

Exploring what parents of children under 5 years old say could help them  
engage in a programme about child development.

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## Abstract

This exploratory qualitative research used interviews and a focus group to explore the views of parents of children under five regarding what could help them engage in a child development programme being set up by the Educational Psychology Service. Using thematic analysis parents' views were brought together to understand what has helped them engage in groups, what would attract them and hold their interest in a group run by the EPs and what would be potential barriers. The research found that parents use prior experiences to reflect on what they want from groups and that they were attracted through advertisements in familiar places and learning in areas of interest. They highlight the importance of supportive staff and a variety of activities as well as an awareness of the benefit of engagement for themselves and their child. Furthermore, parents shared practical and personal barriers that can make it difficult to attend groups.

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## Abbreviations

EPS	Educational Psychology Service
EP	Educational Psychologist
LA	Local Authority
SES	Socio-Economic-Status
UEL	University of East London
BPS	British Psychological Society
HCPC	The Health and Care Professions Council
U.K	United Kingdom
U.S	United States

## Chapter 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Chapter overview

This chapter will explore the background and introduce the rationale for this study. The study explores what parents in an inner London Borough say helps them attend groups and, in particular, what would help them attend a course about children's psychological development, run by an Educational Psychology Service (EPS). Through this chapter, the national and local context of parenting and early years support is outlined and an understanding of the terms 'parenting programmes' and 'parent engagement' will be shared. Furthermore, the position of the researcher and the aims of the study will be outlined.

### 1.2 National context

Family support became a key agenda on the government's policy in England in the 'new labour' government of 1997 (Cullen, Cullen & Lindsay, 2016). From this, various reports, acts and legislation were written with the family and child in mind. These included Every Child Matters and The Children's Act 2004 (HM Government, 2003; HM Government, 2004). Early years provision received more government funding, which helped set up parenting programmes (Cullen et al., 2016). Subsequent governments commissioned reviews into the benefits of early years intervention (e.g. Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; Tickell 2011) which highlighted the effectiveness of early years intervention on children's outcomes. The reviews explain how an effective early years intervention can have a positive impact on later life (Field, 2010) and therefore promoted continued support of early years intervention, including education and support for parents (Department for Work and Pensions & Department for Education, 2011).

However, following the financial crisis of 2007-2008 (Cullen et al., 2016) this focus on parenting support has been disrupted (Social Mobility Commission, 2017) with centres delivering parenting programmes suffering cuts to funding and, in many cases, closures (Social mobility commission, 2017). There has been some investment into new digital services to offer universal parenting support (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). However, despite a recent study by the Social Mobility Commission (2017) highlighting the impact of parenting on children's outcomes and a continued belief that the early years interventions are influential in terms of later outcomes, this funding stream had been reduced.

Therefore, local authorities are investigating ways to support parents with less funding and resources.

Additionally, following the economic recession, Educational Psychology teams received less funding and many have adopted either a partially or fully traded system (Lee & Woods, 2017). This means that Educational Psychology services are expected to receive income from customers to meet costs (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2013). Many services gain commissioning from a variety of groups including local authorities, academies, social enterprises and parents (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2013). Therefore, there has been a change in the way that Educational Psychologists market and commission their work (Lee & Woods, 2017). One aspect of this change is the possibility of a range of work being 'bought in' by those commissioning them and it also enables projects to be funded via a variety of different sources. With this in mind, there may be an emphasis on finding a way for Educational Psychology Services to trade and fund early intervention work (such as parenting groups).

For any programme to be effective, it must recruit and maintain attendance by those targeted. However, largescale parenting programmes in the UK (such as the CANparent trial; Lindsay et al., 2014) have suffered from difficulties in recruitment (Cullen et al., 2016). In a recent study, Cullen et al. (2016) showed how parental engagement could be dependent on a multitude of different factors, including the availability of parenting support and cultural attitudes towards the concept. Therefore, when conducting engagement research, it would seem appropriate to conduct it within the context in which the parenting programme is to be run.

### 1.3 Local context

This research is set within the context of an inner London EPS in one of the most deprived local authorities in the UK (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015). The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) works within the Local Authority (LA), operating a traded model. The EPS has devised a programme to support parents of children under five years old in their knowledge of child psychological development. The aim of this project is to improve outcomes for children in the Borough by encouraging interaction and positive home learning environments. Similar projects conducted in

Northamptonshire provided parents with information on early experiences and brain development which led to increased parenting self-efficacy, knowledge and improved parent engagement with children (Richer, 2012). The project was funded through the public health grant, which aims to improve health in local populations. In particular, there was a concern raised by the EPS regarding children's development in the early years. However, recruiting parents can be difficult and many larger-scale projects (e.g. CANparent trial, Cullen et al., 2016) have found it difficult to recruit parents to this type of programme. The EP service in this inner London Borough were concerned that parents within the Borough may be hard to recruit and wanted to explore ways to extend their course to parents who may not usually attend such programmes.

#### 1.4 Definitions

There are numerous terms used to describe work in this area and it is important to make the use of the terms used in this study clear. The following section provides definitions as a guide to the general use of the words 'early years', 'parent programmes' and 'parent engagement' within this study. It is to be noted that these terms can be used differently in other papers and contexts.

##### 1.4.1 Early years

The early years foundation stage is defined in the UK as the period from birth to 5 years old (HM Government, 2019). It is usually counted as the phase before compulsory education; in England, children of this age may attend learning establishments such as preschools and nurseries (Department for Education, 2019).

##### 1.4.2 Parent programmes

Many different phrases can be used to describe 'parenting programmes' including 'parent training' (Goss, Belcher, Budhathoki, Ofenedu, Uveges et al., 2018) and 'parenting intervention program' (Mucka & Dayton, 2017). Parenting programmes come in various different forms and can include a variety of different taught and practical information, including a drop in support and training for parents (Social Mobility Commission, 2017).

These programmes are aimed at parents with the purpose of enhancing parenting skills and therefore child outcomes. This means that many programmes are based on the idea that parents can help change their

children's behaviour based on changing their own behaviour (Gross et al., 2018) - an approach based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). The intended outcomes or changes for the children of those who attend parenting programmes depend on the aims of the programme; these can include improved parent-child interaction, language, health, play and behaviour (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Interventions often have similar aims, but the way the groups are run can vary depending on the programme (Gross et al., 2018).

#### 1.4.3 Parent engagement

Research has indicated that it can be challenging to recruit and retain parents on parenting programmes (Baydar, Reid & Webster-Stratton, 2003; Kazdin, Holland & Crowley, 1997). Dumas et al. (2010) summarised that for the parents that enrolled in preventative programmes, 50 – 65% attend their first appointment and, of those, only 50% or less complete the intervention. No matter how effective the parenting programme, without parental attendance the efficacy of the programme and therefore the large scale implementation of a programme is limited (Dumas et al., 2010; Lochman, 2000). Additionally, parents need to attend consistently in order to prevent diminishing returns, as the fewer parents attending the group, the more expensive per parent the intervention becomes (Gross et al., 2011). Therefore, an increase in parent engagement needs to incorporate enrolment *and* attendance, otherwise, the interventions become economically unviable (Gross et al., 2011).

However, what constitutes 'parent engagement' can be viewed in several different ways. Studies of parent engagement may include enrolment, attendance/retention, quality of participation (e.g. Dumas et al., 2010, Dumas et al., 2008) and completion (e.g. Gross et al., 2018).

Ideally, an intervention would aim to have a high enrolment, attendance, active participation and completion rates. However, there are several factors that can impact on parental engagement. Studies can focus upon the predictors of engagement (e.g. age, SES) and/or the practical approaches to remove barriers and enhance motivation (Dumas et al., 2010). For the purpose of this research, parental engagement will be discussed in terms of what would help at the recruitment stage, their initial and continued attendance as well as exploring what might make the group more engaging. The exploration will focus on

provision, activities and content that could be put in place in order to improve 'recruitment' and 'continued attendance'.

### 1.5 Factors influencing parental engagement

It is important to note that barriers and facilitators to engagement with parents can be seen at many different levels, and many studies explore the demographic details that could be associated with lower attendance (e.g. maternal age; Nordstrom, Dumas & Glitter, 2008, lower socio-economic-status and minority ethnic groups; Eisner & Meidert (2011)). However, this research will focus on the provision, group structure and individual motivation to attend, with the aim of allowing these areas to be addressed by the services that are trying to deliver the parenting programme. It is important to note that these factors of engagement can be influenced by socio-demographic indices and this research is not seeking to ignore the importance of these, but instead focus on the provisions that can be made to support parents to attend and engage with these programmes.

These provisions may include providing transportation, childcare and enabling the parenting programme to be close to those attending (Spoth, Goldberg & Redmond, 1999; Spoth, Redmond, Hockaday & Shin, 1996). Provisions necessary to parental engagement can be associated with demographic factors such as work commitments, financial cost, language barriers and cultural mismatch of the services available (Tunstall, Allnock, Akhurst & Garbers, 2005; Churchill & Williams, 2006). These difficulties may be more present in low socio-economic groups (Coie et al., 2003; Eisner & Meidert, 2011) and for parents with lower levels of social support and education (Barnes et al., 2006). Therefore, more provisions may be required in these areas to facilitate parents to access the course (e.g. need reading materials to be adapted or an interpreter; Axford et al., 2012; Gray, 2002; Haggerty et al., 2006; White & Verduyn, 2006). However, all previous research provides a wide picture of potentially influencing factors, but this research aims to specify which provisions might need to be considered specifically for parents in this locality.

Furthermore, this study explores factors that can influence the continued attendance and participation of the group, which current research indicates could be related to the skills of facilitators (Hackworth et al., 2018) and group composition (Houle, Besnard, Bérubé, Dagenais, 2018). Exploring how parents

perceive the group learning experience and suggestions for change would be useful to explore. Individual motivations have previously been shown to be a perceived factor in maintaining parent engagement within the parenting groups (Mucka et al., 2017). Therefore this would also be an interesting area to explore further.

As outlined, research shows that there are a variety of factors that could influence whether parents attend a parenting programme. To accommodate for all of these would be not only costly but potentially unnecessary, as these studies are not necessarily targeting the needs within the local context. In accordance with the Department for Education guidance, which suggests parent support should reflect the local context (DfES, 2006), the local authority service should work towards understanding how to engage parents within this context.

### 1.5 Theoretical perspectives

Parent programmes require adults to engage in group learning within the structure of their current environment. Therefore, the researcher understands that adult learning theories and organisational theories will be important to understand the ability to access and attend a parenting programme. This section will outline how adult learning theory and organisational theory could be applied in understanding parents' engagement with parenting programmes.

#### 1.5.1 Organisational theory

Handy (1999) outlines how, essentially, organisations are 'collections of people' (p.23). In trying to understand organisations, it is important to understand the elements of the organisation that can influence its functioning. In particular, Handy (1999, p.24) focuses on the aspects of 'people' (including motivation, needs), 'power' (including groups, leaders and intergroup relations) and 'practicalities' (including the environment and ownership) in relation to organisational theory, but these areas are by no means exhaustive. For the purposes of this research, the theories developed around 'practicalities' and 'power' are primarily explored. The 'people' aspect of organisational theory is less useful due to personal motivation often being situated within the work context. Therefore, the researcher considered adult learning theory to understand personal motivations.

In terms of understanding the implementation and engagement of parents within a parenting programme, it is important to understand where the power may lie. In particular, the researcher notes that 'resource power' (Handy, 1999 p.127) could be relevant to the engagement of parents. If transport, daycare and distance (as noted before; Spoth et al., 1999; Spoth et al., 1996) are important features of attendance in previous research, it is interesting to note who has the power or perceived power to provide these resources. This power could be within the government, local authority or within the institutions themselves.

Furthermore, all behaviour takes place within a certain ecology (Handy, 1999, p.137). Ecology takes note of the environment that we are situated in, for example, living in the town or the countryside comes with certain environmental impacts. This could be the space people have, the noise that surrounds them, the increased interactions with people or their environment (Handy, 1999). The environments are not unchangeable, but they can have an impact on how people engage in those environments.

Ecological models, such as Bronfenbrenner, (1986) highlight how external systems can impact the family. For example the need to go to work, the social networks and the family within the community (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The pressure or lack of support within these areas could impact on behaviour. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the environment, to understand the impact the environment can have on decisions to engage, or not engage, with certain activities.

It is key to note that in setting up a group where parents come to learn, there are likely to be stages in that group development. Tuckman (1965) outlines that there are four stages of group development. These are proposed to be forming, storming, norming and performing. Each will be discussed in turn for later reflection. The forming stage is when group members establish a relationship with other members of the group and leaders. The storming stage involves individuals testing group norms, and a degree of challenge and conflict is presented to the group. At the norming stage, the group has overcome any resistance and feel cohesive and comfortable in expressing themselves within the group. Finally performing allows the opportunity for groups to structure and resolve tasks. For parents engaging with a group-based parenting programme, it seems integral that the dynamics of the group are considered. If there were



difficulties in the forming stages or challenges at the storming stages were not resolved, it could easily affect parental engagement with a course. How these challenges are resolved may depend on the role different people within the group are given (Handy, 1999).

It is important to note that there are many different models of group development (Connors & Caple, 2005), however, all sequential theories (such as Tuckman's stages) include an initial 'tentative' stage, a stage of 'conflict', then a time where the 'norm' is established, followed by effective 'working' and an 'ending' stage (Connors & Caple, 2005 p.105). Tuckman's (1965) theory has been chosen as it benefits from a history of application and research (Bonebright, 2010) and although it may not yet have been applied to group development for parenting programmes, there is some evidence of its applicability to adult learning courses (e.g. Runkel, 1971). Connors & Caple (2005) suggest that Tuckman's (1965) theory is yet to be proved incorrect or irrelevant to the development of groups; instead new sequential models of group development appear to be built upon, or derive ideas from, Tuckman's (1965) model. Therefore, it is a useful theory to consider when looking at the development of groups.

Handy (1999) provides a broad overview of organisational issues and the discussion of 'power' and 'practicalities' are applicable to the structure of the local authority and the context in which the parenting groups are to be run. This broad organisational theory has previously been used in a variety of different settings (e.g. nursing; Clifford, 2000). Organisation theory has been applied to this research. In particular, it is helpful to use organisational theory to understand the environment, system and group factors that could impact engagement.

#### 1.5.2 Adult learning theory; Andragogy

As noted earlier, parent programmes aim to offer an environment where training and learning occur through guided support. If this training is to be effective, parents will need to learn and incorporate their learning into practice. Therefore it is important to understand how adults learn. Knowles, Holton III & Swanson (1998) proposes an adult learning theory described as 'andragogy'. Just as pedagogy is the 'art and science of teaching children' (Knowles et al., 1998 p.61), andragogy relates to adult learning. A key difference between traditional

pedagogy and andragogy is that pedagogy traditionally assumed that the learner is in a submissive role, whereas andragogy recognises that the learner needs to take a more self-directed role (Knowles et al., 1998). However, it is to be noted that there are many different definitions of pedagogy and theories of pedagogy have moved towards higher levels of learner autonomy and student voice (Waring & Evans, 2014). Knowles et al. (1998) acknowledges that an individual does not make an immediate switch from needing pedagogical practices to andragogical practices. Instead, individuals require increasingly more self-directed learning as they mature.

Knowles et al. (1998) suggest six assumptions of Andragogy. They suggest (1998 p.64-68) that adults 'need to know', the reason for learning. Secondly, adult learners feel a higher level of responsibility for their choices and dependency on a facilitator to teach, can create a conflict between their need to be self-directing and the position as a learner. Therefore, adults have a need for higher levels of self-direction. Thirdly adults come with a higher level of experience and teaching and learning strategies and may need greater individualisation. The fourth assumption considers that adult learners are ready to learn when the learning helps them cope with real-life situations. The fifth assumption is that adults are motivated to learn when the learning will help them overcome current life problems. In a related concept, Knowles et al. (1998) noted the sixth assumption that adults are responsive to internal motivations. For example, adults might want something to change about their own self-esteem or quality of their life and may be less motivated by extrinsic rewards.

Knowles et al. (1998) provided further information on the basis of the theory of andragogy. Knowles et al. (1998) suggested that the principles of clinical and developmental psychology are integral to the development of andragogy and details further the conditions that might help an adult learn. For example, highlighting the value of feeling safe enough to be able to learn. However, for the purpose of this research, the six assumptions as outlined by Knowles et al. (1998) are used as a basis to understand and reflect upon parent engagement with parent groups.

However, it is to be noted that there is continued debate regarding the theory and application of andragogy (Merriam, 2001). One major criticism of the Knowles

(1999) theory is that the self-directed nature of 'andragogy' may serve to ignore the social context in which the adult learner tries to engage (Grace, 1996). Grace (1996) highlights that there are organisational and social restrictions in adult learning. This is why it is integral to consider the organisational factors (as discussed in section 1.5.1) as well as the individual motivations.

#### 1.6 Position of the researcher

It is important that the researcher's position within this research is transparent. The following paragraphs outline the researcher's experience and background.

The researcher is a Trainee Educational Psychologist on placement in an EP service in which this research is being conducted. With a background in philosophy this researcher particularly enjoyed and engaged in modules that focus on social justice and autonomy as well as child development and equal opportunities. Central to these beliefs is the fair distribution of resources and the implications of projects that fail to engage those that are most in need.

Therefore, the researcher was interested in pursuing this research due to its link to the current funding given to the Educational Psychology Service to set up a parenting programme and the researcher's enthusiasm to help inform how to best reach the parents it seeks to serve. The researcher regularly works with parents to try and share resources and knowledge between school, home and other professional services. This work has included helping schools set up parent-based interventions to encourage the discussion of child development and ways to problem-solve around current difficulties.

By providing parents with accessible support, the researcher hopes parents have the opportunity to feel supported enough to help their children develop within their family environment. This research is of particular interest as it provides a link from previous research into parent engagement through to the specific needs and motivations of parents in the Borough. This researcher is particularly interested in conducting research which has a practical application both in terms of the Educational Psychology Service where they are on placement and in their own practice with parents.

#### 1.7 Rationale for the research

Experiences children have from an early age are suggested to be related to their later outcomes (Field, 2010). In particular, the activities parents offer to

their children at home in the early years ('the home learning environment') is associated with later life outcomes (Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons & Siraj-Blatchford, 2004). It is suggested that the home learning environment has a strong impact on cognitive development even when controlling for income, socioeconomic status of the family and parent qualification level (Social mobility commission, 2017; Sylva et al., 2004). Educational Psychologists are encouraged to consider the benefit of intervention and the fair treatment of those involved (BPS, 2009; HCPC, 2016). Therefore investment in the parenting programme set up by the Educational Psychology Service should seek to engage as many parents as possible in order to establish whether it can improve outcomes for children. Recruiting and maintaining attendance is essential for evaluating the outcomes and potentially having a positive effect on children. Therefore, the need to understand how to engage parents within the local authority is essential in supporting parents to attend the groups.

Local Authorities' resources are limited, and in recent years their funding has been reduced (National Auditing Office, 2014). With limited resources, it is even more important to consider the fair distribution of these (Beauchamp & Childress, 2001). Information around engagement may help employ effective use of the resources provided to the EPS to run the course.

This would also be important to the continuation of the project and ethical use of the funding. This research will seek opinions from parents from a broad range of experiences, including those who have yet to participate in a parenting group. Therefore, it will seek views from parents who are rarely spoken to in regards to engagement (those who have not initially engaged with the group). This research seeks information from participants who are under-researched and who may be key to understanding how to reach parents who do not usually attend parenting groups.

Parents may be part of complex family and social environments and may have a multitude of factors that could influence attendance. This research aims to give the EPS an opportunity to consider how to make this programme fair and accessible to parents in a range of different social contexts. Therefore, this research hopes to highlight factors that parents of children in the early years in an inner London borough perceive to be important to engagement.

## 1.8 Chapter summary

This chapter provided an overview of the national and local context of the research, including understanding how parent engagement is important to the wider project within the researcher's local authority. This is within the context of changes in funding from governments towards early years services.

Additionally, the terms 'early years', 'parenting programmes' and 'parent engagement' were discussed and defined for the purposes of this research. An introduction of the broad factors influencing engagement enabled an understanding of the areas of focus for this research, and the position of the researcher was outlined. Finally, the rationale for the research, as linked to the local context in which it was conducted, was outlined.

## Chapter 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Chapter overview

The following chapter will provide an overview and critique of relevant research and literature on parents' engagement in parenting groups. The purpose of the literature review will be outlined in section 2.2; the systematic approach to the literature search will be stated in section 2.3 (including the inclusion and exclusion criteria). The research will then be analysed and critiqued in section 2.4 and finally, a summary provided in 2.5 and 2.6.

### 2.2 Purpose of the literature review

This literature review aims to provide a systematic search of the literature to synthesise relevant ideas about parent engagement in parenting groups. This literature review aims to place the current study within the context of previous research, examining papers that should help frame the research within the broader research currently being conducted. This review aims to answer the question 'What are the flexible factors that are suggested to influence parent engagement with face to face parenting programmes for children in the early years'. In particular, individual motivations, group environment and provisions have been prioritized through the use of the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

### 2.3 Systematic approach to the literature search

This search used the stages of a literature search as described in Booth, Sutton & Papaioannou (2016, p.111-113). The stages of the search: are an initial 'scoping search', followed by 'conducting the search', a 'bibliography search' of the papers and 'verification' and 'documentation'. The 'scoping search' identifies and evaluates the breadth of the literature. 'Conducting the search' includes a comprehensive search of databases with key search terms. The 'bibliography search' uses reference lists in order to identify additional relevant studies. Verification includes checking papers and revising search strategies. Documentation requires the researcher to record how they conducted their search. Together, these develop a comprehensive understanding of the available literature.

#### 2.3.1. Scoping search

In December 2017 a scoping search for reviews and journal articles that discussed parenting programmes and/or parent engagement was conducted.

This process enabled the researcher to understand the available literature and research published.

Using Booth et al. (2016) the researcher reviewed the electronic databases listed (p111-113) and reviewed their coverage for relevance to parenting programmes. Through this, databases related to the subject field areas were identified. The databases identified were: Education Resources Information Centre, British Education Index, PsychInfo, science direct, Cochrane Library and SCOPUS. Additionally, key reviews (such as Axford, Lehtonen, Kaoukju, Tobin & Berry, 2012) were read to get an overview of the research that has been conducted within parent engagement.

Furthermore, this scoping search helped gain a broad understanding of the literature surrounding parent engagement and helped develop possible areas for the interview and focus group questions.

### 2.3.2 Conducting the search

During October 2018 several searches through the key databases outlined above were conducted. Initial searches in Psychinfo revealed that broad search terms such as 'parent\*' AND ('engagement' OR 'participation') lead to over 16,000 results alone. Due to the lack of specificity in terms, many papers did not refer to parenting engagement with programmes. Following this, the researcher searched for 'Parent\*' AND ('Parent group\*' OR 'Intervention') AND ('engagement' OR 'participation'), this retrieved 1844 results. However many papers appeared to review parent engagement with their child or school following an intervention. Therefore search terms were adapted to specify the interest of parent engagement within parenting programmes. It was decided that searching the freehand for ('parent\* group' or 'parent\* program\*') and ('parent participation' or 'parent engagement') revealed the most relevant articles to the question outlined above. Furthermore, the researcher searched for thesaurus terms relevant to parent programmes or parent participation within each database. Searching each of these databases freehand and with thesaurus terms lead to a combined total of 1,317 papers. Initial filters for papers were applied using automated database limiters. These limiters varied according to the database, see table 2.1 for details on the filters applied. Following these filters, 562 papers were left to be reviewed according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria which will be outlined in the following section. After removing

duplicates and conducting a bibliography search, there were 11 papers to help inform the literature review question. The final number of papers selected for the in-depth review satisfy the requirements of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. See table 2.1 for database searches and final papers.

Table 2. 1

Database Search in October 2018

Database	Search Terms	total	Filters applied	Final papers After criteria applied
Cochrane central register of controlled trials	("Parent* Program*" OR "Parent* group*" ) AND ("parent engagement" OR "Parent participation")	40	(from 2008) 34	Morawska, Nitschke & Burrows (2011)  Dumas, Begle, French & Pearl (2010)
British education index	(DE "parent education" OR "Parent* group*" OR "Parent* Program*" ) AND ("Parent participation" OR "parent engagement" )	31	(journal article, from 2008) 16	Cullen, Cullen & Lindsay (2016)
ERIC	("Parent* Group*" OR "Parent* Program*") AND (DE "Parent Participation" OR "Parent engagement" )	351	(journal article, English language, from 2008) 39	Nordstrom, Dumas & Gitter (2008)  Dumas, Moreland, Gitter & Nordstrom (2008)
Psychinfo	(DE "Parent Training" OR DE "Parenting Skills" OR "Parent* group*" OR "Parent* Program*") AND (DE "Group Participation" OR DE "Parental Involvement" OR "Parent Participation" OR "Parent engagement")	177	(from 2008, English language, journal article) 110	Hackworth et al. (2018)  Gross et al. (2011)
Science Direct	("Parent* group*" OR "Parent* program*" ) AND ( "Parent participation" OR "parent engagement")	275	(2008 and journal article) 117	Axford, Lehtonen, Kaoukji, Tobin & Berry (2012)



Table 2. 1

Database Search in October 2018

Database	Search Terms	total	Filters applied	Final papers After criteria applied
SCOPUS	("Parent* group*" OR "Parent* program*" ) AND ( "Parent participation" OR "parent engagement" )	443	(from 2008, English language, journal article)  246	Houle, Besnard, Bérubé & Dagenais (2018)  Mucka et al. (2017)
Bibliography search	A hand search of reference lists			Rahmqvist, Wells & Sarkadi (2014)

## 2.3.2.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

In order to find relevant papers to answer the question ‘what are the individual motivations, group environment and provisions that are suggested to influence parent engagement with parenting programmes for children in the early years’ inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. See Table 2.2 for all inclusion and exclusion criteria; the following sections will outline the justifications for each of the criteria listed.

Table 2. 2

Summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria (based on Pettigrew &amp; Roberts, 2006)

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Paper characteristics	Published from 2008 Journal article Written in English	Published prior to 2008 Papers not written in English Literature reviews and meta-analysis
Population	Parents of children 0-6 year's old, special populations included. Practitioners involved	Involvement with parents that have children over 6 years old.

