Investigating the impact of parental constructs of school and school related elements on their children's constructs of school and school related elements and their subsequent emotionally based school refusal behaviour

By

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was to investigate the impact of parental constructs of school upon their children's constructs of school and their emotionally based school refusing (EBSR) behaviour. The literature review explores the range of definitions surrounding EBSR and examines the existing research conducted to date. Finally, the literature review explores the lack of current research around parental constructs and the potential role parental constructs may have upon EBSR. Using a Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955) methodology called the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT), 5 parents and their children's (who present with EBSR) constructs were elicited around school and school related elements. A focus group was conducted with 3 parents of children who were EBSR to determine the elements to be used within the RGT. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected from the RGT interviews and also the shared themes between the constructs elicited from the parents and children and also between the parent-child dyads. In addition, a chi-square methodology was used to examine whether any of the parent-child repertory grids could be identified as being significantly similar. The results are discussed in relation to PCP and the impact the findings may have upon interventions for the child and their family and also the practice of professionals around the family. Methodological challenges with the study are examined and opportunities for future studies are illustrated.

To my wonderful husband Al.

Thank you for all your love, support and encouragement… I could never have done it without you.

'A princess is nothing without her prince.'

To Mum and Dad, David and Karen, Janet and Barry.

Thank you for all your love and support.

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Introduction

This volume contains the research conducted into parental constructs of school how they might impact upon their child's constructs of school and their emotionally based school refusing behaviour (EBSR).

The research was negotiated with the Local Authority Educational Psychology Service because EBSR was an area of interest for the Service. A tool to assess EBSR had been developed within the Service and although it acknowledged the importance of the context within which the child was situated (e.g. community factors, family factors), the tool did not consider parental constructs as a factor that may influence child behaviour. In addition, from a review of the existing literature it was acknowledged that research had been conducted into possible parental influences on their children's emotionally based school refusing behaviour, for example a history of anxiety in the family, however this seemed to be from a clinical diagnostic point of view. There appeared to be a lack of research focussing on parental constructs of school and school related elements and how this may have impacted upon their child's constructs of school and ultimately, their EBSR behaviour.

Procter (1996) gives a description that fits with the fundamental epistemological stance of this piece of research:

'While I would want to assert that no direct knowledge of the world is possible- it is always seen through the spectacles of constructs- Kelly's original assertion (1955) that the external world exists (and that we are gradually coming to know it better) remains fundamental for me. We are not free to simply dream up a different set of events from those that occur, although the construction we make of them is all we can know' (p176).

Therefore within this constructivist position events cannot affect people except through the way they are construed by them (Procter, 1996). It is the aim of this piece of research to investigate whether the way primary caregivers construe the world has an impact upon the way their child construes the world. Specifically, the study investigates the way parents construe school and whether this affects the way their children construe school and impacts upon their EBSR behaviour. This is in line with Pellegrini (2007), who noted the need to adopt a less clinical construction of EBSR. Place et al (2002) illustrate the need to acknowledge parents' own difficulties and the impact this has upon their children's EBSR and Lyon and Cotler (2007) highlight the need to view family factors in combination with other variables, for example their constructs.

In order to investigate the impact of parental constructs on their children's EBSR behaviour a personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955) technique called Repertory Grid Technique (RGT) was used. Kelly's (1955) fundamental postulate of PCP stipulates that 'a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events' (Kelly, 1955, p32). This argues that individuals use their own personal constructs to understand and interpret events that occur around them and that these constructs are tempered by the individuals' experiences. Although

Kelly (1955) refers to 'he' it is important to note that to ensure equality, references specifically made to 'he' or 'mothers' throughout this study should be understood to refer to 'he' and 'she' and 'mothers' and 'fathers' respectively to reflect the current climate of equality in society.

In order to elicit a person's constructs, objects, known as 'elements' have to be used. Kelly defines elements as 'the things or events which are abstracted by a construct' (Kelly, 1955, p137). Within this current study the elements used with the parents and their children were school related words, such as 'break time,' written on white paper in black ink. The elements were generated after a focus group discussion with three parents with children who were EBSR. A focus group with parents was used to generate the elements to try and ensure they were within the participants range of convenience. Fransella et al. (2004) state that 'for a given act of construing at a given time, the range of convenience of our constructs is always limited' (p9). Thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) was used to extract the elements from the focus group discussion data.

A range of data analysis techniques were used to examine the data collected from the repertory grid interviews; frequency counts, thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006), and a chi-square statistical test was conducted to analyse any similarity between the parent-child repertory grids.

This volume of work contains the following sections:

- A critical literature review examining the existing research into school refusal;

- A methodology section outlining the methodological decisions and the epistemological stance for this particular research study;

- A presentation of the focus group and repertory grid data collected and the analysis of the data;

- A discussion and conclusion section that examines the presented results and whether it highlights an impact of parental constructs upon their child's constructs of school and school related elements. The discussion also examines the implications for the role of an Educational Psychologist, the methodological challenges with the study and areas for future investigation; and

- Finally, the references and appendices are included to guide further understanding of the presented information. Included within the appendices are the documents used to disseminate the findings of the research to the parents, their children and the staff at the provision where the children were on roll.

