links to the force of marketisation in education. Marketisation is a force which also influences the next Abductive Category in which the pervasive constraint of 'Accountability' is articulated by staff and parents alike. Lastly, 'Supportive Power' explores how friendly, relational, and social approaches to Family Learning correspond to the force of governmentality.

### **11.3 Abductive Categories Relating to the Phase of Process**

#### ***"Learned helplessness"***

During semi-structured interviews head teacher and Family Learning Tutors described the needs of parents. They also shared their perception of appropriate ways to respond to these needs. This is the social process of evaluation at work as staff members consider what accounts for the situation and status of families and what is required to make improvements in these areas. These accounts often included raising concerns about the disposition,

aspiration, and ability of parents. For example, in the indicative example below a head teacher explains her reasons for removing a community washing machine from the school because of the potential for this sort of provision to generate a dependent disposition in families.

*'It's hard to get it right...you know we haven't had any provision for a long time here whereas there was a time when we were doing all sorts. We had a washing machine and we were helping clean uniforms and that sort of thing. Which in the end I withdrew, and we've gone the other way now...*

*...what happens you see, is the parents start to come here for everything and you know they won't go into town and try for a job or phone the council to sort their housing situations, they'd want us to do it...at the time we had a very established family liaison worker and so I mean there was a reliance and you know that sort of learned helplessness where it did feel they just couldn't do things independently'*

CR18. Beth. HT

I connect this head teacher's evaluation, of parents as dependent, to the force of social abjection. This is a force that constitutes individuals as responsible for their position in society. Consequently, those individuals who lack the aspiration to transcend, perceived, wretched conditions are conceptualised as tragic or even repellent. Arguably, this sentiment was communicated to the parents of the school through the removal of the washing machine and the reduction of family engagement activities. Actions which were intended to trigger families to act in their own interests to alleviate what is perceived as an untenable way of life.

The interplay between the social process of evaluation and the social force of abjection was evident in a range of semi-structured interviews across the data set. This is in part because terms linked to abjection are pervasive within the jargon of educational interventions like family learning. Thus, families were repeatedly described as 'hard to reach', 'vulnerable', 'disadvantaged' and 'marginalised'. The influence of social abjection on the discourse around families in schools may not be visible to those who are engaged in this discourse. In fact, head teachers and Family Learning Tutors concomitantly expressed concern and compassion



when evaluating the needs of families. Suggesting that critical consciousness about the forces shaping the dominant discourses about families was not part of participants lived experience.

### **Status Anxiety**

Semi-structured interviews with parents and staff revealed their concern about how they are measured against others and the pressure they feel to succeed. For staff, they described comparisons with other schools and the scrutiny of Ofsted such as in this discussion at Lee Road, a school that had recently received a report of 'Requires Improvement':

*'...a big focus for me is attainment, it just has to be because it's the metric that moves the needle on the performance tables and it's a big part of the discussion when Ofsted visit. We've got 'Requires Improvement' posted to our website, that's just the way it is. We're not where we need to be and that's one of the reasons I'm here and one of the reasons we're glad to have you here...helping us communicate the strategy, the values, the expectations to the parents and helping us all work on that together because ultimately, that's what's going to benefit the children'*

LR17. Jolene. HT

Additionally, staff talked about a need to develop social mobility within the school community and compared parents who were having more, or less, success in developing pro-social behaviours. For example, Felicity the head teacher of Roundswell described her hope that parents who were operating outside of school norms might learn from those who were operating within these norms.

*'Recruitment wise we've also reached out to some of our parents...who do well with things like uniform and punctuality, that sort of thing. So, there should be a bit of a mix in the room and hopefully those parents can model that sort of stuff for the rest of the group...maybe create some bonds between the ones who really get it and the ones that for whatever reason, just don't.'*

RW18. Felicity. HT

Here concern about succeeding as an appropriate parent is experienced by the head teacher on behalf of the parent. These concerns were felt by parents who commented on a sense of expectation from both school staff and the other parents. These expectations included being

a good parent and bringing up children who were well behaved. Interestingly, parents often described an awareness of these expectations but were quick to reject them in favour of raising children who were 'happy'.

*'We get a lot of texts and letters from the school and you know I've had letters and meetings and things. If you're late it's like the end of the world and the kids don't get their picture up for 100% anymore and it's you know it's like wha-oo-wha-oo, sound the alarm you know. Disaster. You feel bad because the kids really do care about all that but at the end of the day there's more to life than school, school, school. Like non-stop homework, non-stop messages, no thanks. I think chill out. I do, to be honest. I do. Cos as long as my kids are happy then I'm happy.'*

RW18. Amy. M.

Contrary to this framing, all the head teachers, who took part in a semi-structured interview, indicated more understanding of the expectations placed on schools, even when they initially described that scrutiny in more critical terms.

*'...we have a lot to do in terms of children meeting or exceeding levels and that's a lot of pressure on the school and it means we need that family support. We just don't get to where we need to be without it and that has to filter from me to teachers, to support staff and then out to families through this sort of thing [AFL]. It's not something we can take lightly and of course it can have down sides. Ultimately though Ofsted and testing and so on, well they're about improving outcomes for our children and so we're happy to sign on and manage the pressure for them, making sure they don't feel it but also getting them ready for the phonics check or SATs or whatever the case may be.'*

CR18. Beth. HT

This suggests that, at the sites included in this study, acceptance of meritocratic ideals - and the accompanying practices of assessment and scrutiny - differs between parents and senior staff. Indicating further that anxiety about success, status and comparison are experienced differently. For parents, their concern remains rooted in their sense of feeling judged – as per Phase 1. Whereas for head teachers, their anxiety is felt on behalf of parents, in relation to their own normative references for 'good' parenting and in relation to external measurement of the schools' attainment.

## ***Asset Balanced***

The process of critical consciousness, discussed in 'Learned Helplessness', and the real talk which accompanies critical consciousness, means that acknowledging, rather than minimising, the difficult realities faced by parents was a customary feature of each Authentic Family Learning course. This focus on the needs of parents introduced some concern, captured in my fieldnotes below, about whether this represented a backslide towards the deficit-based practice from which AFL was intended to be a departure.

*'In FLLN a lot of the early part of each course was spent finding out what was 'wrong' with parents and then trying prove those problems had been fixed. Usually the things that were 'wrong' were in relation to the lack of literacy skills the courses were funded to address, as opposed to anything the parent actually felt was wrong with them. Particularly, when they joined a course they may have thought was simply about spending time with their child at school. In AFL courses, there are no diagnostic tests to quantify the needs of parents – an intentional move to avoid the deficit approach I found to be oppressive in FLLN. That said, because of the more relational approach in AFL, we do talk about needs, issues, challenges and problems in a way that is certainly not wholly asset or strengths based. However, when I have tried to work from an unconditionally positive perspective, I have felt inauthentic. This is because, for me, mining a person's very difficult circumstances, for positive features requires disingenuous mental gymnastics that can feel less like a helpful reframing and more like spin.'*

CR18. Field Notes. Week 6

This reflection led to an interest in becoming 'asset-balanced' which better aligns with, among other things, the drive in AFL to acknowledge the realities of parents lived experience whilst concomitantly identifying and building on the variety of assets those same parents possess. Participants showed awareness of this asset-balanced approach by commenting on:

- The way goals were set in a shared way as opposed to being imposed upon them or being left entirely open.
- The acknowledgement of systemic factors when discussing difficult life circumstances
- A high-challenge and high-support approach to facilitating classes.
- A motivated but realistic understanding of aspiration

The following extract from a semi-structured interview with Lindsay indicates the value she placed on one facet of asset-balanced practice mentioned above; a motivated but realistic understanding of aspiration.

*'This whole course is no nonsense. Like, when other people come in and talk about 'you can do anything' and it's just so out there that actually you might as well not even say it. I was like that before, I'd say my kids can do anything, you know, like "nothing's impossible". But now I'm not up for that. I want to talk about what can I actually, literally do today and tomorrow and next week and next year. Which sounds depressing – like I'm saying forget your dreams - but actually it's not, not at all. It's the opposite. Because doing it's what counts. God, there's too many dreamers round here. Lifelong dreamers.'*

CR18. Lindsay. M

The force of marketised education which places more emphasis on the skills learners may lack, has driven deficit modes of practice and in so doing has had an equal part to play in the rise of asset-based and balanced modes. Additionally, the social force of positive social psychology, which is suffuse across progressive education, shapes practices which seek to take learners' lived experiences into account.

### ***Family Centred?***

As per statutory requirements, each school has posted their 'ethos' - with a vision, mission statement and set of values - to their website. Notably, none of these declarations, across all five schools, mention the word 'family'. Although discussions of community, similar in sentiment to the following excerpt from Chestnut Road's School Ethos, were included and could include the notion of family:

*'Our aims are to develop a thirst for learning in all members of the school community, developing pride, intellectual ability, skills, knowledge and personal responsibility which benefits the person, the school and the wider community'*

CR18. School Website. School Ethos

Whilst family was not centred, in terms of the school ethos, each of the schools' websites include a dedicated 'Parents' tab. However, the focus here is to communicate practical matters such as information about uniform, school lunches, late and absence procedures, and holiday dates. Although, two of the four schools do share details about parent groups and the family liaison role through this tab, reflecting an interest in developing parental involvement.

This messaging is reflected in participants' descriptions, and my observation, of inconsistencies in how schools' present the value they place on the role of family to parents. Semi-structured interviews with all the head teachers captured internal conflict about establishing a consistent approach to the involvement and engagement of families in their schools. For example:

*'It's never off the agenda. Engaging parents, making sure families feel a part of the school. It's something we could improve, and we work with people like yourself, Pauline, Wendy because of that. We don't have a liaison at the moment and that's key, it's absolutely key, because staff are at capacity and need to be protected from parents [laughs]. Their time, that is. Their time needs to be protected. We value parents highly, of course, yes...but we need you and that liaison role so we can make sure there's the right balance, for everyone'*

LR17. Jolene. HT

Head teachers were clear about the necessity of including families and in fact often characterised involving families with the school as an obligation. They all referenced either Ofsted and/or the Local Authority as having an important role in driving expectations about including families.

*'...there are expectations about involving parents, Ofsted look at that. So, I feel we do need to have 'an approach' rather than just ensuring we are welcoming or perhaps expecting teacher's to set the example for parents...and as we don't have a set plan I think, it's fair to say we've had mixed success with working with parents...there's been quite a lot of trial and error'*

CR18. Beth. HT

Despite raising concerns about developing a consistent approach and ensuring family involvement activities did not affect staff workloads, head teachers did not suggest that family involvement should not be a priority for the school. In fact, several head teachers and Family Liaison Workers noted that they were glad to see expectations about including families rising up the agenda of scrutinising bodies. This was often linked to an awareness that parental engagement with children's learning would have a positive impact and that encouraging at as early a stage as possible was imperative. How effective the school might be in supporting this engagement was queried by several head teachers.

*'...For us, working with the parents is all about early intervention...we want to set a tone from the outset, particularly for parents who haven't got a model for sharing books or quiet time, things like that. ...and we do that, we do. We have information nights and we have tried courses here and there. The question I think we ask, is whether we can do enough. Because really, it's not something we can lead if they're not at all interested in the first place. On the other hand, of course, some will come in and they're interested. But, and we're a dual-entry school, we might only get 6 or so parents in. So, it can feel a little like a drop in the bucket when we do try to deliver things ourselves. We don't stop of course, we don't give in but I think, well there's question marks about the best way to do it aren't there.'*

RW18. Felicity. HT

Head teacher comments about including families in the school reveal an interconnection with the early intervention movement. A social force which, driven by the Allen Report (2011), promotes preventative measures as a way to reduce social problems.

### ***Finance and Facilities***

The nature of each course was inevitably shaped by the resources and space that each school could make available. These issues are explored in the first Findings chapter when I considered the experience of first entering the four sites. The data presented here was collected towards the end of the fieldwork when participants reflected on their overall experience, often seeking to make sense of factors such as sub-optimal room allocations

and limited engagement from staff. For example, Wendy, a teacher, compared the intentions of the school at the initial meetings and the realities of delivering the course.

*'It's a common problem with Family Learning. You set up the course and we promise you the world and then you arrive to deliver it and there's no sign of the head and reception don't know who you are and the room's doubled booked or it's too small or there's no chairs. But, look you have to fit in around all that in this job because there's no time and there's no money to fix it. Every school is stretched to the max'*

LR17. Wendy. T

Parents were also aware of the financial pressures the schools faced, with several raising concerns about the types of activity that would be more likely to draw resources from their perspective.

*'...it was interesting that they tried to move our course out during SATS week. Our kids aren't even doing them, and they wanted all of us lot to miss a week to have our room. I understand it's important but then you know they had teachers inviting us to this, saying it's like 'precious', 'special' and 'you can't get time with your kids back' and then next thing 'sorry ladies, SATS is on, we're having your room, see you later cancelled, cancelled, cancelled'.*

CR18. Lindsay. M

All of the head teachers acknowledged these pressures by noting that activities such as class teaching and SATs preparation would be prioritised when making decisions about where to allocate resources. An awareness of creating clearer channels of communication about these priorities was also a part of these discussions, with more than one head teacher identifying concerns about messaging.

*'Communication is always a challenge with parents. There are things we need to do, when it comes to funds or rooms or whatever, that are hard to justify to parents. You know the upset about taking back the room when SATs was on – I totally understand it and they were right; we did give a mixed message there. We made the right call, but we communicated it in the wrong way'*

CR18. Beth. HT

This Abductive Category indicates that both head teachers and parents are aware that Family Learning is not a secure priority for schools in relation to the allocation of resources. The

impact of SATs on the course at Chestnut Road is indicative of the ways the social force of marketised education connects to processes such as allocating resources. This force, which derives from a need to raise standards and hold schools accountable for those standards, means that an assessment-driven culture is felt by the whole school, in ways that can contradict value-statements about the importance of involving families.

### ***Accountability***

The pressures within primary schools that have been described above and linked to the force of marketisation are also evident within Local Authority funded Family Learning, as noted during my fieldwork at the first site. Here staff raised concerns about the increasingly performative nature of lesson planning for family learning sessions. They explained that their focus with planning and learner files was scrutiny and making learning visible and auditable. Something Pauline explained by saying:

*'...well I do write two, yes, two lesson plans. I have the one in this folder here and that's in case Ofsted came. So that has everything on it like how we include numeracy or ICT and it has British Values on it and there's columns for differentiation. That's all on there. Then I have this list, that's what I'm really doing in class. I keep that separate. I don't follow the proper one because, well you'd never get through all that in real life'*

LR17. Pauline. FLW and adult trainee literacy tutor

Pauline was creating one document that conformed to a set of external, normalised expectations that she acknowledged were un-achievable. Thus, the lesson plan is an accountability artefact, serving no authentic purpose and constructed to support the performance of meeting specific expectations that are external to the actual activity of her family learning sessions.

I had experienced the influence of accountability when delivering Family Learning in my earlier practice. Encountering it again led me to reflect on the impact of removing this pressure by working independently from the local authority:

*'No longer having to consider an unseen entity who insists on having ECM and other outdated metrics crammed onto a lesson plan has, unsurprisingly,*



*been liberating. I am preparing lessons for the people in the room. However, I do feel disconnected from a greater system. I am still parachuting into the school and whilst they seem so happy to have me I am worried I will be gone soon and that it won't leave a trace...'*

CR18. Field Notes. Week 9

Here, a growing disquiet about the benefits of parachuting into schools to deliver Authentic Family Learning is emerging. My disconnection from the school, or from an outside agency, has significantly removed outside accountability from my practice; raising questions about the degree to which some externally set expectations are required. AFL intends to be accountable to the needs of the parents who attend the courses and should not be swept up in the external-accountability of schools, in ways that might mean classes become heavily focused on attainment-raising activities for children. At the same time, if AFL becomes part of the Local Authority funded approach, then classes are increasingly shaped by employability agendas.

### ***Supportive Power***

Examining my field notes and semi-structured interviews reveals that AFL is replete with instances of 'noisy surveillance' (Robinson, 2000, p. 81). This is where moments of informal, friendly connection with parents are part of a process of inspection and judgement. Such as when I ask the names and ages of children upon first meeting a parent or when a head teacher commends a family for attending a taster session or when a Family Liaison Worker bustles around the playground to follow up with particular families about the start dates of the course in the playground. One Family Liaison Worker valued the attempts to cultivate a transparency in AFL but revealed her concern that recruiting parents through friendly interactions inevitably entailed some degree of masking the corrective or instructive nature of any family learning course that targets certain families to attend:

*'This course is more up front. You talked about why it's on and why parents are there and it's been great. We're a proper group. Definitely. But at the end of the day we know that at the start, all that connecting and chatting works. And so, you do ask yourself, like, am I just selling now, you know is this just all about getting them in the door because we've picked them as the 'ones*

*that would most benefit' meaning yeah, the ones who we think aren't good enough in some way. And, well. We never said that to them did we.*

RW18. Tanya. FLW

This comment is a reminder not to overstate the mutuality of AFL and to be conscious that the true conditions of the partnership with families can be masked by the friendly nature of processes like noisy surveillance and the social bonds that develop between parents, Family Learning and Family Liaison Workers. This aligns with Wainwright and Marandet's (2013, p. 504) argument that family learning is accomplished through 'supportive power' whereby the projects of state governance are embodied in the helpful and nurturing relationships between tutors and parents. This can be seen as the force of governmentality at work, where family learning becomes a tool for encouraging individuals to engage in programmes that build individual responsibility and self-improvement. As Tanya's comments suggests my efforts to diminish the effects of this force through open communication were inhibited by practices such as targeting particular groups of parents.

### **11.2 Taking Note of Objectification**

In this phase of ECM, I have sought to identify the external forces that act upon Authentic Family Learning. However, there is a risk of treating social forces as if they are fixed and natural objects. The limitation of objectification reflects the tangible power exerted by political, economic, and cultural systems on participants. It is important to acknowledge this power, but it should not be exaggerated. At the same time, systemic forces often contain inherent contradictions that can unexpectedly come to the forefront Even as we accept objectification, we must be ready for concealed processes to disrupt the established field of forces.

### **11.3 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the insights presented in this phase derive from Burawoy's (1998, p. 20) concept of 'structuration,' establishing connections between the social processes within AFL and the reciprocal influence of external social forces. This phase serves as a bridge linking

micro-level actions to macro-level contexts by correlating social processes with social forces. The findings presented here consider the forces shaping the beliefs and values of various stakeholders in the school community where AFL is situated, including head teachers, Family Liaison Workers, Family Learning Tutors, and parents. Noting how the force of meritocracy, intertwines with processes like social comparison and competition. Further, the social forces moulding the conditions and ethos of schools are considered. Abductive Categories such as Accountability correlate with the force of datafication, through processes like goal attainment, leadership, and role-performance. Attention is also directed towards the forces emanating from local and central Government. This reveals the influence of forces such as inclusion, governmentality, and marketisation on AFL. Lastly, the power effects arising from the 'Objectification' highlights the risk of treating such forces as rigid and concrete, it is emphasised that the influence of social forces should not be overstated, leaving room for unexpected contradictions and breakdowns within the assumed sphere of influence.

## **Chapter 12: Findings - Reconstruction**

### **12.1 Extension of Theory**

In this chapter, I draw together the three Phases of Intervention, Process and Force to provide a reconstruction of my preliminary theory: the Five Key Practices of Authentic Family Learning. I developed the Five Key Practices after I had left my post as a Family Learning Tutor and therefore, I never had the opportunity to spend time doing, what Burawoy (1998, p. 28) calls, 'dwelling in theory'.

In this study, the Five Key Practices guided my experience in the field, my dialogue with participants and my interpretation of the data. Allowing me to inhabit my preliminary theory, through a reflexive approach that 'embraces not detachment but engagement as the road to knowledge' (Burawoy, 1998, p. 5). Presenting my findings across the phases enables me to move from the micro to the macro, by looking first at the interaction between parents, tutors, teachers and Family Liaison Workers, before embedding this dialogue within the local processes and the extralocal forces at work in Authentic Family Learning. The aim of this journey being, to extend my existing theory through a reconstruction, which incorporates anomalies, unexpected insights, and new understandings. Resulting in a reconstruction of the Five Key Practices into the Three Characteristics of Authentic Family Learning.

To explain my reconstruction of the Five Key Practices, I first briefly provide the reader with my starting point for analysis; the creation of the Abductive Category Wall which visually depicts which Key Practices were substantiated by my own experiences in the field and my semi-structured interviews with participants. Next, I set out the journey from the preliminary theory to my reconstructed theory; namely the path from Five Key Practices of Authentic Family Learning to Three Characteristics of Authentic Family Learning. After which, I operationalise the three characteristics my charting my concern about drifting away from authentic approaches, the challenge of operating within the complex ecology of schools, the emergence of the Three Characteristics and the 'Steering Statements' which can be used to realign inauthentic practice. After this, I briefly summarise each Characteristic, before closing

the chapter with a cautionary note about the potential for normalisation when developing theory. This is the risk that neat explanations of the processes and forces at work within a context might be interpreted as natural, normal and immovable and then seen as the proper or correct form of conduct. This can in turn lead to the theory being used as a way to exert social control. Acknowledging and exploring the normalising potential of extending theory is a means to understand and contain its influence on the data; as with the other 'Power Effects', of domination, silencing and objectification, that are associated with the extended case method.

## 12.2 Deconstructing the Five Key Practices

The reconstruction of my preliminary theory began with its deconstruction. I wrote an abridged version of the initial book chapter in which I first described the Five Key Practices (Hardacre, 2017a). This process, undertaken before entering the field, helped me to become attuned to each practice and was a way to inhabit the preliminary theory. I first deconstructed the Five Key Practices into a set of deductive codes represented using an Abductive Category Wall (Figure 12.1). Following the fieldwork, through abductive analysis, a final set of abductive categories emerged, as can be seen in Figure 12.2. This diagram visually represents the degree to which certain Practices have been substantiated through my own experiences in the field and through semi-structured interviews with participants.

Authentic Lifeworlds	Authentic Places	Authentic Agendas	Authentic Actions	Authentic Relating
Custom	Facility	Meaning	Meaning	Vulnerability
Perspective	Belonging	Goal	Values	Collusion
Experience	Exclusion	Participation	Interests	Alignment
Attitude	Comfort	Consciousness	Congruence	Intention
Conforming	Ownership	Hidden	Social Trust	Tension Management
Values	Status	Power Relations	Curiosity	Normative Reference Groups

Figure 12.1. Deductive Code Wall Before Data Analysis

Authentic Lifeworlds	Authentic Places	Authentic Agendas	Authentic Actions	Authentic Relating	Emergent Categories
"Out of my Shell"		Family Centred?		"What you're about"	
"Well thick me"	Finance and Facilities	"Learned Helplessness"	Supportive Power	Collusion	
"Like a chav"	"Sore subject"	"Comfortable with Control"	"Say it how it is"	Intention	Accountability
Conforming	"Make a brew"	Hidden	Social Trust	Tension Management	Status Anxiety
Values	Status	Power Relations	Curiosity	Normative Reference Groups	Asset Balanced

Figure 12.2. Abductive Category Wall After Data Analysis

### 12.3 Initial Reconstruction of the Five Key Practices

In the previous chapters, I considered the Practices, in their deconstructed form of Categories, across the three phases of Intervention, Process and Force. Untethering any direct connection between the whole forms of each Key Practice and the data. Allowing the Practices to become diffuse across the Phases in more deconstructed, granular forms. This process of deconstruction and dispersal was designed to ascertain the way Authentic Family Learning functions at a micro, meso and macro level. Now, to begin the reconstruction of the preliminary theory, I step back and return to looking at each practice as a whole. Allowing me to better understand the degree to which each distinct Practice been substantiated following fieldwork and data analysis. In the interests of clarity, I use a set of tables to first summarise the original definition before presenting additions and amendments to the Practice.

Authentic Lifeworlds
<b>Summary of Original Definition</b>
The Lifeworld (Habermas, 1987) encompasses a wide range of conventions and suppositions about "who we are as people and what we value about ourselves: what we believe, what shocks and offends us, what we aspire to, what we desire and what we are willing to sacrifice" (Frank, 2000, para. 16). In Authentic Family Learning, no Lifeworld is privileged above

another, although power is disproportionately allocated and therefore always relevant and impactful.