Table 2. 2

Summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria (based on Pettigrew & Roberts, 2006)

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Intervention	<p>with parents 0-6 years old.</p> <p>Parents' engagement with a facilitator led group aimed at parent training.</p> <p>Any variable related to individual motivation, group factors or provision.</p>	<p>Parent's engagement with groups that are not face to face and/or group based.</p> <p>Parent led group</p> <p>Not a parent programme</p> <p>It is related only to demographic details only.</p> <p>Interventions are focusing on supplemental behaviours (e.g. alcohol or drug abuse). Other programmes or general centres.</p> <p>Mandatory courses.</p>
Outcome	Findings related to parent engagement.	Outcomes are related to something other than engagement e.g. the success of the parent programme
Context	Parent group specific context (see intervention), all	

Table 2. 2

Summary of inclusion and exclusion criteria (based on Pettigrew & Roberts, 2006)

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
	countries papers considered.	

#### 2.3.2.1 Inclusion criteria

In order to answer the question posed at the beginning of this literature review, it was important to include relevant papers. The first relevant factor was ensuring that the papers reflected modern views about engagement with parenting groups. The researcher decided that due to the financial crisis of 2007-2008 environmental conditions across the globe are likely to have shifted. It would be valuable to understand parent engagement within this new context. Therefore papers from 2008 were included. Papers that have been published in journals were included as a degree of checking and verification provided by the journal they are published in, and there was a requirement for the research to be published in English in order for the researcher to be able to access it. Through the scoping search, it was apparent that many of the early years parenting interventions targeted parents of children who are 0-6 years old and therefore this was the age needed to be included in the search. Papers that included practitioner and parent views were included, as the literature review question is interested in the group and provision factors as well as individual motivations and practitioners may provide different perspectives on this. Face to face parenting groups were included as it is most relevant to the literature review question and to the research in general. It was important that the findings of engagement were related to groups aimed at improving parenting, but it was not necessary for the parents to have attended the group.

#### 2.3.2. 2 Exclusion criteria

Papers published prior to 2008 were excluded to maintain a degree of relevancy. Papers that were not published in journals were not included and reviews and meta-analyses were not included due to the difficulties in checking for the relevancy of the paper according to the criteria (e.g. age of the child). Papers that suggested that they were working with parents of children over 6 years old were not included in order to facilitate the exploration of engagement

for parents of children in the early years. As the literature review question is looking at individual motivations, group dynamics and provisions, therefore papers looking at demographic details were not included. Furthermore, parents who had engaged in online or individual courses would potentially stray too far from understanding the group and provisions needed to participate in a face to face group course. Therefore all distance based parenting courses were not included. Mandatory courses were excluded due to engagement (in terms of attendance) being necessary and therefore providing a different picture of engagement. Furthermore, programmes that did not relate to parenting, but were for parents e.g. parent led support groups or alcohol programmes were not included due to the perceived difference in the aims and outcomes of these groups. Papers that only relayed information about attendance on outcomes of the programme were also excluded. For numbers of papers that did not meet the criteria for inclusion please see table 2.3.

*Table 2. 3*

Number of papers excluded

Exclusion criteria	Number of papers
Not written in English	1
Review – literature, book or meta-analysis	22
Child over 6 years old	66
Not face to face or group based	31
Only focused on demographic details	9
Outcome not about parent engagement	224
Parent led group	6
Not a parenting programme	177
Mandatory group	3
Duplicates removed	10
Papers included from database search	10

## 2.4 Overview of papers

The literature focused on factors that could encourage enrolment, attendance, engagement and completion of an early years parenting programme. The studies investigated the structure or provisions that would need to be available (e.g. appropriate referral, interpreters), the group factors (e.g. group dynamic) and individual motivations (e.g. financial incentives or personal goals), that can influence engagement in group-based parenting programmes for the early years. For an overview of the papers please see table 2.4. As the researcher

wished to explore the individual motivations, group environment and provisions that are suggested to influence parent engagement, quantitative and qualitative papers were included. The researcher also used Tracy's (2010) 'big-tent' criteria to further explore the papers. Although designed only for qualitative research it provided a framework to consider all papers together acknowledging the 'topic', 'rigour', 'sincerity', 'credibility', 'resonance', 'significant contribution', 'ethics' and 'meaningful coherence' of the papers. Each of these criteria will be briefly outlined in turn, based on Tracy (2010, p.840). The 'topic' of the research can be considered in terms of the subject matter being timely, relevant, significant and interesting. The 'rich rigour' asks one to consider the theoretical constructs, sample, context, data collection, analysis of the research and the time spent in the field. The 'sincerity' refers to the self-reflexivity of the researcher and transparency about the methods being considered. The 'credibility' is judged through detailed description, triangulation, multivocality and member reflections. The 'resonance' of the papers can be judged by how the research influences the reader through its evocative representation, generalisations and transferable findings. The 'significant contribution' considers the ability for the research to contribute conceptually, practically, morally or methodologically. The 'ethics' should consider procedural, situational, relational and exiting ethics and finally, the 'meaningful coherence' asks the reviewer to consider whether the study follows through with its aims, uses methods that fit with its aims and connects literature, research questions, results and interpretations together. This criteria is very broad and the researcher believed that this breadth would assist in reading a variety of types of studies. The researcher made notes in these areas in order to structure the reading of the papers and quality assuring the papers (see Appendix A for details).

Table 2. 4

An outline of the papers to be included in the literature review

Authors	Type of study	Country	Further information
Axford Lehtonen, Kaoukji, Tobin & Berry (2012)	Mixed methods	United Kingdom (U.K)	<p><b>Outline:</b> This case study outlined a variety of systemic changes made to recruitment in a parenting programme (3-4 year olds). Following the changes, they assessed engagement rates (attendance and referrals).</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> Attendance to one session: increased from 62% to 70% following additional interventions.</p> <p>Completion rate: Increased from 50% to 53% after additional intervention. Significance not tested.</p>
Cullen, Cullen & Lindsay (2016)	Mixed methods	U.K	<p><b>Outline:</b> This study interviewed 42 interview providers of the “CANparent” trial (parents of 0-5 year olds) and thematically analyses these to understand parents’ participation. It also offered survey data of parents at two points in time.</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> Professional views – parents were resistant to universal parenting support, professionals reported that parents hold stigma regarding parenting classes and parents have other sources of parenting support. It was suggested that there is a concern about paying for parenting support.</p> <p>Parent views – 50-53% of parents agreed to the statement ‘...parenting classes should be something that all parents should be encouraged to do’. Only 37-39% agreed that ‘it’s better</p>

Table 2. 4

An outline of the papers to be included in the literature review

Authors	Type of study	Country	Further information
			to talk to professionals than family and friends' and 42-44% agreed that parenting classes should only be free if parents cannot afford to pay.
Dumas, Begle, French & Pearl (2010)	Quantitative	United States (U.S)	<p><b>Outline:</b> Parents of 3-6 year olds participated in the PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) program and were either given a monetary incentive or no monetary incentive to attend the 'PACE program'. Parent engagement was measured through intent to enrol, enrolment, attendance and participation quality. The more sessions attended the more money participants gained.</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> 23.6% (30) of those enrolled never came to sessions in the no incentive condition vs. 76.4% (97) in incentive condition. A significant difference was found in attendance between two conditions when all parents were included. However, when those who enrolled but never attended were removed, it became non-significant, suggesting incentives encouraged parents to enrol but not attend.</p>
Dumas, Moreland, Gitter, Pearl, & Nordstrom (2008)	Quantitative	U.S	<p><b>Outline:</b> This study assessed engagement and SES, ethnic or belief match between group leaders and parents. Using the PACE parenting program to measure attendance, retention and participation (parents of 3-6 year olds).</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> Attendance was higher and parents remained longer when group leader was comparable SES background to themselves (less than 10% of variance though). Attitude and</p>

Table 2. 4

An outline of the papers to be included in the literature review

Authors	Type of study	Country	Further information
			value match not related to engagement. Ethnic match only predicted retention. Ethnicity match not mediated by SES or belief match not mediating factors. Further discussion as to the other factors that could influence SES and ethnic match and continued attendance discussed.
Gross, Johnson, Ridge, Garvey, Julion, Treysman et al. (2011).	Quantitative	U.S	<p><b>Outline:</b> This study assessed the impact of using discounts on childcare bill as a motivator for engagement (enrolment, attendance and engagement in the Chicago parent program (parents of 2-4 year olds). Discounts depended on parent's weekly childcare bill.</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> There were no significant differences in attendance, parents' motivations for enrolling or parents engagement in the sessions by condition. Enrolment was non-significantly higher in discount condition than the control condition.</p> <p>The author discussed problems in parents receiving the discount, many parents either did not recall or did not receive the discounts on time. Only 2.2% of parents identified the discount as most important reason for attending.</p>
Hackworth, Matthews, Westrupp,	Quantitative	Australia	<p><b>Outline:</b> This study used regression models to assess individual, programme and contextual influence on participant enrolment, retention and involvement on community based parenting programme (two programmes spanning 6-36month old children).</p>



Table 2. 4

An outline of the papers to be included in the literature review

Authors	Type of study	Country	Further information
Nguyen, Phan, Scicluna, et al. (2018)			<b>Findings:</b> Retention in the group programme for infants and toddlers was associated with barriers, including logistic difficulties (child routine, transport, work commitments) and family related barriers. In the toddler group the belief that the child was not benefiting also associated with lower retention.
Houle, Besnard, Bérubé & Dagenais (2018)	Mixed methods	Canada	<p><b>Outline:</b> This study used concept mapping to find out what influences parent recruitment based on the opinions of those involved. Participants were parents with children of under 5, or Practitioners or administrators working on preventative parent programs for parents under 5. The participants were highly involved in the generation of statements and mapping the statements together.</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> The areas deemed important to engagement were mapped under the headings of practitioner, parent, policies, organisation and service.</p> <p>Practitioner: knowhow and soft skills, recognition and valuing, and reliable.</p> <p>Parent: motivated and responsive to their needs, climate of security, enjoyment and trust.</p> <p>Service: Accessible, flexible and group composition</p> <p>Organisation: Positive image, accessible promotion, inter-institution networking, and facilitating social policies.</p>

Table 2. 4

An outline of the papers to be included in the literature review

Authors	Type of study	Country	Further information
Morawska, Nitschke & Burrows (2011)	Quantitative	Australia	<p><b>Outline:</b> This study tested whether parent or professional video testimonials impact on parent perception (child age <math>m=3.97</math>) of the parenting programme using rating scales. Understanding parents' attitudes towards attending parenting programmes following testimonials.</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> It was suggested that the testimonials made parents feel more confident in the parenting programme and encouraged to try the parenting programme. However no significant difference between ratings of the programme following expert or parent testimonial. Proposed to be a ceiling effect because parents viewed the programme positively generally.</p>
Mucka, Dayton, Lawler, Kirk, Alfafara, Schuster, et al. (2017)	Qualitative	U.S	<p><b>Outline:</b> This study used motivational interviewing to understand mothers' reason for participating in the 'mom power' parenting intervention programme. Content analysis and grounded theory used.</p> <p><b>Findings:</b> It was reported that Mums want a welcoming environment for them and their children, to enhance their parenting. 44 of 64 parents reported expectation to help their child, 58 noted that they expected to improve their parenting, 61 reported an 'expectation related to bettering themselves'.</p>
Nordstrom, Dumas, &	Quantitative	U.S	<p><b>Outline:</b> This study controlled for demographic features to understand barriers and facilitators to intent to enrol, enrolment and attendance at PACE parenting (child age 3-6 years).</p>

Table 2. 4

An outline of the papers to be included in the literature review

Authors	Type of study	Country	Further information
Gitter (2008).			<b>Findings:</b> More personal and family obstacles associated with lower attendance. Low parenting efficacy associated with low engagement, in line with parent attributional process model, higher efficacy higher enrolment. Parent cognitions were attributed to 20% of unique variance. Fewer time and scheduling barriers increased intent to enrol, actual enrolment and attendance
Rahmqvist, Wells, & Sarkadi, (2014).	Qualitative	Sweden	<b>Outline:</b> Following the triple P intervention parents were interviewed to understand why parents participated. Responses were thematically analysed. <b>Findings:</b> The themes related to engagement (not evaluation) were about wanting to learn more, to seek help about specific problems and because of advertisements and recommendation from friends.

## 2.5 Literature review

First, the structure and provisions that need to be put in place in order to ensure initial access to the group will be examined. Six studies considered an aspect of the structure or provisions needed to enable parents to engage in parenting programmes. These studies suggest that better information and structure around the referral process, equipment, advertisement, childcare provision and extra money for refreshments, administration, crèche and interpretation could increase referrals and enrolment, but may not be sufficient to increase completion rates (Axford et al., 2012). These resources were also found to be important to practitioners, parents and administrators involved in early years parenting programmes (Houle et al., 2018).

### Systems level

Axford et al. (2012) considered the logistics of setting up a parenting group to try and improve referral, enrolment and completion of the parenting group. They gained feedback (via an online survey and 'mystery shopper' calls from researcher impersonating parents) into a group parenting programme. From this feedback, Axford et al. (2012) determined that difficulties in recruitment may be because the referral process was unclear, there was a lack of knowledge who could refer and who was responsible for referring. In addition, a lack of advertising materials meant that there was uncertainty in how to sign up for the programme, the venue or timing of the programme. Additionally, provisions and incentives to attend were not advertised (free crèche, interpretation services, transport, refreshments, certificates and financial sum). It was noted that some of these provisions (such as transport, crèche and interpretation) were considered by the service providers to be beyond their financial and staffing capacity. Axford et al. (2012) addressed these issues by briefing partner agencies about the programme and referral process. They provided additional support to ensure the rooms were equipped, provided extra money for areas that were perceived as 'beyond capacity' and recruitment adverts were extended to new areas (e.g. Supermarkets).

Following these changes referral rates increased from 25% of eligible parents to 55% of eligible parents and attendance at the first session increased from 62%

to 70%. However, it is worth noting that completion rates only increased from 50% to 53%. Axford et al. (2012) do not test for statistical significance, and even if this were a consideration, it would be hard to determine to which extent the new factors had influenced the increase in recruitment, attendance and completion. Supporting evidence for the benefit of additional provision comes from Hackworth et al. (2018), this research suggests that logistic difficulties (e.g. transport, medical appointments and work commitments) are associated with lower retention in parenting programmes. Furthermore, Nordstrom et al. (2008) note that parents who reported fewer barriers related to time and scheduling predicted higher rates of attendance. In a study by Rahmqvist, Wells and Sarkadi (2014) parents reported that successful use of promotional brochures and posters at the pre-school they attended encouraged them to enrol. Therefore removing barriers through providing provision and successful advertising are likely to be a feature in engaging parents in parenting programmes.

Axford et al. (2012) provide some logistical and practical considerations when developing provision to engage parents in parenting programmes. However, how these were identified as solutions to specific problems were unclear. For example, the analysis of the information they received through the survey and mystery shopper phone calls was not outlined, and therefore potential bias in interpretation and conclusions were not made explicit.

Houle, Besnard, Bérubé and Dagenais (2018) used a more explicit method of considering engagement for those involved in a prevention programme for parents of children between 0 to 5 years old. They used the process of concept mapping, which is clearly outlined in a 6 step process. The participants (parents, practitioners and administrators involved in a prevention programme) generated, grouped and rated statements. The researcher then performed an analysis on how the statements are clustered together (using hierarchical cluster analysis), how each cluster is related to each other (using multidimensional scaling) and calculated mean ratings to determine importance. Finally, names were attributed to each cluster by participants and researchers.

This process of determining the factors that are important to enrolment and recruitment is transparent, and participant lead. Houle et al. (2018) found that several service factors were perceived to impact on attendance. This included

flexible enrolment, choice of time, cost, day-care, accessible and diversified promotion and communication and accessibility (e.g. group composition). The concept map helpfully provides a visual representation of the factors important to parent engagement and brings together the views of practitioners, parents and administrators. This study highlights the various areas that different actors in parenting groups may consider important to engagement.

Implementing appropriate systems and provisions is not the only factor in attendance. The group dynamic may influence the attendance of sessions. Four studies examined aspects of the group dynamic (both facilitator and/or other group members) that can impact on enrolment, attendance, engagement and completion. From these studies, it is apparent that socio-economic match and ethnic match of facilitator with parents may be associated with engagement (Dumas et al., 2008). Trust in the facilitator may encourage enrolment (Nordstrom et al., 2008) and soft skills from the facilitator and a warm group environment were also highlighted as areas that could influence parental engagement (Houle et al., 2018; Mucka, 2017).

#### Group level

Dumas et al. (2008) aimed to find whether ethnic match, socio-economic-status (SES) match, attitude match or value match of parents and facilitators were predictive of point of dropout, attendance, or quality of participation in the course. The SES match was gained by a measure of yearly family income, marital status and education. Measures of value and attitude match asked questions mainly in relation to attitudes towards parenting.

Dumas et al. (2008) found that when the parent's ethnicity and socio-economic-status were not matched by the group leaders, parents dropped out earlier on average than if they were matched. Furthermore, socio-economic-status was shown to be predictive of attendance and quality of participation. However, they all accounted for less than 10% of the variance and so did not account for a large degree of the variation. Interestingly, attitude and values match were not predictive of any of the three dependent variables. Attitude match was correlated with ethnic match, however not correlated with dropout. Therefore the requirements for mediation were not met.

As Dumas et al. (2008) explained this study was conducted in America with mainly African American or European American parents and group leaders. Therefore this may not apply to other ethnic groups. Additionally, it may be that there are other processes that account for the influence of SES and ethnicity matches. For example, Dumas et al. (2008) noted that matched SES and ethnicity may increase the perceived relevance of the intervention (Flaskerud, 1986) or reduce the fear of judgement from a facilitator with dissimilar ethnicity or SES (Vorauer et al. 1998). It is possible that the effect of ethnicity match could be overcome if the practitioner possesses the skills to address any concerns and create a welcoming and warm environment.

Houle et al. (2018) identified several practitioner factors that are important in recruitment for parenting programmes. This included 'know how' and 'soft skills' and providing a welcoming and unpressured environment. Houle et al. (2018) defined 'know-how and soft skills' as a non-pressured, non-judgmental environment for the parent. Houle et al. (2018) noted that parents require an environment of security, trust and enjoyment. This included feeling like their child is safe and feel like they will enjoy themselves. Mucka, et al. (2017) give further evidence that the group environment may help recruitment. Mucka et al. (2017) used an attachment based parenting and self-care skills programme to help high risk mothers and children under 6 years old. The programme aimed to strengthen mother-child relationships. Key to this group is to build safety and trust with the facilitator of the group and with the group itself. Mothers reported that they wanted the group to be a 'fun and social environment' (10/64 mothers), where their children could 'play and interact with other children' (17/64 mothers). Therefore the group environment was perceived to be important to parents. Furthermore, Hackworth et al. (2018) reported that higher ratings of group cohesiveness in the infant group were associated with retention on the course.

Nordstrom et al. (2008) suggested that parents who showed trust in the leaders had higher enrolment rates. Although group dynamic and facilitator skills may need to be carefully considered in order to help parent engagement, Hackworth et al. (2018) noted that (self-reported) facilitator skills were not linked to retention, but were associated with parent's active involvement. Facilitator skills within the group have varying effects, this research indicates that facilitator skills

are important to parents. The perception of trust in the leaders of a group may be associated with higher enrolment and active involvement, but it may not directly link to continued attendance.

#### Individual level

Therefore other factors may be influential in retention. Studies have explored whether individual motivations are important in engagement. Two of studies (Gross et al. 2011 and Dumas et al. 2010) offer an insight into the impact of offering monetary incentives as motivation to attend. Additionally, studies (e.g. Mucka et al. 2017) explored parents' personal motivations for attending the parenting group, and Cullen, Cullen & Lindsay (2016) explored parental attitudes towards parent groups.

Using monetary or equivalent (e.g. child care discounts) as an incentive to attend parenting interventions derives from the application of the behavioural theory of operant conditioning (Skinner, 1953). It is the idea that financial incentives are a reward to reinforce behaviour and therefore encourage attendance at groups. Two studies used money to incentivise attendance at the parenting groups, Gross et al. (2011) gave individual discounts based on a parent's weekly childcare bill. The Chicago childcare centres had over 90% of its families considered as low income, and the parents were of children between the ages two and four. The parents were enrolled in the Chicago parent program (Gross, Garvey, Julion & Fogg, 2007) and were assessed on parent enrolment, attendance (number of sessions attended) engagement (active participation as perceived by group leaders), motivation for enrolment, children behaviour problems and demographic details. Gross et al. (2012) found that there was a non-significant difference for enrolment, attendance and engagement for parents enrolled in the discount condition (n=93) than parents in the control condition (n=81). Although, attendance and engagement between the control and the discount condition, were in the hypothesised direction. In order to understand these results better, Gross et al. (2011) contacted parents in the discount condition that attended at least one session to see if and when they received the discount. Out of the 71 parents that attended at least one session in the discount session 85% were interviewed via telephone. Gross et al. (2011) explained that 34 parents reported receiving the discount while still attending, but 14 reported receiving discounts after the programme ended and



13 did not recall receiving it at all. Gross et al. (2011) suggest three reasons for parents not recalling receiving the discount, either the discount was too small to remember, the number of sessions they attended too few to notice the effect or it was not big enough relative to the childcare bill. Therefore, Gross et al. (2011) explored whether monetary incentives were a motivator to attend through a survey. Gross et al. (2011) found that only 2.2% of parents identified the discount as the most important reason for attending anyway. Instead, parents cited the most important reasons to attend were to become a better parent and learning better ways to communicate with their child; this was the same for both discount and non-discount conditions. This indicates that whether or not money had been received on time, it may not have provided much motivation to continue attending the course.

Dumas et al. (2010) offered further support as to the limited use of monetary incentives. Dumas et al. (2010) offered a financial reward for parents to attend sessions, the incentives became larger as more sessions were attended (e.g. \$3 for the first two parenting sessions attended, \$6 for the next two etc.). The program was the PACE parenting program run in daycare centres in Indiana for parents of children between the ages of three and six.

Dumas et al. (2010) found that incentives encouraged some parents to enrol, but not to attend sessions. As there was a difference in demographics between the financial incentive and non-financial incentive groups, Dumas et al. (2010) suggests that younger, socioeconomically disadvantaged parents may be more likely to enrol given monetary incentive. However, overall the incentive condition did not result in enrolment in greater numbers, attendance of sessions or participation within the sessions. Dumas et al. 2010 noted that monetary incentive commonly includes attendance and enrolment together. This study separates enrolment from attendance and recognizes that financial incentives may only impact enrolment, not attendance. Through anecdotal evidence collected during the study, Dumas et al. (2010) suggested that the incentives might even “cheapen” parents’ participation. However, it would be beneficial to have gathered more structured qualitative feedback to understand this lack of difference.

These studies indicate that, at most, monetary incentives appear as an initially attractive idea that could increase enrolment, but struggles to have an impact

on the engagement of parents of early years children in parenting programmes beyond this point. Personal motivations may be more important in the continued engagement of parents in parenting programmes, rather than external rewards. Houle et al, (2018), further confirm this by offering evidence that parents are motivated by the perception of the usefulness of the service in terms of a concrete and positive outcome for them or their child following the intervention. Parents' personal motivations were rated the highest in relative importance for engagement, however, it should be noted that all the clusters of statements received a high rating. Therefore, not much weight can be put to the order of the statements. Hackworth et al. (2018) offer some support of the findings that parents are motivated to attend through getting help for their child, as a multivariate analysis of retention found that believing the child was not benefiting from the programme was associated with lower retention and participant involvement. This suggests that the programme needs to continue to meet the expectations and goals throughout the sessions in order to retain parents.

Mucka et al. (2017) explored further what areas parents might want to improve in. They used motivational interviewing techniques as part of an initial individual session before entering the group. From the interviews, Mucka et al. (2017) found that parents were motivated by getting help for their child, improving their parenting and bettering themselves. It was noted that there were certain areas mothers reported to want to help in, including learning about separation and their child's personality. Fifty-eight mothers reported wanting to have help with parenting, including working with the child's father, discipline techniques and understanding the child's behaviour. Parents also reported personal benefits including, having an activity, to be able to cope with stress, improve their communication or socialising skills, making friends, learning and having fun. Therefore motivations may come from the benefit it will have for the child, the family or personal benefits for attending a parenting programme. Rahmqvist et al. (2014), offer further qualitative information regarding motivation for parents to engage in the Triple P parenting programme. Rahmqvist et al. (2014) suggested that being able to solve and resolve everyday issues was important to parents. Hackworth et al. (2018) note that retention to parenting programmes is linked to whether there was a perceived benefit to their child in attending. It

would be interesting to understand whether continued progress or benefit in the areas noted by Mucka et al. (2017) would be associated with continued attendance.

It is important to note that these motivations may be a driving force for joining, however, there can be personal perceptions that may make parents reluctant to join a group. Cullen, Cullen & Lindsay (2016) reported on practitioners and parent perception about parenting programmes. Cullen et al. (2016) suggested that there are barriers in parent engagement due to parental attitudes towards universal parenting programmes. They explained that 'stigma associated with parenting classes', 'resistance to universal parenting support', the 'availability of other sources of parenting support' and 'paying for parenting support' all contributed to a reluctance to attend. They explained that there was a stigma around parenting classes because they were perceived as applicable only for "dysfunctional" parents. Suggesting that parenting classes are not the 'norm' and only target parents who are perceived to not be coping. Cullen et al. (2016) suggest that longer term and more commonplace parenting programmes might help normalize parenting groups. This would suggest that this stigma exists due to the lack of provision in universal parenting programmes. However, it could also suggest the need to change parent perceptions of parenting courses. Simply having more parenting groups available would not necessarily increase acceptability or attendance of parents. Furthermore, practitioners noted that parents had many other sources of support, which are accessible, trusted and stigma-free (e.g. Family, midwives, health visitors). Therefore, parenting programmes may be at a natural disadvantage compared to these other forms of support. This highlights the need for groups to be seen as a judgment-free zone so that they can be viewed as complementary to other sources of support (Houle et al., 2018).