An investigation into the impact of parental constructs of school on their children's constructs of school and their emotionally based school refusing behaviour

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1. Critical literature review

The following literature review examines existing research on 'school refusal' and addresses the following questions:

1. What are the challenges associated with the conceptualisation of school refusal and therefore determining prevalence levels?

2. What does the research say about the associated family factors contributing to school refusal?

3. Are there any gaps in the research into these associated family factors?

4. To what extent could parental constructs impact upon their children's school refusal?

1.1 Defining school refusal

Pupil school attendance is a key issue for schools, families and the Government. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), recently (June 2010) renamed the Department for Education (DfE), publishes national figures that state the percentage of school non-attendance and are instigators of the behaviour and

attendance strategy. The 2008/2009 National Attendance Strategy is based on the idea that reducing absence and persistent absence is a vital and integral part of schools' and local authorities' work to:

- Promote children's welfare and safeguarding;
- Ensure every pupil has access to the full time education to which they are entitled;
- Ensure that pupils succeed whilst at school; and
- Ensure that pupils have access to the widest possible range of opportunities when they leave school.

Thambirajah et al (2008) highlight that 'children who fail to attend school are not a uniform group and school non attendance, especially when it is prolonged and persistent, remains a puzzling and complex problem' (p11). The official guidance to schools on the different reasons for absence distinguishes between two groups:

1. Authorised absence: This is absence from school with permission from a teacher or other authorized representative from school.
2. Unauthorised absence: This is absence from school without permission from a teacher or other authorised representative from school.

(Thambirajah et al, 2008. p12)

The last figures published by the Department for Education (DfE) showed that pupil absence, for the combined period of the autumn term 2009 and spring term 2010,

was 6.04 per cent of which 5.03 per cent was authorised absence and 1.01 per cent was unauthorised absence (DCSF, 2009). This represents half-day sessions missed as a percentage of total possible sessions.

Thambirajah et al (2008) emphasise that 'apart from the legal requirement, school non attendance is a cause for concern for a number of reasons' (p13). Loss of schooling may lead to poor academic performance and attainment (Thambirajah et al, 2008) and reduce the amount of time children have for age appropriate socialisation and peer relationships and therefore interfering with the child's social (emotional) and educational development (King and Bernstein, 2001). The figures published by the DCSF are crude measures because, for example, unauthorised absence is made up of at least two subgroups; truants and parentally condoned absences, and the figures do not tell us about the latter group. In addition to this, 'hidden within the statistics is a small but significant subgroup of school non-attenders variously called school phobics, school refusers and school avoiders' (Thambirajah et al, 2008, p 13). The lack of clarity surrounding the definition of this sub-group of school non-attenders will be discussed below.

1.1.1 Definitions of school refusal

Historically a variety of terms have been used to describe the various groups of children who do not attend school, including truant, school phobic, school refuser, parent condoned absentee, and emotionally based school refuser. Research commissioned by the Local Government Association (Archer et al, 2003) pointed out that there was no clear definition

among practitioners and schools distinguishing between the various groups of school refusers. This study also pointed out that there was a lack of clarity about the definitions of the various terms used to describe this group. The study was carried out in the academic year 2002/2003 and involved three strands. The first involved a questionnaire survey to all local education authorities (LEAs) in England, specifically addressed to the principal Educational Psychologist for each authority, with 60 LEAs returning the questionnaire. The second strand involved a questionnaire survey to 600 schools in England, including primary, secondary, special schools, and pupil referral units, identified through the LEA survey response. A total of 280 schools returned questionnaires, of which only 48 schools distinguished school refusers or phobics from other non-attenders. The third strand involved case studies in 16 schools where school refusers or school phobics had been identified. The 16 schools were identified due to their willingness to participate in the case study phase and therefore the data provided is only representative of schools that are willing to recognise school refusal as a key concern and be questioned further about the issue. Interviews were conducted with a range of school staff, LEA representatives, professionals from other agencies (for example social services, the health authority or voluntary organisations), and with a number of pupils identified as school refusers or phobics and their parents or carers.

Archer et al (2003) noted that very few practitioners in LAs and schools used definitions that distinguished between 'willful' non-attenders and those whose school refusal had an emotional basis. As a result, the incidence of school refusal is not reliably known, although it is relatively low and probably affects less than 2% of pupils in their school careers (Archer et al, 2003). This figure may be artificially low,

however, due to under-reporting or misdiagnosis (Paige, 1993) and Kearney (2001) suggests that the problem affects between 5% and 28% of all school-aged children at one time in their school career. The variability of these estimates illustrates the challenges associated with school refusal in terms of the definitional ambiguity that exists and the difficulties surrounding identification and quantification of the issue (Lyon and Cotler, 2007).