### **Reconstruction of Lifeworlds**

The value of attuning to the Lifeworlds of those involved in family learning, was substantiated by the data through the unalloyed voices of participants, who expressed entrenched beliefs about how their identity affects how they are perceived and positioned. The data suggests that rejecting hierarchical positioning may be difficult when middle-class values or individualist narratives about resilience pervade education.

## **Authentic Place**

### **Summary of Original Definition**

The authentic practitioner recognises the potential for parents feeling they are in a hostile environment by providing a threshold space between home and school (Pahl and Kelly, 2005). Seemingly small actions, such as insisting on appropriate rooms with adult-size furniture, disrupt the conventions of family learning courses and set an authentic tone that prioritises the immediate experiences of the people involved.

### **Reconstruction of Authentic Place**

The perception of schools as potentially hostile was substantiated in the data, which captures the psychological barriers of entering schools after having poor-prior experiences. The Practice has been extended to include the way in which the fortification of schools and the provision of suboptimal learning spaces have generative power that creates subordinate, outsider and disruptor 'status' for both parents and practitioners. This is not a linear process with static outcomes. It can be interrupted by relational activities and material changes to the school. Anomalies in the data demonstrate that schools are perceived as both painful and pleasant places and, further, that even painful prior experiences can be integrated into current schemas or used as a catalyst to enact change for children.

<b>Authentic Agendas</b>
<b>Summary of Original Definition</b>
The underlying motives for providing a Family Learning programme are not always evident to parents and not always aligned with parents own reasons for attending the course. To navigate this issue, establishing shared goals, focused on real tasks, is a fundamental aspect of Authentic Family Learning. Especially given that many families have experienced deficit-based interventions where they were told what is wrong with them.
<b>Reconstruction of Authentic Agendas</b>
The categories associated with Authentic Agendas are particularly diffuse across the Phases of Intervention, Process and Force. Suggesting an extension outward of the initial Practice to more explicitly locate the lived experiences of participants within their extralocal determinations. Additionally, the Practice is extended to include the discomfort practitioners feel when exerting control in order to manage shared goals. Which in turn, places emphasis on open communication and relational approaches as a way to temper this discomfort.

<b>Authentic Actions</b>
<b>Summary of Original Definition</b>
Activities in FEML programmes can be abstract, decontextualised, and prescribed in advance. In contrast, authentic activities are grounded in the lives of the families and involve practitioners and parents co-planning meaningful activities using real-world materials. This requires practitioners to be deeply curious about the lives of the families they are working with, in order to plan meaningful activities. The authentic practitioner will need to establish trust and build constructive relationships with families in order to agree on a shared goal that works for everyone.
<b>Reconstruction of Authentic Actions</b>
The data confirms the value of co-production for developing meaningful activities within trusting and constructive relationships. Anomalies in the data suggest that whilst abstract, decontextualised and prescriptive modes of family learning exist, there is also a clear drive



to deliver individualised, learner centered courses that are developed in ad hoc ways for each new site. This lack of a central thread for family learning was queried. Additionally, whilst authenticity may inform actions the role of supportive power should not be minimised. Lastly, social trust means that authentic actions may be rejected because of the complex hierarchies and social comparisons that occur in schools.

## **Authentic Relating**

### **Summary of Original Definition**

This Practice emphasises the importance of the children being part of every Family Learning session, because this makes the relationship between parent and child visible and central to the learning, solidifying the shared identity of 'parent' within the wider group and offering a powerful and relatable point of reference for all. Additionally, the Practice requires practitioners not to align with a particular group at the expense of another, such as the teachers over the parents, even when this means eschewing social niceties. During sessions, the lack of hierarchy and focus on co-production can create suspicion and or discomfort. This can create a period of negotiation and, in some cases, boundary testing which is regulated through open communication.

### **Reconstruction of Authentic Relating**

This Practice is the one that remains most intact following reconstruction. What has been added is further texture, via the voices of participants, who confirm that having the whole group having a shared understanding about the intentions of practitioners and the purpose and practices of AFL is important to them. Congruence between what practitioners say the course is about and what they feel it is actually about is important for productive relationships. Additionally, this Practice has been extended, based on the fieldwork, to incorporate intra-group relationships between parents. For example, participants evaluating the habits, actions and values of other group members and communicating sentiments relating to these evaluations. This adds

depth to the processes of negotiation and tension management that were part of the original definition of this Practice.

#### **12.4 The Journey from Practices to Characteristics**

An empirical and theoretical interrogation of the Five Key Practices has taken place by journeying through the Phases of Intervention, Process and Force. The aim has not been to emerge with a novel theory, rather, applying the extended case method provides an opportunity to sharpen, revise, and reconstruct my preliminary theory. ECM is a way to adjudicate between the Practices based on whether they are more, or less, useful to practical action in the world.

Having completed this process, I am now able to set out my reconstructed theory. The development of this theory, summarised below in Figure 12.3, starts with the Five Key Practices being deconstructed and then conceptualised across the Phases of Intervention, Process and Force before being reconstructed into Three Characteristics: Adaptive Intelligence, Ambitious Practicality and Holistic Understanding.

Start Point: Key Practices of AFL	Authentic Lifeworlds	Authentic Places	Authentic Agendas	Authentic Actions	Authentic Relating
<b>Intervention</b>	"Sore subject"	Status	Power Relations		
	Social Trust	"Make a brew"	Normative Reference Groups		
	Curiosity		"Well thick me"		
	"Like a chav"				
	Values				
<b>Process</b>	Hidden	Intention	Tension Management		
	Conforming	"What you're about"			
	"Comfortable with Control"	"Out of my Shell"			
		Collusion			
		"Say it how it is"			
<b>Force</b>	Asset Balanced	Accountability	"Learned Helplessness"		
		Family Centred?	Status Anxiety		
			Finance and Facilities		
			Supportive Power		
<b>End Point: Characteristics of AFL</b>	<b>Adaptive Intelligence</b>	<b>Ambitious Practicality</b>	<b>Holistic Understanding</b>		

Figure 12.3. Journey from Practices to Characteristics

The question of why 'Practices' become 'Characteristics' emerges at this point. The answer is that the concepts that constitute my preliminary theory of AFL have evolved in response to both new empirical evidence and careful consideration of the theoretical composition of AFL. This consideration required multiple theoretical decisions. For example, to what

phenomena does AFL refer? What is important about each of the Abductive Categories? What do the Abductive Categories indicate about AFL? The outcome of these decisions is that the extended theory now centres around the nature of AFL, what AFL looks like in practice and creating the conditions for AFL within the complex ecology of the school rather than on the individual actions of the practitioner.

The three Characteristics are quality statements that express the defining nature of Authentic Family Learning. They underline the importance of creating the conditions for a flexible, meaningful, and practical form of Family Learning. The Five Key Practices of AFL were an essential starting point for this new extended theory. The Five Key Practices articulate my concrete lived experience, using the microstructures of everyday life as a foundation for explaining how other practitioners might overcome the decontextualised teaching methods that are associated with functional models of adult education. The Practices have not remained in-tact however because, as the analysis and explication across the last three chapters has shown they are limited in the ways outlined in the following table.

<b>Limitation of Centering on Practices</b>	<b>Benefit of Centering on Characteristics</b>
They focus on specific actions a practitioner might take and unevenly intersperse ideas about how to create the conditions for learning.	The characteristics describe the nature of AFL and focus on creating conditions. Allowing the practitioner to use more of their own discretion.
They are unwieldy. Keeping five practices in mind is difficult when preparing and delivering a course of learning.	The three characteristics summarise the important features of AFL succinctly.
They hint at contextual complexities without always charting clear links between micro and macro.	The necessity of managing complexity is recognised explicitly in the extended theory. Operating in a complex system is an expected and ordinary part of AFL.
Do not incorporate the voices of parents, teachers or Family Learning Workers	The Characteristics recognise the role of a wider range of stakeholders and are not limited to the practice of FEML workers who deliver Local Authority Funded family learning.

Table 12.4. Limitations of Practices and Benefits of Characteristics

A distinction has now been drawn between characteristics and practices. It is a subjective distinction because I do not subscribe to 'the positivist ideal of a scholarly community reaching agreement on a single, clear theoretical definition and operationalization of a concept' (Welch, Rummyantseva and Hewardine, 2016, p. 112). However, at the same time, I am not making a postmodern argument that the reconstruction of my preliminary theory is only a matter of individual interpretation through a solipsistic change in semantics. Instead, the shift from practices to characteristics offers an insight into how Authentic Family Learning has evolved through empirical and theoretical investigation.

### **12.5 Drift and Steer: The Characteristics in a Concern/Solution Context**

As explained above, the reconstruction of the preliminary theory into an extended theory centres on the characteristics that are present when Authentic Family Learning is taking place. These are characteristics that necessarily align with genuine and meaningful learning experiences. Thus, attending to the three characteristics is a solution to inauthentic forms of family learning. The extended theory plots a course in the direction of Authentic Family Learning. It is not a prescriptive design that sets out precisely how to deliver AFL. Instead, the extended theory can be understood as a wayfinding tool, that maps the attributes and conditions to aim for, in order to steer towards Authentic Family Learning.

The infographic overleaf (Figure 12.5) places the Characteristics of AFL in a concern/solution context, where unease about drifting away from authentic values is challenged by the complex ecology of family learning in primary schools. To acknowledge and address this challenge the Characteristics, and a set of associated 'steering statements', signpost the way towards AFL.

<b>DRIFT</b>										
<b>Concern</b>	Drifting Away from Authentic Family Learning									
<b>Challenge</b>	Complex Ecology of Family Learning in Primary Schools									
<b>Response</b>	<p style="text-align: center;">Characteristics of Authentic Family Learning</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="width: 33%; text-align: center;"><b>Adaptive Intelligence</b></th> <th style="width: 33%; text-align: center;"><b>Ambitious Practicality</b></th> <th style="width: 33%; text-align: center;"><b>Holistic Understanding</b></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;"><i><b>Steering Statements</b></i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i><b>Steering Statements</b></i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i><b>Steering Statements</b></i></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">           Create the space and place for learning.             Respond to the context.             Set and pursue goals as a group.         </td> <td style="text-align: center;">           Make it easy.             Make it attractive.             Make it social.             Make it timely.         </td> <td style="text-align: center;">           Use systems thinking.             Introduce rebalancing processes.             Manage perceptual barriers.         </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<b>Adaptive Intelligence</b>	<b>Ambitious Practicality</b>	<b>Holistic Understanding</b>	<i><b>Steering Statements</b></i>	<i><b>Steering Statements</b></i>	<i><b>Steering Statements</b></i>	Create the space and place for learning.  Respond to the context.  Set and pursue goals as a group.	Make it easy.  Make it attractive.  Make it social.  Make it timely.	Use systems thinking.  Introduce rebalancing processes.  Manage perceptual barriers.
<b>Adaptive Intelligence</b>	<b>Ambitious Practicality</b>	<b>Holistic Understanding</b>								
<i><b>Steering Statements</b></i>	<i><b>Steering Statements</b></i>	<i><b>Steering Statements</b></i>								
Create the space and place for learning.  Respond to the context.  Set and pursue goals as a group.	Make it easy.  Make it attractive.  Make it social.  Make it timely.	Use systems thinking.  Introduce rebalancing processes.  Manage perceptual barriers.								
<b>Solution</b>	Steering Towards Authentic Family Learning									
<b>STEER</b>										

Table 12.5. Moving from Drift to Steer

## **12.6 An Extended Theory of Authentic Family Learning**

So far in this chapter I have explored the degree to which each of the original Five Key Practices were substantiated within the data, I have justified the reconstruction of Practices into Characteristics and I have placed the extended theory in a concern/solution context through the metaphors of drift and steer. To further explain the extended theory, I will now draw together the insights from across the phases of Intervention, Process and Force to set out each new Characteristic. Each characteristic is operationalised by a set of steering statements. These are summarised briefly here and expanded on in full in the practice guidance presented in Chapter 14.

### **12.7 Characteristic One: Adaptive Intelligence**

Authentic Family Learning is characterised by curious tutors who want to foster a sense of belonging by understanding and adapting to parents' strengths and needs. This characteristic can be advanced by attuning to the three steering statements that are set out below. In brief summary, the first steering statement recommends that organisers create the space for learning by ensuring parents feel welcome when entering the school, that the family learning space is fit-for-purpose and that the significance of returning to learn in a formal setting is recognised. The second steering statement highlights the need to respond sensitively to local contexts through the appreciation of the real-world factors that shape the lives of families. The final steering statement suggests that the goals of each course are set collaboratively and pursued as a collective under the leadership of an adaptable organiser.

### **12.8 Characteristic Two: Ambitious Practicality**

Taking a serious interest in the small actions that connect and contribute to the wider context is characteristic of Authentic Family Learning. This is an alternative to a singular focus on idealistic principals which may be impractical and unrealistic in real-world contexts. Instead, AFL is a pragmatic approach with a focus on small, practicable actions that centre around making family learning courses easy, attractive social and timely for parents (EAST). EAST is

an existing approach for 'making services easier and more pleasant for citizens to use' (Service *et al.*, 2014, p.3) and offers an ideal framework for explaining the nature of AFL. This characteristic, of a highly practical approach that is attuned to the wider context, can emerge by regarding the four steering statements that are set out below. The first contends that participating in a family learning course should be a straightforward endeavour that is not made unduly inconvenient for parents. The second steering statement recommends increasing the appeal of family learning through eye-catching, accessible and personalised communication. Next, taking a relational approach to implementing family learning and paying attention to the influence of social norms social networks is suggested. The final steering statement highlights the importance of a strategic approach to the timing of announcements, the setting of intentions and the provision of feedback.

### **12.9 Characteristic Three: Holistic Understanding**

Acting in accordance with an understanding of Authentic Family Learning as a complex system is the third characteristic of the approach. This starts with perceiving AFL as determined by social forces and nested within other complex systems, including the school system and the education system. This allows organisers to avoid conceptualising AFL in terms of causal, linear relationships among various components and to instead conceptualise AFL in terms of the 'dynamic and changing relationships that take place between individuals and the collective' (Cochran-Smith *et al.*, 2014, p. 10). Allowing for this characteristic, creates the potential for generating explanations about why disappointing outcomes occur after a change has been made at the systemic level.

This characteristic, distilled in the three steering statements that follow, prompts organisers to pay attention to the influence of action and inaction, feedback loops, disequilibrium, and the influence of nested layers of system. The first steering statement recommends thinking of Authentic Family Learning as a whole entity, as opposed to a collection of ad-hoc courses, and as such suggests it should be designed at the system level as an essential component of the school's educational and community development aims. The second steering



statement focuses on identifying and monitoring the gaps between authentic and in Authentic Family Learning and introducing rebalancing processes to close these gaps. The last steering statement notes, that efforts to rebalance will not result in equilibrium because the dynamic nature of complex will keep things in flux, for example strongly held beliefs of people within the system can potentially delay and distort the intended consequences of change. In this way considering complexity demands participation in the changes made to a system, over-prescription and entanglement with the outcomes of changes over distance and detachment.

### **12.10 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have drawn together the three Phases of Intervention, Process and Force to provide a reconstruction of my preliminary theory: the Five Key Practices of Authentic Family Learning. I summarised the starting point, my creation of the Abductive Category Wall, and explained how the Five Key Practices became Three Characteristics of Authentic Family Learning. After which, I set out how unease about drifting away from authentic values is challenged by the complex ecology of family learning in primary schools and position the extended theory as a potential solution. I then briefly set out each Characteristic. In the next chapter, I will underpin the characteristics with relevant theory and operationalise them by providing practice guidance.

## **Chapter 13: Towards an Improved Theory of Authentic Family Learning**

In the previous chapter, it was established that Authentic Family Learning (AFL) converges around three key characteristics. In this chapter, I seek to fulfil the aim of this thesis by arriving at a better theorisation of AFL. Consistent with the pragmatic orientation of this study, the type of theory I aim to construct is praxis—a practical theory focused on guiding action, rather than a predictive scientific theory (Kemmis et al., 2013; Schwab, 1969).

### **13.1 Why Develop a Praxis?**

Creating a theory that emphasises how to act is significant, given that the primary goal of education, as outlined by Kemmis (2008), is to enable individuals to thrive in a meaningful world. Unfortunately, amidst ongoing debates about educational practices, this essential purpose is often sidelined. Bureaucratic systems prioritising performance and management frequently neglect the needs and interests of families. As neoliberal policies become more prevalent, it becomes imperative to re-establish a humanistic perspective in education, taking into account the moral and political aspects of family learning (Grootenboer, 2013). Therefore, developing a praxis underscores the vital pedagogical role of the family learning tutor and underscores AFL's dual nature as both a value-based and practical endeavour, that serves children, parents, schools, and communities alike.

This study began with a preliminary theory based on my approach and understanding of family learning practice, which I then refined through engagement with existing literature, as summarised in section 4.6 of the practice guidance. In Chapters 9 to 12, using the extended case method, this refined theory evolved into the extended theory of Authentic Family Learning (AFL), comprising three characteristics: Adaptive Intelligence, Ambitious Practicality, and Holistic Understanding. These characteristics incorporate anomalies, unexpected insights, and new understandings from fieldwork with families and practitioners. In this chapter, I incorporate philosophy into the extended theory. The focus is on integrating

both theory and practice. This combination is the central contribution of this thesis, referred to as the praxis of Authentic Family Learning (P-AFL).

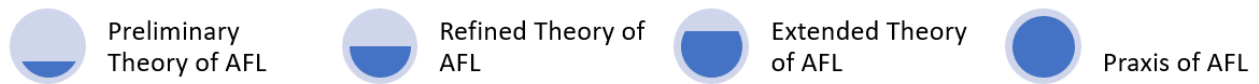


Figure 13.1 Towards a Praxis of AFL

### 13.2 How the Praxis Develops

The praxis of AFL, that takes shape in this chapter, locates the extended theory in its theoretical context by enquiring into the 'meaning and purpose' of my practice (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p.7). This theoretical locating began as I analysed data from my practice and relevant concepts from the philosophy of authenticity and the Middle Way were considered for their explanatory power (Appendix 13). This process aligns with Arendt's (1958) idea of uniting the 'active life' and the 'contemplative life'. Developing this praxis reveals the relevance of philosophical ideas to the real lives of myself, parents, and practitioners in the study.

In simple terms, this chapter combines practical knowledge and philosophical ideas. I use footnotes to point out relevant abductive categories and their associated characteristics, indicating where insights are derived from the data. I also indicate where philosophical ideas are addressed in the practice guidance.

The selection of authenticity and the Middle Way is intentional, driven by their resonance with my experiences, the pragmatic orientation of this research, and the cross-cultural insights that Eastern philosophy brings. In navigating the landscape of family learning, authenticity, rooted in existentialist philosophy, has always served as a beacon in my practice, illuminating ideas about genuine engagement with parents. Simultaneously, the philosophy of the Middle Way, emphasises the pursuit of practical harmony, aligning with the pragmatic worldview I have cultivated throughout this thesis. The integration of these philosophies

enriches the praxis of Authentic Family Learning, contributing a comprehensive understanding.

The integration of theory and practice occurs through iterative reflection and action during fieldwork, analysis, and writing phases (Arendt, 1958; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Stuart and Perris, 2017). The resulting praxis that develops in this chapter is productive in two ways firstly because, in line with Freire (1970) it is directed at the structures to be transformed (in this case family learning practices). The transformative orientation is operationalised in the practice guidance provided in Chapter 14.

Secondly, it is productive in the Aristotelian sense of being poetical or having an end goal of creating something (Smith, 1999; Calhoun, Sennett and Shapira, 2013). The journey of this study has been shaped by the production of tangible artefacts from the outset. From creating story sacks, classroom displays and educational games during family learning sessions to the production of the learning journeys that reflect parents' ideas, opinions, and experiences as participants in this research. Hence, the creation of associated practice guidance, that can be used as a practical tool to support the delivery of family learning and the development of Praxis in other fields.

### **13.3 The Place of Authenticity in the Praxis**

I now reflect on and incorporate philosophical insights from thinkers who have written about authenticity including Sartre, De Beauvoir, Aristotle, and Heidegger. I propose three perspectives from the philosophy of authenticity that are instructive for thinking about the practice of family learning as I experienced it:

1. Authenticity as Freedom (section 13.3.1)
2. Authenticity as Truth (section 13.3.3)
3. Authenticity as Affect (section 13.3.5)

My summary of these in relation to their utility for P-AFL are explored in relation to the data and wider literature, in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

### ***13.3.1 Integrating Authenticity as Freedom***

Authenticity as freedom first provided theoretical insight when, at every site, parents reported that the school environment inhibited their ability to be themselves. In semi-structured interviews parents shared<sup>1</sup> that what they would say and do in the school did not always match with their inner state of mind and that they felt unable to overcome this disconnect. This insight tethers P-AFL to Sartre's contention that freedom is central to authenticity (Drummond, 2010; Bauer, 2017; Richmond, 2018). The restriction of participants' freedom was captured at all sites when parents described<sup>1</sup> the subordinating effect of entering the school. This was a major finding with numerous descriptions outlining a demoralising process of navigating buzzers and electronic entry systems, being labelled as a visitor, corralled into a holding area and escorted through the school to the family learning room. Parents' reflections of entering these fortified school spaces (Casella, 2010; McCormick, 2004) align with the idea that a school is a generative building which is not merely a 'passive container for actions happening in it' (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004, p.1095). This was evident in the socio-spatial terms of reference used by parents when they explained how being in the school space was generative of an inferior and outsider status<sup>2</sup>. The constraining impact of the school environment is addressed in section [14.1.1](#). of the practice guidance.

Thus, the school environment actively impacts on the freedoms of its inhabitants. Insight into this process can be found in the work of numerous scholars. These include Hannon and Bird's (2004) work on parents' sense of belonging in schools, Kwan and Wong's (2016) discussion of schools as middle-class institutions and Loughrey and Woods (2010) thinking on the disconnect between home and school. Here, I explain the impact of the school

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<sup>1</sup> Abductive Category 'Sore Subject', Characteristic 'Adaptive Intelligence'

<sup>2</sup> Abductive Category: [Status](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

environment through Scott's (2014) perspective on institutionalisation. The influence of institutionalisation is addressed in section [14.1.2](#) of the practice guidance. Scott (2014) conceptualises the carriers of institutionalisation as the habits and routines that sanction norms within a setting. For example, the widespread and uncritical use, at all the sites, of unwelcoming processes for entering the school. The routine treatment of parents as interlopers - as opposed to community members - contributes to the production and endorsement of institutional norms that legitimise the authority of the school and curtail the freedom of some parents to participate as an equal member of the school; for example, by speaking freely, making requests, or setting their own boundaries. A call to notice and address the curtailed freedom of parents by introducing rebalancing processes is included in section [14.3.2](#) of the practice guidance.

This influence of the institution on parents' sense of self<sup>3</sup> can be further understood through Esteban-Guitart and Moll's (2014) 'funds of identity' concept. A fund of identity refers to the 'historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for people's self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding' (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 37) and as such aligns with ideas explored elsewhere in this thesis including lifeworlds (Habermas, 1984) and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). What may be overlooked in extant scholarship about funds of identity, and analogous concepts, is the awareness and understanding that parents have about the limiting ways in which they are perceived within the school.

This understanding was absent from the preliminary theory of AFL but was articulated vividly during semi-structured interviews<sup>3</sup> when parents described themselves as being seen by the school as 'thick' or 'chavs'. This suggests that the influence of forces such as social abjection (Tyler, 2013) on the discourse around families in schools may not be visible even to those who work in education and social justice spaces. Such that, while head teachers and Family Liaison Workers demonstrate concern and empathy in assessing family needs, there is a

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<sup>3</sup> Abductive Category: "[Like a Chav](#)". Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

tendency to overlook that parents' funds of identity are often shaped by harmful deficit narratives originating from the school. These narratives define who parents are and how they can exist within school spaces, perpetuating a cycle of misperception and limiting the full recognition of parents as valued contributors within the school community. The need to tackle deficit narratives is incorporated into section [14.3.3](#) of the practice guidance.