In Rahmqvist et al. (2014) study parents cited interest in attending the triple P programme because of recommendations from partners or other parents. Morawska et al. (2011) sought to test whether using testimonials could increase attitudes or behavioural intentions in relation to the Triple P parenting. In order to try and increase positive perceptions and interest in parenting groups, Morawska et al. (2011) showed parents testimonials (from parents or experts) about the triple P parenting group. No significant impact of testimonials (parents

or experts) were found to increase their attitudes or behaviour intentions in relation to the programme. This was found to be the case whether or not the message used a positive frame or a fear-based message. Morawska et al.(2011) found that there was a ceiling effect on parents' ratings, which may have impacted on the ability to see if there were any effects following the testimonials. More sensitive measurement of parents' perceptions of parenting groups may have been better used to evaluate impact. Alternatively, it could mean that parents already had a positive perception of the group and there wasn't much room to improve this.

In line with Morawska et al. (2011), Mucka et al. (2017) found that the mothers they interviewed had positive expectations for parenting programmes. There could be several reasons for the discrepancy between Cullen et al. (2016) and Mucka et al. (2017) and Morawska et al. (2011). It is possible that Cullen et al. (2016) gained information from a different subset of parents. Not only was Cullen's study in the U.K as opposed to Mucka et al., (2017) in America and Morawska et al. (2011) in Australia, but the U.K survey had a larger participant base. This may have meant that they were able to derive their sample from a wider range of people and views.

However, Cullen et al. (2016) reported that 50% - 53% of participants thought parent groups are something that all parents should be encouraged to attend. Therefore around half were prepared to agree with quite a positive statement (i.e. all parents should be encouraged to join a parenting programme). Overall, this provides an unclear picture about whether parenting programmes are seen by parents in a negative light.

In summary, parents appear more motivated to attend parenting groups when the reward is intrinsic (e.g. meeting personal goals) as opposed to extrinsic (financial rewards), and parents may continue to need to see the positive outcomes of attending the group during the group sessions. It is interesting to note that motivations to attend may be at odds with the parental stigma surrounding parenting programmes

## 2.6 Summary of literature review

Overall the literature for parent engagement for early years programmes indicates that the systems around the parent group need to be well set up and

provisions well-funded and advertised in order to increase referral rates (Axford et al., 2012) and attendance at the first session. However, group factors can influence engagement and potentially retention, with mismatches in parent and group leaders SES and ethnicity associated with dropout rate (Dumas et al., 2008). However, if the facilitator is skilled in providing a warm environment, this has been suggested to improve recruitment (Houle et al., 2018; Mucka et al., 2017), and Hackworth et al. (2018) indicated that facilitator skills may help with participation but not necessarily attendance. A key factor is likely to be individual motivations in attending and it appears that monetary incentives could be effective in getting parents to enrol but may not be very effective in increasing retention (Dumas et al., 2010). Instead, a focus on the benefits, both to the child and to the parent might motivate parents to attend (Houle et al., 2018; Hackworth et al., 2018 & Mucka et al., 2017). However, those running parenting groups must be aware of the general stigma that may exist around parenting groups, which may discourage enrolment and participation for some parents (Cullen et al., 2016). It is important to note that all of these factors are likely to interact with each other, for example, without the correct provision and systems in place there is likely to be low enrolment, even if parents have personal motivations to attend. It is also possible that parents may not engage if there is not a warm and friendly environment, therefore may not reap the benefits of the things they are learning and could perceive that the course is not helping them towards their goals and decide to drop out early.

While developing a new parenting course, this study aims to identify the factors that parents deem important for engagement for the cohort being asked to join. The previous research offers a varied picture, from parents all across the world engaging in different programmes. It is useful to use this to consider what parents of children in the early years within an Inner London Borough believe to be important in order to shape the programme as it progresses. This research asks open-ended questions around the areas of advertising, attendance, retention, content and group dynamics. The structure of the proposed research will enable participants to expand on their views, enabling discussion around some more vague ideals, e.g. 'warm environment' to be exemplified and expanded upon so that it can prove useful to the practitioners utilising this information.

## 2.7 Research questions

Following the literature review, it is apparent that there is a multitude of factors that could influence engagement. In particular, it would be interesting to look at the engagement of parents within the local context of this inner London borough and understand what could attract them to a programme run by the EPS, what could hold their interest and what they consider barriers to recruitment and attendance.

Therefore, four research questions are proposed:

RQ1. Key research question: What do parents say has helped them engage in groups?

RQ2. What would attract parents to a programme run by the EPS?

RQ3. What could be put in place to hold parents' interest in the group?

RQ4. What do parents consider to be barriers to recruitment and continued attendance?

## 2.8 Chapter summary

This literature review aimed to systematically search and critically review the relevant research in a way that frames the current study. The results of previous studies were outlined and are further considered in the discussion section to help understand these results. The research questions were outlined at the end of this chapter.

## Chapter 3 Methodology and data collection

### 3.1 Chapter overview

This chapter outlines the ontology and epistemology underpinning this research. This provides the basis for understanding the research questions, design and technique. The recruitment of the research participants is discussed, including the different stages and participant details. The method of data collection and data analysis is outlined and the epistemological position is linked to the chosen analysis. Finally, ethical issues are discussed, alongside methods of addressing these.

### 3.2 Ontology and epistemology

According to Crotty (1998), all research stems from a researcher's ontological and epistemological viewpoint. Ontology is the nature of existence or study of being (Crotty, 1998). An ontological position outlines what exists for us to know (Willig, 2008). For example, a realist ontology asserts that reality exists independently from the mind (Crotty, 1998). Epistemology is how knowledge can be created, attained or communicated (Cohen et al., 2007). For example, an objectivist believes that they can objectively find out about reality without the influence of the mind or consciousness (Crotty, 1998). Although there is some debate as to whether ontological beliefs necessarily influence epistemological standpoints (Crotty, 1998), some epistemological beliefs can only fit with certain ontological positions (Cohen et al., 2007). For example, in order to gain objective knowledge, reality has to exist separately from the perceiver. The epistemological position then influences the research questions and the method of discovering this knowledge (Danermark, Ekstrom & Jakobsen, 2002; Crotty, 1998).

#### 3.2.1. Epistemological Position of this research

Objectivism asserts that a researcher can remain unbiased and detached from the knowledge that they discover. This view has suffered criticism as all objects are perceived through our senses and all knowledge communicated through a form of language (Danermark, 2002). Therefore, differences in perception and interpretation of language can make an objectivist position difficult to defend. This criticism of objectivism led to an increase of relativist positions. One such position holds that we cannot know of any reality beyond the reality of socially constructed meanings (Danermark, 2002). This idea, in itself, can be a

problematic statement; if no truths exist beyond the construction of truth, then a relativist may struggle to assert the universal existence of relativism (Danermark, 2002).

This research assumes a critical realist ontology and epistemological position. There are many different forms of critical realism (Danermark et al., 2002). The critical realist ontology adopted for this research suggests that reality is independent of the perceiver and has consistent enduring features (Bhaskar, 1978). However, knowledge of this objective reality is biased and only knowable through fallible theories (Cruickshank, 2003). These biases are influenced by political, social and cultural values (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson & Norrie, 1998). The critical realist researcher recognises that the self is socially mediated and that the self is neither divorced from nor reducible to social structures (Cruickshank, 2003). The critical realist researcher recognises the fallibility of scientific enquiry and fragility of knowledge (Danermark et al., 2002). Therefore the critical realist accepts that objective reality may exist, but the knowledge of it may be in some way distorted, although it is not knowable how or by how much it is distorted (Howitt, 2016). Therefore any researcher's observations and experimentation may not completely reflect the real world (Howitt, 2016).

Critical realism recognises that the knowledge gained from data may be fallible and flawed, but this does not prevent us from finding some shared understanding of reality. Therefore, a critical realist position can be used in qualitative data collection to find similarities between responses, with the aim of improving our understanding, whilst acknowledging the fallibility of their findings (Cruickshank, 2003). Critical realism theory is well placed to help inform current situations and influence change (Fletcher, 2017), the information gained from this research hopes to support recommendations for the implementation of the future child development programme to be offered by the Educational Psychology Service.

### 3.3 Research Design

Qualitative research aims to collect a rich description of phenomena, aiming to capture a deeper understanding of the individual's perspective and how these are situated within the social world in which they live (Howitt, 2016). This is an exploratory piece of research aiming to understand what parents perceive to



impact on their engagement. Therefore a qualitative exploration using semi-structured interviews and focus groups was used to ascertain what factors may support engagement. The following section will outline the details and reasons for these methods and the data analysis that was employed.

### 3.4 Research technique

This research used semi-structured interviews and focus groups in order to collect qualitative data. Both these forms of data collection enable open questions to be answered in a detailed and full way, whilst maintaining some structure and direction as to the areas discussed (Howitt, 2016). The unique contribution of each data collection type is outlined.

#### 3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are a method of collecting detailed, rich and extensive qualitative data. Therefore, it is ideally suited to research that seeks to discover the views and opinions of those interviewed (Howitt, 2016). Unlike the structured interview, which requires the researcher only to ask pre-set questions of participants, the semi-structured interview provides flexibility to explore and expand on participants contributions. This fits neatly with the researcher's epistemological viewpoint of critical realism, as the semi-structured interview enables researchers to clarify their understanding of participant's contributions and therefore acknowledge and hopefully reduce the researcher bias in the data collection phase. Furthermore, the semi-structured interview may have a more conversational flow to it, which could help the participant to feel more at ease during the interview. This might prove especially important if parents may be reluctant to respond due to the positioning of an Educational Psychologist as a 'professional' and the perceived power difference that may come from this (Davies & Harré, 1990).

#### 3.4.2 Focus groups

Focus groups share some of the same structures as the semi-structured interview. For example, the interviewer asking questions and moderating the flow of conversation. However, the focus group enables a more dynamic interaction between participants, enabling the exploration of a topic area and generation of ideas through discussion (Howitt, 2016). It is a useful tool to explore significant areas, generate conversational data and evaluate findings. For this research, focus groups were utilised with existing groups, where the

dynamic of the participants would encourage a rich discussion and the pilot focus group proved helpful in creating and adapting questions to suit interviews for the study.

### 3.5 Pilot interview and focus group

The pilot interview took place in May 2018 and a pilot focus group in June 2018. The parents that attended the interview and focus group had a child under 5 years old and resided in a different Local Authority to that in which the research took place. The purpose of the focus group and interview was to trial the structure, questions and equipment needed for both methods of data collection. All but one parent required their child to be present due to difficulties with arranging any childcare and the focus group had an imposed time limit due to parents' commitments.

As a result of the pilot interview the researcher considered feedback and made the following adjustments (See Appendix B for focus group and interview schedule):

- Time constraints due to children being present meant that questions that overlapped were condensed. For example, a question that asked about access to the course overlapped with a question about what practically would need to be in place. Both questions brought about similar discussions and stilted the conversation as it encouraged repetition, therefore this was condensed into one question.
- The researcher developed further flexibility in helping parents expand on points, using additional prompts and questions to facilitate this.
- Questions on the interview schedule were written to more closely relate to the focus group topics so that responses could be joined together at the point of analysis.
- Due to parents having their children with them, question style and additional time were needed to ensure parents understood and could reply to the questions fully, whilst being able to respond to their child's needs.

### 3.6 Selection criteria for research participants

The selection of participants was dependent on a number of factors and deciding upon the participant group was discussed within the context of the intended groups to be run by the EPs. The Educational Psychology Service intends to run their courses in children's centres and nurseries in the Borough but wished also to engage parents outside of these venues. Therefore purposive sampling of parents who attended children's centres, nurseries and health centres was sought.

#### 3.6.2 Recruitment

Purposive sampling of parents who currently have a child of under five years old was employed. Parents were recruited via a variety of Early Years services within the Local Authority including children centres, health clinics and nurseries

Managers of children centres were contacted and given an overview of the research and asked to request permission to recruit from within their attendees. The managers provided the researcher with names of group leaders within the children's centres to contact and provided information on health services to contact. The researcher contacted the group leaders and joined sessions to explain the aims of the project and seek parents' involvement in the research. The researcher also contacted nurseries within the local authority, explained the purpose of the research and visited these settings to explain the purpose of the research.

#### 3.6.1 Focus groups participant

Three participants took part in a focus group. All three participants were already attending the pilot of a child development programme as run by the Assistant Educational Psychologist. They were all mothers of children aged 1 year and under. One parent also had another child. The participants' age ranged between 27 and 39 years old. Two participants were British, and one participant was Romanian. None had requested the use of an interpreter for the focus group. They had all previously taken part in children centre groups, including three pilot sessions for the EPS 'psychological development of babies' programme. Due to childcare demands, they attended the focus group with their children. The assistant educational psychologist joined the focus group to ensure the technical set up and help parents feel comfortable in contributing their points. For full details of the parents that joined the focus group, please

see Table 3.1. All pseudonyms were gained from a google search appropriate to parent's gender and nationality.

Table 3. 1

Focus group participants

Pseudonym	Relationship with child	Age of child under 5	Nationality	Languages other than English?	Interpreter needed?	Participation in parenting groups
Lucy	Mother	11 months	British	No	No	Yes, weekly
Charlotte	Mother	10 months	British	No	No	Yes, weekly
Alexandra	Mother	1 year	Romanian	Yes	No	Yes, a few times a week

### 3.6.2 Interview participants

Eight interviews were conducted. Seven mothers and one father participated. Three parents were recruited from the children centre, two from the health clinic and two from a nursery. Clarke, Braun and Hayfield (2015) suggest that 6 to 15 qualitative interviews should be carried out for interviews to be analysed via thematic analysis for the purpose of doctoral research. They were parents of children from age 3 months to 3 years old. Two parents also had other older children. The participants' age ranged between 26 and 46 years old. Parents reported to be British, Czech, British Asian, Indian or St Lucian and although some reported speaking languages other than English, none had requested the use of an interpreter for the interview. Three parents were recruited from the children's centre, three from the health clinic and two from the nursery. Five of the eight interviewed, reported that they had not previously taken part in any courses, training or groups aimed at parents. All interviews took place in a room in the children's centre or in a nursery and (with the exception of the nursery interviews) parents attended the interview with their youngest child. For further details of the parents that were interviewed, please see Table 3.2.

Table 3. 2

## Interview participants

Pseudonym	Relationship with child	Age of child under 5 years	Nationality	Languages other than English?	Interpreter needed?	Participation in parenting groups
Freya	Mother	1 year	Indian	Yes	No	No
Amir	Father	3 years	British Asian	Yes	No	No
Laura	Mother	10 months	Czech	Yes	No	Yes, 8 weekly course
Hannah	Mother	3 months	British	No	No	Yes, once or twice
Megan	Mother	5 months	St Lucian	Yes	No	No
Sarah	Mother	6 months	British	Yes	No	Yes, one for 5 weeks
Daisy	Mother	3 and 2 years	English	No	No	No
Olivia	Mother	3 years	English	No	No	No

### 3.8 Data collection and analysis

#### 3.8.2 Method of data collection

Gaining rich data on parents perspectives of what helps them to engage with groups can be achieved using a variety of qualitative methods (Howitt, 2016). Qualitative research often aims to concern itself with meaning (Willig, 2008). It aims to describe and explain events but not to predict (Willig, 2008). Willig (2008) explains that the choice of method of data collection will depend on the research question and the type of data sought from it. As part of deciding upon methods of data collection, it was necessary to consider the research question and the participant group.

In this project, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were used (Howitt, 2016). Both focus groups and interviews can provide rich historical information and are useful when the topic can be difficult to observe; it also enables the researcher to influence the line of questioning (Creswell, 2014). Both methods also have their own advantages and disadvantages which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

The focus group enabled the researcher to structure the conversation, introduce topics, and encourage interaction (Willig, 2008). The benefit of a focus group is that participants can respond to other participants' contributions and can help form rich data where points are expanded upon (Willig, 2008). As focus groups benefit from participants already being acquainted in order to better interact with each other, the focus groups were formed from parents that were part of the same group (Willig, 2008).

However, collecting data through a focus group can cause problems, including not hearing the voice of quieter members of the group due to dominating voices, and some areas of discussion may be avoided if they are more socially difficult to discuss (Willig, 2008). Semi-structured interviews enabled areas of interest areas to be explored and elicit open answers encouraging elaboration and detail (Howitt, 2016). When agreeing to a focus group, it is necessary for all participants to be available at the same time. Interviews offered an opportunity for parents who may find it difficult to attend a fixed time to engage with this research at a time convenient to them (Willig, 2008).



### 3.8.1 Procedure

The interviews were conducted in a quiet space where confidentiality could be maintained. For parents attending a course at the children's centre or at nursery, a space within these sites was found. For the parents attending the health clinic, interviews were held at a local children's centre.

Semi-structured interviews require several open questions to be prepared in advance and the interviewer is then able to use additional prompts and questions to support conversation (Wengraf, 2001). Participants had an opportunity to read the participant invitation letter, sign the consent form and additional information (see Appendix C). The interview and focus group contained introductory comments, key questions, prompts and concluding comments (Robson, 2011). The researcher built rapport at the beginning and throughout the interview. The flexibility of a semi-structured interview enabled the interviewer to support parents in understanding the questions. Flexibility was required depending on the parent's experiences of parenting programmes and group training. Kvale (1996) notes that as the interviewer does not offer a similar level of spoken reciprocity as the interviewee may feel bereft. Therefore it was important to debrief participants and remind them of places of support (see Appendix D). This was done through reference to the debrief sheet following the interview.

The interviews were recorded through a Dictaphone and transcribed. The focus group was recorded through a Dictaphone and video camera. The recordings were transferred onto a password secured computer, transcribed by the researcher and checked for mistakes.

### 3.9.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is an effective method of finding, analysing and summarising themes (or patterns) in qualitative data sets (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As thematic analysis can be used in many different ways and is often used without explicit labelling (Braun & Clarke, 2006), it is important to outline the purpose and method the thematic analysis was used in this research.

The theoretical position of the researcher is essential in understanding how thematic analysis has been interpreted and applied (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

For example, a researcher who holds a naïve realist view, may consider that the thematic analysis process simply represents and configures the voice of the participants, however a subjectivist researcher recognises their own influence on the data and may be more aware of the impact of the interpretation and application of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the researcher is a critical realist, thematic analysis offers an opportunity to access an imperfect reality through joining together themes between participants. The critical realist acknowledges that access to reality will be mediated by the experience and understanding of the participant and the researcher (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). The aim of this thematic analysis is to group together parents' responses, whilst recognising that some of the themes may be subject to the researcher's interpretations and biases.

#### 3.9.4 Using thematic analysis; epistemological position

Thematic analysis as a data analysis technique can be used by researchers who hold a variety of different epistemological or theoretical positions. This is because thematic analysis can be used for different purposes; from the objective to the experiential (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was used in this research as a way to understand and reflect reality through collecting parents' common experience together (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The thematic analysis process will enable conclusions about common themes to be drawn from the data whilst acknowledging the fragility and fallibility of the resulting conclusions.

#### 3.7.5 Approaches to thematic analysis

Thematic analysis can be applied in different ways (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The way in which thematic analysis is applied depends on the theoretical assumptions, research questions and the data collected (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). Clarke, Braun & Hayfield (2015) outline various methods of grouping and analysing data using thematic analysis including inductive, deductive, semantic, latent, descriptive and interpretative. A researcher looking to understanding the meaning that lies underneath the data (e.g. world views) may use latent thematic analysis in order to ask the question about what would lead someone to have made this statement or assumption (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). It is possible that a thematic analysis may have more than one approach to it, for example, someone may use deductive analysis to apply

theories to coding and theme development and apply interpretative thematic analysis to decipher the deeper meaning of the data that is presented.

Thematic analysis can be used to understand links between data and can bring multiple interviews together, in this way it can be used to combine many shallow interview data or a few very rich and detailed data sources (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). It also is an appropriate method of data analysis when the question is exploratory, as inductive thematic analysis can enable research questions to be refined following the responses given and therefore works well with unknown data with open-ended questions (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015).

However, no matter which version of thematic analysis is employed, it does not provide unbiased results, as coding and themes will be influenced by the researcher's input. Therefore results will need to be considered carefully in terms of the researcher's experience and input.

#### 3.9.6 Approach used in this research

This research was analysed using an inductive, descriptive thematic analysis. In the inductive analysis, the researcher discovers themes through considering the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, through the process of familiarisation, the researcher asked some deeper questions regarding the data. Through this analysis, the researcher aims to describe and summarise patterns of meaning within the data (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015).

The thematic analysis was carried out using the suggested six phases of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The stages outlined by Braun & Clarke, 2006 are as follows:

- 'Familiarisation' – This includes listening to audio recordings, making notes, reading and rereading the transcripts.
- 'Coding' – A process of identifying, classifying and categorising the data. This is the first step in finding patterns in the data. Each code will have a name e.g. 'child care' and a definition of the code e.g. 'child care needed to attend the group' (Joffe, 2011).
- 'Searching for themes' – This involves clustering together codes in order to find key patterns in the data. This is not a

passive activity by the research and instead is an active process whereby the researcher compiles clusters of codes together.

- 'Reviewing themes' – Themes will then be checked to see if they fit with the coded data and whether they have a distinct concept. This is an opportunity for themes to be reviewed or revisit a previous stage.
- 'Defining and naming themes' – Creating a written definition of each theme which ensures clarity of each theme concept.
- 'Writing the report' –The data themes will be summarised and analysed, and conclusions will be constructed through looking across themes. The understanding of each theme concept will be discussed by the researcher.

Central to the creation and ordering of themes is the notion that what is of importance is not the most common statements, but instead, that they are the most meaningful ones (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to note that the process of theme development is part of a review process and revisiting previous stages in order to develop and adapt themes is usual (Howitt, 2016). As outlined in Braun and Clarke (2013) themes cover patterns in data and codes that do not appear to fit, do not sit within initial candidate themes or appear irrelevant may be able to be categorised under miscellaneous for later review/inclusion.

This analysis joins together the experiences and perspectives of different parents to reach some common reality. Therefore this type of analysis fits with a critical realist ontology and epistemology. During analysis, the researcher acknowledged the biases from participants and their own fallibility in interpretation. Therefore, the researcher will consider the reliability and validity of this research

### 3.10 Validity and reliability

Good qualitative research is not determined by the same criteria as quantitative research; it does not aim to find objective findings or a sample size that will produce statistically representative outcomes (Yardley, 2000). However, there are methods and techniques to check for the quality of qualitative research.

(Creswell & Miller, 2000). The following section will outline the steps taken to ensure quality assurance in this research (as guided by Creswell, 2014).

Quality of data is ensured by considering its qualitative validity and reliability (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative validity can be referred to as trustworthiness, credibility or authenticity (Creswell & Miller 2000). Validity refers to the checks that are employed by the researcher to ensure the accuracy of the findings. Reliability in qualitative research is the judgement of whether the approach is consistent or stable (Creswell, 2014). In the following paragraphs, the steps to ensure validity and reliability will be described.

### 3.10.1 Validity

Validity in qualitative research considers how well the research has been conducted and whether the results are useful and trustworthy (Yardley, 2008). There are several strategies that can help reinforce the validity (Creswell, 2014), and those employed in this research will be discussed in turn.

a) Triangulation of data is a way of gaining different data sources in order to justify the themes created (Creswell, 2014). This research aimed to gain perspectives from different groups of parents. Participants were recruited from different groups and environments, they are likely to have had multiple different experiences, i.e. going to courses and baby groups, having a young baby or an older child. This variety of experiences and methods of contacting parents helped to expand the range of information the researcher would find. Additionally using focus groups and interviews helped provide different structures for parents to voice their opinion.

b) Reflecting on the thoughts, actions and decisions taken by the researcher helps to understand any researcher bias, making the influence of the researcher explicit helps to create an honest depiction of the research (Creswell, 2011). Reflexivity was employed throughout the research process in order to be aware of researcher bias. Reflexivity is an awareness of the researchers values, interests, beliefs, political commitments, social identities (personal reflexivity) and consideration of how the research was designed, the limits of the data, how it could have been investigated in a different way and other possible interpretations of the data (logical reflexivity; Willig, 2008). Yardley (2000) notes the

importance of the researcher being aware and reflecting upon the socio-cultural impact of their data collection. It is also important to make explicit in writing the interview context and to use direct quotes when exploring a theme (Creswell, 2014). In coding, the researcher was aware of not adding value judgments to the overall themes and including a variety of codes within the theme.

c) Finally, the researcher aimed to find variation within the theme, seeking discrepant information that may run counter to a theme (Creswell, 2014). As this research aims to have a variety of parents with a range of experiences with different groups, it is important for evidence of disconfirming cases to also be acknowledged. In the discussion section of this research, findings which did not fit appear to join with the other codes, but may offer an interesting insight to parents' thoughts and feelings about the interview process and their part in it are reported and reflected upon.

### 3.10.2 Reliability

Reliability is the process of working towards research being consistent and stable Creswell (2014). Creswell (2014) uses Gibbs (2007) as guidance on creating a reliable data set for thematic analysis. This includes checking for accuracy of transcription, consistency of themes and cross-checking coding.

Recordings were transcribed by the researcher and read through to check for mistakes (Gibbs, 2007). Once the data had been checked for mistakes, the data was read through to discover general ideas and impressions, which were noted down by the researcher (Creswell, 2014).

### 3.11 Ethics

Ethical approval was gained from the University of East London (UEL) (see Appendix E). The research was conducted according to the guidance produced by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2009; BPS, 2014) and the HCPC (2016) standards of conduct, performance and ethics for educational psychologists.

#### 3.11.1 Ethical issues in the current research

It was important to ensure consent, confidentiality, and anonymity to conduct ethically sound research. The researcher carefully considered the environment of the interview, the questions that were asked and the signposting to further

support following the interview. This was to ensure that there was a low risk to both parents and interviewer whilst this research was conducted.

The researcher recruited participants and gained informed consent through contacting early years' services and children centres in the Local Authority and presented the research to parents in a friendly, non-pressurising way. The researcher outlined the research to parents and gave the opportunity for them to provide contact information and to sign up for an interview. Parents were provided with an information sheet and a consent form which was written in clear English and easy to understand (Appendix C). Parents also had the option for the information sheet to be read to them and for any additional questions to be answered. The consent form includes information about the purpose, how the data will be used, what is required of them and the right to withdraw (Aurini, Heath & Howells, 2016). Parents were made aware that the interviews will be recorded and transcribed and that they have the right to withdraw from the interview at any point (See Appendix C).