Thambirajah et al (2008) attempt to summarise and clarify the various terms used to describe groups of children who do not attend school. Table 1 illustrates the wide range of terminology used and the salient features of each group, however, Thambirajah et al (2008) warn that 'in reality it is more complicated and accurate identification may be difficult' (p14).

Table 1: The range of terminology used to describe school non-attendance (From Thambirajah et al, 2008, p14-15)

Terminology	Definition
Truancy	Absence from school without the knowledge, approval or consent of parents or school authorities
Parentally condoned absences	Unauthorised school absence in which the parents keep the child at home for reasons of their own
School phobia	An outdated term that was used to describe a specific fear of a school situation (such as assembly) leading to school non attendance
Separation anxiety	Extreme difficulties in separation from the attachment figure usually leading to school refusal
School Refusal	Difficulties attending school or absence from school on account of severe emotional difficulties at the time of attending school

In a review of school refusal, conducted over the last ten years, King and Bernstein (2001) identified that the term 'school refusal' is preferred over 'school phobia' due to its 'descriptive and comprehensive nature' (p197). They note however, that debates continue in the literature about whether truancy, school attendance problems associated with antisocial behaviour, and conduct problems should be included within the construct of school refusal. The lack of agreement and clarity surrounding

definitions of school refusal should be considered when interpreting any published work on this topic area.

Broadwin (1932) was the first to describe the school phobia syndrome, explaining that absence from school was consistent, although the reason was incomprehensible. Although he noted some children said they were afraid of school, afraid of the teacher or that something terrible was happening to mother while they were at school, Broadwin (1932) discounted such statements as rationalisations for a more general deep-seated neurosis (in Pilkington and Piersel, 1991). Johnson et al (1941) were the first to use the term 'school phobia,' differentiating it from truancy and classifying it as a psychoneurotic disorder. However, Johnson (1957) later restated that 'school phobia is a misnomer. Actually it is a separation anxiety, which occurs, not only in early childhood, but also in later years' (p307).

Since then, many definitions of school phobia have evolved, with most emphasising separation anxiety as a critical element. However, Pilkington and Piersel (1991) argue that the 'intrapsychic perspective on school phobia, exemplified in the separation anxiety theory, does not adequately explain the aetiology of all school-phobic cases' (p297). To provide support for this Hersov (1960) found that over 5% of school-phobic children feared a sarcastic teacher, bullying classmates or academic failure. Pilkington and Piersel (1991) believe that not all children who refuse to go to school deserve the label 'phobia' as it 'implies a neurotic behaviour and is associated with a negative connotation' (p297) and it fails to take into account the external variables that may be causing school refusal. They appeal for a more

inclusive term which can cover all cases in which a child avoids school, including truancy, such as 'school refusers.' They also highlight that 'the school environment and personnel have too long been ignored as contributing factors in school refusal' (p300) and therefore begin to emphasise the need to examine all systems, e.g. school, family, community, around the child. In Egger et al's (2003) study they analysed data from an ongoing longitudinal study in North Carolina, using the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment (CAPA) (Angold, et al, 1995). This interview tool combined information from both child and parent before generating a range of DSM-IV diagnoses. The test-retest reliability and construct validity of the CAPA have been well supported (Angold and Costello, 2000). The sample included data from 1422 children aged 9 to 16 years of age. Although the findings are based on data from America, and therefore there will be cultural and environmental differences compared to a UK based study, it is important to carefully consider the findings.

Egger et al (2003) found an association between separation fears and pure anxious school refusal however, the prevalence of separation fears remained remarkably low therefore contradicting the hypothesis, by Johnson (1957), that school refusal arises from separation anxiety. The study has limitations however, including a lack of data on the frequency, context and function of the school refusing behaviour and the authors acknowledge that the 'use of an assessment such as the School Refusal Assessment Scale (SRAS) (Kearney and Silverman, 1990) would help…to understand better… the functions these behaviours serve' (p806). The SRAS is a measure that assesses 'four hypothesized maintaining variables for school refusal behaviour' (Kearney and Silverman, 1990, p344) as detailed further below. The sample that was selected for the study was also selected from a school roll and

therefore 'might exclude children whose anxious school refusal was so severe that they have dropped out of school' (p806).

Similarly, Kearney and Silverman (1996) recommended the term 'school refusal behaviour' to embrace all previous terms and refer to 'child-motivated refusal to attend school and/or difficulties remaining in school for an entire day' (p345). They identified four categories of behaviour that are encompassed by the term school refusal; children 'a) are completely absent from school, b) are absent for part of the day (e.g. skipping classes), c) attend school only after severe morning behaviour problems (e.g. tantrums) to miss school, and/or d) attend school with great dread that precipitates requests to miss school in the future' (p345). Similarly to this, Thambirajah et al (2008) highlight the varying degrees of school refusal in the diagrammatic model below (p29).