The idea that external influences, like social abjection<sup>4</sup>, can shape parents' sense of self establishes a connection between the Praxis of Authentic Family Learning and Sartre's assertion that freedom is integral to authenticity (Sartre, 2003). Sartre argues that individuals are accountable for their own freedom and those who attribute their lack of freedom to external factors exist in a state of inauthenticity or 'bad faith.' In delivering P-AFL, creating the space for learning involves creating the space for authenticity. That is the space in which to be yourself, to ask for what you really need and to do what you really want. This stands in contrast to adopting roles in bad faith, such as playing the contrite parent, the compliant student, or the all-knowing tutor. The influence of group dynamics on individual behaviour is accounted for in section [14.2.3](#) of the practice guidance.

I accept the Sartrean understanding of authenticity as freedom (Howells, 2009; Zheng, 2002; Detmer, 1986) in that, theoretically, the school environment does not literally remove parents' capacity to be themselves, to act as they please or to unshackle themselves from the bad faith perception that they are causally determined to take up particular modes of thought and action<sup>5</sup>. However, theoretical notions of freedom are unhelpful when the powerful carriers of institutionalisation (Illich, 1971; Kornberger and Clegg, 2004; Scott, 2014) are so inhibiting perceptually that freedom to be oneself is still curtailed. So, it is useful to engage with the work of De Beauvoir, a more practically minded philosopher than Sartre, who points out that in ordinary life it is impossible not to take social position into account when talking about freedom. A claim echoed in Heidegger's (2010) expression that we are

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<sup>4</sup> Abductive Category: "[Learned Helplessness](#)", Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>5</sup> Abductive Category: Asset Balanced, Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

'in-the-world'. In line with this, De Beauvoir (1949) contends that there is not simply freedom but rather degrees of freedom depending on the kind of social relations in which we find ourselves and which any exhortation to be free should consider. Thus, the Praxis of Authentic Family Learning encourages practitioners to act in good faith by acknowledging the significance of real-world factors such as the impact of returning to learn in a formal setting as an adult and the generative power of school buildings. Recognising degrees of freedom is embedded in section [14.1.2](#) of the practice guidance which encourages being pragmatic about the realities of parents' lives.

### ***13.3.2 How Authenticity as Freedom Contributes to the Characteristics of AFL***

Considering authenticity as freedom reveals implications for each characteristic of Authentic Family Learning. Integrating philosophical perspectives into these characteristics is integral to developing the praxis.

#### ***Adaptive Intelligence***

Freedom is central to fostering authenticity, it is crucial to acknowledge that parents often feel restricted in expressing who they really are in the school environment. In response, practitioners should get to know parents and work to understand and counter harmful deficit narratives originating from the school. This would align with Esteban-Guitart and Moll's idea of 'funds of identity'. It is also important to think about external influences like social abjection and how they shape parents' overall sense of self. In summary, learning and adapting to obstacles to parental freedom in schools means using identity-informed strategies and accounting for outside influences.

#### ***Ambitious Practicality***

School spaces can contribute to parents' feelings of inferiority and outsider status. P-AFL encourages practitioners to pay close attention to seemingly minor aspects of the school environment that can negatively impact parents' sense of identity. The aim is to establish spaces that foster a sense of belonging and a positive self-perception and is informed by



the concept that school buildings are not merely a 'passive container' (Kornberger and Clegg, 2004, p.1095). Small actions, such as welcoming entry processes, providing adult chairs, and ensuring inclusive communication channels, play a crucial role in shaping an environment where parents feel genuinely valued and free to express their authentic selves. This holistic approach, grounded in the understanding of the school as an active and generative space, underscores the importance of addressing "small" details to promote a culture of authentic interactions within the school community.

### ***Holistic Understanding***

Schools have a complex social structure and as De Beauvoir pointed out, there are different degrees of freedom in social relationships. Sartre argues that those blaming external factors for a lack of freedom means living in a state of inauthenticity or 'bad faith'. However, overcoming these external factors within the complex ecology of the school is not straightforward. The complexity deepens when considering that, although school leaders and family support workers generally display care and understanding while addressing family needs in professional conversations, this narrative may shift during informal discussions where grievances are aired in less formal spaces. Moreover, practitioners may place blame on parents, overlooking the fact that parents' self-perception is often influenced by deficit narratives originating from the school. These stories not only shape how parents see themselves but also affect how they fit into the school environment, creating a cycle of misunderstanding, and limiting the full recognition of parents as valuable contributors to the school community.

### ***13.3.3 Integrating Authenticity as Truth***

The importance of truthful communication and exchange is a second way that authenticity is essential to the Praxis of AFL. For example, during courses parents would often reveal a range of previously hidden ambitions and vulnerabilities<sup>6</sup>. Later, when discussing these disclosures parents explained that a mutual exchange of trust and truthfulness with me and

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<sup>6</sup> Abductive Category: [Hidden](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

the Family Liaison Workers allowed them to reveal aspects of themselves that had previously felt unsafe or uncomfortable to share. This mutual exchange of truth is enabled through the open communication that P-AFL places high value upon and correlates with an important aspect of the Aristotelian interpretation of authenticity; truthfulness or parrhesia (Fields, 2020). This orientation towards truth means that the P-AFL practitioner's relationship with parents must account for the real-world factors that shape their lives and is less impinged upon by normative values<sup>7</sup>. In this way, P-AFL pursues truth in practice by situating the 'person-in-the-world' that they really inhabit (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 52). An approach that is realised by acknowledging challenges and setting intentions as a learning community at the start of courses<sup>8</sup>. An imperative I include in section [14.2.3](#) of the practice guidance. This disposition towards truth makes acknowledging that family learning is mediated through relationships with community members an imperative and is also indicative of P-AFL's critically realist ontology.

The value of understanding authenticity as truth is also helpful when seeking to understand communication between participants. A salient instance of this was teachers' frustration with parents espoused values being seemingly misaligned with their actions<sup>9</sup>. For example, when parents expressed strong educational values or a keen interest in being part of the school community whilst concurrently not returning reading books, missing meetings, or bringing their child to school late. The explanation for this gap between stated values and actual behaviours was attributed, by teachers, either to parents' desire to curtail further discussion by telling teachers what they wanted to hear or to a deficit narrative of 'problem families' who were beyond help<sup>10</sup>. These assumptions are recognised in sections [14.1.2](#) and [14.2.4](#) of the practice guidance. In seeking to understand both the gap and this unsatisfactory explanation of the gap by teachers, I was drawn to Aristotle's thinking on authenticity, which is framed in terms of how people relate to the actions that they themselves perform. That is,

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<sup>7</sup> Abductive Category: [Normative Reference Groups](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>8</sup> Abductive Category: [Intention](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>9</sup> Abductive Category: [Values](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence'

<sup>10</sup> Abductive Category: [Family Centred?](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

Aristotle compels us to seek out the *origin* of our actions and to understand whether we are being true to our own beliefs or if our actions serve the interests of another. For example, we might ask ourselves whether we are doing something for praise or to avoid punishment or to align with the values of our organisation. Keeping this perspective in mind, encourages a dialectic approach (Nelson, Palonsky and McCarthy, 2021) to working with parents that focuses on reset and reconciliation as opposed to sustaining a deficit narrative<sup>11</sup> about problem families.

As shown so far, my conception of the role of truthfulness in P-AFL is that it is essential for social cooperation because it allows for members of the group to develop trust in one another<sup>12</sup>, therefore minimising the doubt and scepticism that is cultivated between teachers and parents when the real-world factors that affect parents cannot be openly communicated. Thus, in line with Williams (2015) I contend that authenticity is a social ideal as opposed to an individual virtue because it contributes to the construction of intersubjective relationships of trust within a group. Such relations are key to orienting the group in a harmonious and productive direction<sup>13</sup>. This perspective is embedded in section [14.2.3](#) of the practice guidance. Of course, communicating truth about ourselves to others requires knowing or discovering our true selves which is an enormous challenge when we are - as Heidegger (1962) points out - absorbed in everyday modes of existence that occupy our attention and lead us to forget ourselves.

In other words, human beings - or what Heidegger called Dasein - unknowingly give up their unique selves to the everyday world and its 'commonly defined styles of living, thinking, and communicating' (Sherman, 2009, p. 2). For Heidegger, this everyday world is constructed by both everybody and by nobody or what he called the 'they' and human beings define themselves in relation to this 'they' or as he puts it:

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<sup>11</sup> Abductive Category: [Collusion](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>12</sup> Abductive Category: ["Out of My Shell"](#). Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>13</sup> Abductive Category: [Social Trust](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

'The 'they', which supplies the answer to the question of the 'who' of everyday Dasein, is the 'nobody' to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself' (Heidegger, 1962, p.165)

P-AFL heeds this warning by seeking to create an environment<sup>14</sup> and numerous opportunities for parents to discover their true selves<sup>15</sup>, as embedded in section [14.1.1](#) of the practice guidance. One way this occurs in P-AFL is that Family Liaison Workers gain an opportunity to regularly meet with parents in a space where they engaged in positive and productive tasks. A recommendation found in section [14.2.1](#) of the practice guidance. This allows FLWs to establish relationships with parents and engage in dialogue about parents' interests and abilities. They can then encourage and support parents to discover their true calling in terms of the types of activity which they can claim as their own. This can be seen in the ways that, through P-AFL, parents took up opportunities to join PTAs, establish new friendships or seek out further education. To explain this impact, I draw on Heidegger's concept of resoluteness which captures what it means for Dasein to heed the call of conscience and act accordingly and consistently, over time in pursuit of self-actualisation. This is an important task for all involved in P-AFL as it speaks to the persistence that is required to commit to the approach, even in settings where the policies, customs, and habits<sup>16</sup> are contrary to the values and aims of P-AFL. In this way resoluteness is a reminder to let 'oneself be summoned out of one's lostness in the 'they'' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 345) and establish our unique place in, and approach to, the world by doing our work with specific intent and self-knowledge. This orientation is embedded in sections [14.2.1](#) and [14.2.2](#) of the practice guidance.

Overall, this section has established that authenticity can be valued in terms of truth. This conception reminds of the importance of knowing and understanding oneself and being able to communicate about oneself and one's circumstances. This open and truthful

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<sup>14</sup> Abductive Category: [Curiosity](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

<sup>15</sup> Abductive Category: "[Say it how it is](#)", Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>16</sup> Abductive Category: [Accountability](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

communication between participants is valuable for generating trust and contributes to an understanding of authenticity as a social ideal. Lastly, P-AFL recognises that a commitment to truth requires resolve or resoluteness and takes time and skill to establish and maintain.

### ***13.3.4 How Authenticity as Truth contributes to the Praxis of AFL***

Insights from integrating ideas about truth in relation to authenticity into the praxis of AFL surface some implications for each of the characteristics of AFL.

#### ***Adaptive Intelligence***

P-AFL highly values open communication, aligning with the Aristotelian understanding of authenticity, which emphasises truthfulness or parrhesia. Truthfulness is deemed crucial for fostering social cooperation, as it enables group members to develop trust, thereby reducing doubt and scepticism that may arise between teachers and parents when the real-world factors affecting parents cannot be openly communicated. Thus, authenticity is better understood as a social ideal rather than an individual virtue, playing a vital role in constructing intersubjective relationships of trust within a group. With this perspective, practitioners should actively work towards establishing trust by expressing genuine interest and maintaining a non-judgmental approach.

#### ***Ambitious Practicality***

Communicating truth about ourselves is a challenge due to our absorption in everyday modes of existence that dilute our sense of self. Heidegger's concept of Dasein suggests that individuals unwittingly conform to the 'commonly defined styles of living, thinking, and communicating.' P-AFL prioritises truthful exchanges that facilitate parents being their true selves. Family Liaison Workers facilitate this by engaging with parents positively, discussing their interests and abilities, and encouraging them to pursue activities aligned with their true calling. Drawing on Heidegger's concept of resoluteness, P-AFL emphasises the persistence needed to commit to the approach, even in settings where policies and habits contradict practitioner values. Resoluteness calls for individuals to heed their conscience, act

consistently over time, and pursue self-actualisation. In this context, resoluteness reminds us to break free from conformity to the 'they' and establish a unique approach to the world by working with specific intent and true self-knowledge.

### ***Holistic Understanding***

Complexity and a need for holistic understanding emerges in relation to truth because of the challenge of knowing or discovering one's true self amid everyday distractions. Aristotle suggests that truthfulness is a virtue, and authenticity emerges when individuals express their true selves. However, the challenge lies in navigating the balance between truthfulness and societal expectations, particularly in the school environment, where normative values can influence interactions. Unlike approaches bound by normative values, P-AFL acknowledges the unique circumstances and challenges faced by parents. This recognition is crucial for fostering genuine communication and relationships, enabling parents to express their true selves without conforming to societal expectations.

### ***13.3.5 Integrating Authenticity as Affect***

On reflection, I recognise that the emotive sense of professional discomfort I experienced as a family learning practitioner demonstrates how the affective nature of authenticity has been relevant to the Praxis of AFL from the outset. Many others have made similar connections between affect and the social world, as reflected in the affective turn in the social sciences. This shift disrupted the 'notion of the self-contained, rational subject' (Dernikos, Lesko, McCall and Niccolini, 2020, p. 6) and made emotion more relevant than ever within research (Clough and Halley, 2007; Cvetkovich 2012; Zembylas 2014).

Before further discussion of the ways that an affective understanding of authenticity is useful, it is worth noting that there are varied theoretical interpretations of affect. In this thesis I conceptualise it as the embodied ways that we feel our existence in the world as we relate to other subjects and objects. I also contend that affects – such as fear, anxiety, or anger – are embedded in our actions and that authenticity ought to be understood in terms of how

our actions generate the capacity 'to affect and be affected' (Zembylas, 2019, p. 216). As I will show, an understanding of this is helpful if we are called to act in ways that are counter to our beliefs about who we are and what we believe to be right, by encouraging us to consider the affective impact of our choices on ourselves and others.

It is P-AFL's resonance with an affective orientation to authenticity that underpins its call for acts of everyday resistance to rationalised approaches that yield irrational outcomes<sup>17</sup>. For example, the excessive lesson planning, unused risk assessments, and impossible differentiation I encountered in my early family learning practice. Openly resisting such practices, which emphasise 'productivity, economic liberalization policies, and the significance of the individual' (Zembylas, 2019, p.212) can take place through a series of small choices – similar to what Foucault (2009) collectively termed counter-conduct - that challenge normative expectations in the setting. Counter-conduct is one of the rebalancing processes described in section [14.3.2](#) of the practice guidance. This counter-conduct provides an alternative to the ambivalence and unease generated by false-compliance (Anderson, 2008) and validates frank dialogue that questions rationalism and accountability.

This affective distrust of reason and rationality is further legitimised by Rousseau's philosophy on authenticity (Melzer, 1996; King, 2021; Savruk and Jenan, 2021), which holds that we are at our most authentic when we are in touch with the more passionate side of our nature and that reason is often used in a self-deceptive way. For Rousseau, as an existentialist, this means being diverted from what is good in our originally 'good' nature. Whilst I do not frame the affective understanding of authenticity in these moralistic or virtuous terms, the orientation toward seeing emotion as valuable is echoed in P-AFL's call for practitioners to be alert and attentive to their compassionate instincts<sup>18</sup>. This cognisance validates and sustains the application of counter-conduct and rebalancing processes which may go against the grain in settings where habitual practices diminish parents. For example,

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<sup>17</sup> Abductive Category: [Accountability](#), Characteristic 'Ambitious Practicality'

<sup>18</sup> Abductive Category: [Social Trust](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

informed by an affective understanding of authenticity a P-AFL practitioner will insist on appropriate learning environments, involve children in all sessions and prioritise humanistic rather than bureaucratic administrative activities. These expectations are incorporated into sections [14.1.1](#) and [14.3.1](#) of the practice guidance. In line with Scott's (1990) analysis of everyday resistance, low-profile tactics such as these are 'born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power' (p. 183) and represent as legitimate a challenge to oppression as collective action such as strikes, sit-ins or sabotage.

Through its particular forms of resistance, P-AFL recognises and confronts the corrupting influence of social spaces<sup>19</sup> and is informed by Rousseau's suggestion that social settings can stifle our natural tendency toward kindness and introduce worse dispositions, such as a preoccupation with what others think of us<sup>20</sup>. Evident in section [14.1.2](#) of the practice guidance. Understanding people's potential to act based on 'motives derived from the periphery of the self' (Varga and Guignon, 2020, online) is valuable to praxis in hierarchical communities like primary schools. For instance, bolstered by this understanding, PP-AFL seeks to offset the impairing influence of the competitive public sphere on humans' ability to turn inward and engage in introspection and self-reflection<sup>21</sup>.

Such offsets include parents drawing their learning journeys as a way to explore their individual strengths and needs, a notion embedded in section [14.2.2](#) of the practice guidance. Another example is practitioners taking a compassionate approach when parents contravene expectations set by the school in relation to attendance, punctuality or the return of resources. This creates a non-judgemental space for parents to safely reflect on their circumstances, from which altruistic intentions can be directed towards the actual needs of parents as opposed to serving neoliberal conceptions about social investment for the greater good of society (Fretwell, 2021; Gillies, 2020; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2014; Wainwright and Marandet, 2017). In turn, this can enable dialogue that accepts and examines the impact

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<sup>19</sup> Abductive Category: [Collusion](#), Characteristic 'Ambitious Practicality'

<sup>20</sup> Abductive Category: [Normative Reference Groups](#), Characteristic 'Adaptive Intelligence'

<sup>21</sup> Abductive Category: [Hidden](#), Characteristic 'Adaptive Intelligence'



of systemic inequalities (Goodall, 2021). The need to be aware of the broader system in which family learning sits is recognised in section [14.3.1](#) of the practice guidance.

The Praxis of Authentic Family Learning acknowledges that in the complex environment of a school, people often take on roles that may seem suitable for the setting but may not align with their true selves. This is acknowledged in section [14.3.3](#) of the practice guidance. In family learning, this can mean presenting as a 'good' parent, engaged literacy learner or motivated employment seeker. My findings indicate that this role-performance<sup>22</sup> can cause alienation from the self and ultimately inequality and injustice because - drawing further on Rousseau - these roles obscure the authentic feelings, strengths and needs of parents and practitioners. While sociological research argues that adopting social roles is unavoidable, the ability to establish what Goffman (1956) termed as role distance becomes relevant. That is, 'the knowledge of how to apply the rules, when to deviate from the roles, and the ability to negotiate role conflicts' (Schmid, 2017, p. 4). This management of roles is incorporated into section [14.3.2](#) of the practice guidance.

Presenting yourself as being removed or at a distance from the role you are being required to play is often achieved by employing strategies like cynicism, humour and dis-identification with the context (Lupu, Ruiz-Castro, and Leca, 2022). However, studies suggest that such coping mechanisms can lead to increased compliance and a delay in taking any meaningful action, essentially maintaining the status quo (Contu, 2008; Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Kosmala & Herrbach, 2006). As a result, there is minimal observed change in practice. Consequently, in P-AFL, overcoming misalignment between life choices, priorities, values and the practices of the school is better overcome not through 'role distance' and instead through connection<sup>23</sup> between the requirements of the self and the context. The intention of building this connection is to develop critical consciousness using a bricolage of tools including open communication and an awareness of power relations in the school<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Abductive Category: [Conforming](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

<sup>23</sup> Abductive Category: ["Say it how it is"](#), Characteristic: Think Big, Act Small

<sup>24</sup> Abductive Category: [Power Relations](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

So far, I have expressed that, following Rousseau, an important aspect of P-AFL is to unearth what is truly us, underneath the 'masks' imposed by society. However, Sartre's critique that it is unhelpful to have too much of an introspective focus on one's own inner feelings and attitudes is worthy of attention. This argument suggests that preoccupation with the self leads to self-deception or evasion, to escape the anxiety and responsibility that can come with true self-awareness. In doing so, people may act in 'bad-faith' by adopting socially acceptable personas which can be destructive of altruism and compassion toward others particularly those at the margins of society.

Despite these considerations, the social and relational dimensions inherent in P-AFL go beyond a narrow interpretation of Rousseau's ideas about attending to one's own emotions. To illustrate, in the context of P-AFL, placing importance on spending time getting to know parents<sup>25</sup>, pursuing shared goals<sup>26</sup>, and collaboratively creating meaningful tasks is emphasised. These are considered crucial elements for achieving significant social goals such as group cohesion, mutual trust<sup>27</sup> and reciprocity.

Hence, the social and relational approach of P-AFL – embedded in sections [14.1.3](#) and [14.2.3](#) of the practice guidance - incorporates the idea that the praxis necessitates an appreciation of authenticity as both 'being at home in the world' and 'being at home with ourselves.' This addresses the existentialist dilemma of staying true to oneself while coexisting in a diverse society and aligns with modern sociological and political perspectives that view emotion as interconnected with reason and rationality (Zembylas, 2019; Ahmed, 2004; Barbalet, 1998; Hoggett & Thompson, 2012).

Forms of rationality that emerge in P-AFL, when we accept the realities of living in plurality, include being clear about what degree of individual progress we can reasonably accept in a

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<sup>25</sup> Abductive Categories: Curiosity, ["Make a Brew"](#) and ["Say it How it Is"](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>26</sup> Abductive Category: [Intention](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>27</sup> Abductive Category: [Social Trust](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

10-week course and as a result focusing on shared goals over individual goals<sup>28</sup>. This focus on manageability and practicality is captured in sections [14.2.1](#) and [14.2.4](#) of the practice guidance. Creating this room for various degrees of rationality within P-AFL tackles a concern articulated by Arendt. Much like Rousseau's unease with reason and rationality, Arendt suggested that there is a need to be mindful of potential negative consequences arising from attuning to our emotions. For example, Arendt points out that narratives of suffering may lead to moralisation through sentimental discourse about individual struggles which 'evoke pity for the sufferers rather than...action and lead to voyeurism and passivity'<sup>29</sup> (Zembylas, 2019, p. 507).

According to Arendt (1958), suffering is a worldly experience and so a reliance on emotions - such as pity - that serve to insulate or protect individuals from suffering actually prevents us from understanding the world. This challenge shifts the focus of affect and authenticity from emotions influencing our individual self-perception (Tryggvason, 2017), to evaluating the societal and political implications – both positive and negative – of emotions like compassion, outrage, or disgust. This perspective also clarifies P-AFL's stance, which neither dismisses the impact felt by families when faced with rationalistic school mechanisms (such as attendance awards, reward charts, and uniform policies) nor attributes parents' feelings solely to a deficit narrative of suffering or social abjection (Tyler, 2013). Instead, P-AFL uses reactions to these mechanisms as a starting point for dialogue aimed at bringing about positive change. This focus on continual adjustment is embedded in section [14.3.2](#) of the practice guidance.

In this way, P-AFL retains an interest in Rousseau's perception of amour propre, which refers to a type of self-love that arises from social comparison. In Rousseau's view, amour propre is distinct from "amour de soi," which is a more basic form of self-love associated with self-preservation and well-being. Amour propre, or social comparison, emerges when individuals

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<sup>28</sup> Abductive Category: "[Comfortable with Control](#)", Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

<sup>29</sup> Abductive Category: "[Learned Helplessness](#)", Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

start comparing themselves to others in society. Rousseau believed that in a state of nature, where individuals lived more independently, amour de soi prevailed. However, as societies developed and people began to interact more, social comparison became a significant factor. Unlike amour de soi, which is self-referential and based on internal needs, amour propre relies on external validation<sup>30</sup>. Rousseau expressed concerns about the negative impact of amour propre on individuals and society. He believed that the shift from a state of nature to a more complex social order brought about this form of self-love, introducing potential problems such as inequality, envy, and competition.