All interviews were conducted individually in a quiet space within a children's centre or a nursery. This ensured confidentiality within the space. All participants were given pseudonyms for the purposes of transcriptions, and all names of individuals and names of places were removed to ensure anonymity. The audio recordings of interviews were kept until the audio was transcribed and checked. The transcriptions use pseudonyms rather than the names of individuals. The anonymised data was shared with the researcher's supervisor and are available to examiners. Additionally, an anonymised summary of the research will be shared with the Educational Psychology service within the local authority.

The questions in the semi-structured interview aim to address what supports parents to attend groups. Therefore the questions being asked are framed positively and should not cause any undue harm. However, parent engagement has been associated with social isolation, mental health and drug addiction (Axford et al., 2012) and it is important that the researcher is aware that these topics may arise. If necessary, the researcher can signpost the parent to other services. After the interview, the researcher can provide the participant with details of the local and national support available through the Local Authorities website.

### 3.12 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the meaning of ontology and epistemology and the epistemological position of the researcher as a critical realist. This chapter provided a link between the epistemological and ontological position and the research questions, design and technique. Details of the participants in this study were outlined and the stages of recruitment provided. The method of data collection and analysis was shared and how this links to the epistemological position. Finally, a discussion of the ethics of the research was shared.



## Chapter 4 Results

### 4.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter will explore the interview and focus group data using an inductive thematic analysis. The process of understanding the data derives from the text.

This chapter outlines the process of the thematic analysis and the results gained from it. First, an overview of how the results are linked to the proposed research question and theory is outlined. Then the process of thematic analysis is explained, including initial thoughts regarding each interview and the focus group, then the process of coding and revising codes is shared. Finally, details of the final thematic map, with overarching themes, main themes and subthemes are explored. An overview of the findings is outlined before each theme is explained and quotations are included to exemplify and evidence the themes.

### 4.2 Overview of results

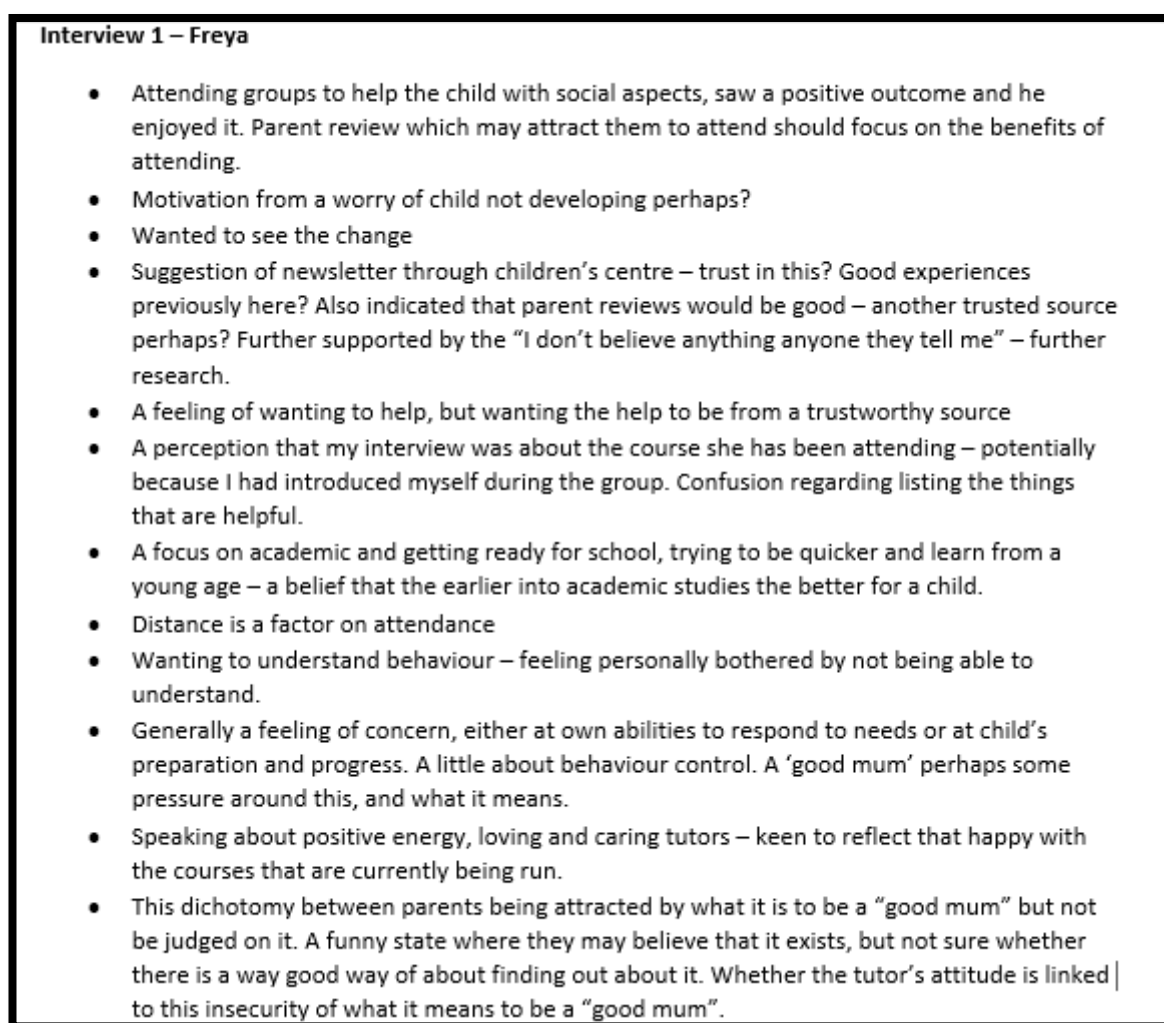
Through the process of inductive thematic analysis, the research questions were answered, and as will be discussed in the next chapter, the results were in line with the organisational and adult learning theories proposed in the introduction. The research questions will be linked to the themes in the discussion section.

These questions can be answered through an exploration of the overarching themes of 'factors to attract' (see section 4.5.1) which highlights that parents want to learn in areas they are interested in and would be attracted to a course through familiar and trusted sources of advertisement (e.g. health clinics, parent recommendation). The overarching theme of 'maintaining interest and attendance' (see section 4.5.2) which highlights the participant's value of supportive staff and the variety of activities and resources as well as being aware of the continued benefit of attending. The final overarching theme explained is 'barriers' (see section 4.5.3) where parents spoke about practical barriers (e.g. timing, lack of childcare) and personal barriers (e.g. lack of confidence).

In the following section, the process of analysis and development of these themes will be outlined and exemplified.

### 4.3 Initial reading and understanding of the data

As outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), it was integral to the process to engage with a data set through reading, listening to audio-recordings and making notes of initial observations. This included understanding and describing the data, but also questioning the data, looking for assumptions that underpin their words, trying to understand their world view, underlying feelings and implications (this method of questioning was derived from Clarke, Braun and Hayfield (2015)). This process enabled the researcher to start thinking about each interview as a whole and to understand the concepts being discussed. For an example of the notes that were asked and answered during the familiarisation stage, please see Figure 4.1.



*Figure 4. 1* An example of notes taken during the data familiarisation stage

### 4.4 Coding

The data was then coded initially using semantic codes (codes that closely reflect the information in the data) and latent coding (coding that moves beyond

what is explicitly stated) (Braun & Clarke, 2013). As noted by Clarke, Braun & Hayfield (2015) most analysis contains a mixture of both latent and semantic codes. This was an inductive process whereby text was coded according to the information they held, rather than the application of the theory or research question. Initial coding was ‘complete coding’ (as opposed to selective coding) where each line was read and coded according to the meaning it was perceived to hold. This meant that the text was read for meaning and coded according to the information held within the text, therefore several lines of text might be coded together to accurately portray the meaning (Howitt, 2016). This approach was used to keep the coding stage as inductive (derived from the data) as possible (please see Appendix F for example of coding). As stated by Clarke, Braun & Hayfield (2013 p.234) a ‘code identifies and labels something of interest in the data’. The codes were defined and the quotes under each code were brought together for review (Howitt, 2016).

Code	Interview	line	Def: health based practises to advertise/share
Share through GP/health	4 Hannah	25	Doctors that might be another one to have a few up there
	6 Sarah	69-72	Sarah: Email, posters, also leave stuff at the GP.  Interviewer: Okay  Sarah: Because some women, I mean, I regularly, well I try to be regular, come and get baby weighed. Checking her progress, at that point, it's ideal, because that's your main contact. I mean yesterday it was really busy

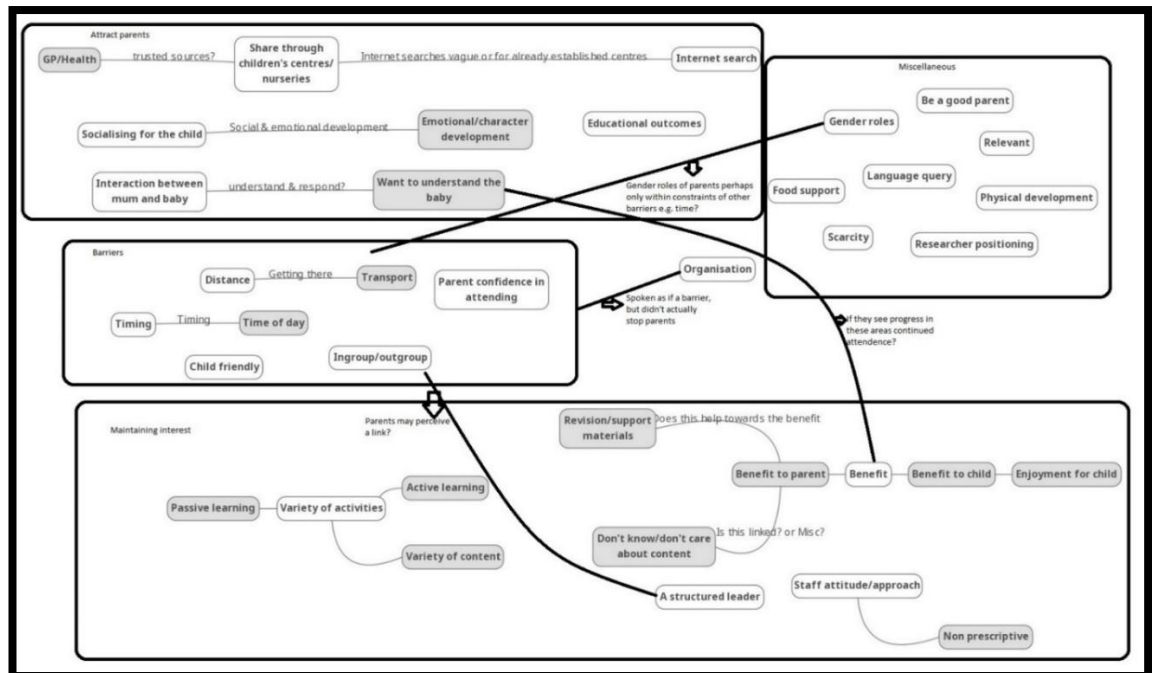
Figure 4. 2. This figure shows an example of collating quotes under codes to review

#### 4.5 Themes

Identifying themes is a process of understanding a ‘central organising concept’ (Braun and Clarke 2015). Themes were created through bringing together similar codes and gaining an understanding of what unifies these codes (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). For phase 3 ‘searching for themes’ the researcher printed all codes and grouped similar codes together. The researcher wrote potential themes for the code groups on paper, this process included active movement in grouping codes and adjusting theme names to represent the grouped data.

For this process, the researcher categorised codes that dealt with similar topics and labelled them under a theme. This process was done physically at first (please see Appendix G for photographic example of the physical grouping of codes) and then the final grouped codes were mapped graphically and

questioned. Figure 4.3 visually shows the process of coding and grouping codes into themes.



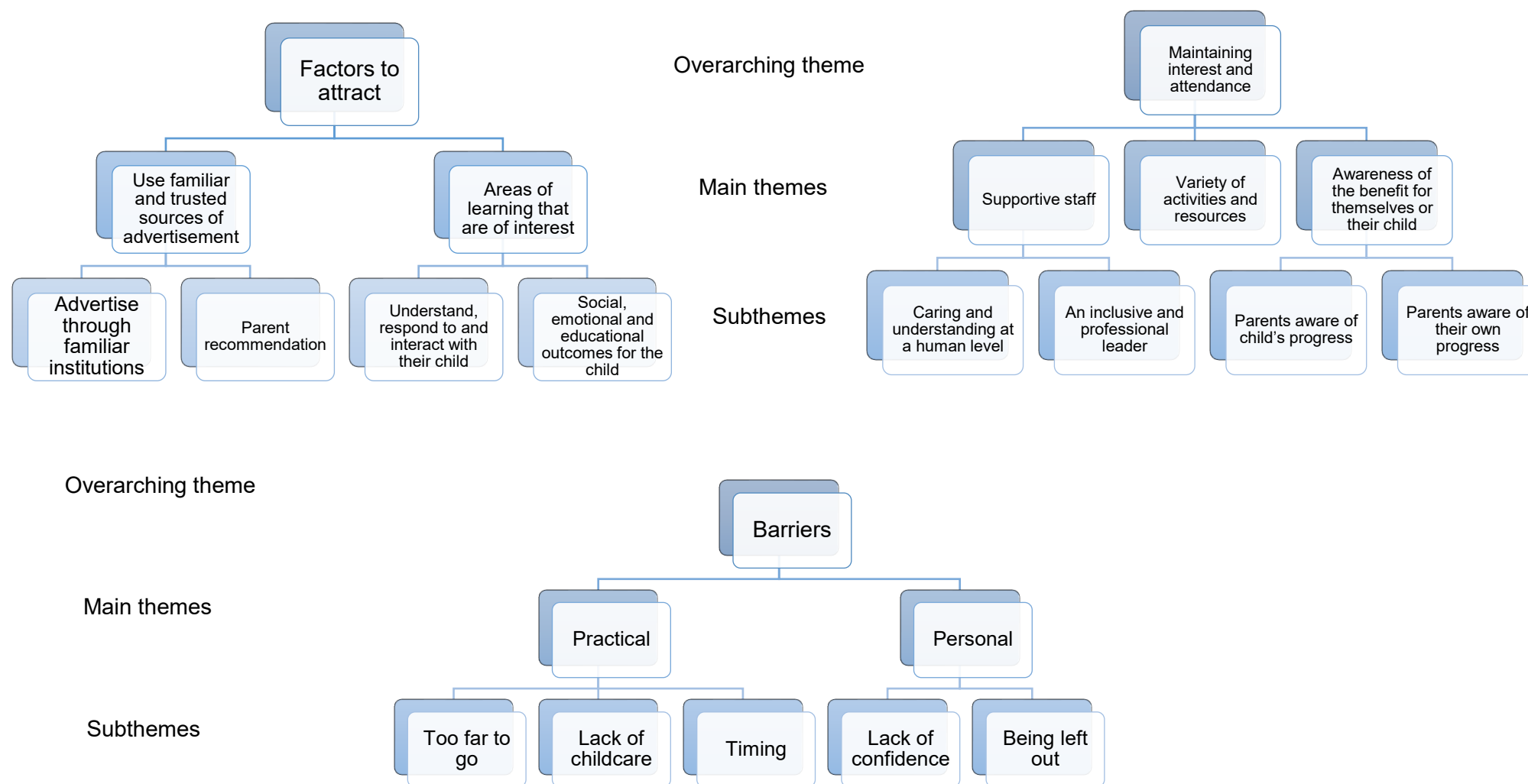
*Figure 4. 3* A visual representation of the process of codes and the creation of themes. The researcher has annotated the map with questions and connections that appeared throughout the process.

Following this, the researcher reviewed the themes. Themes were reviewed in relation to the collated data for each theme and the whole data set (Clarke, Braun & Hayfield, 2015). Finally, the themes were defined and named, the following sections will explain the final themes gained from the data.

The following overarching themes were created from looking at the data:

- 1) Factors to attract
- 2) Maintaining interest and attendance
- 3) Barriers

Derived from these overarching themes, the data was grouped into main themes and subthemes. The map of these themes is depicted in Figure 4.4.

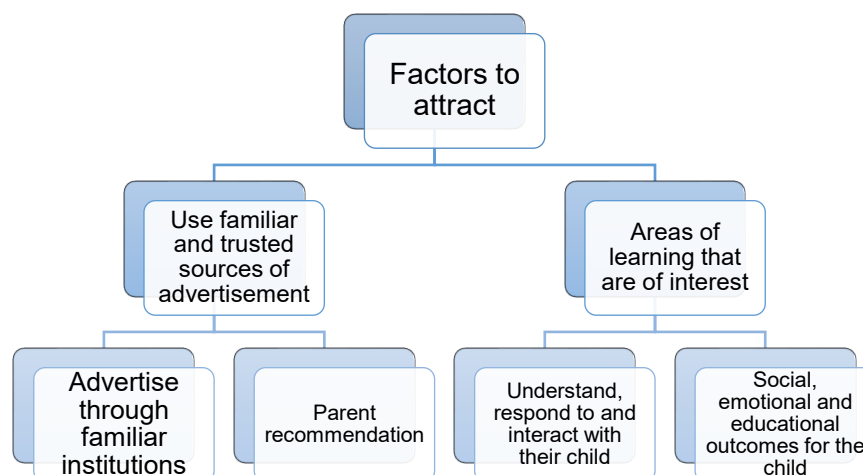


*Figure 4. 4* Final thematic map of all themes. The themes are hierarchical. At the top of the map are overarching themes, the main themes are underneath and subthemes.

#### 4.5.1 Factors to attract

This overarching theme highlights areas that parents deem attractive or would attract them to a course. Finding the right places to advertise and gaining an understanding about what should be advertised to gain parents interest is the first step to engagement with any course.

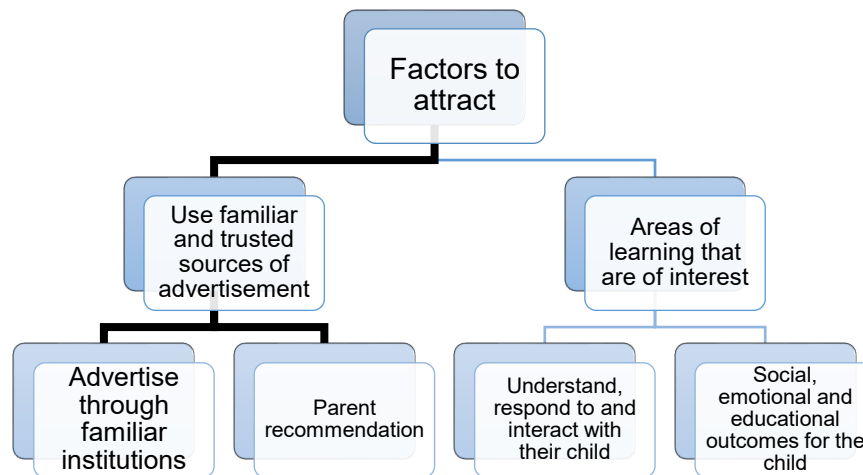
Participants provided specific information about where they would look for advertisement of a new course, very little researcher interpretation was needed to understand the best places to advertise as participants were very explicit with their naming of venues. Participants also spoke about areas in psychological child development that they would like to learn about and from this, the researcher inferred that advertising to parents in these areas may attract them to the course.



*Figure 4. 5* Factors that attract overarching theme

##### 4.5.1.1 Use familiar and trusted sources of advertisement

This main theme suggests that new programmes should be advertised through services that parents already attend. Parents also appeared to value other parents' recommendation in attracting them to new courses.



*Figure 4. 6.* This figure highlights the ‘using familiar and trusted sources of advertisement’ theme

#### 4.5.1.1.1 Advertise through familiar institutions

Participants shared several places that they currently would look for new programmes to be advertised. They highlighted that health clinics, children’s centres and in frequently visited public spaces, schools and nurseries are places they would look for new courses or programmes. These areas appeared to be the institutions that they are currently attending and also are viewed as trusted sources. There was only limited reference to internet sources not attached to a government run establishment (e.g. social media, internet searches).

Sarah highlighted the need to target areas that are already busy in order to gain attention, in particular, health centres.

*‘Because some women, I mean, I regularly, well I try to be regular, come and get baby weighed. Checking her progress, at that point, it’s ideal, because that’s your main contact. I mean yesterday it was really busy’*

(Sarah, line 71-72)

Olivia, who was currently taking her child to the nursery, shared that school and council websites were areas that she would search for further information

*‘Put it on the school website, put it on the NAME OF COUNCIL website.’*

(Olivia, line 65)

Similarly, Hannah, who was utilising children's centres at the time suggested this was the preferred venue for advertising.

*'I think if you are going to share information to get people going I probably advertise it with posters, 'cause people tend to have those around NAME OF CHILDRENS CENTRE.'*

(Hannah, line 25-26)

The method of advertisement was discussed by many parents and it was highlighted that up to date methods of advertisement should be used. For example, the use of newsletters and text messages sent to parents. However, concerns that some forms of advertisement may be unclear e.g. badly worded messages or posters without any dates might cause further confusion.

*'Charlotte: If there were posters up in here, because we are in here, we would "oh look this new thing is starting."*

*Interviewer: so posters up in children's centres.*

*Charlotte: But that over there is just chaos isn't it?*

*Interviewer: So you don't really...*

*Charlotte: I've never, I wouldn't be able to tell you if any of that is new.'*

(Charlotte, lines 128-132)

#### 4.5.1.1.2 Parent recommendation

Parents reported that in deciding to attend parents tend to value parent recommendation. One participant shared that they would tell other parents about courses that they deem valuable in order to encourage other parents to attend.

Megan highlighted that it does not need to be a mother that they know in order to take advice and suggestions from

*'Maybe asking other mums because it was a mum, I met a mum on the bus once and she told me about NAME OF CHILDREN'S CENTRE, yeah. '*

(Megan, line 51-52)



Freya highlighted the perceived value that parent recommendation could have on encouraging other parents to attend the course, by suggesting that advertisements should have a parents review.

*‘...but you know a little message from the parents who have previously attended about how they enjoyed it’*

*(Freya, line 37-38)*

Sarah highlighted how she recommends activities that she has previously found enjoyable to other mothers.

*‘I would also recommend it, to er, because what I have done, a few friends of mine have had babies and I’ve said to them "as soon as possible find your nearest children centre and register with them, so they can let you know what groups and things are going on" and I have told them to "do baby NAME OF GROUP" and "try and go to the other ones as well" I've told them that "it gets them out of the house and you learn new things with baby"’*

*(Sarah, lines 204-206)*

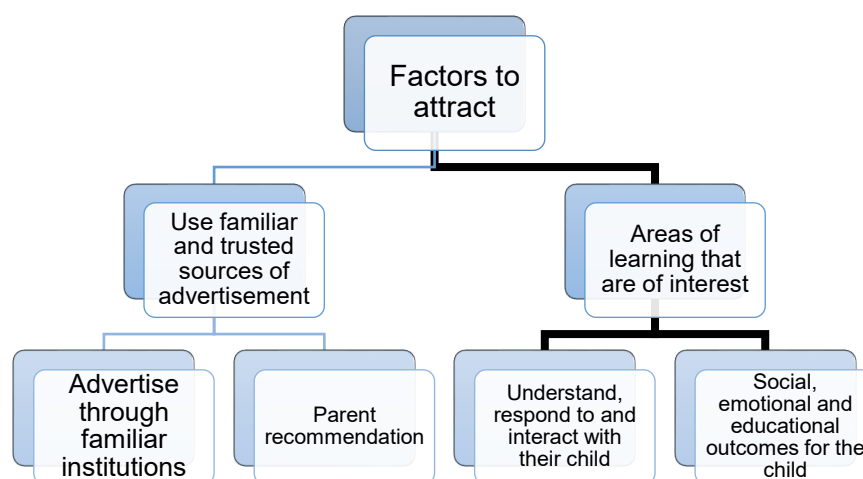
#### 4.5.1.1.3 Summary of main theme ‘use of familiar and trusted sources of advertisement’

In summary, participants indicated that they would like to access advertisements through easily accessible methods; through establishments that they already attend and via other parents. It is likely that both of these are seen as trusted methods of understanding what is available. Therefore these methods would be useful to employ in order to attract parents to the course initially.

#### 4.5.1.2 Areas of learning that are of interest

Many participants highlighted that there are specific areas of learning that would interest them in attending a course like this. This included learning to understand, respond and interact with their child and to be able to help with their child’s social, emotional and educational development. It was inferred that advertising that these areas would be taught during the course could make the course attractive to a parent. These areas are of current concern in the parent’s

life and reflected areas where they would like to see improvement in their own child. The information gathered here gives an insight into the areas that parents would deem valuable.



*Figure 4. 7.* This figure highlights the appeal to ‘areas of learning that are of interest’ theme

#### 4.5.1.2.1 Understand, respond to and interact with their child

Parents shared that they would like to understand their child, but often this was put in the context of being able to respond to them and foster good communication skills between them and their child.

Being able to understand their behaviour is highlighted by Freya’s quote below:

*‘I would like to learn about their behaviour and sometimes I don’t understand why they’re crying and what they want. I do try to understand but sometimes it gets difficult. That would be nice if there is any sign that we can make out like why what exactly is the reason for that particular behaviour or crying probably you know?’*

(Freya, line 80-83)

Daisy explained how she would like to ‘know’ about children better and particularly the influence of the adult response to child behaviour.

*‘and I think sometimes I can lose my temper with him and be like "NAME" and I shout sometimes and he goes on the naughty step sometimes I feel like you’ve not done that that calmly, so you know, if I am acting erratic or like with him, he*

*might feed off of that, so just to learn how children can mirror your behaviour I think, to learn the workings of how you can affect your child, cause they are really like a blank canvas in a way, not completely, they have their own things, but you can help develop them. That kind of way to know about children, I have always found that quite interesting'*

(Daisy, line 133-137)

Hannah highlighted how communication is of interest in terms of what she would like to get from the course.

*'I think some real strong knowledge of how to communicate with my child, you know.'*

(Hannah, line 109)

Some parents highlighted that the most important thing is that there is some "benefit" from attending the course and did not necessarily specify an area of interest. This concept of 'benefit' will be further discussed in the theme of continued attendance.