| Occasional Reluctance | Reluctance | Extreme Reluctance | Complete Refusal |
| Full attendance | Occasional attendance | Sporadic absences | Persistent non-attendance |
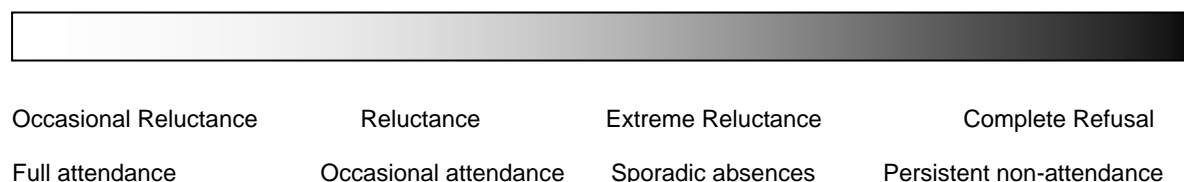
The West Sussex Educational Psychology Service (EPS) (2004) developed guidance for schools and support agencies around emotionally based school refusal and adopt the term 'Emotionally-Based School Refusal' (EBSR). It emphasises that school refusal is characterised by the presence of anxiety, which can impact upon a person's attendance and behaviour at school. The following matrix model of EBSR illustrates the relationship between anxiety and attendance:

Figure 1: West Sussex County Council EPS model of the relationship between school non-attendance and anxiety (p7)

High/Good school attendance

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                    A              │              B

    Low                            │                              High

    Anxiety    ────────────────────┼────────────────────          Anxiety

                    C              │              D
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Low/Poor school attendance
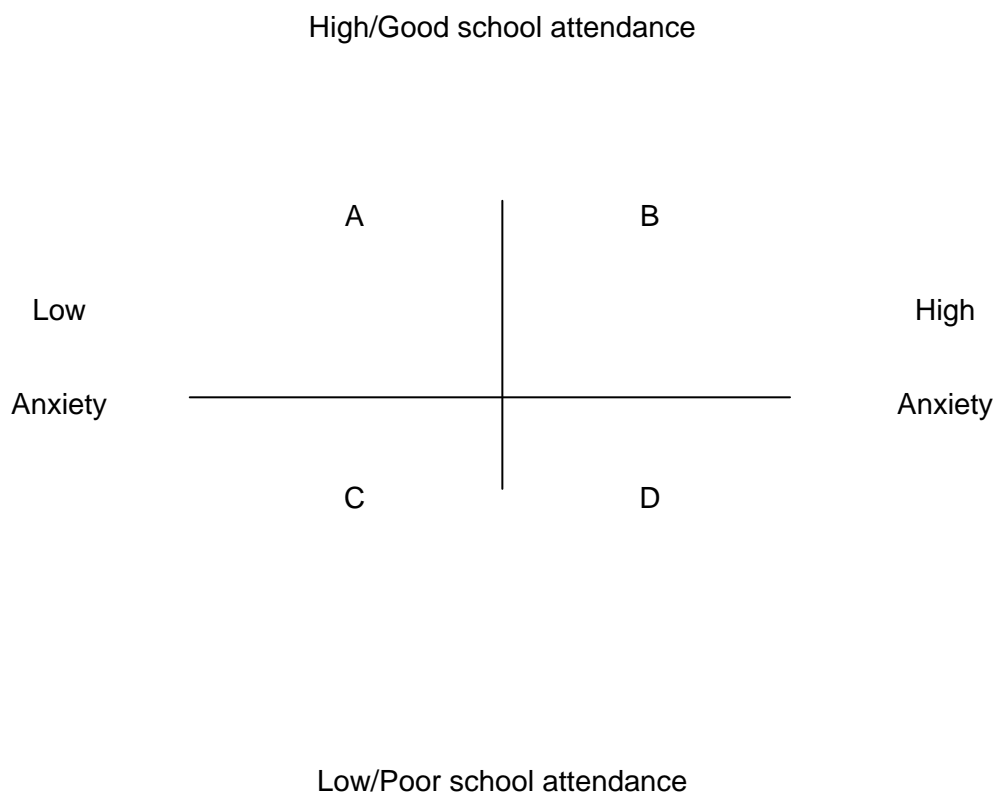
A - The majority of the school population in that they are not anxious

B – Children who are very anxious but do maintain school attendance

C – Children who may be considered truants in as much as they have low school attendance but do not show anxiety as the major factor leading to their non-attendance

D – Children who are highly anxious and feel unable to attend school. These are children considered to be anxious school refusers.

Category (group D) represents children who are absent from school for a large proportion of time and show high anxiety levels and as a result they are relatively straightforward to identify by parents, schools and professionals. The children within this group are likely to be

known to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and access specialised provisions for persistent absence. Category C represents children who may be considered truants (low school attendance with non anxiety), which official statistics refer to as 'unauthorised absences'. Category B, on the other hand, represents a group of children who successfully manage to attend school, despite their high level of anxiety. There is the possibility, however, that young people may display intermittent patterns of attendance and high anxiety (individuals that fall in between categories B and D), and these children may run the risk of persistent non-attendance in the future (category D). West Sussex County Council EPS state in their guidance that:

> 'The exact nature of the predisposing vulnerability and the precipitating events will vary according to an individual child's unique set of characteristics, circumstances and experiences, but it is still possible to identify factors associated with that vulnerability and the potential triggers leading to EBSR' (p8).