Both parents and staff expressed apprehension about being compared to others and the pressure to meet certain standards. Some staff members hoped that family learning could positively influence pro-social behaviours by exposing parents who deviate from school norms to those who adhere to them. Parents sensed the school's expectations regarding raising well-behaved, academically successful children. Notably, while parents acknowledged these expectations, they often responded defensively by highlighting the goal of raising 'happy' children as their main priority. This disconnect is dealt with by discussing, setting and pursuing goals as a group, as embedded in section [14.1.3](#) of the practice guidance. Here Rousseau's insights on amour propre hold significant implications for self-esteem, identity, and social dynamics, particularly in relation to learning and life goals where affect and emotion play pivotal roles.

A family learning tutor with an awareness of amour propre might consider the emotional dimensions tied to social dynamics and conflicts arising from social comparisons between the parent group and between parents and teachers. This involves promoting inclusivity, collaboration, and emphasising shared goals over competition – as found in section [14.1.3](#) of the practice guidance. That said, recognising individual growth is possible but the focus is placed on acknowledging and celebrating progress rather than comparing families<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Abductive Category: [Status Anxiety](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>31</sup> Abductive Category: [Asset Balanced](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

Encouraging self-reflection is a crucial strategy that allows parents to understand their values independently of external validation, fostering a more authentic connection with their own emotions. Addressing social comparison issues involves attentiveness to signs of competition among families, providing guidance that appreciates achievements without undermining self-worth. Open communication about the potential impact of social comparison on well-being enhances a shared understanding of the importance of a positive, collaborative learning environment.

Incorporating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is useful in this context, as it not only promotes empathy and self-regulation but also acknowledges and validates the emotional experiences of both parents and children. Lastly, advocating for a pragmatic response<sup>32</sup> to external pressures, such as high stakes testing or ranking systems, aligns with Rousseau's insights on *amour propre*, fostering an educational environment that values individual strengths, promotes collaborative learning, and diminishes the detrimental impact of social comparison through a more emotionally attuned approach (embedded in sections [14.3.1](#) and [14.3.3](#) of the practice guidance).

In conclusion, this section highlights AFL's praxis, viewing authenticity as encompassing both rationality and emotion, encouraging practitioners and participants to feel 'at home with themselves' and 'at home in the world.' Recognising the social nature of reality, the praxis prioritises an affective sense of belonging. AFL practitioners focus on activities fostering belonging, trust, and reflective insight. Examining Rousseau's *amour propre* within P-AFL, it proves pertinent to self-esteem, identity, and social dynamics in learning.

### ***13.3.6 How Authenticity as Affect Contributes to the Praxis of AFL***

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<sup>32</sup> Abductive Category: [Supportive Power](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

### ***Adaptive Intelligence***

P-AFL prioritises time spent learning about parents, pursuing shared goals, and co-creating meaningful tasks for social cohesion and mutual trust. This helps families navigate social comparison and promotes inclusivity, collaboration and a positive learning environment. Also, P-AFL responds to rationalistic mechanisms in schools without dismissing parents' feelings, using reactions as a starting point for learning and adapting to parents' strengths and needs. Also, an affective understanding of authenticity is defined as embodied feelings in relation to the world and actions, impacting choices and encouraging learning about and adapting to affective impacts.

### ***Ambitious Practicality***

P-AFL aligns with Foucault's concept of counter-conduct by advocating subtle, everyday resistance to rationalised educational approaches. Emphasising the importance of small choices that challenge normative expectations within educational settings, P-AFL seeks to rebalance established power structures. In doing so, it embraces the notion of counter-conduct, encouraging practitioners to engage in acts that deviate from the expected norms, fostering an environment of resistance to rigid educational paradigms.

### ***Holistic Understanding***

P-AFL recognises that the complex ecology of a school requires role-playing and emphasises aligning the self with the context by seeking to be both 'at home in the world' and 'at home with ourselves.'. Practitioners aim to react to rationalistic mechanisms in schools without dismissing parents' feelings, using reactions as a starting point for dialogue. Balance is important and P-AFL acknowledges the potential negative consequences of inauthentic emotional attunement, aligning with Arendt's concerns about sentimental discourse. Social comparison an inevitable consequence of living in plurality and requires a pragmatic response that values individual growth alongside collaborative learning.

### **13.3.7 Concluding thoughts on the Philosophy of Authenticity**

In conclusion, the integration of authenticity as freedom, truth, and affect into the Praxis of Authentic Family Learning reveals profound implications for fostering genuine relationships between schools and parents. Firstly, recognising freedom as central to authenticity underscores the importance of addressing the obstacles parents face in expressing their true selves within the school environment. Practitioners must actively learn about and adapt to the challenges parents encounter, countering harmful narratives and fostering spaces where parents feel genuinely valued and free to engage authentically.

Secondly, understanding authenticity as truth highlights the significance of open communication and trust-building in AFL. Practitioners must prioritise truthful exchanges, facilitating parents' expression of their true selves while navigating societal expectations and normative values within the school environment.

Thirdly, embracing authenticity as affect emphasises the importance of emotional engagement and resistance to rigid educational norms. Practitioners should prioritise learning about and adapting to parents' affective experiences, promoting inclusivity, collaboration, and a positive learning environment while challenging established power structures through rebalancing counter-conduct. To navigate the complexity of the school environment, practitioners must think big and act small by recognising the interplay between individual agency and societal influences, seeking to establish a balance between authenticity and pragmatic responses to challenges.

### **13.4 The Place of Middle Way Philosophy in the Praxis**

The second area of philosophy to be reflected on in this chapter is the Middle Way. The Praxis of AFL recognises that the *subjective* wishes of parents, teachers and funders exist in relation to the *objective* conditions of their context. In this way, P-AFL practitioners' sense of

justice or fairness is aligned with Confucian Middle Way philosophy - or Way of Zhong - which calls for 'a mutually relational perspective between the innermost being and the outside objective being' (Keqian, 2012, p. 436). This perspective does not fall to the level of conciliation - revising one's own opinions in the face of others - or to eclecticism – allowing all perspectives to discordantly exist at once. Instead, it is an ongoing dialectical interaction between subjective interests and objective reality with the aim of acting appropriately in the given conditions. There is not space here to offer a complete expression of the philosophical significance of the Way of Zhong and so I draw on Keqian's (2012) work to present two major teachings of the Way of Zhong. These are that Middle Way philosophy is instructive for seeing the importance, in all contexts, of:

1. Paradoxical Integration (section 13.4.1)
2. Pragmatic Wisdom (section 13.4.3)

My summary of these in relation to some examples of their utility for P-AFL expanded upon in relation to my data and wider literature, in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

### ***13.4.1 Integrating Middle Way for Paradoxical Integration***

The first element of the Middle Way that I found instructive is its focus on paradoxical integration. Family Learning Workers often occupy a position at, or on both sides of, the boundaries between home and school, parents and teachers, support staff and management, families, and funders. From this position, the worker can be called on to bridge the gap between disparate perspectives that are often interdependent. Work that is recognised in section [14.1.2](#) and [14.3.2](#) of the practice guidance. During fieldwork, this labour was evident when I had to challenge the perspectives of school leaders and teachers who often spoke positively about their interest in including parents in the school community<sup>33</sup> but used concern around impact on staff workload or the influence of school involvement on parents' self-reliance as reasons for inaction<sup>34</sup>. Looking to Middle Way theory (Chen,

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<sup>33</sup> Abductive Category: [Family Centred?](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>34</sup> Abductive Category: ["Learned Helplessness"](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding



2002) has helped me to understand why being able to reconcile apparent contradictions is valuable for P-AFL practitioners and legitimises a dialectical approach to the task (Keqian, 2012).

This legitimacy stems from a strength of Chinese philosophy; its 'integrative and encompassing nature' (Chen, 2002, p.179). This is distinct from the strengths of Western thought which is generally most noted for its powers of categorisation and analysis (Littlejohn and Li, 2021; Macfie, 2019; Neville, 2000; Waldmann, 2000; Zhang, 2006). These powers are useful, but paramount to the praxis of AFL is achieving what is manageable in the context without becoming mired in conflict or grievance-airing. For this Eastern philosophy has particular value. A striking illustration of the need for theories that provide integrative and dialectical direction, is the continual pressure to collude<sup>35</sup> with various stakeholders that appears across the data. These sorts of perceptual barriers are addressed in section [14.3.3](#) of the practice guidance. In fieldwork, pressure to collude took the form of implicit requests to endorse negative communications about either parents or teachers. Resisting this pressure could lead to uncomfortable encounters with both groups. A useful way to reduce this pressure, as noted in section [14.2.3](#) of the practice guidance, was to openly restate P-AFL values and to discuss the shared aims of all parties and to bring parties together to speak directly.

This approach to dialogue minimises the impulse to speak *for* people which, if left unquestioned or unexamined, contributes to the reification of parents—treating them as if their perspectives, voices, and agency are fixed and easily represented by others<sup>36</sup>. A better approach is to hold space for parents to be visible and vocal, which demonstrates a willingness to advocate and can demonstrate trustworthiness<sup>37</sup> to all parties. Equally, acknowledging the role of workload or decision-making structures that are part of the complex ecology of the school is essential, especially during uncomfortable interactions or

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<sup>35</sup> Abductive Category: [Collusion](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>36</sup> Abductive Category: [Tension Management](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>37</sup> Abductive Category: ["Out of my Shell"](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

when encountering unfavourable characterisations of the school. This consistently open approach necessitates thinking at the system level and having a clear understanding of when it is appropriate to challenge and when it is appropriate to yield, considering timing carefully as recognised in sections [14.3.1](#) and [14.2.4](#) of the practice guidance.

The important lesson from Middle Way thinking here is that this acknowledgement must not fall to the level of appeasement and pacification<sup>38</sup>. Instead, the Middle Way is a pragmatic mode of thinking that emphasises harmony through compromise, agreement, and action towards a shared goal. As recognised in section [14.1.3](#) of the practice guidance. It is worth noting at this point that it is, of course, not only Eastern philosophy that can be instructive about integrative approaches to polarised perspectives. For example, social theorists such as Giddens (1984) apply the concept of duality, rather than dualism, to draw seemingly opposite elements – in his case structure and agency – closer together and to emphasise their interdependence. In fact, Farjohn (2010, p, 203) offers a pithy summary of the widely held support across social science for perceiving opposite concepts as dualities not dualisms:

'...stability often presupposes flexibility and change (Bateson, 1972), and reliability requires variation (Weick & Roberts, 1993). Mirroring this, bureaucracies can be remarkably flexible (Adler, Goldoftas, & Levine, 1999), and limits can be liberating (Dewey, 1922) and instrumental for innovation (Dougherty & Takacs, 2004).'

Recognising the interdependence of perceptually opposing ideas is in line with The Middle Way's concept of paradoxical integration (Chen, 2002). This concept emphasises replacing the 'either/or' framework with a 'both/and' perspective. For example, in family learning, both conformity and diversity, or cooperation and competition will need to coexist simultaneously as assorted individuals coalesce into a group and embark on meaningful projects together, such as organising an educational visit or creating phonics resources for the school. Understanding paradoxical integration aids practitioners in transcending paradoxes,

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<sup>38</sup> Abductive Category: "[What you're about](#)". Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

asserting that it is crucial to accept these perspectives as part of an expansive totality. It implies balance between extremes and over time, an identification of commonalities and relationships. This philosophical shift makes room for contradictions and the identification and management of paradox in practice – such as the way family learning can be at once controlling and liberating<sup>39</sup>.

This is a duality also recognised by Wainwright and Marandet (2013) who note that liberation occurs as parents take advantage of new social connections and learning opportunities, using their own agency and to meet their own needs<sup>40</sup>. At the same time, control is at work as local authorities, schools and community teachers examine families to identify suitable candidates based on government strategies such as employability or levelling up<sup>41</sup>. Then the community teacher builds friendly and supportive relationships to encourage parents to become responsible individuals who comply with the norms of what characterises suitable parenting and citizenship.

Seeing these activities as part of a symbiotic whole has the potential to encourage practitioners to navigate complex situations with increased flexibility, as advised in sections [14.3.1](#) and [14.3.2](#) of the practice guidance. Moreover, embracing paradoxes cultivates empathy by acknowledging inequity – for example learning phonics was experienced by some parents as encouraging and by others as disheartening depending on their prior educational experiences<sup>42</sup>. This recognition leads to more balanced decision-making, as educators and authorities consider both sides of seemingly conflicting issues, resulting in more informed and fairer choices. Paradoxical integration can also strengthen problem-solving skills as individuals grapple with contradictions, learning to navigate complexity, synthesise information from different viewpoints and find solutions that address multiple dimensions simultaneously. Techniques include establishing goals for both sides that are interdependent on each other, engaging in open-minded discussion of opposing opinions

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<sup>39</sup> Abductive Category: [Supportive Power](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>40</sup> Abductive Category: ["Out of my Shell"](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>41</sup> Abductive Category: [Power Relations](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>42</sup> Abductive Category: [Hidden](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

to integrate them<sup>43</sup> and role modelling the “both/and” mindset approach<sup>44</sup> (Wei, Zhou and Wang, 2023).

As noted above Wainwright and Marandet’s (2013) concept of supportive power is an example of paradoxical integration which acknowledges that control and liberation can take place simultaneously. This can be understood as a Foucauldian reading of family learning as a means to exert control and govern at a distance (Wandel, 2001). However, my data aligns with their reading, which diverges from Foucault, by acknowledging that parents are not passive ‘dupes’ but people with agency who can resist, subvert, disrupt, or submit to the supportive power relations at work in family learning. For example, some parents were aware of the deficit discourse emanating from the school and would openly challenge this. Further, parents would regularly question the gap between the schools espoused values and enacted values. This advances my preliminary theory of AFL by now acknowledging that a) family learning is simultaneously controlling and liberating and that b) within this framework parents can still exercise agency. I also now recognise the need for Family Learning Tutors to be keenly aware of their potential to be an agent of governmentality. This is a call rooted in the ‘both/and’ framework of paradoxical integration that requires the community teacher to examine their participation in *both control and liberation*<sup>45</sup>. I recognise this requirement in section [14.3.1](#) of the practice guidance.

My evolving comprehension of power dynamics<sup>46</sup> in family learning signifies a substantial advancement from the initial theory, fundamentally reshaping how I perceive the agency of parents within the framework. In the earlier theory, parents were often portrayed as subjects of oppression with limited power. The new perspective, however, acknowledges that family learning is a complex interplay of both control and liberation, presenting a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic<sup>47</sup>. While the bridging role of the family learning worker was

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<sup>43</sup> Abductive Category: [“What you’re about”](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>44</sup> Abductive Category: [Asset Balanced](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

<sup>45</sup> Abductive Category: [Supportive Power](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>46</sup> Abductive Category: [Power Relations](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>47</sup> Abductive Category: [“Comfortable with Control”](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

acknowledged in my original theory, the lack of an underpinning philosophy limited the clarity and depth of the conceptualisation. Now, the concepts of "supportive power," and paradoxical integration connect P-AFL to a broader body of literature.

The evolution of my theory also introduces an imperative for Family Learning Tutors to be acutely aware of their potential role as agents of governmentality. It underscores the dual responsibility of community educators, who must navigate their participation in both control and liberation aspects within the family learning context. This call has elements in common with Freire's (1979) concept of critical consciousness that requires individuals to perceive and expose social and political contradictions and act against oppressive elements in life that have been illuminated by such understandings.

However, some interpretations of critical consciousness may simplify complex issues by suggesting a binary choice between action or inaction, which contradicts the caution against oversimplification advocated by the Way of Zhong. The study revealed that parents' behaviours and attitudes evolved throughout the duration of the courses, presenting a more intricate role-set than initially perceived by either myself or the parents<sup>48</sup>. For example, one parent consistently criticised school policies during group discussions, and was viewed as disruptive by others in the group, resulting in her isolation. In such instances, identifying a singular source of oppression to address becomes challenging, as not all parents perceive the school as oppressive, and those who do may do so differently and at different times. In this case, internal group dynamics predominantly influenced outcomes<sup>49</sup>. What proved effective was employing equitable decision-making processes, nurturing trust over time, and enabling parents to coalesce around shared values and objectives as described in sections [14.2.1](#) and [14.2.3](#) of the practice guidance. This integrative approach allowed for the coexistence of two readings of the school without attempting to resolve the paradox of contradictory truths simultaneously.

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<sup>48</sup> Abductive Category: [Hidden](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

<sup>49</sup> Abductive Category: [Status Anxiety](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

Reflecting on my experiences, I began to consider the more adaptable interpretation of critical consciousness put forth by Kincheloe (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1993; Kincheloe, 1999; Thomas and Kincheloe, 2006). In this framework, critical consciousness is viewed as provisional and continuously evolving, containing inherent tensions as individuals' perceptions and insights develop (Kincheloe, 2012). This perspective represents a significant enhancement to my initial theory as it acknowledges the complex nature of the social world, likening it to human beings—unpredictable, context-dependent, and influenced by minute fluctuations, as recognised throughout all three sections of the practice guidance. This realisation alleviates some of the pressure I experienced as an educator with deep-rooted connections to critical pedagogy. In the past, when I couldn't effectively confront or reveal oppression, I often felt discouraged and concerned that my actions were futile. Integrating this adaptable understanding of critical consciousness into the Praxis of AFL marks a notable progression because it enables the acceptance of provisional, incomplete, and fluctuating forms of awareness, aligning better with a critically realist view of the world.

In summary, recognising the strengths of both Eastern and Western philosophies highlights the pragmatic nature of the Praxis of Authentic Family Learning, which prioritises harmony through concerted action towards common objectives. Drawing from the concept of paradoxical integration found in The Way of Zhong, this approach emphasises embracing contradictions and understanding the interconnectedness of seemingly opposing ideas. Understanding family learning as simultaneously empowering and controlling, as demonstrated by the notion of "supportive power," represents a significant advancement in understanding parental agency within the praxis. Additionally, revisiting critical consciousness with a Middle Way lens reveals the limitations of adopting a rigid either/or perspective. Advocating for a more adaptable expression of critical consciousness, as suggested by Kincheloe, aligns with the integrative approach promoted by Middle Way philosophy. Ultimately, the process of bridging disparate perspectives within family learning

has refined the conceptualisation of P-AFL, highlighting the importance of a dialectical and integrative approach.

### ***13.4.2 How Paradoxical Integration Contributes to the Praxis of AFL***

P-AFL aligns with Foucault's concept of counter-conduct by advocating subtle, everyday resistance to rationalised educational approaches. Emphasising the importance of small choices that challenge normative expectations within educational settings, P-AFL seeks to rebalance established power structures. In doing so, it embraces the notion of counter-conduct, encouraging practitioners to engage in acts that deviate from the expected norms, fostering an environment of resistance to rigid educational paradigms.

#### ***Adaptive Intelligence***

P-AFL underscores the significance of establishing an inclusive atmosphere where parents feel acknowledged and valued, thereby fostering trust. To bridge gaps between disparate perspectives the practitioner, must synthesise available information and respond flexibly. For instance, while encouraging parental visibility and advocacy, they must also demonstrate an understanding of the broader contextual factors that may impact interactions, such as teachers' workload constraints or the influence of decision-making structures. By integrating these elements, practitioners can cultivate an environment where diverse perspectives are acknowledged, valued, and harmonised, thereby promoting genuine engagement and collaboration within the school community.

#### ***Ambitious Practicality***

P-AFL focuses on taking small, practical steps every day to connect different perspectives among stakeholders like school leaders, teachers, and parents. These small actions help bring together diverse viewpoints. There's a need for a balanced approach because there's constant pressure to collude with others by endorsing negative comments about parents or teachers. Middle Way thinking helps here by offering useful ways to deal with these pressures without resorting to appeasement or pacification. It suggests paradoxical

integration as one of these small actions. Techniques like pursuing shared goals and having open discussions about different opinions help integrate different viewpoints. This helps practitioners find solutions that deal with lots of different perspectives at once.

### ***Holistic Understanding***

Reflecting on how Middle Way thinking helps bridge perspectives, I realised that family learning can both empower and constrain simultaneously, connecting P-AFL to wider literature. This shows the importance for practitioners to be aware of their influence. This new understanding of power dynamics in family learning represents a significant departure from the more simplistic notions of parental oppression of the preliminary theory. Now, I see that control and liberation interact in complex ways within family learning, so we need to develop a holistic understanding of the wider system. Middle Way thinking also made me see critical consciousness differently. It is not fixed but always evolving as people learn and grow. Integrating this flexible view of critical consciousness into AFL is a step forward. It means we accept that awareness can be uncertain and incomplete, which fits better with a critically realist view of the world. This helps us bridge perspectives by avoiding dualistic and either/or thinking.

### ***13.4.3 Integrating on Middle Way for Pragmatic Wisdom***

The second element of Middle Way philosophy relates to finding the practical and manageable in each situation, sometimes known as pragmatic wisdom. This insight was relevant as I considered both what was manageable in family learning practice and what was appropriate in terms of values (Keqian, 2012). Specifically, I found the Middle Way perspective helpful for managing my acute sense of discomfort when families were impacted by inherent structural contradictions. For example, when children were not released to attend family learning sessions or when sessions were moved or cancelled because of preparation for SATs<sup>50</sup>, despite schools recruiting parents to attend by telling them how

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<sup>50</sup> Abductive Category: [Finance and Facilities](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding



important family learning time is for children<sup>51</sup>. Drawing on the Middle Way helped me to understand that any plausible approach to Authentic Family Learning accepts that it must take place within “ordinary life” (McManus, 2021). Middle Way philosophy recognises that practical applicability and feasibility take precedence over theoretical correctness (Chen, 2002). In this view, theories and ideals must conform to reality, tempering unhelpful forms of idealism (Puolakka, 2014). This is recognised by the practical focus of sections [14.2.1](#) and [14.2.4](#) of the practice guidance and allowed me to approach situations with a greater understanding of feelings on both sides.

In my initial theory, I overlooked how idealism could result in frustration and inaction. For example, in [Authentic Lifeworlds](#) I called for a straightforward rejection of hierarchy without recognising the impracticality of this when, as my data suggests, middle-class values and individualist narratives about resilience pervade education<sup>52</sup> (Vincent, 2017; Goodall, 2021). The impact of these values and narratives was evident in the data when parents engaged in negative self-talk<sup>53</sup>, referred to poor prior experiences of education<sup>54</sup>, and critiqued assumptions made about them by the school. In the example provided in the previous paragraph, rejecting the hierarchy of the school by refusing to yield time away from family learning in favour of SATs preparation would have been damaging to the relationship with the school. At the same time, passive acceptance of the situation communicated mixed messages to parents and conflicted with my values. The resolution is not inaction rather, The Middle Way approach demands judgement and adjudication as described in section [14.3.1](#) and [14.3.2](#) of the practice guidance. Consistent with Heidegger's discussion of *phronêsis*, the Middle Way embodies pragmatic wisdom. It can be understood as a thoughtful approach to acquiring pertinent knowledge tailored to specific situations, characterised by a mindset of openness.

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<sup>51</sup> Abductive Category: [Family Centred?](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>52</sup> Abductive Category: [Normative Reference Groups](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>53</sup> Abductive Category: [“Well thick me”](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>54</sup> Abductive Category: [“Sore subject”](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

Pragmatic wisdom supports key features of the P-AFL approach such as being curious about families' lives<sup>55</sup>, setting intentions for the course early<sup>56</sup>, engaging in productive and meaningful tasks together and being comfortable with transparent communication<sup>57</sup>. Challengingly, it involves being responsive to all aspects of a situation simultaneously, a feature not adequately articulated in my preliminary theory. By connecting my analysis to Middle Way philosophy, I now understand how family learning practitioners need to examine all possibilities in a situation to determine the best course of action, even where that impinges on values. This deliberative approach is significant because the routines and habits of daily life in a school can cause individuals to close themselves off from discerning the best actions. Instead becoming engrossed in everyday tasks, surrendering to immediate concerns, and developing a habitus that maintains the status quo and ignores the broader context, such as the values and interests of parents<sup>58</sup> (Bourdieu,1990). For instance, prioritising finding a room for SATs preparation overshadowed the importance of maintaining a consistent message to parents about the value of family learning, even when the wider impact of damaging the relationship between school and families is profound.