#### 4.5.1.2.2 Social, emotional and educational outcomes for the child

Parents appeared keen to engage in courses that targeted children's social, emotional and educational outcomes for the child.

Amir spoke both of the social and emotional aspects that he would like to see his child gain.

*'Interviewer: Psychology yeah, what would you like to gain?*

*Amir: Children, you know learn a lot of things about society, about with other children some are very aggressive, the kindness.*

*Interviewer: So how to help him be kind in society?*

*Amir: Friendly with society and other children'*

(Amir, lines 122-125)

Sarah explained that she would like to learn how to support her child in areas of cognition.

*‘if there’s anything more I could be doing to helping her learn, because I want her to be intelligent and smart, more than me, not like I’m dumb, but you know what I mean, I want her to have a good start in life basically’*

(Sarah, lines 142-143)

#### 4.5.1.2.3 Summary of main theme ‘areas of learning that are of interest’

Participants outlined areas they would be interested in learning about. These areas were of current concern to them and potentially could attract them to engage with a course about child psychological development. It is essential to appeal to the audience’s interest in order to motivate them to attend a voluntary course. It should be noted that some parents expressed an interest in more health based or non-specific areas. These non-psychological areas of interest will be discussed further in the next chapter.

#### 4.5.2 Maintaining interest and attendance

Once parents know about and have been motivated to enquire about a course, engagement cannot stop there. It is necessary that after the initial recruitment stages, parents continue to attend programmes in order for the programme to have any chance of being effective. This theme explored how parent’s interest could be maintained. It highlights that parents have their own needs within a course, including needing supportive staff members, interesting activities and benefits for themselves as well as benefits for their child.

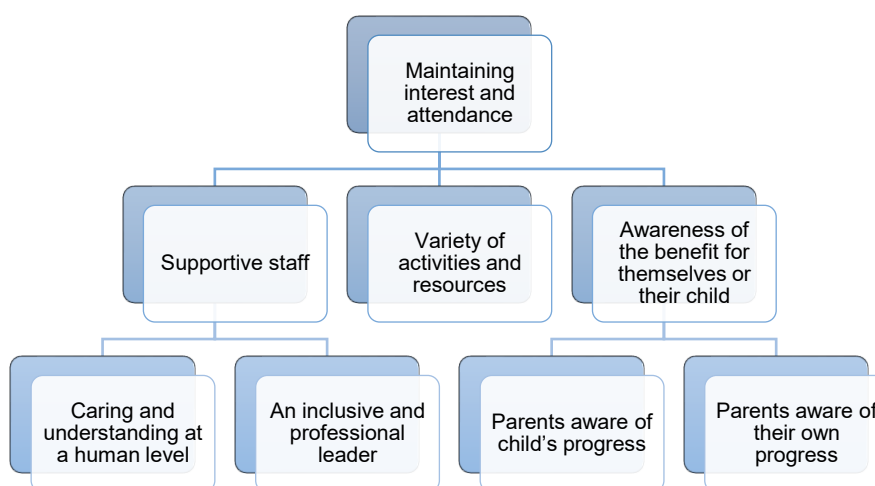


Figure 4. 8. 'Maintaining interest' overarching theme

#### 4.5.2.1 Supportive staff

Staff were seen as integral to fostering a feeling of being understood, welcomed and cared for, and participants suggested that group leaders could have an influence on how the group is structured and how they interact.

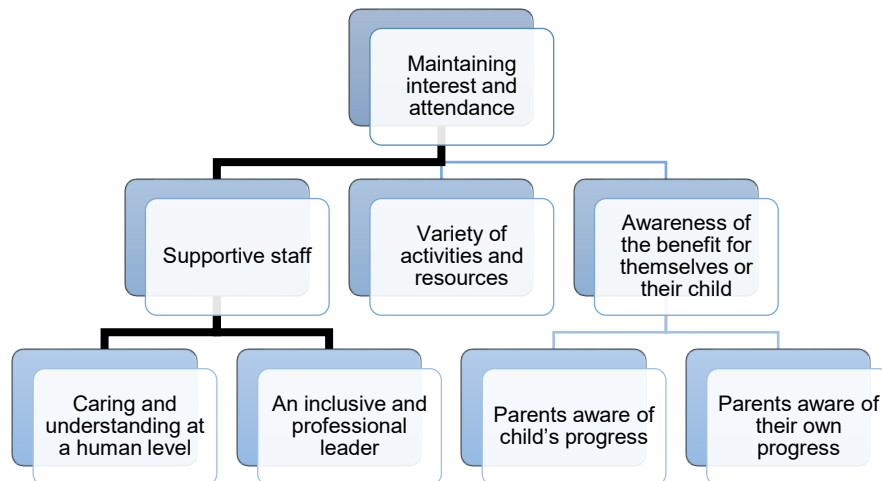


Figure 4. 9 This figure highlights the 'supportive staff' theme

##### 4.5.2.1.1 Caring and understanding at a human level

Participants suggested that staff running the group should have personable qualities that could help them open up, feel welcome and create a bond. This 'caring' attitude was expressed in a variety of ways with different terms, but all lack a certain formality to them and suggested that the staff should meet them at a more individual level.

Laura explained how 'friendly' staff may help her get the answers she needs and help her feel confident to approach them with any concerns she may have.

*'Very friendly and that helps because if you have any problems with baby they are very friendly and open minded you find it easy to talk to them, to approach them. It's more likely you gonna discuss and get the answer. But if, for example, you have a real problem and you really want to discuss but you see the person really like is thinking about something else you might miss on it.'*

(Laura, lines 66-68)

Several parents highlighted that formality (like that of a school teacher) should be avoided. Oliva shared the need for a certain informality to the learning.

*'I dunno, just being able to have a laugh and being, erm, what are the words I am looking for? Erm, obviously you got to take it seriously, because it is serious, but not too serious, it's not a joke, you are not taking it as a joke, but it's not dead pan serious like sitting your GCSEs at school you know? Erm, when you just want to cry \*laughter\*'*

(Olivia, lines 45-47)

Within the focus group, Lucy reflected on leaders she had liked in the past, and shared that a 'mother figure' instead of a teacher was desirable.

*'She would say "I'm gonna do Makaton your more than welcome to join in, if you don't want to join in its fine". You weren't forced to do anything, and she were just, she felt more like a mother figure in the class. Like you could go to her if you had an issue, she wouldn't come in and she weren't like a teacher, it's really weird to explain it.'*

(Lucy, lines 27-29)

The researcher linked this subtheme to continued attendance due to a participant expressing that a change in group leader can make a big difference in whether they feel comfortable in attending a group anymore.

*'Well originally it was the person that run it, 'cause it was a really nice lady who used to be in the children's centre. But then when she stopped running it and it was put with someone else, that's when it just, you get used to one person running it so you sort of build that bond with them, and then when they change it you've got someone doesn't know who you are doesn't know how you parent, doesn't know what you've been through.'*

(Lucy, lines 14-16)

#### 4.5.2.1.2 An inclusive and professional leader

Participants stated that the leader should have certain skills to bring structure and authority to the group activities. This skill and knowledge were perceived as helpful in supporting feeling included in the group activities.

This structure as delivered by the leader was perceived by Olivia to help with group inclusiveness.

*'but erm, where that was a little more structured and because you had somebody there that was more like authority, it made the mums not be so cliquey, everyone would talk to everyone and if the kids would come, 'cause where you stayed there and you played with the kids at the one at the run by the council, you wasn't allowed to sit there and chat and let your kid run riot, you had to sit there and interact with your child and play with your child, so if your child goes over to the other side of the room you had to get up and go over there. And help them, encourage them, and help them learn to interact.'*

(Olivia, 29-33)

A professional leader also may help with group and homework activities by ensuring the inclusion of those who need additional support. This was highlighted by Hannah in reference to homework tasks.

*'Erm, patient maybe? Yeah, for example, I don't know how you are going to do it, I shouldn't think there would be homework, but if should there be that homework, I don't know but if there is then a parent might not understand something and just have some patience to help them understand certain subjects or things that they want to know.'*

(Hannah, lines 88-90)

This professional and structured authority that the facilitator of the group could provide may be linked to participants continued attendance. As Sarah highlighted in the extract below.

*'If there's not gonna be a structure, okay, this is how you do NAME OF SERVICE, this is how you get them to speak, this is how you get them to make rhymes. This is how you speak to them or encourage them to talk. Someone that knows what they are doing rather than just parent. Not that parent led is bad.'*

(Sarah, lines 89-91)

Similarly, parent led courses did not appeal to Charlotte or Alexandra because they did not offer anything additional to play dates at home. Providing further evidence of the benefit of a leader to the course.

*‘Charlotte: sometimes they still run them but they call them ‘parent led’, so it’s just basically coming to play with toys. It’s not...*

*Interviewers: Okay, so parent led is not something that’s appealing to most people?*

*Group: No*

*Alexandra: No, because we could have playdates at home and it would be more fun.’*

(Focus group, lines 68-71)

#### 4.5.2.1.3 Summary of main theme ‘supportive staff’

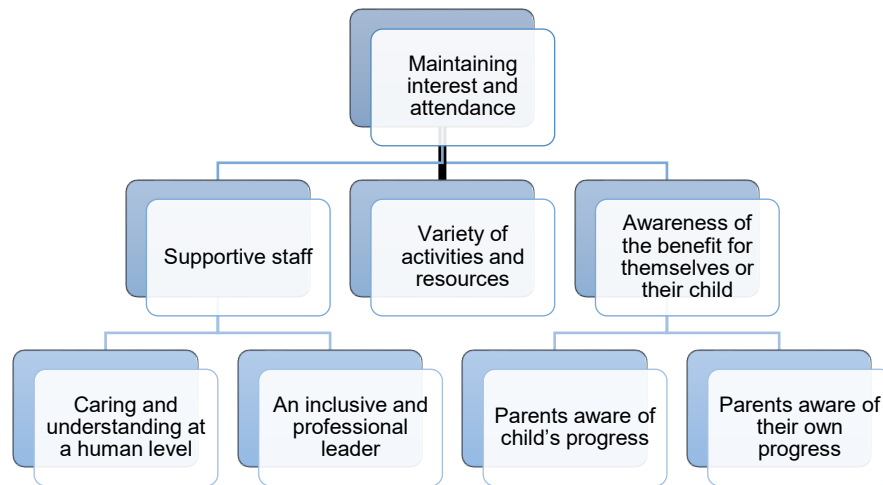
This main theme highlighted the tension in parents’ understanding of how they would like a group leader to behave in order for them to continue to attend. Parents appeared to want staff to be both caring and supportive, providing them with the freedom to learn independently and yet maintain an authoritative role to keep the group inclusive and guide their learning. This theme shows that participants perceived the facilitator of the group to be integral to their continued attendance, supporting their access to and safety in learning and building on their experiences. Additionally, staff are perceived to be able to keep an inclusive group structure which may be successful in avoiding feeling ‘left out’ of a group. ‘Being left out’ is a barrier that is discussed in section 4.5.3, and is perceived to influence non-attendance.

#### 4.5.2.2 Variety of activities and resources

When asked about what activities participants would like to engage in, a variety of activities were shared. Although some parents expressed a strong opinion about which type of activities they would like to be involved in e.g. very active learning, it did not appear that one type of activity was more preferable than another across all participants. Instead, participants suggested a variety of different activities would keep them engaged. Participants highlighted the need to keep them and their children interested and engaged in the materials in order



to continue to attend. This included providing resources within a variety of useful activities.



*Figure 4. 10.* This figure highlights the ‘variety of activities and resources’ theme In the focus group Charlotte (who had attended a pilot of a developmental psychology course for parents) highlighted how the learning lessons were different every week.

*‘Interviewer: and, what might keep you coming to course like this?’*

*Charlotte: I dunno, do you know what, it was different every week’*

(Charlotte, lines 235-236)

Laura highlighted how activities should be varied within each session as well.

*‘Maybe you have a board and you can ask our opinion and put it down like sometimes maybe people in the group can interact like teamwork an as well like if you have some video because you can separate your attention because if we have to listen to what you say for one hour it will get boring, maybe I will get sleepy or something. But if I listen you 20 minutes then 10 minutes of video then 10 minutes we discuss all together then I will be participating through the whole programme on the same activity level.’*

(Laura, lines 53-56)

Sarah reflected that the previous course she attended provided resources for the group activities and helpful resources to rehearse and practice what she had learnt at home.

*'There were resources, she gave like handouts, she provided us with the oil, all we had to bring was a towel or blanket for the baby to lie on. There were toys in the middle for distraction'*

(Sarah, 37-38)

Similarly, Alexandra spoke about the resources provided for the children in a group she had been to. Commenting that the resources were not only accessible during the session but enabled her to use similar household items at home.

*'The way, you know the toys, the handmade stuff, but you never think of it. You see them, but you never think to do this at home. But actually, after the lady brought this basket of you know. I started to give the baby spoons and sponges and wooden things and he loves to play with them. So you think, yeah I should buy a toy from the shop, but this one is much better.'*

(Alexandra, 238-240)

Participants shared that keeping them engaged with a variety of activities and resources could help them maintain interest during the course and avoid becoming bored. As Charlotte aptly shared, engaging in different activities during the pilot study helped her escape the 'monotonous Cbeebies life'.

*'I mean I quite like the true and false activities, 'cause it makes you think. I like the fact that there is activities for the, I nearly said humans, for the adults to do, rather than the babies. Activities for the, it gets my brain working again, because obviously you get into this monotonous Cbeebies life.'*

(Charlotte, lines 135-137)

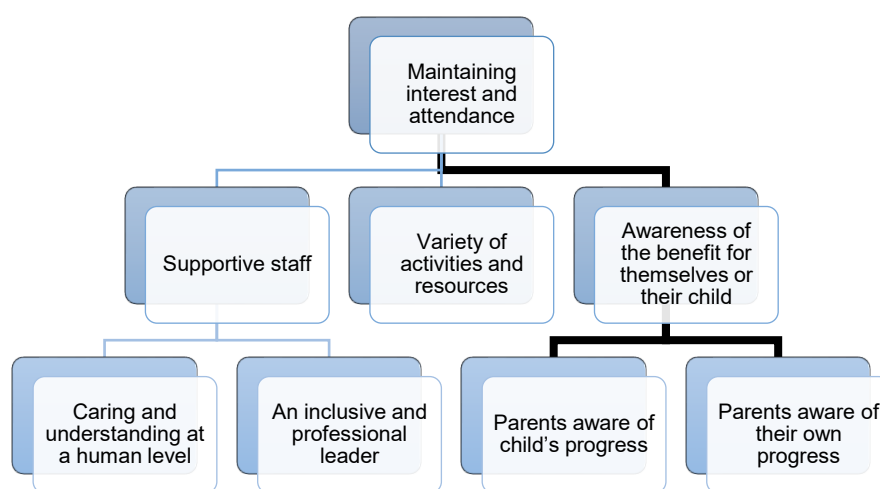
#### 4.5.2.2.1 Summary of main theme 'variety of activities and resources'

Participants shared a variety of activities they would be interested in. The researcher determined that between all participants there was not one particular style of activity or learning that was preferred, but instead, parents needed to be kept engaged through a variety of activities. Parents seemed motivated to learn,

as currently they may not be being challenged intellectually when spending a large proportion of their time engaging with children's activities. However, in order to maintain parent's interest, short, varied activities with resources provided was perceived to help maintain continued attendance.

#### 4.5.2.3 Awareness of benefit to themselves or their child

Participants shared that in previous groups, they had continued attending when they were aware of the benefit of attendance. It was shared that they would be motivated to continue to attend if they had noted the benefit in either themselves or their child.



**Figure 4. 11.** This figure highlights the 'Awareness of the benefit for themselves or their child' theme

##### 4.5.2.3.1 Parents being aware of the child's progress

Freya reflected that whilst participating in another group, she had witnessed the change in her child's ability to socialise and this had helped her continue to attend the group.

*'a drastic change, I mean before he wasn't even going to anyone and then I saw that he is going even to the parents to the other children he's going and saying hi to them. The first session I went very very well and that's what interested me to be honest. I saw a very positive sign on that day. I said "no, this really helps, probably he likes a different environment, this kind where are toys and other kids and very colourful" so I thought I should take him then regularly and since I started coming regularly to the classes.'*

(Freya, lines 13-16)

Megan suggested that with the new course, any observable benefit would be welcome and help continued attendance.

*‘Interviewer: and what would keep you coming on the course?’*

*Megan: If I see an improvement I would continue.*

*Interviewer: So is there any particular thing you'd like to see an improvement in?  
That would motivate you to come back?*

*Megan: Any improvement.’*

(Megan, 110-112)

#### 4.5.2.3.2 Parents being aware of their progress

Participants shared that they would be motivated to continue to attend if they felt like they were learning something. This learning would need to be enjoyable and may hold other benefits such as meeting new parents.

Daisy shared that when making the time to attend a course then she would need to experience some benefit in an area of learning.

*‘Actually feel like I'm properly getting somewhere with it, to feel like it's actually working and that I am learning something, if I went and I felt like actually, it's not offering me anything possibly new or it's that I'm not going to get anything from it, then I possibly wouldn't go, but if I felt like it was worth me taking the time out, it's worth that extra bit of effort then I would definitely go back, if there is something I would gain from it then I would.’*

(Daisy, lines 119-122)

Daisy also expressed how the learning can help interact with new parents and make new connections. This development of friendships could only take place through continued attendance.

*‘Interviewer: Really interesting, anything else you would like to gain?’*

*Daisy: Erm, I suppose it would be nice to hear other, because as I say, not many of my friends have children. So, I have not really got that, some people have where they have got a friendship group where you all have kids and you can all, but I have not really got that, so it would be quite nice to maybe. I mean I have my next door neighbour and we have become quite close, cause she has got NAME who is the same age as NAME so we have got that, but it would be nice to just to speak to other mums and sort of find out what they think and to learn things together I think can be quite a nice thing to do.'*

(Daisy 138-143)

Olivia highlighted that this learning needs to be done within a certain environment where the learning can be enjoyable.

*'Interviewer: Oh absolutely, thank you, that is very helpful. So what might keep you coming on a course like that?. Coming back on a course like that?*

*Olivia: Erm, I think if it's there's enjoyment.*

*Interviewer: Yeah, what might maybe make you enjoy...?*

*Olivia: I think when something is, it sounds like being a child again but being at school, if something was taught being fun you would enjoy it. You know what I mean, I don't, it sounds like...'*

(Olivia, lines 138-144)

#### 4.5.2.3.3 Summary of the main theme 'Awareness of the benefit for themselves or their child'

Parents appeared to want to continue to attend a course if they are aware of the benefits they or their child are receiving. Progress for their child can be in many different areas, but it is likely to relate to the areas they are currently concerned with e.g. socialisation. Some parents, were more interested in benefit overall, rather than improvement specific areas. Parents also shared that they would be motivated by personal learning. Parents reported that if they could recognise that they had gained skills and knowledge within an enjoyable and social environment, they would be encouraged to continue to attend.

### 4.5.3 Barriers to attendance

Barriers to attendance were discussed throughout the interviews even though no specific question was set up around this. Barriers were areas that prevented continued attendance at a group. Barriers were themed as either practical or personal. Practical barriers were related to the physical aspect of attendance. Parents reported that barriers are getting to the group, having the right child care and the timing of the group. Personal barriers include the social and emotional aspect of attending a group, including lacking the confidence to initially attend and feeling left out from the group. It is apparent that these barriers may be linked to the areas perceived to contribute to continued attendance in the previous themes. It is essential to understand what these barriers are in order to begin to understand what may need to be in place to overcome these barriers.

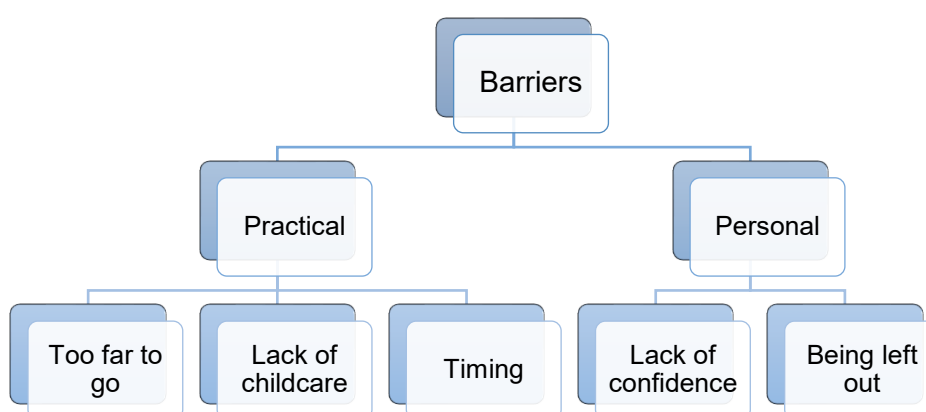
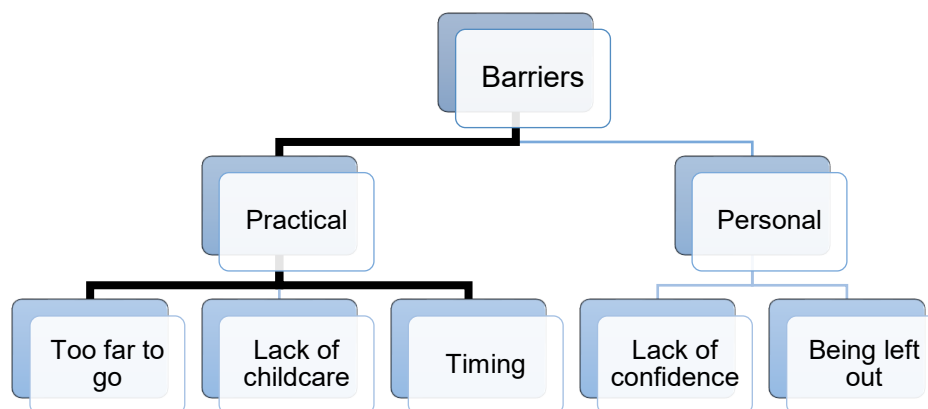


Figure 4. 12 'Barriers' overarching theme

#### 4.5.3.1 Practical

Practical barriers are defined as physical constraints when attending the course. They were often related to provisions that would need to put in place to aid accessibility. The areas that were often cited as barriers to attendance was the location, provision and timing of the course. The subthemes found under this theme explain that it can be a barrier if the venue of the group is 'too far to go', that the group has a 'lack of childcare' and if there are difficulties in the correct 'timing' of the course, due to parent obligation and the child's routine.



*Figure 4. 13* This figure highlights the ‘Practical’ theme within the barriers overarching theme

#### 4.5.3.1.1 Too far to go

Many participants spoke about the distance to attend a group. Participants often referred to being able to walk to the group and close proximity was even referred to as a reason for continued attendance. Close proximity seems to be an important factor in attendance and participants spoke about the distance of previous groups being a barrier to attendance. This barrier is not just about the distance, but about the difficulty in getting to a group because of transportation difficulties.

Freya explained that sometimes the benefit can outweigh the distance, but that that it still restricts the number of occasions she feels she can attend a group. Furthermore, Freya expressed that the centre close to her house should have more sessions.

*‘I can’t go to NAME OF PLACE, it’s quite far so in a week I can only come once or twice. I don’t mind coming even if it’s every day I mean it’s good for the children for half an hour one hour. So they should increase more sessions in this centre I feel.’*

(Freya, lines 75-77)

Amir explained that it can be difficult to get to places whether you are going by public transport or by car.

*‘I’m driving so that, so there’s not any parking places is a big problem. Okay, so if you parking, yeah and there’s two hours means and if there is a delay, you*

*need to book it otherwise they charge, £80 or something that's a bit difficult. Transport also, in this area, not much connectivity, not good. So really hard, if you go to London. Just 10. Most of the shopping in London, just 10 mile, it will be an hour by public services, by car it is 20 minutes. So in this area, connectivity is a little bit difficult. So that's the problem Yeah. So PLACE NAME is just 2-3 miles, it took 45 minutes that's the difficulty.'*

Amir (lines 73-76)

#### 4.5.3.1.2 Lack of childcare

Surprisingly, parents have experienced difficulties in bringing their child along to groups aimed at parents. Participants shared their need for their child to be accommodated for during groups. Additionally, it was deemed important to accommodate other children (e.g. older siblings) in order for many parents to be able to attend.

Laura clearly expressed the need to have childcare within the structure of the group.

*'It's important that they have a crèche here. If I can't bring baby with me or no space to leave baby somewhere I can't go to that group'*

(Laura, line 29-36)

And Daisy highlights that parents with other children need to be accommodated for.

*'For me, where NAME is not at nursery now, so it would possibly for facilitating the fact that I would have to bring him, that would be my only thing, what would I do with NAME'*

(Daisy, line 63)

#### 4.5.3.1.3 Timing

Whether it be due to work commitments, maternity leave, the time of the day and the child's current routine, time was repeatedly mentioned as something that would influence attendance. Many parents noted that they had work commitments or following maternity leave would be returning to work and expressed that this would put restrictions on when they would be able to attend.



Additionally, differences in the child's routine appeared to impact on whether it was possible to attend.

Amir highlighted the difficulties in timing for working families, especially when they are engaged in shift work.

*'Interviewer: So, would you ever come on your own to learn about psychological development?'*

*Amir: For me, the time is the problem for me. See I finish in morning 3 o'clock, night shift, only 3 hours sleeping.*

*Interviewer: Goodness me, you're doing a great job for someone only on 3 hours.*

*Amir: So that's the problem, his mum's studying as well as working as well. Very difficult.'*

(Amir, lines 109-114)

Megan expressed that timing for attendance can be dependent on the sleep patterns of her child.