The guidance continues by highlighting that 'in order to identify, plan and intervene… one needs to understand that each pupil has a unique constellation of problems and thus behaviour is inevitably an interaction of complex within-pupil and environmental factors.' (West Sussex EPS, 2004, p25)

For the purposes of this study, the term 'EBSR' will be used throughout as it reflects the presence of school attendance anxiety for the child, but also the wide-ranging factors and emotions that may be impacting upon the child and family, to cause the non-attendance.

1.1.2   Factors associated with EBSR

Kearney and colleagues emphasise the importance of looking at the reasons why children do not attend school and the functions served by not attending and argue for a functional analysis of school refusal (Lauchlan, 2003). In addition to this Elliot (1999) points out that 'it is now widely accepted that school refusal should not be considered to be a unitary syndrome but rather one that is heterogeneous and multi-causal' (p1002). Elliot asserts that a reduced emphasis on symptoms and a focus, instead, upon the functions served by school refusal may be more helpful and may result 'in more sophisticated approaches to assessment and treatment' (p1009). However, caution is noted about the need for further research to determine the extent to which this improves clinical outcomes for the child.

In line with this Kearney and colleagues (Kearney, 2001; Kearney and Silverman, 1996; Kearney and Silverman, 1990) developed a functional analytic model that relies more on the reasons why children refuse to attend school (Kearney et al, 2001). Kearney and Silverman (1990) aimed to identify the maintaining variables surrounding school refusal behaviour. They assessed seven persistent non-attenders, 5 males and 2 females, (mean age 12.5 years) using semi-structured child and parent interviews, and a range of child self-report measures designed to assess school refusal behaviour (i.e. Fear Survey Schedule for Children-Revised (FSSC-R) (Ollendick, 1983); Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale-Revised (CMAS-R) (Reynolds and Richmond, 1978); State-Trait Anxiety Inventories for Children (STAIC) (Speilberger, 1973); Social Anxiety Scale for Children (SCAS) (La Greca, et al,

1998); and the School Refusal Assessment Scale for Children (SRAS-C) (Kearney and Silverman, 1988). Parents and class teachers were also asked to complete a series of questionnaires to highlight the 'value and necessity of collecting data from more than one source to ensure the accuracy of an assessment approach' (p363). It is important to note that this study only used 7 participants, and only 2 of these were girls and therefore the findings are not representative of the wide range of ages, cultural backgrounds and gender from which children and young people can be found. It is also important to consider that all the subjects had already been referred to a school refusal programme within New York and therefore their difficulties had been recognised by others. In line with this, there would be a need to consider children whose school refusal is masked or undiagnosed in future studies as their difficulties may differ from those participants used in the study or be more entrenched and therefore their responses to the questionnaires may be different to those recorded in the study. A final point of consideration is that this study was conducted in America and therefore differences between culture and environment will exist when generalising the results to the UK. However, this report was the first to examine a prescriptive treatment of school refusal behaviour based upon a functional model of assessment and therefore the findings need acknowledgement and consideration.

From the findings of this study Kearney and Silverman (1990) suggested that there are four motivating factors surrounding school refusal behaviour. In essence, they found that children refused to attend school in order to:

a) Avoid school-based stimuli that provoke a general sense of negative affectivity (i.e. dread, anxiety, and depression);

b) Escape aversive social and/or evaluative situations (e.g. tests, presentations, recitals, conversations with peers or gym class);

c) Obtain attention from significant others; and/or

d) Obtain tangible reinforcement outside of school (e.g. sleeping late, visiting with friends, drug use).

(Kearney et al., 2001, p3)

In a more recent study, Kearney and Albano (2004) assessed 143 youth with school refusal behaviour (mean age 11.6 years) and their parents to examine diagnoses that are most commonly associated with proposed functions of school refusal behaviour. The SRAS- C/P and the Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for Children and Parent versions (ADIS-C/P) (Silverman and Albano, 1996) were administered. 'The diagnoses from the ADIS-C were compared to SRAS-C ratings, diagnoses from the ADIS-P were compared to SRAS-P ratings, and diagnoses derived from combined child and parent reports were compared to combined SRAS-C and SRAS-P ratings' (Kearney and Albano, 2004, p152). The authors noted that the function of the child's school refusal behaviour when the SRAS-C and SRAS-P reports were combined may be different from the function reported only by the child or only by the parent and therefore this needs to be considered when examining the results.