Moving away from an idealised understanding of family learning has increased my comfort with both implicit and explicit forms of control in AFL<sup>59</sup>. Implicit control involves offering easy choices, adopting a relational approach, and leveraging social norms, cues, and comparisons<sup>60</sup>. As described in sections [14.2.1](#) and [14.2.3](#) of the practice guidance. On the other hand, explicit control includes professional role performance, such as providing expert literacy instruction, correcting spelling, and setting deadlines, and course leadership, including collecting data and monitoring performance<sup>61</sup>. This increased comfort with control

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<sup>55</sup> Abductive Category: [Curiosity](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

<sup>56</sup> Abductive Category: [Intention](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

<sup>57</sup> Abductive Category: ["Comfortable with Control"](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

<sup>58</sup> Abductive Category: [Values](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

<sup>59</sup> Abductive Category: ["Comfortable with Control"](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

<sup>60</sup> Abductive Category: [Conforming](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

<sup>61</sup> Abductive Category: [Accountability](#), Characteristic: Ambitious Practicality

has facilitated a more transparent approach to power, enabling greater equity and agency for parents who are informed about the nature and purpose of these measures.

That said, it is essential not to exaggerate the mutual aspect of AFL. It is important to be aware that the real nature of the partnership with families might be obscured by seemingly friendly processes like noisy surveillance (Robinson, 2000) and the social bonds (Fletcher, 2022) formed between parents, Family Learning, and Family Liaison Workers<sup>62</sup>. As noted in the previous section, this corresponds with Wainwright and Marandet's (2013, p. 504) assertion that family learning involves 'supportive power,' where the initiatives of Government are embodied in the supportive and nurturing relationships between tutors and parents. This can be seen as the influence of governmentality, using family learning as a tool to encourage individuals to participate in programmes that promote individual responsibility and self-improvement. Despite my efforts to foster open communication and mitigate this influence, certain practices, such as the school targeting specific parents for family learning based on perceived benefits, hindered these efforts.

This study recognises that schools have complex ecologies made up of 'structural, functional, and built aspects, coupled with interpersonal interactions' (Waters, Cross and Shaw, 2010, p. 381). Incorporating a Middle Way perspective into the praxis suggests that authenticity should be embedded in the 'ordinary life' that takes place in this complex ecology. Because individuals who aim to be authentic still have to participate in similar socially-defined, shared roles and practices – such as being a parent, a teacher etc<sup>63</sup>. The crucial distinction lies in *how* authentic individuals engage in these practices, for this Middle Way thinking is instructive.

It involves making 'All Things Considered' judgments, as described by McManus (2021), which entail considering multiple factors before acting. This is recognised in sections [14.1.2](#)

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<sup>62</sup> Abductive Category: [Status Anxiety](#), Characteristic: Holistic Understanding

<sup>63</sup> Abductive Category: [Conforming](#), Characteristic: Adaptive Intelligence

and [14.3.1](#) of the practice guidance. In practical terms, it means that authentic individuals, guided by the principles of the Middle Way, approach their roles and goals with a holistic mindset. They consider all relevant factors before making decisions. One salient example from the data is when our family learning group continued to advocate for a celebration assembly despite resistance from the school. My support for this choice was based on the belief that this advocacy was manageable in the given situation and aligned with family learning values and the stated values of the school. This balanced perspective enabled me to avoid overlooking the broader context or long-term consequences of acquiescing to the school's initial negative response.

In conclusion, adopting the Middle Way as a guiding principle emphasises the need to balance practicality and values in navigating complex educational contexts. Insights from the Middle Way highlight the importance of managing discomfort arising from structural contradictions, such as conflicting priorities between family learning and standardised testing preparation. This perspective encourages a deliberative process characterised by pragmatic wisdom, akin to Heidegger's concept of *phronêsis*, urging practitioners to remain open and responsive to all aspects of a situation, even when it conflicts with their values. Embracing the Middle Way challenges idealised understandings of family learning and promotes both implicit and explicit forms of control to foster transparency and equity in AFL. However, practitioners must remain vigilant of obscured power dynamics within AFL, as seemingly friendly processes may perpetuate surveillance and influence associated with governmentality. Despite efforts to promote open communication, certain practices, like targeting specific parents for family learning, may hinder authentic partnerships. By embracing the pragmatic wisdom of the Middle Way, practitioners can pursue a balanced approach, fostering genuine partnerships that prioritise both practicality and values within the school environment.

#### ***13.4.4 How Pragmatic Wisdom Contributes to the Praxis of AFL***

Incorporating ideas about 'finding the practical and manageable' from Middle Way philosophy into the Praxis of AFL sheds light on several implications for each of AFL's characteristics.

##### ***Adaptive Intelligence***

This characteristic denotes an individual's ability to continuously acquire fresh knowledge and insights about their environment, while remaining flexible and responsive to changes by adjusting strategies, behaviours, or approaches accordingly. Connecting this to pragmatic wisdom, as described in Middle Way philosophy, suggests that practitioners should explore all possibilities, even when this challenges their values. This approach is vital because daily routines in schools may lead to closed-off thinking, focusing solely on immediate concerns and overlooking broader contexts.

##### ***Ambitious Practicality***

Ambitious practicality involves the capacity to envision long-term goals within a broader context while also possessing the practicality and discipline to take small, incremental steps towards them. This combination of visionary thinking and grounded implementation often results in sustainable and effective progress towards larger objectives. Incorporating pragmatic wisdom from Middle Way philosophy into this characteristic, underscores the importance of embracing both implicit and explicit forms of control in AFL. An acknowledgement of this was overlooked by the preliminary theory even though it was part of ensuring smooth course operations. When done transparently, tutor-led approaches can empower parents and promote equity. This pragmatic approach to leadership in the family learning classroom aims to manage power dynamics in a way that balances practical considerations with ethical values.

### ***Holistic Understanding***

Incorporating pragmatic wisdom into the characteristic of holistic understanding provides a method for navigating discomfort in family learning practice by avoiding idealistic frustrations. By viewing the entire system from a pragmatic perspective, practitioners can recognise the impact of middle-class values and individualist narratives in education. However, pragmatic wisdom also cautions against overstating the mutual aspect of AFL. It prompts practitioners to remain attentive to potential challenges such as surveillance and social pressures that could hinder genuine partnership with families.

### ***13.4.5 Concluding thoughts on the Philosophy of the Middle Way***

In conclusion, embracing the Middle Way as a guiding philosophy for the Praxis of Authentic Family Learning fosters a nuanced and balanced approach that prioritises harmony and practicality within the complexities of educational settings. This approach draws from both Eastern and Western philosophies, encouraging practitioners to embrace paradoxical integration, which entails accepting contradictions and recognising the interconnectedness of seemingly opposing ideas.

This integrative approach is particularly evident in the understanding of family learning as both empowering and controlling, as seen in the concept of "supportive power" within family dynamics. However, practitioners must remain vigilant of obscured power dynamics, such as those perpetuated by seemingly benign processes like the collection of personal data, which can undermine authentic partnerships.

Furthermore, adopting a Middle Way perspective to critical consciousness reveals the limitations of rigid either/or perspectives, advocating instead for adaptability and the integration of diverse viewpoints. This aligns with the notion of pragmatic wisdom, akin to Heidegger's concept of *phronêsis*, which emphasises remaining open and responsive to all aspects of a situation, even when this impinges on personal values.

By embracing the Middle Way, practitioners challenge idealism within family learning, promoting a balanced approach that acknowledges both implicit and explicit forms of control, as well as recognising the importance of effective and ethical leadership by skilled tutors. Overall, Middle Way thinking offers a holistic framework for navigating the complexities of family learning, fostering genuine partnerships that prioritise transparency, equity, and mutual understanding.

### **13.5 Arriving at the Praxis of Authentic Family Learning**

The development of the Praxis of Authentic Family Learning has significantly deepened my understanding of the data I gathered, analysed, and restructured to formulate the Three Characteristics of Authentic Family Learning. These enhancements to the initial theory span various aspects of the praxis, but I will highlight some to underscore the significance of arriving at the Praxis of Authentic Family Learning.

Firstly, conceptualising authenticity as freedom enabled me to recognise the profound impact of the school environment on individuals' capacity to express their true selves. This realisation led me to explore broader insights from literature, including the ways institutionalisation shapes personal freedoms as discussed by Scott (2014) and the concept of 'funds of identity' introduced by Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014). I now perceive the notion of freedom, as elucidated by philosophers like De Beauvoir and Heidegger, as crucial for understanding how institutional influences can constrain individuals' authenticity. Furthermore, drawing on an Aristotelian perspective, I found support for P-AFL's emphasis on truthfulness and alignment with personal beliefs.

This philosophical grounding underscores the importance of honesty in nurturing relationships with parents, acknowledging the real-life factors that shape their experiences. Additionally, while the preliminary theory called for responses to oppressive institutional norms, it lacked specificity. In contrast, P-AFL, influenced by Foucault's analyses, proposes

the concept of counter-conduct— a consistent series of small choices serving as everyday resistance to rationalised approaches that yield irrational outcomes.

Moreover, the integration of Middle Way philosophy into P-AFL emphasises paradoxical integration to achieve balance between extremes. This approach addresses the complexity inherent in family learning, where elements of control and liberation coexist. It underscores the necessity of navigating these dynamics with flexibility and an open mind. Furthermore, P-AFL incorporates a more adaptable interpretation of critical consciousness, an aspect missing from the preliminary theory. Instead of focusing solely on theoretical correctness, the praxis prioritises practical applicability, aligning with Middle Way philosophy's emphasis on judgment and pragmatic wisdom. In summary, philosophy provides a robust foundation for advancing my understanding of Authentic Family Learning, guiding the transition from the original concept to the more comprehensive Praxis of Authentic Family Learning.

### **13.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the findings from Chapters 10, 11, 12, and 13 have been examined in connection with both the philosophy of authenticity and the philosophy of the Middle Way. Throughout the chapter footnotes have been used to identify where the data connects to philosophical insights. This exploration of philosophy has deepened my understanding of the Characteristics of Authentic Family Learning results and has led to development of a praxis; the subsequent chapter seeks to operationalise the praxis by proposing practice guidance. Key elements of philosophy identified within this chapter have been highlighted within the practice guidance.



## Chapter 14: Practice Guidance

In this chapter, I set out practice guidance for the praxis of Authentic Family Learning. The praxis is comprised of three characteristics along with a set of steering statements that instruct practitioners how to create the conditions for Authentic Family Learning to take place.

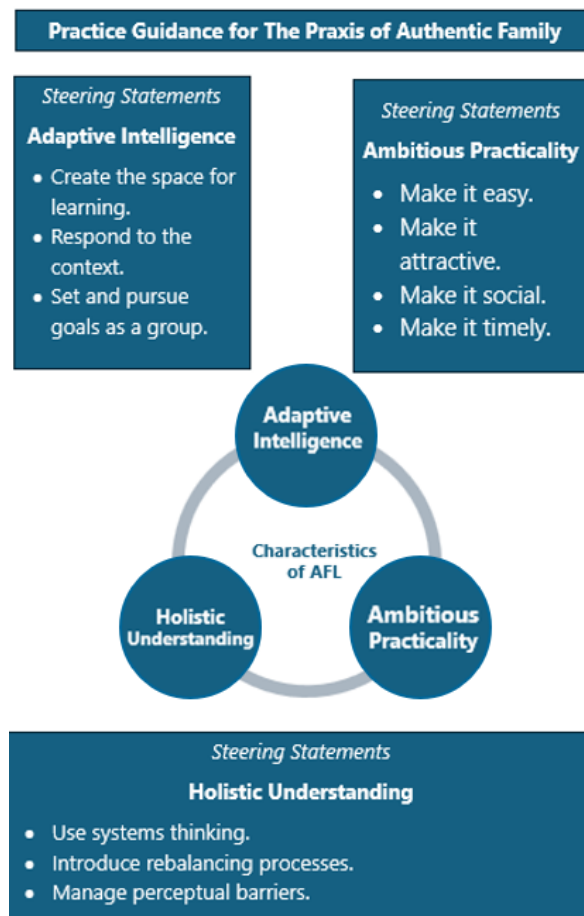


Figure 14.1. Summary of Practice Guidance

### 14.1 Characteristic One: Adaptive Intelligence

The Praxis of Authentic Family Learning is characterised by curious tutors who want to foster a sense of belonging by understanding and adapting to parents' strengths and needs. This characteristic can be advanced by attuning to the three steering statements that are set out below. The role of curiosity is about the disposition towards helping parents to belong. It

asks the practitioner to be curious about is creating the space for learning, responding to the context and setting and pursuing goals as a group.

### **14.1.1 Creating the Space for Learning**

**Steering Statement 1: Parents feel welcome when entering the school, the family learning space is fit-for-purpose and the significance of returning to learn in a formal setting is understood.** Far too often, parents and Family Learning Tutors feel discouraged by fortified school buildings, unwelcoming gatekeepers and sub-optimal family learning spaces. Mishandling these experiences wastes an opportunity to engage families and overlooks the significance that returning to learn in a formal setting has for some parents. Parents are more interested in and motivated to participate in family learning when they feel a sense of ownership and purpose in the space.

<b>Signposts for Creating the Space for Learning</b>		
<b>Do</b>	<b>Offer</b>	<b>See</b>
Take a warm and welcoming approach informed by the significance that returning to learn in a formal setting may have for parents	Easily accessible, comfortable, and appropriate spaces with relevant resources	Parents who are at-ease in the environment both when alone and with their children.
<b>Points of Praxis</b>		
<p>Authenticity as Freedom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An unwelcoming school environment inhibits parents' sense of self and perpetuates institutionalisation.</li> </ul> <p>Authenticity as Truth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create an environment for parents to discover their true selves, heeding Heidegger's warning about defining oneself in relation to societal norms.</li> </ul> <p>Authenticity as Affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritise appropriate learning environments.</li> <li>• Involve children in all sessions.</li> <li>• Emphasise humanistic over bureaucratic administrative activities.</li> </ul>		

### 14.1.2 Responding to the Context

**Steering Statement 2: Facilitators avoid imposing normative values on parents by recognising and responding with compassion to the real-world factors that shape the lives of families.** Organisers of family learning who are focused on gaps between parents' espoused values and parents' actions become disheartened when corrective approaches are unsuccessful. Instead, a compassionate and curious stance toward parents' real lives circumvents both deficit and idealised stereotypes of parents. This is driven by a powerful interest in relationship building and should communicate, to families, a serious degree of investment and commitment on the part of organisers. Schemes of work should emerge through consultation, during which time open communication and continual adjustment will help to develop the shared norms and expectations of the group.

<b>Signposts for Responding to the Context</b>		
<b>Do</b>	<b>Offer</b>	<b>See</b>
Find out about the people enrolled on the course without resorting to the use of tokenistic proformas.	A range of consultation activities to help develop programmes that fit with parents' needs and interests.	Regular attendance and high levels of retention.
<b>Points of Praxis</b>		
<p>Authenticity as Freedom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remember that habits and routines within a setting can perpetuate norms and institutionalisation, impacting families.</li> </ul> <p>Authenticity as Truth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seek the origin of people's actions, as per Aristotle, to determine if actions align with personal beliefs or serve external interests. This may help dispel deficit narratives about families by uncovering reasons for discrepancies between stated values and behaviours.</li> </ul> <p>Authenticity as Affect</p>		

- Recall Rousseau’s caution against hierarchical communities stifling kindness and fostering negative dispositions, such as excessive concern for others' opinions.

Authenticity as Freedom

- Be pragmatic about the constraints on parents' choices due to the realities of their lives.

Middle Way for Paradoxical Integration

- Expect to encounter disparate yet interdependent perspectives, such as parental concerns about high stakes testing or homework, while both parents and teachers aim for children’s overall progress and achievement. Integrating these perspectives will require significant effort.

Middle Way for Pragmatic Wisdom

- Strive for 'All Things Considered' judgments, as advocated by McManus (2021). Approach roles and goals with a holistic mindset, considering all relevant factors before making decisions.

### 14.1.3 Setting and Pursuing Goals as a Group

**Steering Statement 3: The goals of the course are set collaboratively and pursued as a collective with steering from adaptable organisers.** Individualised approaches to short family learning courses are impractical and unrealistic. A collaborative and collective approach is much easier to facilitate and provides the group with a practical, shared purpose that builds social trust and a sense of meaning and belonging within the school. Steering the group is a form of control that operate through the provision of easy choices, using a relational approach and the role of social norms, cues, and comparison. Family Learning Tutors should be transparent about their steering role in order to foster equity and agency for parents.

<b>Signposts for Setting and Pursuing Goals as a Group</b>		
<b>Do</b>	<b>Offer</b>	<b>See</b>
Prepare in advance for goal setting. Understand practical realities to avoid	Choices based on practical realities and the demands of the context. Providing a framework for	Parents engaging actively in making suggestions and decision making. High levels of

over promising and underdelivering.	decision making minimises cognitive overload without removing choice.	participation in goal-directed activities.
<b>Points of Praxis</b>		
<p>Authenticity as Affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate the concept of 'being at home in the world' and 'being at home with ourselves' in social and relational contexts, addressing the existentialist dilemma of staying true to oneself in a diverse society.</li> </ul> <p>Authenticity as Affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage in group discussions, goal setting, and pursuit to ensure parents' interests and needs are integrated into practice, considering the significant impact of learning and life goals on self-esteem, identity, and social dynamics.</li> </ul> <p>Authenticity as Affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledge the emotional aspects of conflicts arising from social comparisons within the parent group and between parents and teachers. Promote inclusivity, collaboration, and prioritise shared goals over competition.</li> </ul> <p>Middle Way for Paradoxical Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resolve disagreements among stakeholders pragmatically, prioritising harmony through compromise, agreement, and action towards shared goals rather than mere appeasement or pacification.</li> </ul>		

## 14.2 Characteristic Two: Ambitious Practicality

Taking a serious interest in the small actions that connect and contribute to the wider context is characteristic of Authentic Family Learning. This is an alternative to a singular focus on idealistic principals which may be impractical and unrealistic in real-world contexts. Instead, AFL is a pragmatic approach with a focus on small, practicable actions that centre around making family learning courses easy, attractive social and timely for parents (EAST). EAST is an existing approach for 'making services easier and more pleasant for citizens to use' (Service *et al.*, 2014) and offers an ideal framework for explaining the nature of AFL. This characteristic, of a highly practical approach that is attuned to the wider context, can emerge by regarding the four steering statements that are set out below.

### 14.2.1 Make it Easy

**Steering Statement 1: Participation in a family learning course is a straightforward endeavour that requires minimal hassle on the part of parents.** Reducing the effort that parents need to make to find out about, enrol and join in with family learning will boost attendance and retention on courses. To make participation easier, organisers should provide clear and simple messages about the content, timing, and duration of the course. Additionally, entering the school should be a safe but streamlined process, that parents do not find onerous, and should fit in with existing routines such as pick up/drop off times. Lastly, enrolment activities and information gathering should balance the parent-experience with the needs of the organiser.

<b>Signposts for Make it Easy</b>		
<b>Do</b>	<b>Offer</b>	<b>See</b>
Make it easy to find out about and enrol in the course.	Streamlined information gathering documents.	Parents who know where to go, when to go and what the course is about.
<b>Points of Praxis</b>		
<p>Authenticity as Truth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitating parents' collaboration towards a significant goal fosters relationships and opens avenues for discussing their interests and abilities.</li> <li>Ensuring courses are easily accessible demands dedication. Stay resolute in striving for honest communication. This dedication defines our distinct position and approach in the world, conducting our work with clear intent and self-awareness.</li> </ul> <p>Authenticity as Affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In short courses, prioritising shared goals over individual progress is often easier and more manageable. This shift can alleviate pressure on parents and reduce the emotional weight of returning to learn in a formal setting.</li> </ul> <p>Middle Way for Paradoxical Integration</p>		

- From the outset, use equitable decision-making processes, build trust over time, and foster shared values and objectives among parents. This will become easier over time.

Middle Way for Pragmatic Wisdom:

- It will be necessary to embrace both implicit and explicit forms of control. These include, offering easy choices, adopting a relational approach, and leveraging social norms, cues, and comparisons.

### 14.2.2 Make it Attractive

**Steering Statement 2: Increase the appeal of family learning through eye-catching, accessible and personalised communication.** Parents find a personal invitation from a compelling messenger, such as a head teacher, a motivating factor for taking part in family learning. This is enhanced further when potential misconceptions are tackled upfront by sharing clear and relevant facts about the benefits of taking part in the course. Promotional materials should be eye-catching with contemporary design features and images that reflect the community in which the course is taking place. The decision-making power that participants have in an AFL course should be highlighted to generate ownership of the activity from the outset and throughout.

<b>Signposts for Make it Attractive</b>		
<b>Do</b>	<b>Offer</b>	<b>See</b>
Allocate a compelling messenger to personally invite parents to attend the course.	Eye-catching flyers with contemporary design and images that reflect the community.	Parents engaging in discussions with staff about the benefit the course would have for their family.
<b>Points of Praxis</b>		
Authenticity as Truth		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be resolute about sharing honest and clear information about the nature and benefits of the course.</li> </ul>		

Authenticity as Affect

- Encourage parents to reflect on their learning journeys to explore individual strengths and needs, fostering ownership over their endeavours.
- Approach contraventions with sensitivity to shame and a sense of compassion to create a positive, attractive learning environment.

**14.2.3 Make it Social**

**Steering Statement 3: Take a relational approach to implementing family learning and pay attention to the influence of social norms social networks.** Organisers of family learning should accept that there is often a gap between what individuals want to do and what they actually do. Rather than this becoming a point of grievance, organisers can harness social influence to encourage parents' commitment to their stated goals. This can be achieved firstly, by ensuring the course is implemented using a relational approach, that fosters connection between participants. Next, ensuring everyone has a part to play in activities generates reciprocity and raises the stakes collectively and individually. Lastly, tackling norms which undermine an authentic approach to family learning is essential, for example rejecting idealised notions of motherhood.

<b>Signposts for Make it Social</b>		
<b>Do</b>	<b>Offer</b>	<b>See</b>
If parents express an interest in family learning, ask for a commitment to attend for a specified period.	Refreshments and a comfortable space that allows for social interaction.	Parents mixing with one another and offering support and guidance.
<b>Points of Praxis</b>		
Authenticity as Freedom <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Acknowledge external influences, such as social abjection, in shaping parents' self-perception.</li></ul>		
Authenticity as Truth		



- Start courses by acknowledging challenges and setting intentions as a learning community to pursue truth in practice within the context of the real world.
- Understand that authenticity is a social ideal, contributing to building trust within a group rather than merely an individual virtue.

#### Authenticity as Affect

- Embrace the social and relational approach of P-AFL, which emphasises both 'being at home in the world' and 'being at home with ourselves.'

#### Middle Way for Paradoxical Integration

- Reduce pressure to endorse negative communications by openly restating P-AFL values, discussing shared aims, and facilitating direct communication between parties.

#### Middle Way for Pragmatic Wisdom

- Reflect on leveraging social norms, cues, and comparisons as a positive form of supportive power, ensuring ethical boundaries are respected.

### 14.2.4 Make it Timely

**Steering Statement 4: A strategic approach should be taken to when announcements are made, when intentions are set, and when feedback is offered.** Without a purposeful design family learning becomes low priority and poorly integrated into the structures and processes of the school. A lack of strategic direction will be felt by families through ad-hoc and inconsistent messaging about the course. To counter this, schedule courses to coincide with the potential interests of parents such as the start of a new Key Stage or the introduction of a new topic. Next, set the intentions of the course early and take delivering on this commitment seriously. Lastly offer parents well-timed feedback about the benefits of engaging with their child's learning or the impact they are having on the school community.