*'Megan: Well, I would just say, the timing.'*

*Interviewer: What about the timing?*

*Megan: Well if it not too early I can make the effort to go.*

*Interviewer: What's good about something being not too early?*

*Megan: Well is just the time he wakes up. I really don't want to make her waking.'*

(Megan, 65-69)

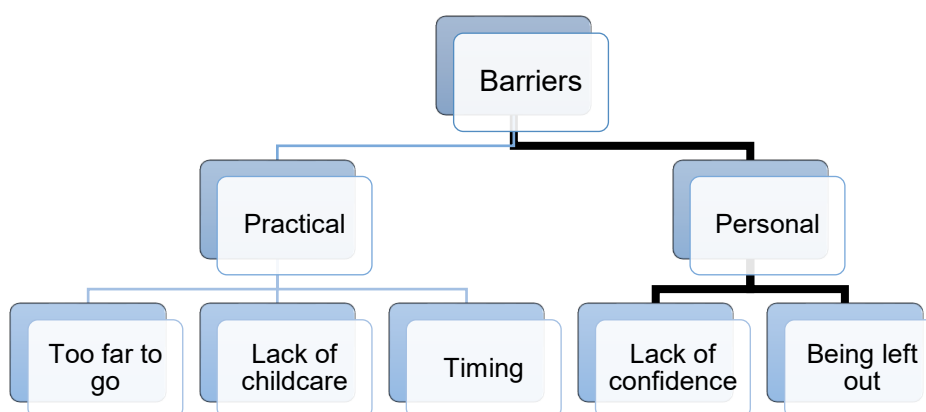
#### 4.5.3.1.4 Summary of the main theme 'practical' in barriers.

Participants shared that they would be unable or less likely to attend a group if it were far away, did not provide the level of childcare needed and the time clashed with their own work commitments or their child's routine. These are barriers that can only be overcome through careful planning and organisation of groups. These barriers are linked to wider structural limitations on parents' engagement, for example, the distance may not be so much of an issue if there weren't difficulties with public transport, traffic and parking. Similarly, the

parents appear to be the sole carer for the child during certain times of the day and there is not much flexibility in childcare for their children. Due to the need for parents to return to work after maternity and potentially shift work patterns, the time of the group can be a barrier to attendance.

#### 4.5.3.2 Personal

Personal barriers are emotional or social aspects that may prevent a parent from attending a group. The personal barriers outlined here are related to the initial joining of the group and continued attendance. Participants shared that lack of confidence may prevent them from attending the first session and feeling left out in the group may deter them from attending any following sessions.



*Figure 4. 14.* This figure highlights the ‘Personal’ theme within the barriers overarching theme

##### 4.5.3.2.1 Lack of confidence

Some participants alluded to the need to have confidence or support in order to attend groups. Attending a group could well be a daunting experience and participants spoke about the things that might help them feel comfortable to attend.

Daisy shared that already knowing someone at a group helped her attend and that this experience was necessary to build her confidence in order to attend another group.

*‘I think because I knew someone there and her child it wasn’t somewhere completely new, where there were new mums and new children. So that was there. The NAME OF GROUP, I think once I done the playgroup, I had a bit*

*more confidence as a mother to take them somewhere where they didn't know anyone, so that's just, I see it advertised and I thought we would give it a go.'*

(Daisy, lines 25-30)

Charlotte referred to not attending unless a certain member of the group was going. It was perceived that this may be related to the lack of confidence in being able to interact with other mums and children.

*'Yeah, rather than the, it needs to be an equal balance I think. If you just came all the time and you didn't make friends with people. For example NAME said to me last week, are you going to NAME OF GROUP, if you're not going I'm not going.'*

(Charlotte, lines 38-39)

#### 4.5.3.2.2 Being left out

Whether it is perceived or actual exclusion, many parents reported an occasion where they have felt outside of the group or have been treated poorly by other members of a group. Some parents suggested that this was a motivator to leave the group and therefore perceived to be a barrier to attendance.

Olivia explained how she felt left out because of the 'cliquey' nature of the group. Olivia suggested that the feeling of being on the outside of the group was transferred onto the children as well.

*'Interviewer: So you were motivated to try somewhere else because...*

*Olivia: Yeah, it really did and I think that when people are cliquey that I think that can transfer onto the children. I think it can also causes an environment, stagnant environment for the children, 'cause I don't think children should learn that, I think they should be able to talk and play with anybody that they want to.'*

(Olivia, lines 23-26)

Within the focus group, Lucy expressed frustration with other parents in previous groups which she felt had made it difficult to continue to attend.

*'Lucy:...I went there once and a vowed never go there again because the parents were just rude and up their own...*

*Interviewer: Okay*

*Lucy: Backsides, basically'*

(Lucy, lines 115-118)

As noted previously in the subtheme 'An inclusive and professional leader' parents may have linked parent behaviour to the capacity for a facilitator or leader of the group to bring authority and group cohesiveness to the programme.

#### 4.5.3.2.3 Summary of the main theme 'Personal' in barriers.

Participants noted that they may be nervous to attend the very first meeting of a group. They explained that without confidence, they may never attend the first session. This appeared to be a personal reflection upon their own confidence to attend. Additionally, some parents reflected that even when they had joined a group, if they felt excluded, they would remove themselves from the group. Parents attributed feeling excluded to the way other members of the group treated them and not their own perception or behaviour in the group.

#### 4.6 Summary of results

Parents sought information about new courses within the institutions they already frequently attend. They reported to trust, or feel more confident, in attending if a reliable source (e.g. a parent) has recommended it. Furthermore, parents wanted to learn about areas that are relevant to their current life stage. Parents reported that staff are integral to the creation of a socially and educationally inclusive environment and a good connection with staff seemed to influence whether they continued to attend. However, good relationships may not be sufficient for continued engagement, as parents expressed that a variety of activities were required in order to maintain their interest. Parents needed to be aware of the progress that they and their child were making in order to continue to return. Organisational constraints and personal attitudes towards the group appeared to be barriers to attendance. Parents reflected that they were less likely to attend groups that were too far away, as public transport and use of the car can be challenging within the borough. Parents were aware that some courses have not catered for them bringing their child and any other children they may have and therefore they were not able to attend. Parents reported restrictions in timing, suggesting that work responsibilities and the

child's routine may impact on their ability to attend. Furthermore, personal barriers such as confidence to attend a group and feeling rejected by other members of the group were suggested to prevent continued attendance.

#### 4.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter begins with exemplifying the process the researcher went through to identify the overarching themes, main themes and subthemes of the data provided through the interviews and focus group. The final thematic map was presented and each theme and subtheme was described and quotes were provided to exemplify the data used to build the themes. The following chapter will build on the evidence provided in this chapter to frame these results within previous research, consider how they relate to theory and explore the implications for practice.

## Chapter 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Overview of Chapter

Using the findings of the previous chapter this chapter will address the research questions. The questions were as follows:

RQ1. Key research question: What do parents say has helped them engage in groups?

RQ2. What would attract parents to a programme run by the EPS?

RQ3. What could be put in place to hold parents' interest in the group?

RQ4. What do parents consider to be barriers to recruitment and continued attendance?

This chapter will address the research questions documented in response to the findings in the previous section. This aims to link the relevant research and theory to the findings in this research. Additional findings that may inform future research are discussed and implications for future research considered. The researcher's reflections upon the research will be shared and the strengths and limitations of the research are explored. The ethical considerations of what has been found and the implications for EP practice are discussed. This section will be concluded with wider contextual implications discussed.

### 5.2 Analysis of findings in light of research questions

#### 5.2.1 What do parents say has helped them engage in groups?

Throughout the interviews, parents used past experience to inform their answers (including experiences at school, previous groups and educational courses). Therefore to answer the question 'what do parents say have helped them engage in groups' we can review the information given across the themes. This question was answered through the integration of the three following research questions.

This study focused on how to help parents know that a group is starting, to go to the group initially and continue attending. Parents reflected on their previous experience to share what may have helped them engage in groups. As indicated in previous research (Axford et al., 2012), methods of advertising need to be clear and up to date and include relevant information to attract parents to the course. Parents said that they wanted groups to be easy to find

and advertisements to be located in places that they already attend. This suggests that parents are not actively searching for particular groups. Parents may also be encouraged to attend courses that were recommended by other parents, although previous research shows an unclear picture for the value of parent recommendation on the interest in joining a group (Gross et al., 2011, Morawska et al., 2011). However, in line with previous research (Gross et al., (2011, Mucka et al., (2017) and adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 1998) personal motivation was reported to be an important aspect of being interested in joining a group. This will be discussed further in section 5.2.2.

This study indicated that parents suggest that staff should hold 'soft skills', but carry a level of authority and structure, that enables parents to feel understood and part of the group and to be included both socially and educationally. In line with Tuckman (1965) people have a perception of the role and relationships of the leaders and members of the group. Parents appear to have a perception about how the group leaders should behave and engage with them as members of the group.

This current study appears to support previous research that indicated that soft skills were important to parent engagement (Houle et al., 2018; Mucka et al., 2017). However, the previous research indicates that this in itself may not be related to continued attendance (Hackworth et al., 2018), but rather active parent involvement. As will be explained in section 5.2.3 regarding holding interest in the group, this could be linked to maintaining group cohesiveness, which Hackworth et al. (2018) found was linked to attendance.

These parents suggested they needed a variety of activities to continue to be engaged and that care in the way the materials are produced is essential in maintaining interest. A variety of ideas were shared on this topic. Adult learning theory indicates that application of personal experiences and self-directed learning (Knowles et al., 1998) should be included within learning tasks for adults. Self-directed learning was commonly referred to in this research. Also, in line with adult learning theories, this learning should ideally be pitched so that parents could be aware of the benefit and applicability of their learning to their own and their child's development.

In line with previous research, practical aspects such as transport and childcare are essential to think about when trying to engage parents (Axford et al., 2012 and Houle et al., 2018). Parents reported that they have engaged in courses that were close by and held at the right time. Adult learners require more flexibility in arrangements in order to attend courses (Knowles et al., 1998) and parents may not feel they have power over the provision or resources to attend and so rely on the organisational structures (e.g. local authority) to provide them (Handy, 1999). Parents have previously shared that engagement with groups has been easier when there has been structure, and this may take away some of the social barriers to attending the group. This is important to consider in terms of group formation and confidence to first attend.

Therefore initial and continued attendance is perceived to be a combination of the successful application of adult learning theory (including relevant material, self-directed learning and non-threatening environment) and organisational theory (cohesive group structure, successful management and provision planning). Discussion of each of the subsidiary research questions will be outlined in the following sections.

#### 5.2.2 What would attract parents to a programme run by the EPS?

Parents said that they wanted to find the groups easily, ideally in places that they already attend. This suggests that parents are not actively searching for particular groups, but are receptive to adverts in the places they currently frequent. In line with previous research, methods of advertising need to be clear and up to date to be effective (Axford et al., 2012). These adverts need to stand out as new in order to gain parents attention amongst the competing information. As Axford et al. (2012) found, advertisements need to hold all the information required to attend, which may include outlining provisions that target any areas considered as 'barriers' by parents (e.g. a crèche). Effective advertisement has previously been viewed to be important to parents (Houle et al., 2018; Rahmqvist et al., 2014) and may help with increased enrolment (Axford et al., 2012).

This study provided evidence to suggest that parents were not looking for specific programmes and were more attracted by advertising that is prominent in places they would generally look, e.g. at the children's centre they currently



attend. It is also possible that these are services that parents perceive as reliable or trusted. This highlights an important aspect of advertising new groups to parents. The adverts need to be where the parents are, rather than through more targeted advertising, e.g. through child development forums. Parents' methods of finding out about new programmes are far from systematic, and so any advertisement needs to stand out amongst the other programmes available. Therefore attracting parents to a programme run by the EPS requires knowledge of where parents are currently attending (in this borough, children's centres, health clinics, nurseries and libraries were mentioned).

There could be a variety of reasons parents are not looking for courses about psychological development. It could be that parents are not that interested in the psychological development of their child. This would fit with the idea from andragogy that adults make time to learn about activities that solve current problems (Knowles et al., 1998) and either the parents do not believe that there is a concern regarding psychological development or they are not yet aware of it. Knowles et al. (1998) suggest that if parents are not aware that this is a concern, facilitators may need to help raise awareness of the need to learn about psychological development before parents will show interest in this area.

However, once the areas of psychology were described, parents appeared receptive and could think of areas they would like to learn about (e.g. interaction). It is possible that parents are aware that the environment they live in is competing for their time (Handy, 1999), with the demands of work and child care, and additional time spent seeking further information about courses may not be a priority or perceived to be their responsibility. Rather, it may be seen as the responsibility of the organisations around them. This may be the reason why frequently used places are the best way to recruit, as there is no additional time needed to seek out the information. However, a study by Cotterill, John & Moseley (2013) indicated that even doorstep canvassing and leaflets for family attendance at sure start centres did not effectively encourage non-attenders to start going to sure start centres. Therefore, even if advertising is obvious and brought to parents' door, it does not guarantee enrolment and attendance. This suggests that successful advertisement is not the only thing needed for parents to enrol and attend.

The results of this study indicated that parents might be interested in the programme if there is a parent recommendation. Recommendation from parent or teacher was mentioned in Rahmqvist et al. (2014) as a reason for participation in the Triple P programme. Morawska et al. (2011) tested whether parent or expert testimonials helped parent attitudes towards engagement in a parenting programme. Morawska et al. (2011) found no significant impact of these testimonials. As mentioned previously, this could be due to a ceiling effect on the pre and post rating scales. Therefore, it is still possible that parent testimonial and encouraging parents to share the programme by word of mouth may attract other parents to the course. Findings from Gross et al. (2011) give a mixed picture about the benefit of recommendation and suggest that although recommendation from a child's teacher or another parent was judged as important in enrolment, it was rarely viewed as the most important factor in enrolling in a parent training programme. Additionally, direct referral to the course via GPs or health visitors was not a method mentioned by any of the parents interviewed, even though this was listed as a method of referral in other studies, e.g. Axford et al. (2012). It is possible that parents wanted to retain the freedom to find out about and attend the programme following their own 'discovery'.

In line with Gross et al. (2011) and Mucka et al. (2017), the results of this study found that personal motivation, including being able to interact with your child, may attract parents to a course. Gross et al. (2011) results suggest that at least 90% of parents viewed that communicating with their child, managing their child's behaviour, learning ways to be a better parent and opportunity to talk with other parents was an 'important' motivation for enrolling in the training programme. Therefore, this research supports the findings by Gross et al. (2011) that engaging with parents' intrinsic motivations can attract parents to join a training group. In particular, this study indicated that parents are interested in supporting their child's interaction and social, emotional and educational outcomes.

Furthermore, Gross et al. (2011) indicate that financial (extrinsic) rewards do not necessarily motivate parents to engage in training. In this study, financial

incentives did not appear as a main theme for attracting parents to engage with the programme. Dumas et al. (2010) found that monetary incentives could, at most, attract parents to enrol, but not necessarily attend. The questions in this study did not explicitly ask about financial or extrinsic rewards, but parents did not immediately think of financial reward in relation to a course about child development. This could fit with Dumas et al. (2010) anecdotal evidence that providing financial rewards may 'cheapen' parents' participation. The idea that parents might be attracted to a course because it offers an area of learning that could develop their own quality of life (e.g. communicating with their child) coincides with Knowles et al., (1998) assumptions of andragogy which perceives that adults are more motivated by internal motivators.

Therefore, through this research, there is an understanding of where advertising should be placed in order to get parents attention. However, based on previous research (Cotterill et al, 2013) and in line with adult learning theory, parents need more than just exposure to advertisement to engage. Parents are motivated to engage in a group that targets their current concerns ('life centred learning', Knowles et al., 1998) and is internally motivating such as being able to interact with their child. However, it is arguable whether social, emotional and educational outcomes for their child is an external or internal pressure.

### 5.2.3 What could be put in place to hold parents' interest in the group?

The results of this study indicate that parents create a bond with staff members and would like a member of staff to offer an understanding approach whilst retaining a level of authority. Dumas et al., (2008) found that socio-economic-status match between participants and the facilitator was predictive of attendance., Interestingly, Dumas et al. (2008) noted that SES match and ethnicity match may increase perceived relevance of the intervention or reduce fear of judgement from the facilitator (Flaskerud, 1986; Vorauer et al., 1998 as cited in Dumas et al., 2008). The current study found that parents did not speak of the background of the facilitator (e.g. their ethnicity or social economic status) but did speak at length about wanting an understanding, caring, non-judgemental group facilitator. Therefore, this study may support the hypothesis Dumas et al. (2008) proposed, i.e. that interest in SES and ethnicity match may reduce the fear of judgment. Interestingly, one parent commented on how her

own background had provided a biased perspective about parenting and shared that she would like to learn about other ways to parent. Parents spoke of the facilitator's soft skills helping them feel included in the group and access materials.

However, the idea that facilitator skills are a factor in continued attendance is disputed by a study by Hackworth et al, (2018) who noted that (self-reported) facilitator skills were not associated with retention, but instead associated with parent active involvement. From the researcher's reading of the data, it appeared that parents may perceive effective facilitator skills as helping create a cohesive group environment. It appeared that parents see the facilitator as being capable of creating an environment that could remove the barrier of feeling left out of a group ('being left out' was linked by parents to be a 'barrier' to continued attendance at a group). Therefore facilitator skills could be perceived to be linked to retention through the ability to maintain good group cohesiveness. The idea that group cohesiveness is associated with retention is supported by Hackworth et al. (2018).

Organisational theory can seek to explain the positioning of the group leader as an understanding guide but also an authority in the group. Parents may perceive the facilitator of the group as a figure of authority and this 'role' given to them may come with some stereotyped beliefs (Handy, 1999) e.g. the comparison of the leader with a teacher. Therefore, facilitators may find themselves walking a fine line between a figure of authority to support group cohesiveness and a guide to self-directed learning.

The literature review did not provide any information on the type of materials that may maintain parents' interest. Parents in this study expressed that they needed variety in order to enjoy and continue wanting to attend the course. Adult learning theory suggests that adult learners like to be more self-directed in learning and draw upon their personal experiences to develop their knowledge (Knowles et al., 1998). Although parents often suggested active, experience-based learning, and sometimes strongly disregarded more passive learning techniques, the data as a whole suggested that variety was the more important factor. This might be particularly pertinent to parents who have not been engaged in much learning recently and felt that the time spent at home meant that they need more guided learning to re-engage with educational material.

However, in line with previous research parents were motivated to attend through the benefits to their child and personal benefits (Mucka et al., 2017). As with Mucka et al.'s (2017) study, parents wanted to learn, whilst making friends and enjoying themselves in the process and wanting their child to have social benefits from attending. It is important to note that some parents were not specific in the outcome they would like to see. This could, in part, be due to a lack of clarity in what may be gained from a course about psychological development.

#### 5.2.4 What do parents consider to be barriers to recruitment and continued attendance?

Parents shared that distance is integral to being able to attend a course. There were several structural reasons that could be linked to the need to have the course close by. Parents referred to difficulties in transport, traffic and parking. As in previous research (Axford et al., 2012 and Houle et al., 2018), transportation and accessibility are perceived to be vital to attending a course. These provisions alongside child care and flexible times have been highlighted as potential areas to ensure successful recruitment (Houle et al., 2018). In this study childcare was highlighted as being needed not only for the younger child but for any other children in their care and time was not only dependent on work shifts but on their child's routine. This suggests that any programme should run at multiple different times in different establishments in order to successfully recruit parents.

Parent's exploration of the practical barriers they faced (getting to the group, childcare and timing) were barriers that were not easily overcome without structural changes to the organisation of the group. The resources parents had at their disposal appeared minimal; they did not report the capacity to have someone else look after the child or much flexibility over their work hours or ways to be able to get to the venue. Parents shared a view that they were confined by the environments they were in, either with minimal personal support, very structured work hours and subject to the functioning of public transportation or London's traffic. It seems that from the perspective of the parents in this study 'resource power' (Handy, 1999) lies mainly with the service providers (e.g. government funding, local authority spending).

This research also highlighted that there were personal barriers to attending the group. For this group of parents, there was a lack of confidence in attending the initial sessions and concern regarding being excluded from the group. This is something parents had reflected on affecting them in the past and had stopped them from attending previous groups aimed at parents. This personal barrier to attendance highlights the importance of feeling safe in the environment in order to learn (Knowles et al., 1998). However, it also draws upon the importance of group formation. Group facilitators would be well advised to consider how groups are formed and the inclusion of new members into the group. Perhaps ensuring that members of a group are initiated and welcomed through the process of forming, storming, norming and performing (Tuckman, 1965).

Personal barriers in previous research had alluded to 'stigma associated with parenting classes', 'resistance to universal parenting support', the 'availability of other sources of parenting support' and 'paying for parenting support' (Cullen, Cullen & Lindsay, 2016). These attitudes could be 'barriers' to attendance, but interestingly, they were not commonly reflected in the current data. Well-structured programmes aimed at parents were perceived as useful. Parents did not talk about any stigma around attending classes aimed at learning about child development and often spoke about the support they have gained in previous groups aimed at parents as being helpful rather than superfluous to their needs. The only time parents suggested they would use alternative parenting support was when the group was 'parent led'.

The study by Cullen et al. (2016) collated views of practitioners and parents focusing on the implementation of a universal parenting programme in the UK. Therefore this sample should be reasonably representative of the parents in the UK. However, Cullen et al., (2016) suggest that parenting groups are at a disadvantage due to other forms of support e.g. family, midwives. Parents in this study did not report high levels of support and it was clear that they were seeking additional support from the facilitators. Therefore, parents in this study may value parent groups because they may not have this support available.

Additionally, it is important to note that in Cullen's et al. (2016) study there did appear to be a proportion of parents that regarded parenting programmes positively. It is possible that this small study has only managed to interview parents within this group. This study does not dispute the findings of Cullen et al

(2016), as its purpose is far more exploratory in nature. However, it is interesting to note the difference in perception of parenting groups and it provides a picture of how parenting groups by differing parent groups.

### 5.3 Links with extended literature

In order to understand how this research may sit within the wider literature of parent engagement, the researcher examined papers that looked at reviews and papers that included parent engagement for parents of children over 6 years old.

In line with the findings of this study, environmental factors (e.g. transport, childcare and timing) and psychological factors were seen as barriers to attendance in studies with parents of older children too (Koerting et al., 2013). A study by Hindman, Brooks and Van der Zwan (2012) found that parents rated the timing of a parenting programme as the most important factor in deciding whether to participate and both location and venue judged as somewhat important. These reflect the findings of this study and place a significance on providing a variety of times and locations for the programme in order to make it easy to access.

Koerting et al. (2013) also reported that the facilitators to attendance included effective advertisement, recruitment, good group experience and facilitator skills. Continued engagement was viewed to be impeded by dislike of group activities (feeling outside of the group), perceiving the group as unhelpful, difficulties with the content of the programme or personal change in circumstances. Interestingly, in the older age range there are some key differences in the content of the material delivered (e.g. Schuster, et al. (2008) parenting programme on parent-adolescent communication about sexual health) and Patterson, Mockford and Stewart-Brown (2005) suggested that parents were interested in learning about areas that are relevant to the stage of development and highlighted that a parent who had an older child dropped out due to feeling like the content was not appropriate. This serves to exemplify the importance of getting appropriate content for the developmental stage.

### 5.4 Additional findings

During the course of coding each line of the data, there were several codes that appeared relevant and interesting to note in terms of the cultural and situational

frame in which this research took place. However, they did not appear to fit within the grouped codes. The codes that would be valuable to discuss in terms of future research directions are 'gender roles', 'food support', 'physical development' and 'language query'.

#### 5.4.1 Gender roles

Gender roles were mentioned in numerous interviews. Parents either referred to their own role or the gender of their child. In particular, Amir (the one father that participated in the study) spoke about the roles of his wife and himself. Towards the end of the interview, Amir commented that perhaps it would be better to speak to the child's mother.

*'Amir: Maybe if his mum comes she can give more, mums knows a lot about kids, the mum only knows about the psychology and everything. The dad is useless.'*

(Amir, lines 135-136)

Amir's interview gave the impression that he was unlikely to attend a programme on psychological development. From the initial reading of this quote the researcher felt that perhaps this was due to gender roles, however, from reading the entire interview and reading across all the other interviews, it appeared to the researcher that time was a main barrier, rather than gender. That lack of time spent with the child contributed to the lack of knowledge about child development and the child's needs, as well as not having enough time himself to attend a group.

Olivia spoke about her husband, her own and her father's role in bringing up children. Highlighting that her father was always at work.

*'Olivia: So, that was a beautiful thing to be able to have that support, cause me husband has no other children and so he hasn't got a clue*

*Interviewer: Mmm, yeah*

*Olivia: I haven't got a clue \*Laughter\*. I got me dad, but me dad hasn't got a clue, because me dad was always working, he was never at home with the kids'*

(Olivia, lines 57-60)



In this study mothers and fathers shared that lack of time due to work commitments would make it difficult to attend groups. Therefore, the subtheme of 'timing' was seen as a priority in the way parents spoke about being able to attend.

In light of the lack of father engagement in parent programmes, it would be valuable to further explore the roles and responsibilities of a father in the psychological development of their child.

#### 5.4.2 Food support and physical development

During the course of the interview, parents noted other areas of child development that would be of interest to them. Initially, the researcher thought that this may be due to difficulties in understanding the language or definition of psychology (see the next section for further information). However, for some participants, it became clear that despite having suggested some areas of psychological development, they were also interested in gaining other types of support for their child.

Freya commented in detail about wanting to know more about what to cook for her child.

*'Interviewer: I guess that's kind of what I'm interested in because it's the psychological aspects.'*

*'Freya: I know they had given us a food chart of what can be given to them you know but that didn't have any cooked recipe. You know, if there is any cooked recipe, puree or stuff like that babies might like I would love to attend those sessions as well. Have some cooking for babies. Asking too much I guess.'*

(Freya, lines 107-110)

Furthermore, Laura shared concerns regarding knowing about her child's physical and health development. Suggesting that more input about general child development would be valuable.

*'Laura: Maybe more about development stages of the children. For example they are saying you should go and bathe kid once in two months at this point and that when the health adviser gives you some tip and maybe you already miss something. Maybe at the point of nine months he was supposed to, I don't know, crawl and he's not crawling still and you get to know at twelve months so*

*maybe you get to know the basics of, each month, what they should do and what they have to do already'*

(Laura, lines 110-113)

These codes were not prevalent across many parent's interviews and did not detract from parents also sharing their want to learn about psychological development. However, the researcher felt that it was important to report that fundamental health and physical development were of concern to mothers. It is possible that the desire to have support in these areas could take priority, as basic physiological needs may need to be met before furthering the psychological aspects (Maslow, 1954). Therefore, if there were courses that supported parents with the fundamental care and development of a child, this may take priority over a psychological one.