The study was conducted in the USA with a population of children that included 89.5% Caucasian, 4.9% Hispanic, 3.5% African-American and 2.1% described as Asian and other. This demographic and the culture within which the children lived would more than likely be different if the study had taken place in the UK and therefore consideration needs to be given regarding the generalisability of the findings to children and young people living within the UK. However, it is prudent to acknowledge the findings from Kearney and Albano (2004) and to use them cautiously to help our understanding of EBSR in the UK. The study provides continued support for the functional model of school refusal classification, however, it was acknowledged that 'many children display mixed functional and mixed diagnostic conditions' (Kearney and Albano, 2004, p159) and therefore understanding a child's school refusal behaviour is complex. Kearney and Albano (2004) point out that many children may 'initially miss school due to something aversive there but later refuse school as well because of the intangible and tangible amenities of staying at home' (p159).

Adding to the concept that a child's EBSR behaviour is influenced by a range of complex reasons, Hughes et al. (2010) investigated emotion regulation strategy use in a sample of 21 clinic-referred children and adolescents (10-14 years old) presenting with school refusal. All of the children included in the school refusal sample were diagnosed with at least one anxiety disorder and were recruited from a School Refusal Clinic located in Melbourne, Australia. The children in the age- and sex-matched non-clinical sample were recruited from 15 primary and 9 secondary schools in Melbourne, Australia.

Emotion regulation can be broadly defined as the processes through which emotional awareness and experience is monitored, evaluated, maintained, and modified (Thompson, 1994). Specifically, two emotion regulation strategies; cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (John & Gross, 2004), were investigated by Hughes et al (2010) by using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003), the CMAS-R (Reynolds & Richmond, 1978), the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI) (Kovacs, 1992) and the Anxiety Disorders Interview Schedule for DSM-IV (ADIS-IV) (Silverman & Albano, 1996). It was found that 'children and adolescents presenting with school refusal reported less adaptive emotion regulation strategy use compared to age- and sex-matched non-clinical children and adolescents' (Hughes et al, 2010, p698). Specifically, the authors found that the children presenting with school refusal reported less use of the cognitive reappraisal strategy and greater use of the expressive suppression strategy than did the non-clinical sample.

It is important to note the small sample size in this study and therefore the results should be seen as preliminary and would need replication with a larger sample. In addition, the study was conducted in Australia and therefore caution should be taken when generalising the results to the UK. Further to this, Hughes et al (2010) state that 'no conclusions can be drawn regarding the causal relationships between emotion regulation strategy use, anxiety, and school refusal behavior' (p699). Despite this, the study highlights another factor that could contribute to a child's EBSR behaviour and Hughes et al (2010) highlight that future studies should

investigate issues such as 'whether emotion regulation strategy use contributes to the development of anxiety disorders and other emotional disturbances including school refusal, whether it changes as a result of these disturbances, or whether it affects the course and maintenance of these disturbances are in need of investigation' (p700).

It can be seen that the factors surrounding EBSR are complex. In line with this, Corville-Smith et al (1998) highlighted the multi-causal nature of school refusal and the need to consider the reciprocal and joint nature of relations between the student, family, school and community. Equally Carroll (1997) (as cited in Place et al, 2000) pointed out 'absenteeism is not just about the absentee but also has to do with the home, the school, the neighbourhood in which the home and school are situated and, in sociological terms, society as well' (p27). Place et al (2000) highlights the importance of these contexts in understanding the influences acting upon a child who is fearful about attending school.

Another important dimension to consider is highlighted by Stroobant and Jones (2006) who draw attention to the fact that 'school refusal behaviour is not fixed but is multi-dimensional, and changes over time in response to internal and external variables such as maturity, school pressures and adult and peer behaviour' (p211). Equally, Thambirajah et al (2008) comment that:

> 'The search for one factor (the 'main effect') responsible for school refusal is insufficient...school refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when 'pull' factors that promote school non attendance overcome the 'push' factors that encourage attendance. It is usually a unique combination of various factors and their interaction that leads to school non attendance, although one factor may be more salient to the problems than others in a particular child' (p33).

Yoneyama (2000) conducted a study in Japan and showed that young people's autobiographical accounts of school refusal (or 'tôkôkyohi') develop as a process over time and that they do not remain a static response. Yoneyama argued that young people with school refusal might go through several stages of not wanting to attend school, but that it may have originated from a particular starting point, or trigger in their lives. Although student discourses of school refusal in Japan may not be representative of young people's discourses of school refusal in the UK it does highlight again the complex nature of school refusal and the subjective experiences of the young people engaging in this behaviour.

From the cited research (Thambirajah et al 2008; Archer et al, 2003; Broadwin, 1932; Pilkington and Piersel, 1991; Kearney and Silverman, 1996; West Sussex EPS, 2004; Kearney and Silverman, 1990; Kearney and Albano, 2004; Yoneyama, 2000) it is evident that not only are there difficulties in defining school refusal behaviour, but the nature of it is not fixed and the triggers for the behaviour can change over time. This makes identification, assessment and treatment complex and to meet this challenge, King and Bernstein (2001) recommended that 'assessment be multimodal and multi-informant...[and] should also determine the specific factors responsible for the maintenance of the child's school attendance difficulties' (p201).