<b>Signposts for Make it Timely</b>		
<b>Do</b>	<b>Offer</b>	<b>See</b>
Take the time to plan courses around the start	A calendar of courses that is posted online, distributed by class	Parents needing fewer prompts and parents

of a new term or new topic.	teachers and in displayed in public spaces.	starting to independently sign up for courses.
<b>Points of Praxis</b>		
<p>Authenticity as Truth</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategically timing intention-setting and feedback may alter parents' responses to support offers or engagement attempts, challenging previous assumptions about parental actions. This draws on Aristotle's recommendation to examine the origin of our actions.</li> </ul> <p>Authenticity as Affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accept the limitations of making major individual progress in a 10-week course, prioritising shared goals over individual ones.</li> </ul> <p>Middle Way for Paradoxical Integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider workload levels and decision-making structures when designing courses to ensure appropriate deployment with adequate resources.</li> </ul> <p>Middle Way for Pragmatic Wisdom</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognise that family learning operates within everyday life, prioritising practicality over idealism to better understand both sides' feelings in various situations.</li> </ul>		

### 14.3 Characteristic Three: Holistic Understanding

Acting in accordance with an understanding of Authentic Family Learning as a complex system is the third characteristic of the approach. This starts with perceiving AFL as determined by social forces and nested within other complex systems, including the school system and the education system. This allows organisers to avoid conceptualising AFL in terms of causal, linear relationships among various components and to instead conceptualise AFL in terms of the 'dynamic and changing relationships that take place between individuals and the collective' (Cochran-Smith *et al.*, 2014, p. 10). Allowing for this characteristic, creates the potential for generating explanations about why disappointing outcomes occur after a change has been made at the systemic level. Techniques for employing holistic understanding include establishing interdependent goals, engaging in open-minded discussions to integrate opposing opinions, and modelling the "both/and" mindset approach (Wei, Zhou, & Wang, 2023).

### 14.3.1 Use Systems Thinking

**Steering Statement 1: Authentic Family Learning should be designed at the system level as an essential component of the school’s educational and community development aims.** Systems thinking is a way of seeing and talking about reality that helps identify where changes to existing approaches might influence the quality of life for the people affected by the system. This approach encourages the identification of the systemic forces, that drive patterns of events and interactions within Authentic Family Learning instead of reacting to individual events as and when they occur. Systems thinking can include working to understand what forces influence the way hierarchy operates in the school, the way parenting is evaluated, and which agendas are driving policies and expectations.

<b>Signposts for Systems Thinking</b>		
<b>Do</b>	<b>Offer</b>	<b>See</b>
Include family learning in continual professional curriculum development, and school governance activities.	Consultation opportunities for staff, families and local community partners.	Fewer staff and parents who are frustrated by requests or events that they find unhelpful, counter-productive or inexplicable.
<b>Points of Praxis</b>		
<p>Authenticity as Affect</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insist on appropriate learning environments, involve children in all sessions and prioritise humanistic rather than bureaucratic administrative activities. These choices are born of a prudent awareness of the balance of power and represent systems thinking</li> <li>• Work to understand what forces influence the way hierarchy operates in the school, the way parenting is evaluated, and which agendas are driving policies and expectations.</li> <li>• Examine the impact of systemic inequalities within the broader family learning system.</li> <li>• Systems thinking can include fostering an educational environment that values individual strengths, promotes collaborative learning, and diminishes</li> </ul>		

the detrimental impact of social comparison through a more emotionally attuned approach. This aligns with Rousseau's concerns about amour propre - a source of social comparison, competition, and envy, that can lead to feelings of inadequacy and conflict in society.

Middle Way for Paradoxical Integration:

- Assess when to challenge or yield informed by system thinking i.e. recognising workload levels or decision-making structures within the school's complex ecology.
- Recognise that actions like selecting families in alignment with government goals whilst fostering friendly relationships to promote "responsible" parenting and citizenship are interconnected.
- Utilise the 'both/and' framework to examine participation in both structure and flexibility, convention and innovation, direction and empowerment, or control and liberation.

Middle Way for Pragmatic Wisdom:

- Acknowledge structural inequalities and actively address them by fostering open dialogue, advocating for policy changes, and collaborating with families.
- Employ 'All Things Considered' judgments, approaching roles and goals with a holistic perspective considering all relevant factors.

### **14.3.2 Introduce Rebalancing Processes**

**Steering Statement 2: Organisers should identify and monitor the gaps between authentic and in Authentic Family Learning and introduce rebalancing processes to close these gaps.** Finding and tracking these gaps can uncover hidden assumptions and habit-forming practices that may be contributing to inauthentic forms of family learning. As a result, remedial action can be introduced to reduce the gaps. For example, noticing that parents draw a distinction between the nature of their relationships with teachers and the nature of their relationships with TAs, could be a starting point for making changes to the allocation of tasks and distribution of responsibility.

<b>Signposts for Introduce Rebalancing Processes</b>		
<b>Do</b>	<b>Offer</b>	<b>See</b>
Allocate time to identifying and monitoring gaps between current and preferred practice and take meaningful action in response.	Training and tools for identifying and monitoring gaps between current and preferred practice.	Staff and parents moving away from being reactive and towards more creative, reflective and generative forms of problem solving.
<b>Points of Praxis</b>		
<p>Authenticity as Freedom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognise and address signs of limited agency or exclusion from the school community, such as minimal participation in events or avoidance of communication with teachers. Passive attitudes towards a child's education may indicate struggles with self-worth or agency, while discomfort during interactions with teachers may suggest feelings of being judged.</li> </ul> <p>Authenticity as Affect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage in counter-conduct by challenging dominant norms and excessively bureaucratic school customs.</li> <li>Embrace collaborative decision-making, flexible learning approaches, critical reflection, advocacy for inclusivity, and fostering critical consciousness.</li> <li>Utilise flexibility in professional roles as a rebalancing process, including knowing when to apply rules, deviate from roles, and negotiate conflicts.</li> <li>Acknowledge the impact of rationalistic school mechanisms on families and avoid attributing feelings solely to deficit narratives. Instead, initiate dialogue with parents to explore alternative approaches aligning with their values.</li> </ul> <p>Middle Way for Paradoxical Integration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suggest feedback systems, engagement opportunities, and alternative practices to reconcile differing viewpoints.</li> </ul>		

### **14.3.3 Manage Perceptual Barriers**

**Steering Statement 3: Be prepared for assumptions and beliefs to delay and distort the intended consequences of change.** Expecting straightforward cause and effect results from systemic change is unlikely because of the complex ecology of schools. A key contributor to this complexity is the fact that people's perceptions of a situation can be so deeply held that

even when the reality of that situation changes, their beliefs and assumptions don't necessarily shift as easily. For example, introducing open communication practices in order to create a safe space for sharing concerns could be perceived as monitoring and thus counterproductively generate a sense of risk and uncertainty. Therefore, it is important not to be idealistic when introducing a change and as a result underestimate the inevitable unintended consequences.

<b>Signposts for Manage Practical and Perceptual Barriers</b>		
<b>Do</b>	<b>Offer</b>	<b>See</b>
Take time to think of the potential unintended consequences of any changes you initiate.	The opportunity to give feedback, in a range of ways, before during and after a change has been made.	Organisers who are comfortable with being challenged about the status quo.
<b>Points of Praxis</b>		
<p>Authenticity as Freedom:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resist endorsing deficit narratives about parents, even if uncomfortable, and raise awareness within schools about the harm they cause.</li> </ul> <p>Authenticity as Affect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledge the pressure on family members to conform to idealised roles, which can lead to alienation from their true selves and perpetuate inequality. Advocate for addressing these pressures, leading to meaningful connections.</li> <li>Advocate for pragmatic responses to external pressures like high stakes testing while maintaining emotional awareness of their impact on families.</li> </ul> <p>Middle Way for Paradoxical Integration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Address the pressure to stereotype parents by adopting integrative approaches that align schools and parents' perceptions more closely.</li> </ul>		

## Chapter 15: Conclusion

### 15.1 Summary of the Work

This research was prompted by my experiences as a family learning tutor, where I felt increasingly alienated from the values of critical pedagogy that had shaped my training. My role required me to navigate a complex web of priorities and expectations, shaped by a range of agencies and stakeholders with diverse motivations and values. These included organisational imperatives for measurable outcomes, funders' demands for evidence of impact, and localised pressures to address community needs. Within this context, neoliberal underpinnings often emerged, privileging market-oriented approaches to recruitment, teaching methods, and assessment strategies. These priorities frequently conflicted with the self-directed and liberatory principles of education I valued, creating tensions that made my daily work increasingly challenging and, over time, deeply demoralising.

To address this professional unease, I developed a preliminary theory: the Five Key Practices of Authentic Family Learning (Hardacre, 2017). While this framework represented an early attempt to navigate the tensions and constraints of local-authority-funded family learning, it was unwieldy, untested in the field and lacked a robust theoretical foundation.

To address these limitations, I conducted 40 weeks of fieldwork, which allowed for an in-depth exploration of the dynamics within family learning. This culminated in the reconstruction of the Five Key Practices into three core characteristics: Adaptive Intelligence, Ambitious Practicality, and Holistic Understanding. These characteristics shifted the focus from the individual actions of the family learning tutor to recognising and creating the broader conditions needed for Authentic Family Learning within the complex ecology of schools.

Seeking to further explore the 'meaning and purpose' (Reason and Bradbury, 2001, p.7) of these characteristics, I embarked on a radical reappraisal that led to the creation of a praxis. By moving between practice and theory, this praxis integrates the Three Characteristics with

the philosophical principles of authenticity and the Middle Way. This combination not only provides a theoretical anchor for practitioners but also offers a comprehensive guide to navigating contested contexts while upholding core values and principles.

Engaging with this journey from practices to characteristics and, ultimately, to praxis, I hope to inspire fellow practitioners to reflect on and improve their work through similar inquiries. My aspiration is that this research will support practitioners in dismantling power imbalances, challenging dominant narratives, gaining autonomy, and cultivating equitable partnerships between schools and families. Central to this praxis is the recognition that practitioners must be equipped to operate professionally and also in alignment with their values, navigating the constraints of their roles while balancing aspirations with the realities of day-to-day practice. This perspective is woven throughout the praxis, informed by the philosophical attention to the middle way and operationalised in the accompanying practice guidance. By fostering reflective practice and empowering practitioners to approach their work with authenticity, this reimagined approach to family learning strengthens the professional identity and agency of a workforce often accorded low status, offering them tools to advocate for their value and impact within wider systems and to work productively in a contested environment.

## **15.2 Revisiting the Aims**

The aims of this study were addressed using the extended case method (ECM) to systematically gather the experiences of parents, family liaison workers, and educators involved in Authentic Family Learning (AFL). By combining semi-structured interviews, visual maps, and field notes, ECM facilitated an exploration of both the micro-level interactions and the broader social forces shaping AFL practices. As with all research, I learned something about the methods along the way.

ECM was both time-consuming in terms of gathering and synthesising a rich volume of data and challenging in finding ways to articulate it meaningfully. However, its emphasis on



refining existing theory—something I had not encountered in my prior experience as an action researcher—proved particularly effective, offering a structured yet flexible framework to deepen understanding. By the end of the thesis, I had a better appreciation of the indispensable role of adjunct staff, such as teaching assistants and Family Liaison Workers, whose contributions are essential yet undervalued. I also recognised the profound value of philosophy in addressing professional discomfort, particularly the Middle Way, which offered a route for navigating tensions without striving to resolve or eliminate them. These insights shaped my understanding of the research aims, as outlined below.

### ***15.2.1 Meeting Aim 1: Seek Parent, Family Support Worker, and Primary School Teacher Experiences of Authentic Family Learning***

This aim was addressed during the 'intervention' and 'process' phases of the extended case method, presented in Chapters 9 and 10 through rich, participant-generated narratives that illuminate the diverse challenges and successes experienced within the educational context. Parents expressed feelings of marginalisation, while family support workers detailed their crucial roles in fostering connections between families and schools. Teachers highlighted the institutional pressures they encounter, which can often conflict with their intentions to engage families meaningfully.

The combination of semi-structured interviews and visual mapping techniques enabled a comprehensive understanding of these experiences, revealing how broader social forces—such as the emphasis on accountability and standardisation—shape individual narratives. The use of the extended case method not only provided insight into the micro-level interactions but also highlighted the structural dynamics at play, demonstrating its value as a methodology for educators seeking to reflect on their practice. Ultimately, the findings underscore the importance of adopting a socially situated approach that values the experiences of all stakeholders.

### ***15.2.2. Meeting Aim 2: Understand the Competing Priorities that Influence How Authentic Family Learning is Carried Out in Primary Schools***

This aim was addressed during the 'Forces' phase of the extended case method, as detailed in Chapter 11. The findings revealed the complexities of educational environments, highlighting the tension between educators' intentions to engage families and institutional demands such as standardised testing and maintaining attendance rates. This underscores the necessity of adopting socially situated approaches and the value of roles like Family Liaison Workers and teaching assistants in mitigating these tensions. By documenting competing priorities through interviews and field notes, the research illuminates how broader social forces — such as meritocracy, marketisation, and the pressures of governmentality — impact the experiences of stakeholders.

The use of the extended case method, combined with qualitative data generation techniques, connects micro-level interactions with macro-level structural influences. This helped delineate the nature of the competing priorities, culminating in the argument that these complexities are inevitable and persistent because they arise from entrenched policies, societal expectations, and institutional norms. As a result, practitioners must navigate these opposing demands, acknowledging that rather than striving for compromise or conciliation, they should embrace the inherent tensions as opportunities for growth and adaptive practice. Insights drawn from Middle Way theory, as discussed in Chapter 13, support this perspective. This encourages a recognition of the interplay between empowerment and control in family learning, allowing for a richer understanding of parental and educator agency. Furthermore, it enhances problem-solving skills by requiring practitioners to manage contradictions, ultimately promoting collaboration among all stakeholders involved in family learning.

### ***15.2.3 Meeting Aim 3: Improve the Preliminary Theory of Authentic Family Learning***

This aim was pursued through the synthesis of qualitative insights obtained via the extended case method and set out in Chapters 9, 10 and 11, leading to the refinement of the

preliminary theory of Authentic Family Learning into a more robust framework, as detailed in Chapter 12. The data collected from interviews and field notes revealed several abductive categories that elucidate the social processes underpinning family learning practices and the external forces that shape them. The resulting framework comprises three key characteristics: Adaptive Intelligence, Ambitious Practicality, and Holistic Understanding.

These characteristics provide a novel perspective by focusing on the conditions necessary for meaningful family engagement, shifting from rigid, directive approaches to a more discretionary model that acknowledges the complexities of real-world educational contexts. The analysis confirms that successful family learning depends on practitioners' ability to adapt to the specific needs and circumstances of families while effectively navigating the inherent challenges posed by external structural forces.

Furthermore, the integration of authenticity and Middle Way theory into this framework creates a praxis of AFL that aligns theoretical concepts with practical applications. This iterative process of theory development not only enhances the conceptual understanding of AFL but also serves as a practical guide for educators striving to implement family learning initiatives that are responsive and inclusive.

#### ***15.2.4 Meeting Aim 4: Produce Practice Guidance for Authentic Family Learning***

This aim was achieved by translating the insights gained from the research into actionable practice guidance for educators, as outlined in Chapter 14. By synthesising findings from the extended case method, the guidance provides a comprehensive framework for implementing Authentic Family Learning that is both practical and adaptable. The guidance outlines key strategies and considerations, emphasising the necessity for educators to create welcoming environments that acknowledge the diverse needs of families. Furthermore, it highlights the significance of collaborative goal setting and the importance of leveraging the expertise of Family Liaison Workers and teaching assistants in facilitating engagement.

Insights drawn from authenticity theory inform this practical tool, emphasising the roles of affect, truth, and freedom in fostering genuine engagement. This perspective asserts that emotional connection (affect), transparency (truth), and the empowerment of individuals (freedom) are essential for building meaningful relationships between families and schools. Additionally, insights from Middle Way theory underscore the value of embracing the inherent tensions within educational settings, promoting a mindset that views these challenges as opportunities for growth and innovation. By fostering an integrative approach, the guidance encourages practitioners to enhance their problem-solving skills and collaborative efforts, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and effective family learning experience.

### **15.3 Contributions to Knowledge**

1. This research presents a worked example of how the extended case method can be used by educators to explore and refine working theories of their own practice. This novel contribution provides an example for others wishing to reflect on the difficulties of navigating power and social justice in their work setting.
2. The research has presented a praxis of Authentic Family Learning with three characteristics, Adaptive Intelligence, Ambitious Practicality and Holistic Understanding. These are original because they focus on the conditions needed for Authentic Family Learning. Moving beyond a rigid directive approach, these characteristics provide quality statements acknowledging the necessity for a discretionary approach by practitioners. They prioritise what is manageable within actual work contexts.
3. The study's discoveries have been applied to creating new practice guidance for educators, offering a critical tool for designing and implementing Authentic Family Learning. These allow the Praxis of Authentic Family Learning to be adopted by practitioners.

4. This thesis highlights the importance of socially situated approaches to family learning, emphasising the need for critical awareness of the multiple agencies and actors involved who are already involved in the work of the school and whose significance with respect to family learning can go unnoticed. The valuable roles of Family Liaison Workers and teaching assistants are highlighted as examples of these actors, with their contributions positioned as central to the practice of family learning.

#### **15.4 Reflecting on Ethics**

In this research, I adhered to a framework of 'everyday ethics,' as defined by Banks and Armstrong (2013), which emphasises ongoing and fluid responsibilities in relation to context and relationships, rather than a rigid application of abstract principles at the outset of the study. This perspective, detailed in Chapter 5, aligns with the relational nature of Authentic Family Learning and complements the reflexive approach of the extended case method, which highlights ethical issues arising from the dynamics of power relations among participants.

Throughout the study, I encountered various ethical dilemmas that required careful consideration and responsiveness. For instance, when a participant unexpectedly requested bus fare after an interview, I navigated this request through the lens of everyday ethics, prioritising fairness and the participant's needs. This decision not only underscored the importance of compassion and flexibility in ethical research practices but also illuminated the broader socio-economic challenges faced by families involved in the study.

Embracing everyday ethics allowed me to strike a balance between adhering to established ethical guidelines and fostering trusting relationships with participants. This enriched the research process by creating a more open dialogue, thereby enhancing the authenticity of their contributions. This ethical directive directly informed the findings outlined in this thesis, particularly concerning the aim of seeking genuine experiences from parents and educators involved in Authentic Family Learning.

The integration of everyday ethics in this study strengthened the relational and context-sensitive approach I developed for Authentic Family Learning. By prioritising the voices of parents, family support workers, and educators, I constructed a praxis that reflects the complexities inherent in family learning environments. This emphasis on ethical integrity - rather than solely on regulatory compliance - reinforced the importance of participant engagement and underscored the need for educators to navigate power dynamics thoughtfully. By championing everyday ethics, I advocate for research practices that are not only methodologically sound but also deeply respectful and responsive to the needs and experiences of all participants.

### **15.5 Limitations**

This research involved four family learning groups across four schools, it does not claim to represent the family learning experiences of all Family Learning Tutors and parents across England. As is commonly acknowledged in socially situated qualitative research, experiences vary significantly in various tangible and perceptual ways. Nevertheless, the experiences of practitioners and parents set out in my findings resonate with other qualitative accounts based in England (Wainwright and Marandet, 2017; Tett and MacLeod, 2020; Campaign for Learning, 2024). The study was not designed as a comparative analysis of four settings. I included four sites to deepen the investigation and enrich my understanding, not as an attempt to represent all experiences.

Data generation methods were consistent across all sites; however, my comfort and proficiency improved over the course of the study. Additionally, I had varying levels of access and relationships with school leaders, teachers, and family support workers at each school. Nonetheless, I conducted in-depth interviews with parents, school leaders, teachers, and Family Liaison Workers at each school, yielding valuable insights into the family learning experience. The differences between sites in terms of engaging families in the school's daily life illuminates how Authentic Family Learning is implemented in diverse settings.

The decision not to directly include the perspectives of children attending family learning in this study was deliberate. I focused on adults' perspectives to ensure a more manageable scope for in-depth exploration. The voices of parents attending family learning are underrepresented in existing literature, hence I prioritised capturing their perspectives during fieldwork. In future studies, incorporating children's viewpoints would offer valuable insights.

Reflecting on the research process, I recognise that my analysis is inherently subjective, as is the case with any method that condenses a large data corpus into coherent insights through the perspective of a single researcher. While this analytical approach offers benefits, such as providing depth and clarity, my focus on authenticity might have prompted me to consider different analytical tools. In retrospect, employing Snowden's (2010) self-signification approach would have been advantageous, as it enables participants to analyse their own micro-narratives. This aligns well with the principles of the extended case method (ECM), which prioritises participant voices and supports my research aim of capturing authentic lived experiences.

## **15.6 Future Research**

Several avenues for further research emerge from the findings of this thesis, which I frame here as four specific questions that could be taken forward.

1. How can the practice guidance developed in this study be effectively implemented in family learning training for practitioners?

This question explores the efficacy of providing family learning training to practitioners using the practice guidance outlined in this study. It should include an evaluation of the perspectives of other Family Learning Tutors on the value of adopting an authentic approach, helping to assess the practical application of the guidance in diverse settings.

2. In what ways do marketisation and governmentality critically influence local authority roles in family learning?

This research would investigate the systemic forces at play, examining how they shape the distribution of resources and support for family learning. The recent calls for increased family learning funding, such as those made by The Campaign for Learning in February 2024, underscore the importance of this inquiry. It will be crucial to explore how funding can be aligned with the interests of parents rather than with specific governmental strategies, ensuring that increased funding translates into tangible benefits for families.

3. What strategies can be implemented to elevate the status and impact of Family Liaison Workers and teaching assistants in family learning contexts?

This question seeks to identify ways to empower these roles through targeted funding for training, salaries, and family learning projects, potentially shifting perceptions of their importance within educational settings. This could include directing funding to schools to strengthen budgets for training and professional development. Additionally, collaboration within a network of Family Learning Workers could provide a platform for mutual support, the exchange of best practices, and the development of a community of learning that enhances overall practice standards. The National Centre for Family Learning has made strides in this area, but the variety of practitioners and the distributed nature of the field present challenges that future research could address.

4. How can quality assurance and evaluation frameworks be designed for Authentic Family Learning programmes to ensure their effectiveness and sustainability?

This question focuses on the development of robust mechanisms for evaluating and improving family learning programmes. By exploring how these frameworks can be structured, future research could provide essential insights into ensuring the long-term effectiveness of Authentic Family Learning, with direct implications for practitioner training and policy decisions.

Addressing these four avenues for future research could contribute to the ongoing refinement and advancement of Authentic Family Learning, ensuring its effectiveness and sustainability.



## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Historical Overview of Family Learning

Date	Event
<b>Post War Period</b>	Progressive child-centred education movements emerge that draw on developmental psychology.
<b>1957</b>	Richard Hoggart's "The Uses of Literacy" is published influencing the development of community education programmes that build on the strengths and knowledge of families and communities
<b>1965</b>	Introduction of the Plowden Report which emphasised child-centred education and the importance of parents in the education process
<b>1966</b>	The Albemarle Report on the youth service recognised the value of voluntary, spontaneous, informal and youth-led learning.
<b>1968</b>	Research appears which shifts focus from training parents towards families learning together (Buckland, 1972)
<b>1969</b>	The publication of 'The Learning Gap' by Bernstein highlighted the need for education to take into account social class differences and the role of the family.
<b>1970</b>	The creation of the Women's Liberation Movement brought attention to the need for women to have access to education and training, including as parents
<b>1972</b>	Buckland calls for parent education theories to be based on a systems model that focuses on 'becoming' rather than causal links between a programme and the absence or presence of prescribed behaviours.

<b>1973</b>	The Community Development Projects, a national anti-poverty initiative, have been running for 3 years. One aim is to support parents in deprived areas through education and training opportunities within the community. All 12 projects were de-funded acrimoniously in 1978 with community workers strongly critiquing Government policies.
<b>1974a</b>	Bronfenbrenner reviews early education programmes from 60s and 70s and concludes that parental involvement is key to success
<b>c.1975</b>	Tizard, Hughes and Friere's research becoming more and more well known
<b>1976</b>	Family Matters project is developed in USA as an alternative to 'deficit model' of other social programmes
<b>1976</b>	The Government issues the "Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit" report, which discusses the need for adult education to be made more accessible and relevant to the needs of adults.