#### 5.4.3 Language query

During the interviews and focus groups, the questions proposed by the researcher were queried several times. There were several factors that could have led to parents questioning the language within the interview questions. For example, many parents spoke languages other than English and sometimes it appeared that either the difficulties with understanding accents or vocabulary could have prevented some understanding. Secondly, some of the language used in the questions may have been unfamiliar to parents, as it is not often that people ask about psychological development or ask for examples of how they would like tutors to 'act or behave'. Thirdly, all parents recruited in the children's centre and health clinics had their child with them during the interviews and focus group, as can be seen in the transcriptions often children made noises during the interviews or were trying to gain their parent's attention. This could easily have been a distracting feature in trying to understand and respond to questions. All these three factors are likely to have contributed towards the difficulty in understanding, below are examples of where the researcher perceived these difficulties were occurring.

The quote below shows a time where Amir needed specific words defined.

*'Interviewer: We are interested in how to set up the group so that it is something that parents would like to attend and continue to attend. So let's think about that*

*specifically. How do you think it is best to share the information that a course like that is starting?*

*Amir: Share means?’*

*(Amir, lines 37-39)*

Furthermore, in Megan’s interview, it was unclear whether there was a misunderstanding or that she was distracted by her child. The process of thematic analysis was only able to highlight these common features, but did not provide further insight into the discourse that preceded and solved the queries.

*‘Interviewer: How would you like tutors to act and behave on the course?’*

*Megan: What do you mean sorry?’*

*(Megan, lines 93-94)*

The researcher was aware of these difficulties as they transcribed the interviews and made a note to try and have further explanations and examples to help parents express their ideas. This may have put some limitations on the research which will be further discussed in section 5.6. It is important to note that, despite asserting that an interpreter was not required, the level of language needed may have been underestimated. This may be important in considering future work with parents.

#### 5.4.4 Implications of additional findings

The additional findings could have important implications for approaching future research. Firstly, semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in resolving and clarifying parents’ positions. The researcher was able to gain information from parents from many different backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, using an inductive thematic analysis allowed for these codes to be highlighted to the researcher. Demonstrating the benefit of this type of analysis. These codes may give an insight into opportunities for future research directions and assists in understanding the limitations of the current research.

#### 5.5 Future research directions

The quotes supplied for the ‘gender roles’ code are important in trying to understand the engagement of fathers of the early years. The researcher believes that, due to the prevalence of mothers in research (e.g. Dumas et al.,

2008), the fathers' views could be overshadowed. Therefore a similarly designed study that looks at how fathers see engagement with parenting groups in the early years would be interesting, particularly from the perspective of fathers that have yet to engage in any groups aimed at parents. Understanding the tensions between fathers' being involved with their child's development and additional pressures around work and available time would be interesting to explore. In order to establish whether time or gender roles may have more of an impact on child engagement. Further study might be to explore how single parent families, who may find themselves working and caring for a child, would be able to access or engage in this kind of support.

Additionally, within the context of the interview, parents often shared quite meaningful stories about joining parenting groups. It could be interesting to understand better the stories parents tell around joining and being part of a group. Although the interview was structured with a thematic analysis in mind, many stories were told about the preceding inclinations to want to go to a group and parents shared their experiences of being part of the group or being rejected from a group. With a few adjustments to the method of data collection, these kinds of stories could be better heard and then analysed using a narrative analysis (Howitt, 2016). Alternatively, further exploration of the language used around parenting groups may be helpful, including perceiving facilitators as 'mothers'. The use of these terms in themselves could be explored further to better understand the kind of language used by parents within this study.

The researcher believes that further investigation into the perception of the role of the facilitator within parent groups would be interesting. In light of Hackworth et al. (2018) idea that group cohesiveness is associated with retention, it would be interesting to understand how group cohesiveness can be fostered within these environments. It appeared to the researcher that parents may perceive that group cohesiveness is the responsibility of the facilitator, but future research could explore whether facilitators believe that this is something that is within their control. If group cohesiveness is related to the facilitator, it would be interesting to test how best to increase group cohesiveness in order to encourage retention.

This research provides a starting point to feedback to the Educational Psychology Service. As so many factors can be part of the decision to join and

continue to attend the group, it is helpful to gain some initial information on what affects parental involvement in this borough. Following on from this, larger scale research could look into how best to adapt resources to work towards attracting and maintaining the interest of parents and removing barriers.

## 5.6 Reflexivity

Reflexivity requires the researcher to critical reflect on the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In this section the researcher will consider the process of the research, the role as a researcher and the position taken during the collection, analysis and write up.

### 5.6.1 Reflections during data collection

Throughout the research process, the researcher kept a diary. This proved useful in recording the decisions made during the process of data collection. During recruitment, the researcher met some barriers that are likely to have impacted on the sample of parents that were interviewed. The researcher needed to contact early years services (such as child centres and health clinics) to ask to recruit in their service. The EP service was not closely connected with these services at the time and so the researcher relied on the time and generosity of the managers and practitioners within these early years services. Once the researcher was able to make connections with the practitioners involved in the children's centre, it was possible to gain direction to a number of children's centres to ask to recruit parents. After visits to the centres and discussions with practitioners working there, it was noted that in some venues there would be difficulties in recruiting and interviewing parents as there was no space to accommodate a confidential interview. It was necessary to keep confidentiality, but parents also expressed the need for interviews to be quick and close by or within their routine. Therefore there was a restriction on where recruitment for participants was able to take place. As no crèche was available for use at any of the children's centres, it was necessary for the researcher to choose venues that could accommodate parent interviews in a quiet and confidential space with room for their child to join us if needed.

As a researcher, it is to be noted that my personal experiences and the information that has been shared by practitioners during my time collecting data will have had an influence on my interpretation of the data set. For example, practitioners explained to me the time constraints parents had, and warned that

it would be hard to recruit parents based on this limitation. As a critical realist, it is important to acknowledge the fallibility of the findings of this study (Cruickshank, 2003).

Additionally, the researcher's training in Educational Psychology meant that the change to 'researcher' from 'practitioner' needed to be reflected upon. Training in areas such as solution focused questioning which may encourage people to reframe and think differently about a situation could influence how my questions during the semi-structured interviews were presented. Therefore, the questioning techniques employed were considered for their level of bias and success in getting participants to elaborate. The focus groups and interviews were conducted over a course of several months and this gave an opportunity for the researcher to transcribe and review the questioning style. Following this, it is important to note that the researcher perceived that there was an improvement in interview technique and this encouraged lengthier contributions from parents.

#### 5.6.2 Reflections during data analysis

Having read a great deal of research on parent engagement, the researcher was aware of the potential theoretical biases that could come in during the data analysis stage. The researcher was aware of the potential influence of this and coded each piece of data equally to try and counteract this.

The researcher holds a critical realist perspective and therefore acknowledges that although there may be bias within the creation of knowledge, this is present within all knowledge we gain. Throughout the process of analysis, the researcher tried to accurately portray the data presented. However, qualitative data, such as this does not provide one answer and the researcher acknowledges the capacity for a different analysis and different findings to result from an alternative researcher.

The researcher enjoyed the process of coding and grouping data. It was important for the researcher to carefully consider parent data and create meaningful patterns in order to present parents ideas in a useful way.

#### 5.6.3. Acknowledging my own beliefs in the conclusions of the research

This research has the potential to make some political and social comments about how early years services should be organised. For example, working

parents appear to struggle to find the time, the transport and the child care to attend groups. This would lead the researcher to believe that funding and governmental support could help parents access the services they need.

The researcher also reflected upon the perceived role of the facilitator on the engagement of parents in groups. Well trained and understanding staff appeared to be important to parents. As the researcher was a Trainee Educational Psychologist and works with parents frequently, this point was particularly pertinent to the researcher. It helped reflect on working with parents and the impact of facilitating change with parents who are in need of support. Therefore, this study had an impact on the researcher's future work with parents in their role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist.

It is the researchers hope that this study will be read with a critical eye. The researcher aimed to make explicit the researcher's theoretical positions, the process of data collection and analysis in order for any political or social comment that may be inferred to be able to be questioned.

## 5.7 Strengths and limitations of research

This research was exploratory in nature and so many of its strengths and limitations will derive from the method of employing exploratory questioning and data collection techniques and analysis within this framework. Additionally, the practical strengths and limitations of conducting research in this area will be outlined.

### 5.7.1 Strengths of the research

Using a semi structured interview technique offered an opportunity for parents to speak flexibly about their experiences and their hopes for group involvement. Through this, parents shared openly some ideas that were not necessarily explored in the previously outlined research for parents of children under 5 years old in this area. Using a mixture of interview and focus group enabled a rich data set to be collected.

This research sought to speak to parents of children under 5 years old and therefore recruited parents with children that ranged from 3 months to 3 years old. This should help to provide a level of breadth to the facilitating factors and barriers to engagement in a course, as children are in different stages of development.

Parents were recruited from a variety of places including children's centres, health clinics and nurseries. This enabled the researcher to gather a variety of perspectives. This included interviewing parents that have not previously attended groups aimed at parents and conducting a focus group with parents that have participated in a pilot study of the current psychological development course that is being run. This variety of experiences enabled a range of barriers and facilitating factors to be shared across the interviews.

Through thematic analysis, the researcher was able to draw out similarities in parent views and understand where these views may differ. Being able to be familiar with the interviews and focus group as a whole (using the familiarisation stage) as well as considering the data line by line enabled a 'big picture' of the data to develop, regarding what was said and how these ideas might be connected.

#### 5.7.2 Limitations of the research

This research was exploratory and used qualitative research to inform the finding. It is not intended to be generalised to wider populations but may give an insight into what provisions or motivations may have supported parents within this borough to engage with groups and therefore inform some ideas around what could support engagement with a programme by the EPS.

During the process of recruitment, the researcher found difficulties in gaining access to some resources to be able to extend their participant pool. For example, the researcher was restricted to locations that had available space to conduct interviews. Furthermore, although interpreters were apparently available through the children's centre, there was no one available at the relevant times to translate the aims of the study in order to recruit participants who would require an interpreter. This is likely to have had an impact on the recruitment of participants.

However, many parents that were interviewed spoke additional languages and the interviewer made an effort to understand and adapt the language to make the research questions clear. Throughout the coding process, it was noted when there were difficulties with understanding the language used. This meant the researcher reflected back answers, rephrased some questions, provided definitions and some examples in order to assist in the understanding of and



transmission of the question. This could have had an influence on the answers provided during the course of the interview. The researcher noted that the pilot had not provided any indication that the language used was challenging. However, the pilot study was conducted in a different borough, with parents who only spoke English. This highlighted the benefit of piloting the study with a similar demographic to the main study.

There was a benefit to having a focus group of three parents that had already participated in a pilot group for the Educational Psychologist child development course. The parents were comfortable in each other's company and shared their ideas freely. However, having the assistant psychologist who ran the pilot assisting with recording may have influenced the feedback given, as parents often reflected back on the course they had just completed. The researcher did not intend to specifically gain feedback on the group they had just participated in and so parents could reflect on any experiences or future ideas, but most parents used their most recent experience (of the pilot psychological development course) to reflect and talk about future groups within this context.

Just as in other studies (e.g. Dumas et al., 2008), the researcher found it difficult to recruit fathers to the study. From recruitment, it appeared that there were fewer men attending children's centres and health clinics. However, even when there were a number of fathers available (for example at the nursery recruitment) none showed interest in participating. Having one father's voice was useful and looking at the 'other findings' gives us an opportunity to look at some of the gender roles discussed during the interviews.

This research could not provide a financial incentive to participate in the study. Dumas et al. (2003) suggested that there is a bias in sampling, as many of the populations that agree to participate in research might be more affluent. Dumas et al. (2003) suggested that monetary incentives might encourage a wider subset of society to participate in research. However, this study was conducted in a generally less affluent area (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2015) and every effort was made to make the interviews close by and flexible.

Although a wealth of information can be drawn from the interviews and focus groups, some of the factors that might impact on retention may appear socially

sensitive e.g. ethnic match of the facilitator to the parent (Dumas et al., 2008) and therefore parents may not have felt like they could freely discuss these areas within an interview or focus group scenario. Perhaps this data would have been more likely to be gained from a more anonymised tool (e.g. open ended questionnaire).

Due to time constraints, there were other methods of qualitative validity that were not employed e.g. member checking (Creswell, 2014). With additional time, this would benefit the process of checking researcher bias and accuracy of the intent of the focus group and interviews.

### 5.8 Ethical considerations

This research sought to ask about engagement both in the past and the future. The semi-structured questions were open in nature and framed positively, therefore there was very little likelihood that distressing topics would arise. Nevertheless, the researcher took care to get full consent and conduct interviews in a private space with parents. The focus group was conducted with members of a group that were already familiar with each other and where they felt comfortable expressing themselves. Some topics parents brought up were significant in terms of their home life and past group experiences. Therefore time was available after the interview to debrief and direct to other services in the borough.

All names have been anonymised and any specific group names of children centre activities have been removed from the data set in order to protect both parents and group leaders being identified.

### 5.9 Implication for EP practice

The model of service delivery can inform the work of the EP and the knowledge and skills they are anticipated to utilise (Fallon, Woods and Rooney, 2010). This research was conducted in a borough where funding for the EPS comes from a number of different sources. In particular, the setting up of a parent group based on child psychological development was funded by a health grant. This research is directly applicable to the service in which the research was conducted, as it can offer an insight into how to adapt the advertising and delivery of the parent programme that is to be implemented.

Additionally, with services becoming traded (Lee and Woods, 2017), Educational Psychologists might find more of their work commissioned in this way, with funding from alternative sources to support early intervention work with groups of adults. This research also provides a structure for other services to conduct their own research into parent (or other) views regarding service delivery. If all services did this when trying to implement a new programme, it would help specify and target the ways to engage parents within their own borough.

Even if EP services do not plan to deliver direct parent training work, much of what is discussed in this research is important to consider in terms of any group adult learning. The outcomes of this research are in line with some adult learning theories and helped the researcher consider the structures around the learning through organisational theory. It would be beneficial for EPs to consider adult group work within these theoretical frameworks, for example, when working with parents to support their understanding of their child, or when arranging teacher CPD events or even peer support sessions within the service. EPs could consider the adult learning theory and organisational theory on any activity where adults come together to learn and grow.

#### 5.10 Conclusion

This study explored what parents of children under 5 years old say would help engagement with a child development programme, as run by the EPS. The study was exploratory and aimed to get parents talking about past experiences to help inform future programmes. Parents indicated they would look for groups in places where they already attend and in line with previous research advertisements would need to be clear and up to date (Axford et al., 2012). Through the discussion, it was suggested that parents are not specifically looking for courses on psychological development and therefore new courses need to be shared through places parents already attend and, in line with previous research, it could be shared through other parent recommendation (Rahmqvist et al., 2014). The discussion proposed reasons why parents may want these adverts in places they already attend and it was concluded that they perceive that it is the responsibility of the service provider to give accurate and well placed advertisements. In combination with prior research (Cotterill et al., 2013), it was noted that good advertisement may not increase attendance in

and of itself and, instead, targeting parents' motivations to attend is key. This was in line with the model of andragogy (Knowles et al., 1998), which states that adults tend to be motivated by personal goals that are likely to improve their own life situations. For the child development course run by the Educational Psychology Services, this included improving interactions between the child and their mother and social, emotional and educational outcomes for their child. Parents highlighted the importance of an understanding leader in the group, suggesting a level of care and understanding should be combined with certain leadership qualities. It appeared to the researcher that the parent may associate group cohesiveness with the facilitator skills and if this is the case, it would be associated with continued retention reported by Hackworth et al. (2018). However, parents also outlined that maintaining engagement also requires parents to have a variety of learning experiences and resources as well as being aware of the progress that is being made. Furthermore, many expressed the need to experience the benefit of the programme for themselves and their child. This sits within previous research by Hackworth et al., (2018) that noted that retention to parenting programmes is linked to whether there was a perceived benefit to their child in attending.

Many practical barriers were outlined by parents and it is perceived that these require additional provisions to be put in place at the systems level (e.g. flexibility in time, groups running in multiple accessible places and childcare). Similar barriers and provisions were outlined in Axford et al. (2012). The barriers found in this study surrounded group behaviour and parents' concerns around initial joining and continued membership of the group. Therefore it is important to reflect upon the group formation when conducting a parenting programme and think about the stages of group development (e.g. Tuckman, 1965).

In light of the value placed by the government on early years intervention to support childhood development, it is apparent that continued funding to support the implementation of early years intervention is required if parents are expected to be able to attend parenting groups. As Cullen et al., (2016) expressed, the shift to parent courses shifts the pressure on parents (rather than government funded provision) to provide the right support to help their child's development. If the shift to early intervention is placed on parents, then

governments need to address the social and economic inequalities found in trying to access these courses. Beyond this, there are many facilitator skills that can help inform how to make the course more accessible, it would be interesting to further explore with practitioners how achieving this would be possible within the service. Therefore, services should consider not just the content, but the method of delivery. Parents reflected upon the variety of learning, the facilitators understanding and leader-like qualities that help them engage. These would be useful to think about in the development of any group.

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# Appendix A – Tracy (2010) big tent criteria notes

Paper	Criteria	Notes on Tracy 2010 big tent criteria
Dumas, Begle, French, & Pearl, A. (2010).	Worthy Topic	Intent to enrol predicted enrolment, but interesting use of incentives – even though incentives increased, it didn't impact continued attendance. Recent paper Yes – worthy to explore engagement.
	Rich Rigour	PACE programme described in detail. Very helpful description on incentives. Between 3-6 Details in the amount received - \$3 per session in first 2, \$6 next two and \$10 for the next two and \$15 for last two.
	Sincerity	Explicit regarding the grant received to fund it, but not apparent bias – mixed results reported, likely to be transparent. Based in behavioural (extrinsic) reward, but this theory not made clear.
	Credibility	Parent voice heard, recorded sessions – quant data. Separated enrolment and attendance great contribution.
	Resonance	This was quite a convincing piece about monetary (extrinsic) reward. Could monetary reward be used to get people interested? May well actually save money and can be generalised and connected to previous research.
	Significant Contribution	Notes that studies have shown monetary incentive has encouraged participation (but bundled participation and enrolment together) its unique contribution is to look enrolment separately. Dumas even notes that when bundled together in their study monetary incentives appear effective.
	Ethical	Parents free to join/not join and drop at any point. Parents not aware that an alternative was available.
	Meaning coherence	Their meaning-making is interesting using a quote in the end of an initial PACE session on explaining the lack of difference "why are you paying us? I mean we get childcare, you had a meal for us earlier, and now you give me money. "It almost cheapens my participation." Furthermore, it is a little bit of an assumption that the younger/socioeconomic factor plays a part, just due to a higher level of this kind of parent in the incentive condition, did not appear to collect age or analysis on this.
Gross, D., Johnson, T., Ridge, A., Garvey, C., Julion, W., Treysman, A. B., ... & Fogg, L. (2011).	Worthy Topic	Finds no difference between anything Offers interesting follow up – looking at the disorganisation and lack of interest in receiving the discounts.
	Rich Rigour	Yes rich descriptive detail -The legal guardian of 2-4 year old enrolled in a participating centre Recruited between 2008-2010 Chicago parent program 11 weekly 2hr group sessions led by two trained group leaders a meeting scheduled 1 month later as booster Proportion of discount was according to the amount of their weekly childcare bill. Rich results
	Sincerity	Tells background theory – based on operant conditioning (Skinner, 1953). Financial incentives as reinforcers to influence peoples decision making Not entirely sure of the background/funding of the author – good description but difficult to determine bias.
	Credibility	Some didn't receive the childcare discounts till after (small amount though?) Could discredit some of the study? Or just raise further questions.
	Resonance	It did make me consider the usefulness of monetary incentive to increase enrolment, if it doesn't increase attendance. Although this was a non-significant difference
	Significant Contribution	Together with Dumas et al., 2010 starting to build a picture of incentives hypothesised direction but non-significant for enrolment again, not about money for continued attendance and furthered this by looking at parents motivations comparatively e.g. money or engagement.
	Ethical	It appears the procedures were ethical, claims of the research due to lack of organisation to provide timely discounts may be harder to confirm.
	Meaning coherence	Yes, Gross et al., 2011 has put meaning to their study in a coherent way. Consistency and checking of their own theoretical position e.g. extrinsic rewards was done.
Axford, N., Lehtonen, M., Kaoukji, D., Tobin, K., & Berr, V. (2012).	Worthy Topic	Worthy topic – the systematic review that precedes the paper is very useful. It is quite evocative and highlights many organisational issues that might need to be sorted to enable parent engagement.
	Rich Rigour	The study aspect of this paper is light in rigour. Although it specifies parents (e.g. parents of 3-4 year old, largest local authority in Europe) and some characteristics, much of the method and claims produced are based on researcher's opinion. Method of collating the information found appears opaque in sections.
	Sincerity	It appears very sincere, but the reporting of the general telephone interviews and the difference in recruitment are just vague and reported in percentages Funded by Birmingham city council, but Hard to know the researchers position within the local authority Theoretical background not outlined explicitly.
	Credibility	Written in a clear and accessible way – perhaps for practitioner. However seems difficult to replicate and some vagueness in reporting. Hard to tell which strategy really improved recruitment. It was apparent that things were reported on even if they reflected negatively on the system. This was helpful and gave a level of credibility.
	Resonance	The systematic review did, but the 'case study' itself results were unclear.



Cullen, S. M., Cullen, M. A., & Lindsay, G. (2016).	Ethical	Appears ethically sound. This paper appears to report an actual practically positive impact. NHS research ethics board approved.
	Meaning coherence	Clear and helpful review at the beginning of the paper and conclusions reached towards the end. Lacks coherence – aims, objectives, perhaps if outlined a piece of action research at the beginning it may have been clearer?
	Worthy Topic	Large scale project, interesting results. Relevant as a UK based study – children 0-5. Parent aspect – through survey data large response 1510 initially and 1603 in second UK
	Rich Rigour	Yes – excellent context given – funded by government, in 2012-2014 universal parenting. Specifies the areas and access to the courses. Note – cannot distinguish between groups and classes that were not face to face?
	Sincerity	The biases clearly stated – government funded, but clearly tried to balance this. Offers a background into development of early years programmes to frame their cultural context
	Credibility	Great detail in the method the qualitative data was collected and analysed. Variety of data collected – 42 interviews with providers, two parent surveys over two time periods.
	Resonance	Larger scale cultural change to encourage engagement. This was an interesting finding of a large and coherent study, had an impact on how to view parenting programme engagement
	Significant Contribution	This study offers some empowerment parents, getting their views. However, expresses how not everything can be altered by the way something is conducted. Acknowledged the cultural barriers to attending.
	Ethical	Appeared ethically aware, but ethics permission not explicitly stated. However, informed consent gained for interviews. Less strict for government programmes in the survey? (What level of consent etc.?)
Dumas, J. E., Moreland, A. D., Gitter, A. H., Pearl, A. M., & Nordstrom, A. H. (2008).	Meaning coherence	Very coherent, set up and explanation v. clear. From the contextual background to researcher bias. To the results associated with cultural and attitudes towards parenting programmes, despite implementation. To be taken with the knowledge that this was government funded and potential biases towards making the problem individualistic?
	Worthy Topic	This has been an assumption and not explicitly tested for a long time, could lead to biases and assumptions as to why people don't engage with a programme, a very worthy study to be conducted. 171 parents 11 group leaders.
	Rich Rigour	Detail on how the research was analysed and all the statistical models that were tested. Tested for mediation effects on SES and belief match and all areas of the engagement separated and considered.
	Sincerity	Goals made clear – to see impact of 4 different characteristics, only 2 proved significant in engagement and attendance, but not even that much of variance explained by it. Explains its intent to replicate a finding by orrell-valente et al (199) and theoretical explanatory model – cumulative (ethnic, SES and belief predict attendance, drop out and cumulative), timing (SES match is important to early drop out. Mediation (any link between ethnic and attendance is mediated by SES or belief).
	Credibility	They highlight fidelity to the course, but do not consider the therapeutic alliance. Well documented process.
	Resonance	This is important that if other measures e.g. therapeutic alliance or maybe judgment from the person conducting the study – this could underlie the need for similar SES or ethnic – can consider for my study.
	Significant Contribution	This study brings in questions of the degree to which ethnicity and SES match is important. It is a significant piece making a delicate case. Not sure whether 'empowering' until alternative explanations for SES or ethnic match are brought in, which are done within the discussion.
	Ethical	Informed consent before interview – parents received cash at completion. Group leader survey provided informed consent and \$15 cash in completion. Group leaders monitored parental attendance and quality of participation.
	Meaning coherence	Very coherently put together. Each test linking to the findings they wished to replicate. Interesting to note that researchers put the variance of the ethnicity match into perspective suggesting that it is less important than previously noted.
Houle, A. A., Besnard, T., Bérubé, A., & Dagenais, C. (2018).	Worthy Topic	Worth seeing which factors influence engagement in early intervention programmes? Interesting qualitative study with a structure creation of statements. However difficult to understand degree of importance as all were perceived as relatively important
	Rich Rigour	Details of how many people participated in statement generation and statement ordering. The 6 step process is outlined. Interesting variability in who participated in each of the steps, with parents, practitioner. Specified that needs to be involved with a programme for parents of children between 0 and 5.
	Sincerity	As each step of the factors are created by the participant this is a transparent process with only one question provided by the researcher. However, difficulties in establishing the theoretical position. Part of a doctoral thesis and funding expressed.