They suggested, amongst other methods, that in addition to a clinical interview, an evaluation of factors maintaining the school refusal behaviour, self reports, teacher reports and parent reports and psychoeducational assessments should be conducted.

As a result of the complex nature of school refusal behaviour and the research highlighting the 'multiple predictors *that* compound over time' (Kearney, 2008, p465) and the interplay between factors from the different systems around the child, i.e. school, family, community, and 'an agreement between authorities that family is an important part of the context in which school refusal occurs' (Thambirajah et al, 2008) the impact of the family system around the child will now be considered.

1.2 Research into specific family factors surrounding EBSR

1.2.1 Parental subtypes and the potential impact upon EBSR

Archer et al (2003) commented in their report that 'it was generally felt that, while school factors could trigger school refusal or phobia, the origins of the problem usually lay in the home' (p26). A key question raised from the report was:

> 'Is there any LEA guidance to schools or parents about issues of attendance generally and, within these, on any distinctive characteristics of school refusal and phobia?' (p27)

Berg and McGuire (1974) used the self-administered dependency questionnaire with 39 mothers of secondary school-aged school refusers and 58 mothers of secondary school-aged school attenders. Their actual (what actually occurred) and preferred (what they would like to occur) scores were obtained. Four kinds of dependency were measured; affection, communication, assistance and travel. Berg and McGuire (1974) found that preference subscale scores for affection and communication were significantly higher in school phobic children than in normally attending children, despite a tendency for school phobic actual subscale scores to be raised. This appears to indicate that;

> 'Mothers of school phobic youngsters encourage affection and communication in their youngsters to an abnormal extent. In contrast, there was no evidence that mothers of school phobic youngsters influence them in… requiring more assistance or of traveling less away from home…' (p12).

Importantly to note, however, is that this study measures maternal attitudes not actual behaviour and so there may be a discrepancy between what is reported by mothers and the behaviour that actually occurs. It needs to be acknowledged that this study was conducted 36 years ago and therefore cultural and societal changes may cause the results of the study to be different if it was conducted with mothers more recently. However, if the key findings are used, in conjunction with more recent research, described below, our understanding of the role of the family in terms of the child's school attendance can be developed.

Similarly, Bernstein and Borchardt (1996) investigated 'family functioning in families of school-refusing children and adolescents, specifically focusing on types of family constellations and associated patterns of family functioning' (p3). It was hypothesised that severity of anxiety and depressive symptoms would be greater in school refusers living in mother-only households compared with children living with both biological parents. As a result of this, the association between school refusal and a particular type of family constellation was examined using the Family Assessment Measure (FAM) (Skinner et al, 1983), the revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scales (Reynolds and Richmond, 1978), the Anxiety Rating for Children-revised (Bernstein et al, 1996), the Children's Depression Scale (Lang and Tisher, 1978), the Children's Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1992), the Children's Depression Rating Scale-Revised (Poznanski et al, 1985), the Symptom Checklist-90-Revised (Derogatis, 1994) and the Hollingshead Two Factor Index of Social Position (Hollingshead, 1957).

Bernstein et al (1996) found that single-parent families were over represented in the sample. It was also reported that mothers of a child with school refusal in mother-only families had an elevated mean on the role performance and communication subscales of the FAM, which was not evident in mothers living with the child's biological father. The authors suggested that this elevation could indicate a disagreement about role definitions among family members and their difficulty adapting to new and changing roles of family members. It was also suggested that it could relate to the parents' relating to the child as a peer rather than taking on the parental role.

Bernstein et al (1996) also found that fathers of school refusers, compared with mothers, reported more symptoms of depression somatisation and phobic anxiety. Similarly, Egger et al (2003) 'found that having a biological parent treated for a mental health problem was significantly associated with both anxious school refusal and mixed school refusal *(school refusal for a variety of reasons, not simply anxiety)*, but not truancy' (p805).

However, the study by Bernstein and Borchardt (1996) has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

1. There were a limited number of fathers that participated in the study compared to the number of mothers (67 fathers and 110 mothers) due to the number of single-parent homes, with mothers as the parent. Approximately half of the fathers completed the FAM therefore the sample is not large enough to provide evidence to sufficiently evaluate father's views of family functioning. There is a need for future studies to examine response rates from a larger sample size of fathers in order to represent the views of father's more accurately.

2. Bernstein and Borchardt (1996) acknowledge that 'the study did not have a large enough sample of subjects from stepparent families to explore the similarities and differences in family functioning between stepparent families and mother-only families' (p16).

3. Another important point to highlight is that the sample of children and parents involved in the study were recruited from a clinic in America. This raises questions not only about the applicability of the results to children and families in

the UK, but also of the generalisability of the results to children and families in the general population, rather than a clinic sample.