<b>1978</b>	The "Russell Report" is published, which highlights the importance of family learning and adult education in meeting the needs of adults in all aspects of their lives.
<b>1979</b>	The Conservatives come to power, and the new government stresses the importance of vocational training and adult education in meeting the needs of industry and the economy.
<b>1980</b>	The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit (ALBSU) was established by the Department of Education and Science to co-ordinate adult literacy and related basic skills work in England and Wales.
<b>1983</b>	<p>The National Institute of Adult Education becomes The National Institute of Continuing Adult Education (NIACE).</p> <p>The inclusion of 'Continuing' in the name was controversial at the time; supporters felt it signalled a commitment to working across all parts of a changing field, opponents believed it represented a capitulation to the vocational agenda of the then Tory government.</p>
<b>1984</b>	Bourdieu's discussion of academic capital as a product of the combined effects of cultural transmission by the family and the cultural transmission by the school is the genesis of the 'intergenerational cycle' argument

<b>1984</b>	<p>Tizard and Hughes publish <i>Young Children Learning: a study on the conversations of four-year-old girls with their teachers in nursery school and their mothers at home</i></p> <p>Contrary to commonly held beliefs that working-class mothers failed to stimulate children, it found a relative paucity of talk at school and a rich learning environment in the home.</p> <p>N.B Barbara considered that 'the changes that have since occurred in nursery schools are not those we had hoped for. Instead they resulted from government pressure to introduce literacy and numeracy at an ever earlier stage.'</p>
<b>1986</b>	<p>The government launches the "Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit," which aims to improve adult literacy and numeracy skills, with a particular focus on those in disadvantaged communities.</p>
<b>1988</b>	<p>The association between family environments and students' outcomes is addressed by Coleman when he develops the concept of social capital.</p>
<b>1990</b>	<p>The Adult Literacy and Basic Skills Unit developed a model for family learning programmes with three required components – basic skills instruction for parents, early literacy education for young children, and</p>

	parent/child activities. In 1995 the ALBSU's changed its name to the Basic Skills Agency.
<b>1993</b>	Wang et al. propose, that the home "functions as the most salient out-of-school context for student learning, amplifying or diminishing the school's effect on school learning".
<b>1996</b>	Vincent refers to "dislocation" (p.3) between parents' own cultural frameworks and those of the school. This is manifested by some parents being distant from school.
<b>1996</b>	Eccles and Harold identified community characteristics that impact parental involvement in education. These include: the amount of cohesion experienced by a community; the amount of social organisation and social networking and access to resources and opportunities (p.8-9).
<b>1997</b>	Publication of the Government White Paper 'Excellence in Schools' driven and driving further the standards and inclusion agenda
<b>1998</b>	<i>Bringing Britain Together: A National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal.</i> Is published heralding a focus on social inclusion and school and community partnerships. Further bringing the concept of family learning to the fore. Breaking cycles of disadvantage a central theme

	signalling the assumption that there is an intergenerational element contributing to poor edu attainment
<b>1998</b>	The Government green paper 'The Learning Age' is published encouraging lifelong learning. In the preface Secretary of State for Education and Employment David Blunkett writes 'Learning enables people to play a full part in their community and strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation'.
<b>1998</b>	Hobcraft used data from the <i>National Child Development Study</i> to explore the "extent to which social exclusion and disadvantage is transmitted across generations and across the life-course"
<b>1998</b>	Reay found that many of the working-class women she interviewed were undertaking educational work with their children but that this was "characterized by a lack of knowledge of appropriate education standards and uncertainty and self-doubt about their competences as educators" (p.78).
<b>2001</b>	The Learning and Skills Council was established in April 2001, under the Learning and Skills Act 2000. It replaced the 72 Training and Enterprise Councils and the Further Education Funding Council for England. In 2006 it had an annual budget of £10.4 billion. It was described as Britain's largest Quango

<b>2001</b>	Skills for Life the national strategy in England for improving adult literacy, language (ESOL) and numeracy skills. The strategy was launched by Tony Blair in March 2001.
<b>2002</b>	Henderson and Mapp argue that the majority of parents, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, are intensely interested in their children's education
<b>2003</b>	The Every Child Matters initiative is launched which highlighted the role of parents in supporting successful outcomes for children
<b>2006</b>	Respect Action Plan in 2006 published which set up the Parenting Early Intervention and pledged that by 2010, all children should have access to a variety of activities beyond the school day – including family learning
<b>2006</b>	Ofsted publish a review of Extended services in schools and childrens' centres. Family Learning positively described. No focus on evidence-based practice
<b>2007</b>	The National Academy for Parenting Practitioners (NAPP) was established in 2007. Its aim was to transform the size and quality of the

	parenting workforce in England so that evidence-based parenting programmes could be made available to families who need them.
<b>2007</b>	NIACE and The Basic Skills Agency merged to become one institution.
<b>2008</b>	The Family Learning Impact Fund (FLIF) is established to provide additional funding from the DCSF for three years. Its aims include involving more at risk families and fathers, extending the range of provision, and placing a greater emphasis on qualifications and progression and improved data collection.
<b>2010</b>	The Learning and Skills Council is abolished and the Skills Funding Agency is established and takes over the distribution of funding for family learning  These changes started in April 2009 and were complete by March 2010.
<b>2010</b>	Field Review on Poverty and Life Chances made a number of recommendations, specifically identifying the importance of the role of parents in the early development of children.
<b>2011</b>	The Department for Education (DfE) published a <u>policy paper</u> on "Supporting Families in the Foundation Years" which included a commitment to expanding family learning opportunities.



<b>2012</b>	Welsh inspectorate of education and training publishes a <u>report</u> titled 'The impact of family learning programmes on raising the literacy and numeracy levels of children and adults' and made recommendations about improving recruitment, progression and quality of provision.
<b>2013</b>	Meta-reviews published by Gorard and the BIS call for 'evidence-based' studies of family learning and characterise the current evidence as weak.
<b>2013</b>	The publication of " <u>Family Learning Works</u> " by the Campaign for Learning, which highlights the benefits of family learning and calls for more funding and support for such programmes.
<b>2014</b>	The Parental Engagement Fund (PEF) is launched to increase knowledge of what works to engage parents, improve the home learning environment and support child development. The fund supported existing parental engagement interventions to develop their delivery and increase these interventions understanding of evaluation and impact.
<b>2015</b>	NIACE merges with the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion and becomes the 'Learning and Work Institute'
<b>2015</b>	The publication of: See, B. H. and Gorard, S. (2015) 'Does intervening to enhance parental involvement in education lead to better academic results for children? An extended review' repeats and builds on the findings of Desforges and Abouchar (2003) and Gorard and See (2013) which found family learning evaluations to be weak.

<b>2016</b>	<p>Raising pupil attainment through Family Learning: A Guide for head teachers and School Governors published by the Learning and Work Institute (formally NIACE).</p> <p>Contrasts with the findings of See and Gorrard's (2015) paper.</p>
<b>2016</b>	NIACE and the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion merge to become the Learning and Works Institute
<b>2016</b>	The community learning budget was combined into the newly created Adult Education Budget, following the Spending Review 2015 settlement. In 2017/18 the community learning budget was 18% (£0.24 billion) of the total £1.34 billion AEB.
<b>2017</b>	The Skills Funding Agency was replaced by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). ESFA set the rules for Adult Education Budget funded <u>community learning</u> (p. including FEML and Wider Family Learning
<b>2018</b>	A <u>review</u> of the PEF was published highlighting the importance for commissioners, researchers, and frontline practitioners of 'understanding the complexity, difficulty and rewards of really

	understanding ‘what works’ when evaluating the impact of social interventions.
<b>2018</b>	The <a href="#">EEF</a> uses a cluster randomised control trial to test the impact of family literacy programmes to improve attainment of reception year EAL pupils. The trial shows no impact and reports low attendance and retention of parents.
<b>2019</b>	The Learning and Work Institute publishes <a href="#">guidance</a> on parent champion programmes for family learning providers. The report recognises that parental engagement requires active collaboration with parents and should be proactive rather than reactive.
<b>2020</b>	The COVID-19 pandemic meant families had to adapt to home schooling and remote learning. The benefits and drawbacks are the subject of much emerging research. Family Learning providers <a href="#">rapidly</a> developed digital approaches to maintain provision. More on this <a href="#">here</a> and <a href="#">here</a>
<b>2022</b>	ESFA funded community learning providers are required to create ‘ <a href="#">pound-plus</a> ’ policies. Pound Plus refers to additional income generated by providers over and above core income from the ESFA’s Adult Education Budget Community Learning funding. It is a term used to describe how learning providers can show how they are maximising the value of public investment i.e., income generated or savings made through course fees, financial sponsorship, access to new learning spaces made available at no or reduced costs; use of volunteer workers;

	the use of shared resources; donations of equipment or consumable items; access to other funding sources or grants
<b>2022</b>	The department for education's FE Funding and Accountability Consultation, which closed on 12 October, proposes that a new set of outcome measures should apply to non-qualification provision, including entering employment or moving closer to the labour market. This would have significant implications for family learning <u>programmes</u> .
<b>2022</b>	The Campaign for Learning publishes the <u>discussion paper</u> 'Bringing it all back home' with recommendations for reviving and unifying the family learning and parental engagement agendas.

## **Appendix 2: Literature Review Concepts**

### ***Appendix 2.1 Critical Pedagogy***

Critical pedagogy, as an educational philosophy and approach, challenges traditional teaching methods to empower learners as critical thinkers and agents of social change. Drawing from a wide array of scholars who have made significant contributions to the field of critical pedagogy, I have chosen to focus on the works of John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, Paulo Freire, Joe L. Kincheloe, and Henry Giroux. My selection is deeply personal, as their works have been instrumental in shaping my understanding of critical pedagogy.

John Dewey, a foundational figure, emphasised experiential learning, encouraging active engagement and reflection. In family learning, this could mean that tutors facilitate environments that promote critical thinking and problem-solving through hands-on experiences and open dialogue. Jürgen Habermas contributes the concept of "lifeworld". This lifeworld encompasses the everyday world of shared cultural, social, and interpersonal practices that define our daily lives. In family learning, this underscores the importance of recognising and respecting the diverse backgrounds and cultural contexts of learners. Moreover, Habermas's concept of communicative action emphasises open, democratic, and inclusive communication. This can be a way to build for mutual understanding within the family learning classroom.

Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy emphasises the importance of fostering an environment where education can transcend direct instruction and becomes a catalyst for liberation. Embracing open dialogue as a cornerstone, Freire's concept of problem-posing education encourages educators to create spaces where learners can actively question, analyse, and propose solutions, instilling a sense of agency and critical thinking. Learning becomes a personal journey, contextualised within the daily lives and unique experiences of individuals. Freire's pedagogy asks how learners can be empowered to raise their critical consciousness, understand social issues, and act as advocates for justice and social change. Encouraging praxis, Freire's critical pedagogy extends beyond theoretical knowledge, translating it into

actions that reflect the values and principles learned at home. Within this nurturing space, self-reflection and self-awareness are key, encouraging tutors and learners to explore their beliefs and biases, ultimately cultivating deeper understanding and connection within the classroom and the world beyond.

Joe L. Kincheloe amalgamates critical theory, feminist theory, complexity theory, indigenous knowledge, and post/anti-colonialism in his work to challenge oppressive power structures. He emphasises the significance of understanding the politics of knowledge and epistemology. Kincheloe advocates for a form of critical pedagogy that empowers individuals to enact personal transformation, bolster their roles as scholars and social activists, unlock their cognitive potential, and foster the creation of democratic spaces in an increasingly interconnected global society. Furthermore, Kincheloe promotes the formation of 'communities of solidarity' that collaborate to advance more inclusive and equitable education, all while striving for a peaceful, just, and ecologically sustainable world. His scholarship addresses contemporary issues, ranging from pre-emptive wars to standardised curricula, the privatisation of public schools, and corporate dominance in the news media. Instead of succumbing to despair, Kincheloe aims to instil hope and offer a pathway for meaningful and transformative knowledge work.

Henry Giroux, expanding on Freire's ideas, emphasises education's central role in addressing power and social justice concerns. He distinguishes between teaching merely as a technique and critical pedagogy, framing the latter as a political and moral endeavour tied to the acquisition of agency. Giroux stresses that critical pedagogy underscores the vital link between how we learn and how we function individually and within society. Therefore, educators employing critical pedagogy must not only nurture critical thinking but also instil a sense of personal and social responsibility, fostering engaged citizens capable of enriching democratic public life. Giroux underscores the challenge in this mission, as he criticises the prevalence of 'practical' teacher training methods that align with outcome-based education systems, which he deems as anti-intellectual and politically conservative. He argues that

these systems reduce teachers to test invigilators and relegate pedagogy to serving data-driven performance metrics. This technocratic approach oversimplifies education, severing the classroom from broader societal, political, and economic influences and offering technical and punitive solutions that lack intellectual and ethical depth. Like Kincheloe, Giroux also delves into questions about who controls the conditions for producing knowledge and queries how knowledge, identity, and authority are constructed in educational settings.

In conclusion, critical pedagogy, rooted in the works of influential educators and philosophers like Paulo Freire, John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, Joe L. Kincheloe, and Henry Giroux, represents a transformative educational philosophy that extends beyond traditional teaching methods. It aims to empower learners as critical thinkers and agents of social change, not only within the classroom but also within the family and broader societal contexts. There is an emphasis on open dialogue, problem-posing education, and personal context enriching the learning experience, fostering critical thinking and social consciousness. There is also attention to the politics of knowledge and how an awareness of this might guide us towards a more equitable society.

### ***Appendix 2.2 Authentic Learning***

The term 'authentic' is commonly used in the field of education, often without a specific definition but typically associated with concepts like real-world relevance, practical application, and meaningful connection to learning objectives (Roach, Tilley and Mitchell, 2018). Teaching guidance linked to authentic learning can be traced back to research on second language acquisition, which demonstrates that acquiring a language through everyday communication is more effective than memorising decontextualised vocabulary lists (Herrington, 2015). I first encountered authentic learning through Jacobson, Degener and Purcell-Gates' (2003) work on Authentic Instruction for adult literacy teaching. This approach eschews traditional classroom materials, like textbooks and worksheets, in favour of real-life materials, such as pamphlets, apps, letters, emails, text messages, websites, or

books as well as authentic activities such as planning an excursion or organising a fundraising event.

The guidance offered by Jacobson, Degener, and Purcell-Gates (2003) aligns with the principles of 'socially situated literacy' (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1984) and the broader framework of 'new literacy studies.' These approaches emphasise the interplay between literacy practices and the social, cultural, and practical contexts in which they occur. In this context, the acquisition of knowledge is inherently connected to the specific situations in which it is applied, underscoring the significance of authentic learning environments. Teaching approaches aimed at authentic learning are also underpinned by epistemological ideas concerning the boundaries and intersections between procedural knowledge, declarative knowledge, and tacit knowledge (Ryle, 1963). More precisely, authentic learning has been put forward to bridge the gap between 'knowing what' and 'knowing how.' Authentic learning methods providing an opportunity to shape knowledge in its context and gradually enhance understanding through practical use in real settings.

Hence, proponents of authentic learning often endorse problem-based and project-based learning approaches and aim to create active, learner-centred, learning environments. In family literacy, this may include the use of authentic texts and activities that people encounter in the world outside of school. A text is considered authentic if it is of a type used by people in real-life situations. Additionally, the reading or writing of that text is considered authentic if the purposes for reading or writing align with real-life purposes. For example, parents might search online for information about secondary schools in their area and then complete an e-form to sign up for an open day, instead of simply reading an online news article to answer comprehension questions. Providing situated learning opportunities serves the idea that authentic learning must be of value to learners personally and involve learners finding their own answers.



From this perspective, authentic learning is rooted in a constructivist approach where students construct their own comprehension of new ideas and skills by blending their past experiences, available resources, personal research, and current experiences. This stands in direct contrast to instructional methods based on behaviourist principles, which aim to simplify, condense, and abstract knowledge about an objective world for transmission to the learner. This suggests that authentic learning emphasises active engagement and personal meaning-making, while behaviourist approaches tend to focus on delivering knowledge in a more structured and simplified manner.

In conclusion, the concept of 'authentic learning' in education emphasises real-world relevance, practical application, and meaningful connection to learning objectives. Originating from insights in second language acquisition, it advocates for learning through everyday communication rather than rote memorisation. An authentic learning approach aligns with socially situated literacy and new literacy studies, highlighting the interplay between literacy practices and contextual settings. Authentic learning, bridging the gap between procedural and declarative knowledge, fosters active, learner-centric environments, in family literacy, this can mean introducing authentic texts and activities that mirror real-world scenarios. Rooted in constructivism, it underscores learners' role in constructing comprehension through personal experiences, resources, and research, in contrast to behaviourist methods that are more likely to focus on direct transmission of knowledge.

### ***Appendix 2.3 Family Learning***

The final concept that was used to scope the literature is family learning. In its broadest sense, Family learning is any learning that includes a child or young person and another generation of their family. The learning taking place can be formal or informal. This includes everything from certified education courses to short family fun activities, and everything in between. In contrast to the intergenerational learning that takes place spontaneously in families, The National Centre for Family Learning suggests that facilitated forms of Family Learning should have clear learning outcomes for both children and adults. Children and

adults could have the same learning outcome, sharing a learning experience which increases their knowledge on a specific subject or develops new skills. Alternatively, children and adults might have different learning outcomes; a parent or carer attending an adult learning course might be developing their parenting skills which allow them to support their child's needs. Also, members of a family can learn together at the same time or separately in different spaces, alternatively one member of the family can learn and share their knowledge and skills in the home learning environment.

In this thesis, I focus on Government funded family learning programmes delivered in community settings that facilitate parents learning alongside their children for mutual benefit. The objectives of these family learning programmes include enhancing the English, maths and parenting skills of adults and equipping parents with the knowledge and ability to better support their children's learning. Funding for these programmes comes via the Adult Education Budget (AEB). Local Authorities allocate this budget following rules set by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA); an executive agency of the government, sponsored by the Department for Education. Beyond the local authority funded programmes, Family Learning can also be facilitated independently by schools, children's centres, museums, libraries, and third-sector organisations.

Research relating to family learning often intersects with research on parental involvement with their children's learning and education and parental engagement with their child's school community. Parental involvement involves parents actively participating in their children's educational journey, encompassing activities like attending parents' evenings, volunteering, and supporting school events. It predominantly centres around interactions within the school environment. Parental engagement, a broader and more dynamic concept, extends beyond the confines of the school. It encapsulates the continuous and active participation of parents in fostering their child's learning and development, emphasising not

only school-based activities but also encompassing conversations and activities within the home environment. This concept underscores an ongoing partnership between parents and educators to enhance the overall educational experience. Family learning is a facet of this interconnected framework, acknowledging the family unit as a significant context for learning. It involves joint learning experiences among family members, transcending traditional educational boundaries and enhancing the agency of families. Parents build their capacity to lead activities such as shared reading, educational games, and exploring learning resources. In essence, these three concepts work synergistically, emphasising the importance of both school and home environments in shaping a child's educational journey. Parental involvement acts as a bridge within the school, while parental engagement and family learning build parental agency and extend the sphere of influence to the broader context of a child's life, recognising the family as a crucial arena for educational enrichment.

### Appendix 3. Invitation Letter



Dear Family Learning Participant,

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. The study aims to understand and describe the features of the way I facilitate Family Learning and the experiences of people who participate in Family Learning courses. Because you are doing a Family Learning course you are being invited to participate in the study.

Before you decide if you are willing to participate you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. In order to do so please to read the attached information sheet carefully.

You can ask questions if anything you read is not clear, or if you would like more information. You should take time to decide whether or not to take part. If you would like to discuss anything about the research please ask me at in person or contact me by email at: [charlotte.hardacre@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:charlotte.hardacre@cumbria.ac.uk).

Yours faithfully,

Charlotte Hardacre

## Appendix 4. Information Sheet



### INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Please take the time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether you wish to take part in this project.

#### **Title of Project:**

Developing a Theory of Authentic Family Learning

#### **What is the purpose of the project and what will participation involve?**

The research aims to understand and describe a way of thinking about, delivering and taking part in a type of school-based intergenerational learning that I call 'Authentic Family Learning'. I want to know if I am correct to give this name to my way of doing Family Learning. Participation will involve:

- Being observed whilst you take part in the course. Notes will be taken that might mention what you did or said during the session
- Creating a visual representation, called a 'learning journey', that depicts your experiences on the Family Learning course
- Your learner file being looked at, discussed with you and written about in the PhD thesis
- Being invited to have a conversation about your experiences that will be recorded and written about in the PhD thesis

#### **How will the research be reported?**

1. An evaluation meeting will be held with the participants to share the results/findings immediately after the study has been completed
2. In a doctoral thesis.
3. Through conference presentations and academic posters

#### **Why have you asked me to take part?**

You have been asked to take part in this study because you are part of a Family Learning course taught by me. Your ideas, beliefs and opinions about the course are of interest to me and so I would like to talk to you about these as it will make sure my research includes the voices of participants.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

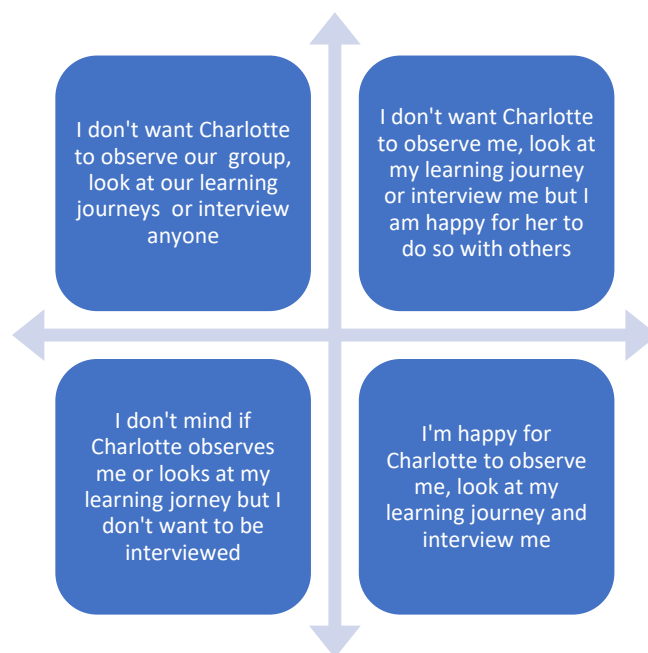
It is up to you to decide if you want to take part or not. It is entirely voluntary. I will describe the study and go through this information sheet with you. I will give you the information sheet to keep

for your reference. I will then ask you to sign a consent form to show you agree to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time and you do not have to give a reason for doing so.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will take part in the Family Learning course as normal, but you may be observed and notes might be taken about you. You may also be invited to participate in a 20-minute 'semi-structured interview'. In this conversation we will discuss your experiences of the Family Learning course. This conversation will be recorded. You will also be invited to draw a visual map called a 'learning journey' depicting your experiences of the Family Learning course.

This diagram shows the different level of participation that you can choose from.



### **What happens to the research data?**

All the data collected will be held securely and anonymously. After three years the data will be deleted from the University of Cumbria server.