	Credibility	Great triangulation, bringing together practitioners parents and administrators. Consensus between research team on concept maps, Clear representation of the significance of each area. Statement generation only by 2 people.
	Resonance	Nice to see a qualitative/quant method translated into a visually understood result – personally find it difficult to understand without further exploration into mapping
	Significant Contribution	More impact or weight put on the words of parents/administrators or practitioners so that is more than testing a researchers agenda. However, difficult to understand the difference between their attitudes – only shared perceptions presented.
	Ethical	All consent seem to have gained, voluntary basis (hence low turnout for statement creation).
	Meaning coherence	Very clearly put together, initial intention explored. Theoretical aspects not outlined – positioning seems to be quite important here. Linked to previous research but not necessary theory.
Mucka, L. E., Dayton, C. J., Lawler, J., Kirk, R., Alfafara, E., Schuster, M. M., ... & Muzik, M. (2017).	Worthy Topic	Yes – looking at interviews, better understand the perspectives of parents and the tension between the experience they hope to gain – provides detail on the kind of intrinsic motivations parents might want to have i.e. grow and develop as women.
	Rich Rigour	Good detail on the MP programmes – attachment based parenting 0-6 years old 99 mothers participated in parenting intervention Using principles of grounded theory thematic analysis of data was conducted – however, this is not explicitly explained
	Sincerity	The author provides information on their interest, it doesn't appear to be affiliated with the mom programme but run by the university. Would be interesting to know the theory behind motivational interviewing and the kind of impact this would have had on the questions in interview. Explains the basis of the programme in terms of attachment theory and trauma theory.
	Credibility	Look at recruitment by looking at maternal expectation and looks at retention effects through evaluating the satisfaction with the program. Fidelity evaluated videotaped for later coding. Satisfactory fidelity. 64 of 99 participants interviewed using MI techniques. Very little information on interview and very little on post intervention qualitative analysis. However – interviews for the purpose of data collection did use motivational interviewing techniques and were not reported to be unguided as much as possible.
	Resonance	Limited overall generalisation due to final interviews being conducted with only 64 mothers, but the concepts brought out in this gave a better picture of the parents experience and wants in this.
	Significant Contribution	More impact or weight put on the words of parents/administrators or practitioners so that is more than testing a researchers agenda. However, difficult to understand the difference between their attitudes – only shared perceptions presented.
	Ethical	All consent seem to have gained, voluntary basis (hence low turnout for statement creation).
	Meaning coherence	Very clearly put together, initial intention explored. Theoretical aspects not outlined – positioning seems to be quite important here. Linked to previous research but not necessary theory.
Hackworth, N. J., Matthews, J., Westrupp, E. M., Nguyen, C., Phan, T., Scichuna, A., ... & Nicholson, J. M. (2018).	Worthy Topic	Large scale study that covers multiple areas of potential barriers and predictors of recruitment and retention. Australia – two recruitment 22months average and 8months average
	Rich Rigour	Gives very clear definition of recruitment, enrolment, retention and involvement. Details of different programmes provided: Smalltalk – school readiness language, communication and literacy for parents of infants and parent child playgroups for toddlers. One risk factor of social disadvantage. E.g. government benefits, young, single or social isolated, low parent education, indigenous or non-English speaking background
	Sincerity	No bias or lack of sincerity appeared, but several limitations not outlined till the very end. E.g. reimbursement for data collection, community level factors to be regarded as 'exploratory' – further explanation would be helpful. Many self-reported measures used, but this is similarly the case for the majority of studies.
	Credibility	So many factors put into the predictive model, but all measured in a clear way. Could be replicable given access to the other study which outlines the actual programme itself.
	Resonance	This study did well to separate the different aspects of engagement with the potential impact. A few links made between the study and would be interesting to see how these areas are perceived to be linked.
	Significant Contribution	This study is mainly quantitative and it does not offer much information on the how to engage. Feels a little oppressive in the number of factors that can impact on the ability to attend and retain parents. Australian study
	Ethical	Informed consent and ethical approval granted.



	Meaning coherence	A coherent work which aims to use quantitative methods (through self-report measures) to associate different aspects of engagement. Theoretical underpinnings appear light, but research underpinning the areas of investigation are clearly returned to.
Morawska, A., Nitschke, F., & Burrows, S. (2011).	Worthy Topic	This is a very specific topic within parent engagement, trying to change parent's perceptions of parenting programmes using testimonials. Australia mean age of children 3.97.
	Rich Rigour	Detailed information on the procedure of the process and the findings. Detail on the measured used, not much detail on the participants themselves.
	Sincerity	Theory of parenting interventions outlined e.g. social learning, functional analysis, cognitive behavioural. Suggests that social influence has a factor on non-engagement. Talks about the framing of messages as threat or benefit. Difficult as some phrasing appears like experts are generally more persuasive than non-experts' difficult to find the evidence for this.
	Credibility	Some interesting claims regarding the trustworthy and influential nature of different experts or parents. It appears that they have provided multiple experts to rate being trustworthy and only one parent from community, which overall received a reasonably high percentage 40.6% for trustworthy and 43.1%. Additionally consistent high ratings with or without testimony showed very little effect. Poorly designed measure or parents generally perceive it well without the testimony.
	Resonance	This research has many difficulties associated with it and although it attempts an interesting exploration into testimonials within perception (and therefore engagement) with parenting programmes, it does not carry these out particularly sensitively and therefore significant findings may be missed.
	Significant Contribution	This research could be replicated with more sensitive measures and produce a very significant contribution. It is a well-designed study.
	Ethical	It appears an ethical study, consent it gained
	Meaning coherence	Authors are clear from the start about the lack of effect found from this, but ground their reasoning and design in theory and research. A clear study design with some flaws only visible once testing has occurred.
Nordstrom, A. H., Dumas, J. E., & Gitter, A. H. (2008).	Worthy Topic	Lack of consideration of the theoretical models within engagement, so interesting topic to consider. In America.
	Rich Rigour	Detailed procedure and measures used. Outlines Family engagement model – applies health belief model, linking sociodemographic factors, parental belief, benefits, barriers and inclination to enrol. Parent attributional process model – attribution model of behaviour. Apply their own behaviour, child behaviour and parenting efficacy (level of control). Barriers to treatment model – multiple barriers due to SES, behaviour problems, parenting, and home chaos. Perceived obstacles not associated with demographic.
	Sincerity	Several measures used in hierarchical multiple regression, it shows multiple models and highlights the attributional model as a success.
	Credibility	Using 347 mothers of pre-schoolers, this research aimed to look at the models that may be applied to parent engagement.
	Resonance	It does not feel like one model is necessarily accountable for all the factors present and low engagement is associated with other factors to within this research. Useful to have the background and perspective of potential influences.
	Significant Contribution	A useful contribution to application of theory into research. However, the slightly inconclusive quantitative results required interpretation from the researcher which could be argued alternatively.
	Ethical	Prior information about contacting for survey and money provided to engage. Consent gained by returning registration form.
	Meaning coherence	Outlining how each theoretical model is linked to each part of the survey would provide better evidence of when a theory is disproved. This is a complex piece that has multitude of different factors to consider, it is interesting to have it all done within the same group.
Rahmqvist, J., Wells, M. B., & Sarkadi, A. (2014).	Worthy Topic	Details on Triple P and the context of Sweden and child development. Worthy of the context in which it is set.
	Rich Rigour	Great levels of details, all questions outlined and contextual information given. However, slight lack of evidence based quotes within the text. Process of theme finding was done in a stage by stage process that was outlined in the text.
	Sincerity	This was quite transparent of the process of interview. Short discussion of results did not lead to much reflexivity and the theoretical stand point of the questions not very clear.
	Credibility	10 (3 fathers 7mothers) parents participated and it would be easy to replicate the environment and questions asked if wanted to replicate this study. Not asked of practitioners who were involved. However, these were 10 parents that have previously participated in the programme and returned 1 year following. It is a retrospective account and of parents that appear quite engaged with child development from the comments in the results.
	Resonance	This study seems to be clearly arranged and does not claim more than the exploration of triple P and motivations to attend. It does not aim to generalise, but offers some insight into parent motivation.

Significant Contribution	This paper is unlikely to have much reach beyond the environment it is conducted, but it is very clearly explained and useful for that environment.
Ethical	Parents asked to participate, participants given a cinema gift card for participating.
Meaning coherence	Throughout this study the aim to understand the motivations and evaluate the Triple P programme through qualitative analysis was described.

## Appendix B – Focus group and Interview schedule

### Focus group

Introduction: “I am ... I am from the University of East London and am conducting research as part of a course I am doing there and I am currently on placement in NAME OF PLACE”

Purpose: “The purpose of this research is to understand what helps parents when attending groups and programmes and how to interest them in attending a new programme being set up by the Educational Psychology Service. We have 30 minutes for the focus group today.”

Ethics: “This focus group is being video recorded and the data will be transcribed and kept safe. You have the right to withdraw at any stage during the focus group and data can be destroyed up until the point of data analysis. The discussion will not be shared with anyone else unless they or someone else is at risk or say something that compromises child protection. “

“I would like to fully understand your views and perceptions and will be asking open ended questions to do this.”

The following questions are a guide to interview and the researcher will use prompts and help the participant explore their ideas throughout the interview.

“Can we introduce ourselves to the group?”

“The educational psychology team is interested in setting up a new programme for parents in order to share knowledge about children’s psychological development, for example, learning emotional development, play skills and language. We are interested in how to set up the course so that it is something that parents would want to attend”

Questions:

- 1) I’m interested in groups that you have attended before, could you talk about groups that you have attended before.

If conversation doesn’t start, prompt with:

Have you been a part of feeding groups, baby massage etc.

Or been a member of groups aimed at health, fitness groups, drama or educational groups?

- 2) What helped you attend that group?

Prompt with: Creches, Times, Reminders If not, what would you have needed to attend this course?

Let's suppose we are running a new group based on child psychological development

- 3) What is the best way of letting you know a new course is starting?

Prompts: any professionals to refer to you, where to advertise?

- 4) What would you like to learn about on this course?
  - 5) How do you like to learn on a course like this?
  - 6) How would you like the tutors/person leading the course to act or behave on this course?
  - 7) What would you like to gain from attending a course like this?
  - 8) What might keep you coming to a course like this?
  - 9) How would you like the tutors to act/behave on this course?
- Prompt: in groups that you have joined, what did you like about the presenters?
- 10) What would you like to gain from attending a course like this?

### Interview Schedule

Introduction: "I am Alana I am from the University of East London and am conducting research as part of a course I am doing there and I am currently on placement in NAME OF PLACE"

Purpose: "The purpose of this research is to understand what helps parents when attending groups and programmes and how to interest them in attending a new programme being set up by the EPS. The interviews typically take around 45 minutes, this can be flexible, let me know if this is okay for you."

Ethics: "This interview is being recorded and the data will be transcribed and kept safe. You have the right to withdraw at any stage during the interview and data can be destroyed up until the point of anonymization. The discussion will not be shared with anyone else unless they or someone else is at risk or say something that compromises child protection"

The following questions are a guide to interview and the researcher will use prompts and help the participant explore their ideas throughout the interview.

Either:

From your participant information sheet you indicated that you attended groups aimed at parents.

Can you tell me:

What interested you in attending that group?

What was in place that helped you to attend that group?

Have you attended any courses, training or support groups for parents?

Or:

From your participant information sheet you indicated that you haven't attended groups aimed at parents.

Could you tell me:

Are you a member of any other groups or take part in any other courses or training that aren't aimed at parents? E.g. fitness groups, health groups, art groups.

If yes:

What interested you in attending that group?

What was in place that helped you to attend that group?

All interviews:

The educational psychology team is interested in setting up a new programme for parents in order to share knowledge about children's psychological development, for example emotional development, play skills and language. we are interested in how to set up the course so that it is something that parents would want to attend and continue to attend.

How do you think it would be best to share the information that this course is starting?

How do you like to learn on a course like this?

Prompts:

e.g. listening to people, watching videos, examples, personal experience?

What would need to be in place to enable you to practically attend the course?

Prompts: crèches, transport?

What would you like to learn about on this course?

How would you like the tutors to act/behave on this course?

What might keep you coming on the course?

What would you like to gain from attending a course like this?

Concluding comments: the researcher will thank the participant, reiterate what will happen next with the data and ask if they have any questions. The researcher provides the participant with information on national and local support services on the debrief sheet.

## **Appendix C – Information sheet, consent form and participant details**



### **PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER**

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree it is important that you understand what your participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

#### **Who am I?**

I am a doctoral student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London and am studying for a professional doctorate in educational and child psychology. As part of my studies I am conducting the research you are being invited to participate in.

#### **What is the research?**

I am conducting research into what helps parents attend groups and what would engage them in attending a course about children's psychological development as run by the Educational Psychology Service.

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

#### **Why have you been asked to participate?**

You have been invited to participate in my research as someone who fits the kind of people I am looking for to help me explore my research topic. I am looking to involve parents with

children of under five years old. I would like to talk to parents who have and who haven't been part of courses similar to this before.

I emphasise that I am not looking for 'experts' on the topic I am studying. You will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with respect.

You are quite free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced.

### **What will your participation involve?**

If you agree to participate you will be asked to provide contact details so that an interview/focus group can be arranged at a convenient and comfortable location. The interviews/focus group will usually take 45 minutes, but there is flexibility within this. Interviews/focus group are informal and the questions will be easy to understand and answer. The interviews will be recorded for the purpose of data analysis.

I will not be able to pay you for participating in my research but your participation would be very valuable in helping services to provide support and education to families in the area.

### **Your taking part will be safe and confidential**

Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times. Once audio/video recordings are transcribed, the data will be anonymised and participants will not be able to be identified in the write up of the results. Participants do not have to answer questions asked of them and can stop participation at any time.

### **What will happen to the information that you provide?**

The audio/video recordings will be kept safe and stored on a password protected computer. Your name and contact details will not be linked to the information you provide in interviews and any names used in interview will be changed. The anonymised data will be shared with supervisors at university, examiners and may be published in academic journals. Interview recordings will be deleted after transcription has been checked for accuracy and contact details will be stored safely until data collection has been completed.

### **What if you want to withdraw?**



You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. However, if you withdraw following anonymised data analysis I would reserve the right to use your information.

### **Contact Details**

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Alana Laing

Email [address@uel.ac.uk](mailto:address@uel.ac.uk)

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Mary Robinson. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: [m.robinson@uel.ac.uk](mailto:m.robinson@uel.ac.uk)

## **UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON**

### **Consent to participate in a research study**

#### **Exploring what parents of children under five years old say could help them engage in a programme about child development.**

I have read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and particular data from this research, will remain strictly confidential. Only the researcher(s) involved in the study will have access to identifying data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason. I also understand that should I withdraw, the researcher reserves the right to use my anonymous data after analysis of the data has begun.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date: .....

**If you are interested in attending, please complete the following details:**

Name: .....

Age: .....

Contact telephone number: .....

Nationality: .....

Do you speak any additional languages? .....

Would you need a translator to participate in an interview or focus group?

YES/NO

How many children do you have? .....

How old is/are your child/children? .....

.....

Have you attended any courses, training or groups aimed at parents before?

YES/NO

If YES how regularly did you attend this course? .....

.....

Appendix D – Debrief form



Debrief form

**Exploring what parents of children under five years old say could help them engage in a programme about child development.**

Thank you for participating in this research. This research was aimed at understanding the views of parents regarding engagement with groups. The interviews will be transcribed anonymously and the data will be analysed help inform future projects in the Local Authority. You have a right to withdraw your data prior to anonymization.

If you would like further support about anything discussed in this interview, the Local Authorities website offers information about where additional support can be found.

WEBSITE OF LOCAL AUTHORITY HERE

Thank you for your participation. If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Alana Laing

EMAIL OF STUDENT HERE

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr Mary Robinson. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: m.robinson@uel.ac.uk

Appendix E – Ethics approval form

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

REVIEWER: Lucia Berdondini

**SUPERVISOR: Mary Robinson**

**STUDENT: Alana Laing**

**Course:** Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

**Title of proposed study:** TBC

**DECISION OPTIONS:**

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.
3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes

place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

**DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY**

*(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)*

APPROVED

**Minor amendments required** *(for reviewer):*

**Major amendments required** *(for reviewer):*

**Confirmation of making the above minor amendments** *(for students):*

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name (*Typed name to act as signature*):

Student number:

Date:

*(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)*

#### **ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER** (*for reviewer*)

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

✓YES / NO

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐

HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

☐

MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

☒

LOW

**Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).**

**Reviewer** (*Typed name to act as signature*):

Lucia Berdondini

**Date:** 04/04/18

*This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee*

**RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:**

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.



For a copy of UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see  
the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard

## Appendix F – Example of coding

3	Laura: This group I am coming for the first time normally I am in NAME OF AREA.	
4	Interviewer: And you are normally in NAME OF AREA.	
5	Laura: Yes because it is always full there so we had to come here.	
6	Interviewer: Ah, right interesting, can you tell me a bit about any of the groups you have attended. It could be this one, it could be the NAME OF AREA one.	
7	What interested you in first attending that group?	
8	Laura: Well basically it's for the kids so he can interact with someone else because we don't have a family here. So, its the interaction with the other	Author Socialising for the child
9	kids that's the main thing. And also some groups they have some discussion, like a teacher who can advise you on issues which are going through	Author Active learning
10	Interviewer: What was in place to help you attend? What was it that meant you could attend?	Author Staff attitude/approach
11	Laura: Sorry what?	Author Language query
12	Interviewer: What things meant that you could attend that group? Was it the location, the timing, was there things in place that meant you could...	Author Maternity leave provides time
13	Laura: Well at the moment I'm on the maternity leave so, never mind timing but the hearer it is the easier it is to attend if I'm trying to work or going to the	Author Distance
14	NAME OF AREA library or the NAME OF CENTRE. I'm not really sure how to pronounce that. But I really like this group because the age is more closer to my	Author Work commitments
15	baby's or for example in the NAME OF AREA there this group were they clean there and all toys working were they are usually not working in the other	Author Relevant
16	groups but it's far away, it's hard to get to.	Author Resources (for the child)
17	Interviewer: So you are saying that the location is important	Author Distance
18	Laura: The location was important, time is not so much at the moment	Author Distance
19	Interviewer: But also you were saying it is about the toys; that they are all working and clean. What was the other point you made about the maternity	Author Distance
20	leave?	Author Timing
21	Laura: I can't remember.	
22	Interviewer: Don't worry I have it recorded. I just wanted to make sure I understood. So have you attended any training or support groups for parents	
23	specifically?	
24	Laura: Yes, there was the for the NAME OF PROGRAMME for a healthy family lifestyle.	
25	Interviewer: So it is the NAME OF PROGRAMME for healthy family lifestyle. Could you tell me a bit about that?	Author Interaction between mother/child
26	Laura: It was programme about how you communicate with the kids, like how your account for their needs or just say do what I do and something like that.	Author Food support
27	Then it was about nutrition and portions and checking the labels when you are buying food. For example buying the same and you see they have similar	Author Child-care
28	ingredients but you see one having a lot of sugar or salt for example. This type of things and how we can get more active like different games or like	
29	INAUDIBLE from the bus when you are going somewhere. This type of things. It's important that they have a crèche here. If I can't bring baby with me or no	
30	space to leave baby somewhere I can't go to that group.	
31	Interviewer: So you can't take your baby to that group?	
32	Laura: At the group I went to we were able to keep them with us or to leave them in the crèche there because he is very small and he was crying there most	
33	of the time he was with me but there was both options.	
34	Interviewer: There was both options, and did that help?	
35	Laura: Yes that helped a lot because basically I wanted to go to the English course, which they provided for mums on maternity leave, but you can't bring	
36	the baby with you. I can't leave him alone anywhere so I can't go.	
37	Interviewer: Okay, so the crèche option, that really helped. Okay. So I think we are likely to touch on a lot of these areas. The Educational Psychology team	
38	are interesting in setting up a new programme to share knowledge about children's psychological development for example emotional, play skills and	Author Share through the children's centre/nursery
39	language. We are interested in how to set up the course so parents will want to attend and continue to. How do you think it would be best to share the	Author Resources for the parent
40	information that a course is starting?	Author Informed advertisement
41	Laura: I think it's good to have that paper were you have written what topics you are going to provide and give them in the children's groups, because if you	
42	just say by yourself but you might cover everything you are going to get or the parent might consider a lot of their things and parent might not have an	
43	opportunity to finish all the topics so then they will say, okay, that sleep is not so interesting for me but they will say solid food which he missed and also if	
44	there is a lot of people, then maybe he will just miss someone, so it be better to give them information then just a little bit what is on the paper and then at	
45	home at our own pace we can decide if we need it or not.	
46	Interviewer: So you think it would be good to let them know it is starting up through groups that already exist and, if I am right, that when they are doing	
47	the group you'd like them to have a piece of paper and try one bit but they can try it later. Is that what you are saying?	Author Revision/support materials
48	Laura: No like say a bit about it but give the paper as well because people tend to forget or not to pay attention because they are looking to see their kid	
49	doesn't hurt someone else or fall over. So they don't really listen to you 100%.	Author Variety of activities for parent
50	Interviewer: Okay, great. How do you like to learn on course like this? ...Maybe people talking to you or activities, videos?	
51	Laura: I think a little bit of everything.	
52	Interviewer: A little bit of everything. Could you give me a little bit of-	
53	Laura: Maybe you have a board and you can ask our opinion and put it down like sometimes maybe people in the group can interact like teamwork an as	Author Passive learning (listening)
54	well like if you have some video because you can separate your attention because if we have to listen to what you say for one hour it will get boring, maybe	Author Active learning
55	I will get sleepy or something. But if I listen you 20 minutes then 10 minutes of video then 10 minutes we discuss all together then I will be participating	
56	through the whole programme on the same activity level.	
57	Interviewer: Is there anything in place that is needed to enable you to be able to practically the course?	
58	Laura: Yeah baby with me.	Author Child care
59	Interviewer: Baby with you.	Author Maternity leave provides time
60	Laura: or crèche.	Author Time of day
61	Interviewer: Or Crèche.	Author Work commitments
62	Laura: At the moment I'm on the maternity leave but as soon as finishing then that timing.	Author Timing
63	Interviewer: What would you need for that timing?	
64	Laura: I think it's good if you run two groups; one in morning one in the evening so everyone can choose according on their working hours	
65	Interviewer: Okay, How would you like the tutors to act or behave?	

66	Laura: Very friendly and that helps because if you have any problems with baby they are very friendly and open minded you find it easy to talk to them, to	Author Staff attitude/ approach (
67	approach them. It's more likely you gonna discuss and get the answer. But if, for example, you have a real problem and you really want to discuss but you	
68	see the person really like is thinking about something else you might miss on it.	
69	Interviewer: Okay so...	
70	Laura: But, at the moment everyone is good, but the only problem is the size of the groups, there's 15 people max and most of the people this way, they	Author Organisation
71	count adults and some people arrive half an hour early or even one hour early because the library in NAME OF AREA is really busy and we see OK there is	
72	one parent sitting and there is other parents who come and we are sixth but other parents come and some of them have 2 or 3 kids, kids running around	Author Scarcity
73	and you are not able to count how many kids actually are there and most of the teachers say 15 parents that's it and then you can't attend. OK we are	Author Socialising for child
74	already 6 and we turn around and we just go back because we are not going to wait half an hour there is no space for us. Or they come and say there is 15	
75	kids only for example just 7 parents and they still not let you go you know, it is really upsetting and we need it more because when you have only one child	
76	they don't have siblings to play with and they don't have maybe friends to interact with and it's the only opportunity for them to socialize but people who	
77	have already two more kids they can already at least play together. So, I think it's not fair because it's starting to happen now recently, they are counting 15	
78	kids not adults.	
79	Interviewer: Have you seen examples where it worked for that? Ones you think it has worked better.	Author Organisation
80	Laura: I think sometimes when there are different teachers because they have different approaches. So most of the year they turn out like 30 people and if	
81	you are a single parents it's not fair so they were excepting fifteen parents and sometimes they say OK if there is like one extra only they will still except but	
82	it depends on the teacher. Sometimes they just say "OK no".	
83	Interviewer: So it is that they have more than one teacher?	
84	Laura: Yes and they have different approaches.	
85	Interviewer: Ah, so different approaches so you can't tell if you are going to get in because of different teachers.	
86	Laura: And also the next day they let us know if it is cancelled but most of the time it doesn't work because still 20 people turn up because they didn't get	
87	informed about it.	
88	Interviewer: OK and how would you find out about that?	
91	Interviewer: Is there any other way they're supposed to tell you?	
92	Laura: They are supposed to send a text but just only half the parents are getting it.	Author Benefit to child
93	Interviewer: Okay, Okay. What might keep you coming to a course like this about psychological development? What would help keep you interested?	Author Variety of content
94	Laura: It's basically I'm interested in my baby developing very well so I would attend but the topic I'm interested is mainly is help getting ready for	Author Don't know about content
95	separation when I'm going to work or when he doesn't want to move to his cot for example or waking up often. I'm sure there will be some other topics	
96	that you know and I don't know will be a problem yet. Maybe it's going to come in the future but the more range of topics, the more help basically. If you	
97	say there will be only one, we are going to just talk about going to sleep then maybe say not worth it. If it's going to be one class its fine but if all eight	
98	classes or whatever definitely not.	
99	Interviewer: What would keep you coming is a variety of subjects and each session might touch on-	Author Variety of content
100	Laura: Maybe not each maybe you can have two same but basically more topics than just one.	Author Want to understand and resp
101	Interviewer: What would you like to gain at the end of attending a course on psychological development?	Author Want to understand and resp
102	Laura: Information that will help me with the kid and as well being understanding better, because, yeah for example, I work in customer service, when	
103	they're having tantrums later on I often see that kids throw them on the floor crying a lot and there are two, three different types of parents who just leave	
104	them and say OK I'm going home and they just leave them in the shop and wait for them outside until they realise and run up to them others just leave	
105	their basket and bags and get their kid out of the shop but they don't really pay attention to why the kid is doing that. There is the third group who really	
106	really asking like what happened and why you doing this and trying to calm them down at this point so basically to know something more about the kids	
107	psychology would be useful.	
108	Interviewer: So you are saying routine, understanding and you sort of gave examples. OK is there anything else that you would like to let us know in that	Author Want food support
109	kind of area that you would like to learn about on this course?	Author Learn about child developme
110	Laura: Like nutrition that might be useful for someone but I've covered that in another course. That was really interesting. Maybe more about development	
111	stages of the children. For example they are saying you should go and bathe kid once in two months at this point and that when the health adviser gives you	
112	some tip and maybe you already miss something. Maybe at the point of nine months he was supposed to, I don't know, crawl and he's not crawling still and	
113	you get to know at twelve months so maybe you get to know the basics of, each month, what they should do and what they have to do already.	
114	Interviewer: Thank you for talking with me.	

## Appendix G - Photographic example of grouping of codes