### **How can I find out more information?**

Please contact me at the following email addresses:

Charlotte Hardacre: [charlotte.hardacre@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:charlotte.hardacre@cumbria.ac.uk)

### **What if I want to complain about the research?**

Initially you can contact me directly. However, if you are not satisfied or wish to make a more formal complaint you should contact Diane Cox, Director of Research Office, University of Cumbria, Bowerham Road, Lancaster, LA1 3JD. [diane.cox@cumbria.ac.uk](mailto:diane.cox@cumbria.ac.uk)

## Appendix 5. Consent Form



### Developing a Theory of Authentic Family Learning

#### Participant Consent Form

**Please answer the following questions by circling your responses:**

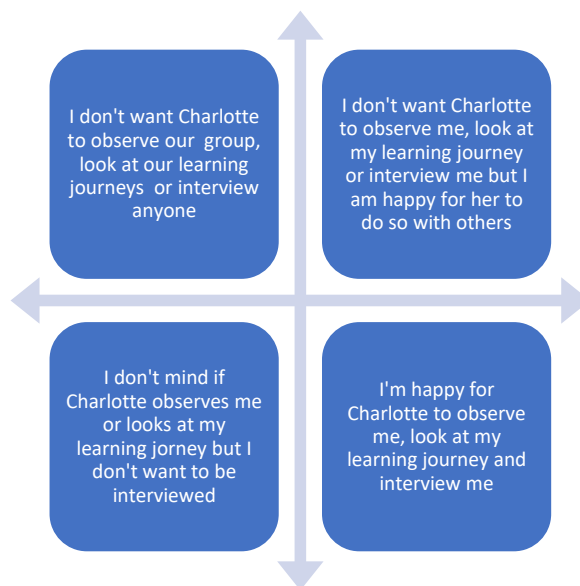
Have you read and understood the information sheet about this study? YES NO

Have you been able to ask questions and had enough information? YES NO

Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time, and without having to give a reason for withdrawal? YES NO

Your responses will be anonymised. Do you give permission for members of the research team to analyse and quote your anonymous responses? YES NO

**Please draw a circle around the box that describes the level of participation you are happy to have in this research study.**











Please sign here if you wish to take part in the research and feel you have had enough information about what is involved:

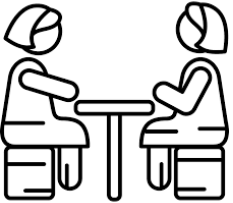






**Signature of participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

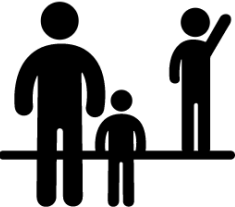

**Name (block letters):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix 6: Children's Information Sheet and Consent Form**

**The Family Learning Research Project - Information Sheet and Consent Form for Children**

<p>Who is the researcher?</p>	 <p>Charlotte</p>	<p>I understand who the researcher is.</p>  <p>Stamp here after talking about this as a family</p>
<p>What is the research about?</p>	 <p>The way Family Learning classes are delivered in primary schools.</p>	<p>I understand what the research is about.</p>  <p>Stamp here after talking about this as a family</p>
	 <p>Charlotte will think about what happens in class and write down notes. She might write about me.</p>	<p>I understand why Charlotte will write notes.</p> 

<p>What will happen?</p>	 <p>Charlotte and my parent might have a conversation about our class. They might talk about me.</p>	<p>Stamp here after talking about this as a family</p> <p>I understand the conversation that might happen.</p>  <p>Stamp here after talking about this as a family</p>
<p>How will the research be shared?</p>	  <p>Charlotte will tell people about some things we say or do in class. She will also write about it in a long book called a thesis</p>	<p>I understand how Charlotte will share the research</p>  <p>Stamp here after talking about this as a family</p>
<p>What will not be shared?</p>		<p>I understand that Charlotte won't tell people our names</p> 

	Charlotte won't tell people my name or my parents name when she writes or talks about our class	Stamp here after talking about this as a family
Do I have to join in?	 <p>I don't have to join in with Charlotte's research. If I do join in, I can choose to stop anytime. It's up to me and Charlotte won't mind either way.</p>	<p>I understand that I don't have to join in.</p>  <p>Stamp here after talking about this as a family</p>

**If you agree to join in with Charlotte's research, please write your name on the line below:**

---

Parent's full name: \_\_\_\_\_ Parent's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 7. Mid-Course Activities

School	Course Goal	Mid-Course Activities
Lee Road	Plan and take part in a class visit from an animal handler and a range of animals including a snake, an owl, a ferret, a chameleon, a tarantula, an opossum, an iguana, a hedgehog, a scorpion, a bullfrog and a millipede.	<p>Parents Only: Researching and costing the class visit, creating an itinerary, assigning roles for managing the visit, developing associated educational activities</p> <p>Joint: Making and playing educational activities associated with the trip including making an animal fact file, creating habitat dioramas, writing songs, poems, scenes and stories about the animals.</p>
Southfield and Chestnut Road	Each family to choose a book and create a story sack based on that book. The bag contains a range of educational activities based on the book. Each activity relates to a different area of the EYFS.	<p>Parents Only: Researching appropriate activities. Identifying best ways to create and decorate bag. Developing a scheme of work for the bags, planning a display to celebrate the work in the school and encourage other parents to make bags</p> <p>Joint: Making and playing educational activities associated with the bag, sharing their story with the group, decorating the bag.</p>
Gloucester Place	Phonics Booklet & Associated Activities	<p>Parents Only: Identify phonics games for a range of phases, research best ways to produce and distribute booklet, plan celebration event.</p> <p>Joint: Play phonics games, photograph game and write instructions, create decorations for celebration event.</p>

Roundswell	Educational Visit to Salmesbury Hall	<p>Parents Only: Research appropriate educational visits, cost event, develop budget and raise funds, develop associated educational activities, plan reflection and celebration activities</p> <p>Joint: Help with fundraising activities including car washing and cake making, engage in associated educational activities</p>
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**Table 7.4 Mid-Course Activities**

## Appendix 8. Abductive Categories in Characteristic One: Adaptive Intelligence

<b>"Sore subject"</b>
School as a 'sore subject' speaks to parents inner-life. Poor prior experiences can: induce disaffection, create desire for different outcomes for children, become integrated into a broader understanding of the shared experience of school for all including teachers/TAs etc. The visible, material carriers of institutionalisation should be tackled upfront rather than accepted as part of the norms of the school especially when there is clear evidence of counterproductivity.
<b>Social Trust</b>
Social trust within the school shapes how parents assimilate to AFL. Lack of social trust makes parents less willing to engage in activities that contribute to school success/less willing to be 'visible' in the school, which creates further exclusion. It is bi-directional but schools should avoid relying on class teachers to build trust and instead take whole-school approach to tackling the issue. This should include capitalising more fully on the stronger sense of trust between parents and TAs/FLWs.
<b>Curiosity</b>
Curiosity is a way to support parents' assimilation into AFL and is integral to core goals of AFL for example a curious stance helps in the development of shared goals. Embedding curiosity and elevating its status within AFL provides is an alternative to the tokenistic approaches embodied by 'individual learning plans' that are completed in a hurry and not referred back to during the course. In this way curiosity acts as one mechanism for building a sense of meaning.
<b>"Like a chav"</b>
Parents are aware of how social class can be used to position them in negative and deficient ways; as 'chavs'. Concurrently, parents self-identified with aspirational notions of motherhood that did not always reflect their reality. AFL, despite careful intentions may impose normative identities on mothers because of the intrinsic value of certain parenting practices. Ultimately, the notion of identity in AFL is linked to critical consciousness and self-becoming by avoiding the deterministic conceptions of 'who we are' that can flow from the teachers, tutors and broader social norms.
<b>Values</b>
Parents values often emerge as part of the learning journey process. This can be helpful as engaging with these beliefs can be motivating starting point for family learning. Parents espoused values may not be in line with their actions i.e. not returning reading books, missing meetings, lateness. A compassionate approach to

the factors that impinge on living their values is useful way to avoid imposing normative values on parents and AFL could be a good reset and start of reconciliation as opposed to being deficit or punitive.

#### Hidden

Moments of revelation recurred throughout the five courses and were at times attributed to the equitable approaches to decision making and the subversion of hierarchies that are central to AFL. The first revelation type was when parents, who initially showed disinterest or mistrust of such ideals, began to share academic, creative or career ambitions for themselves or their child. The second revelation type was when parents, who at first presented as confident and capable, disclosed hidden vulnerabilities relating to a range of factors including drug and alcohol misuse, learning and behavioural needs or their ability to parent effectively.

#### Conforming

Norms and expectations emerge and are reinforced in AFL through social comparison between parents and the consistent routine introduced by the tutor and maintained by the whole group. Parents approach to conformity exists on a spectrum between defensive and accepting. Open communication and continual adjustment are helpful in moving towards the more accepting forms of conformity to the norms and expectations of the group.

#### "Comfortable with Control"

Implicit and explicit forms of control exist within AFL. More implicit forms of control include providing easy choices, using a relational approach and the role of social norms, cues and comparison. More explicit forms of control include professional role performance and course leadership. Family Learning Tutors becoming comfortable with control may make it easier to create a more transparent approach to power thus allowing more equity and agency for parents who would be privy to the nature and purpose of forms of control.

#### Asset Balanced

The concept of "asset-balanced" emphasises acknowledging the difficult realities faced by parents while simultaneously identifying and building upon their strengths and assets. This approach seeks to strike a balance between recognising challenges and fostering empowerment. While deficit-based approaches may perpetuate feelings of helplessness and dependency, asset-based approaches can unintentionally overlook the immediate struggles individuals face and place undue responsibility on them to solve their own problems. Parents may struggle to articulate their strengths when feeling overwhelmed, potentially leading to feelings



of isolation and self-blame. Asset-balanced practice involves setting goals collaboratively, acknowledging systemic factors contributing to difficulties, and providing both challenge and support in learning environments.

## Appendix 9. Abductive Categories in Characteristic Two: Ambitious Practicality

Status
<p>The fortification of schools, through the use of buzzers, holding areas, gatekeepers and processing, is generative of subordinate, outsider and disruptive status for parents and practitioners. This counterproductive approach to safety is indicative of Illich's ideas of institutionalisation and Giroux's concept of hidden curriculum. The subordinate status can be counteracted when families and practitioners feel a sense of belonging in the school space.</p>
"Make a brew"
<p>The factors which parents indicate as important to their learning experience and ability to complete the course, are often counterpoints to the challenge they had in entering the space in the first place. Supportive power is evident in some of the factors that encourage attendance – it encompasses but goes beyond relational activities i.e. 'make me a brew' and learner-initiated activities, it also includes highly teacher-led content such as supporting parents to learn about phonics.</p>
Intention
<p>Setting intentions is not an esoteric exercise. It has practical utility for engagement and retention for example, setting the intention to include family learners in decision making communicates the important and impactful role they have within the course and creates a safer space for parents to share their needs and is important practically in terms of harmonious group dynamics where everyone is on the same page. Parents are aware of the intentions of the AFL. This meta-cognitive awareness helped parents feel valued.</p>
"What you're about"
<p>Two patterns of behaviour, broadly described as 'evaluating' and 'communicating sentiment', emerged during field work. These behaviours relate to parents seeking to understand the intentions of the tutor and the norms of AFL. Authentic relationships can be established by creating the opportunities for sentiments to be openly communicated. The relational and affective aspects of the processes described in this Category are central to participants' descriptions of their AFL experience. Evaluation takes place between group members and serves to establish a degree of conformity to the norms or standards of a shared approach to Authentic Family Learning.</p>
"Out of my Shell"
<p>Participants described revealing more of their authentic selves and/or a reawakening of previous levels of skill or confidence. An important component in this process are the social connections that are central to AFL. Parents point to their children and the Family Liaison Workers as important. Shared activities facilitate parents 'coming out of their shell' as they are occupied with completing a task which brings them alongside others and provides an authentic opportunity for achieving a meaningful goal.</p>
Collusion

Pressure to collude with the various stakeholders in AFL was continual. Resisting this pressure could leave the tutor or FLW feeling either uncomfortable during encounters with staff. A useful way to reduce this pressure was to openly restate the AFL values, bring all stakeholders into the discussion. Thus, minimising the advocate role and holding space for parents to be visible and vocal. Considering the role of work-load or decision-making structures that are part of the complex ecology of the school is essential – especially during uncomfortable and unfavourable interactions.

### "Say it how it is"

The data suggests that consistency, congruence between espoused-values and action and follow through are important ways to generate trust, meaning and alignment with the nature and purpose of AFL. Staff suggest that negative phenomena such as intervention churn are associated with the positioning of parents as 'hard to reach' or passive recipients of instruction, as opposed to holders of agency who can be an active and impactful member of the school community.

### Accountability

External accountability drives visibility and measurement in both primary school settings and for LA funded family learning. This is connected to the force of marketisation. Family learning that is disconnected from external accountability, as in most of this study, is isolating for practitioners. This is compounded by 'parachuting in' for 10 weeks and not being a part of the school. Balancing agendas of funders with the needs of participants is a significant challenge for anyone working with parents. The potential for AFL being based in schools and delivered by Family Liaison Workers has merit as an alternative.

### Family Centred?

Schools complied with directive from Ofsted to include parents on their websites but did not centre them in their ethos or mission statements spoke positively about their interest in including parents but expressed doubts about the a) impact on workload b) efficacy of school-led involvement The social force of 'early intervention' is evident in relation to the data presented in this Abductive Category.

## Appendix 10. Mapping the Abductive Categories from Characteristic Two to the EAST Framework

<b>EAST</b>	<b>Links to Data</b>	<b>Abductive Category</b>
<b>Easy</b>	Reduce effort: Remove material barriers from schools	Status
	Reduce effort: Make family learning fit with existing routines	"Make a brew" Accountability
	Simplify messages: Reveal information progressively over time to minimise complexity (focus on phonics, reading)	"Say it how it is"
<b>Attractive</b>	Personalisation: Use a compelling messenger i.e. personal invitation from head teacher	"Make a brew"
	Attract Attention: Use clear, distilled facts to assert authority and give people a means of backing up their decision i.e. myth busting posters	"What you're about"
	Personalisation: People want to make choices that align with their own identity or their perception of it. For example, use flyers that reflect the community you are working within	"Out of my Shell" Family Centred?
	Personalisation: Give the group ownership and decision-making power about the activities of the group	"Say it how it is"
<b>Social</b>	Networks: Relational activities i.e. making a brew	"Make a brew"
	Make a Commitment: Ask parents to commit to attend weekly with their children for a set number of weeks. Signing a pledge or similar at the outset.	Accountability
	Network: A collective approach generates reciprocity. Everyone has a stake in the activity i.e each person has a 'part' in the assembly and absence would be missed	Family Centred?
	Norms: Tackle norms which undermine the intervention	Collusion

<b>Timely</b>	Make a plan: Set intentions early	Intention
	Immediate costs and benefits: Give the parents frequent feedback about the consequences of their actions i.e benefits of reading with children, impact they are having on the school. Help parents recall actions in the past that affect them in the present	"Say it how it is"
	Prompts: The same offer made at different times can have drastically different levels of success. Behaviour is easier to change when habits are already disrupted, such as at the start of a new key stage	Family Centred?

**Suffuse throughout:** Asset-Balanced

## Appendix 11. Abductive Categories in Characteristic Three: Holistic Understanding

<b>Power Relations</b>
<p>Schools have a complex ecology where strata of power within the faculty are interpreted by parents in ways that affect attachments from forming and can bolster feelings of alienation and powerlessness on both sides. Parents draw clear distinctions between the quality of their relationships with teachers and the quality of their relationships with TAs and FLWs and power relations are a factor shaping this distinction. Parents acceptance of a dissatisfactory status quo in schools raises questions about why they feel it would be futile to attempt to make changes. Understanding parents' beliefs about power relations in the school is an important part of assimilating into Family Learning as these understandings will shape the agency of the group within the school.</p>
<b>Normative Reference Groups</b>
<p>During the 'getting to know you' phase of AFL different social norms around education can emerge. Practitioners may find themselves using normative reference groups when making sense of parents' experiences. Norming middle class values could be unhelpful as it may lead to imposing aims and goals on parents that are not meaningful. Avoiding norming middle class values does not mean endorsing harmful behaviours but does require avoiding unhelpful comparisons because it could create an inhibiting sense of shame that affects the quality of connection and communication between practitioner and parent.</p>
<b>"Well thick me"</b>
<p>The data suggests that, parents do identify their needs, but often low self-concept affects their willingness to share and thus is a barrier to be overcome in the early stages of the course. Strengths and needs emerge through AFL activities with children however, these are not always strengths and needs that the school harnesses or builds on.</p>
<b>Tension Management</b>
<p>The collaborative nature of AFL can create risk and uncertainty. Sensitivity to unaired grievances is needed for effective tension management – even when open communication is in operation. Affective responses during decision making can be subverted by task-shifting interdependence from whole-group onto parent/child dyad. Uncertainty can be managed by creating clarity around tasks and role. To prevent tension arising, choices are managed by the tutor. A balance of rational and relational management is required which the tutor may not always feel comfortable with.</p>
<b>"Learned Helplessness"</b>
<p>Evaluation of parents needs by head teachers positioned families as deficient. This process of evaluation interacts with the force of social abjection which constitutes individuals as responsible for their own circumstances and assumes a desire to transcend such circumstances as natural. Parents who do not show that desire are seen as inexplicable and thus tragic or even repellent. The force of social abjection may be hidden and thus shapes the discourse and perceptions of school leaders and Family Learning Tutors in ways they may not be aware.</p>

### Status Anxiety

Status anxiety describes how individuals measure themselves against others and the pressure they feel to succeed. In school's head teachers described status anxiety in terms of the pressure from Ofsted. head teachers also expressed a vicarious form of status anxiety for parents' lack of social mobility. Parents recognised the expectations placed upon them but often rejected them in favour of their children being 'happy'. Head teachers raised concern about growing pressure and the potential negative impacts but ultimately accepted this pressure as necessary for the life chances of children.

### Finance and Facilities

When participants reflected about the course as a whole, they picked up on discrepancies between how the course was marketed and how the course was experienced. This reflection included noting that school priorities were shaped by a marketised approach to education that created an assessment-driven culture. Head teachers felt these priorities were reasonable, but that communication needed to be clear and consistent. This suggests marketised education is normalised and legitimises certain activities such as test preparation in ways that can delegitimise less measurable activities such as family learning.

### Supportive Power

Supportive power is an embodied process that can be traced to the force of governmentality. It is embodied through activities that amount to 'noisy surveillance' which are forms of friendly, informal connection with families that help to persuade them to attend AFL and through the social bonds of the programme itself. Attempts to diminish governmentality were inhibited by practices such as targeting parents who were seen as in need of a programme that might correct behaviours that were seen as undesirable in the eyes of the school.

## **Appendix 12. Structure and prompts for fieldnotes**

Sunstein's and Chiseri-Strater (2012, p83) list of what should be included in all fieldnotes

- Date, time, and place of observation
- Specific facts, numbers, details of what happens at the site
- Sensory impressions: sights, sounds, textures, smells, taste
- Personal responses to the fact of recording fieldnotes
- Specific words, phrases, summaries of conversations, and insider language
- Questions about people or behaviours at the site for future investigation

### **Prompt A: Description**

What did you do? What did you see?

### **Prompt B: Analysis**

How does what you did and what you saw relate to your research question.

What factors or conditions led to what you did and saw. Are there any themes emerging in relation to your research question? How should you approach your next observation?

### **Prompt C: Reflection**

What is your personal experience of doing the research?



Appendix 13. Constructing a Praxis: Connecting Theories with Findings from Practice  
 The following tables present the relationships between the abductive categories (set out in Findings Chapters 9-11) and the individual theories that support the two central theories within this study; Authenticity and Middle Way. Systematically mapping these connections here helped me to construct the praxis of authentic family learning – explained in Chapter 13. Each table corresponds to a specific phase of the extended case method, showing how the categories that emerged during analysis are underpinned by relevant individual theories. These individual theories, in turn, contribute to the formation and reinforcement of two central theories.

Central Theory	Message	Supporting Theories	Author
Middle Way	Balancing competing agendas has benefits for all stakeholders.	Odd Ducks	Guignon
		Asset Balanced	Stuart
		Golden Mean	Aristotle
		Capacity Building	Mapp
		Degrees of Freedom	de Beauvoir
		Supportive Power	Wainwright
		Gov vs Practitioner (SLB)	Lipsky
		Skilled Helper vs Facilitator	Egan
		Duality vs Dualism	Archer
Central Theory	Message	Supporting Theories	Author
Authenticity	Developing practice which is congruent with both practitioner and participants lives creates meaningful learning experiences	Situated Learning	Lave and Wenger
		5 Strands of AI	Newmann and Wehlage
		Orign of Action	Aristotle
		Anti-Reason	Rousseau
		Self-becoming	Nietszche
		Resolute. Responsibility	Heidegger
		Bad Faith	Sartre
		Authentic Learning	Degener and Purcell-Gates
		Lifeworlds	Habermas
		Post-formalism	Kincheloe
		Human Capital	Bourdieu
		Crit Con	Freire
		Experiential Edu	Dewey

Table A: Individual Theories Supporting the Two Central Theories

Abductive Categories	Supporting Theories	Author	Central Theories
Social Trust	Gov v Practitioner	Lipsky	Middle Way
	Anti-Reason	Rousseau	Authenticity
	Situated Learning	Lave and Wenger	Authenticity
Power Relations	Skilled Helper	Egan	Middle Way
	Origin of Action	Aristotle	Authenticity
	Supportive Power	Wainwright	Middle Way
Normative Reference Groups	Skilled Helper	Egan	Middle Way
	Resolute. Responsibility	Heidegger	Authenticity
Curiosity	Bad Faith	Sartre	Authenticity
	Degrees of Freedom	de Beauvoir	Middle Way
	Capacity Building	Mapp	Middle Way
	Asset Balanced	Stuart	Middle Way
"Well thick me"	Skilled Helper	Egan	Middle Way
	Supportive Power	Wainwright	Middle Way
	Self-becoming	Nietzsche	Authenticity
	Capacity Building	Mapp	Middle Way
"Like a chav"	Bad Faith	Sartre	Authenticity
Values	Origin of Action	Aristotle	Authenticity
	Situated Learning	Lave and Wenger	Authenticity
Status	Rousseau	Anti-Reason	Authenticity
"Make a Brew"	Resolute. Responsibility	Heidegger	Authenticity
	Supportive Power	Wainwright	Middle Way
"Sore Subject"	Bad Faith	Sartre	Authenticity
	Degrees of Freedom	de Beauvoir	Middle Way

Table B: Linking Theories to Abductive Categories (Phase One – Intervention)

Abductive Category	Action	Social Process	Supporting Theories	Central Theory
Intention	Identifying strengths and needs	Cognitive mapping, Participatory, Learner-centred, Setting tone	Situated Learning	Authenticity
Hidden	Identifying shared goals	Acknowledging and Contravening Status-role performance, Equitable Approach to decision making	Skilled Helper vs Facilitator	Middle Way
"What you're about"	Identifying and sharing values	Communication of sentiment, acculturation, evaluation	Origin of Action	Authenticity
Tension Management	Managing tension around how to achieve goals	Conflict, Competition	odd ducks	Middle Way
Conforming	Agreeing goals (not conforming)	Goal attaining, Role performance and normalisation	Degrees of Freedom	Middle Way
"Comfortable with Control"	Est Leadership: Control over chaos	Sanctions, Status Role performance, Boundary maintenance	Supportive Power	Middle Way
"Out of my shell"	Alongside when outside comfort zone	Cooperation, Accommodation	Golden Mean	Middle Way
Collusion	Avoiding endorsing/colluding	Contravention, Conflict	Duality vs Dualism	Middle Way
"Say it how it is"	Doing what you say (another way to create meaning)	Congruence, Communication	odd ducks	Middle Way

Table C: Linking Theories to Abductive Categories (Phase Two – Process)

D:

Abductive Categories	Action	Associated Process	Force	Supporting Theories	Central Theory
"Learned helplessness"	Removal/reduction of services	Evaluation, Communication of sentiment	Social Abjection	Lifeworlds	Authenticity
Status Anxiety	Placing value on academic qualifications or middle class parenting norms	Social comparison, examination, competition	Meritocracy	Self-becoming	Authenticity
Asset Balanced	Acknowledging difficult realities/actively looking for variety of assets (FLWs in particular)	Communication, Participation, co-operation, co-construction	Marketisation (-) Positive social psychology (+)	Asset Balanced	Middle Way
Finance and Facilities	Allocation of resource and space	Evaluation, Communication of sentiment	Marketisation (EBP)	Bad Faith	Authenticity
Family Centred?	Articulating and acting upon school values	Leadership, routines, integrating	Early Intervention	Dual-capacity building framework	Middle Way
Accountability	onerous lesson plannin and marking workload (FLT & Teachers)	Role performance, normalisation	Marketisation	Situated Learning	Authenticity
Supportive Power	Targeting FL to high dep. Friendly, relational, social approaches	Social comparison, task interdependence. Interaction, accommodation	Neoliberalism/Governmentality (Govern at a distance/surveillance)	Duality vs Dualism Supportive Power	Middle Way

Table D: Linking Theories to Abductive Categories (Phase Three – Force)

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