4. Finally, the FAM is a measure based on scaling questions answered by the parents, which then informs the rating of family functioning that is assigned. There are potential problems with this including the 'fixity of response' (Cohen et al, 2008, p328), which causes the response to be selected from a given choice. The researcher does not know if the respondent may have wished to add any other comments about the issue under investigation unless a comments section is added to each question. Another issue about the use of rating scales is the 'tendency for participants to opt for the mid-point' and to 'avoid the two extreme poles at each end of the continuum of the rating scales' (Cohen et al, 2008, p327). The interpretation of the data collected from the rating scales must be handled carefully so that the data is not distorted and reflects the views of the participants as accurately as possible.

Kearney and Silverman (1995) reviewed evidence that several familial subtypes are characteristic of the population of school refusing children. They highlighted six subtypes as described in the table below:

Table 2: Six family subtypes as described by Kearney and Silverman (1995)

Subtype	Description
Enmeshed	The notion of an enmeshed relationship remains popular; however, criticisms have been made of the primary characteristic of this relationship, separation anxiety, for not adequately explaining the aetiology of all school phobic cases (Pilkington and Piersel, 1991).
Conflictive	The conflictive family is characterised through hostile and conflictive behaviour (verbal or physical) of family members.
Detached	The detached family is characterised by family members who are 'not well involved with one another's activities or attentive to one another's thoughts' (p62)
Isolated	An isolated family is identified by little familial contact on the part of its members.
Healthy parent-child dyads	The healthy family is defined as one that 'shows higher than normal levels of cohesion and expressiveness and low levels of conflict' (p64)
Mixed family profiles	Kearney and Silverman (1995) acknowledge that 'considerable overlap exists' (p64) between the family profiles; therefore they identify a final subtype referred to as 'mixed familial profiles' (p64).

This emphasis upon family relationships is noted as being an essential part of understanding school refusal behaviour because 'maladaptive familial relationships are integral to the behaviour's etiology and maintenance' (Kearney and Silverman, 1995, p70).

Similarly, Hersov (1960) correlated parental attitudes with school-refusers' patterns of behaviour in two situations; (1) within the home in relation to their parents, and (2) outside the home in the company of other children and at school. Hersov (1960) identified three main types of parent-child relationships in this population of children:

a) An over-indulgent mother and an inadequate, passive father dominated at home by a willful, stubborn and demanding child who is most often timid and inhibited in social situations away from home.

b) A severe, controlling and demanding mother who manages her children without much assistance from her passive husband [or partner]. The child is most often timid and fearful away from home and passive and obedient at home, but may become stubborn and rebellious at puberty.

c) A firm, controlling father who plays a large part in home management and an over-indulgent mother closely bound to and dominated by a willful, stubborn and demanding child, who is alert, friendly and outgoing away from home

(Hersov, 1960, p140)

Although these relationships were identified over 40 years ago and the definition of 'school-refuser' has evolved over those years, therefore the children identified in

Hersov's (1960) sample may not have been included in a sample today, there is still some relevance in the key messages surrounding the categories because the complex interaction and relationship between parents and child and the impact the parents and child can have upon the others' behaviour is illustrated in the three identified relationships. It is also interesting to note that both mothers and fathers are included in these categories, rather than simply the mother-child relationship. Similarly, Ginsburg et al (1995) found in their work with children and young people with anxiety disorders that 'when family contextual processes are maladaptive' (p461) it tends to limit the treatment effectiveness and the maintenance of the treatment gains. Ginsburg et al (1995) report that, through their work with children and young people, parental anxiety, poor child management skills and poor parent-child communication can impact upon the effectiveness of treatment and the maintenance of any treatment gains within the home environment.

In opposition to the assertion that family involvement impacts upon a child's behaviour, Spence et al (2000) included parents in one of their experimental groups in exploring the effectiveness of their cognitive behavioural intervention programme. Fifty children aged 7-14years of age, with a diagnosis of 'social phobia' were randomly assigned to the child-focused cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) group, the CBT plus parent involvement group, or a wait list control (WLC) group. The use of random assignment of participants helps to reduce any 'selection threat to internal validity' (Robson, 2002, p115). However, it is important to note that this study examined more general social phobia rather than specifically EBSR, and was conducted at the University of Queensland, Australia, therefore differences of culture, family backgrounds and education systems will exist between the UK and

Australia. Despite these factors, there are still key findings that can be considered when looking at the impact the family may have upon EBSR. Spence et al (2000) found there were no significant differences between the two experimental groups who received the intervention programme on any of the six scales used to measure anxiety and behaviour. A study by Barrett et al (1996), however, demonstrated the benefits of parental involvement, although an individual treatment approach was used rather than a group approach. This may suggest that the benefits of parental involvement are more marked for individual therapy formats indicating the complex nature of family impact upon child behaviour.

1.2.2 The impact of parental experience and medical histories on EBSR

Martin et al (1999) examined the parental impact upon children's school refusal behaviour in terms of their experiences and medical histories. The study was one of the first to investigate anxious and depressive illness in both the mother and father of school refusing children. It was found that parents of school refusers with separation anxiety disorder had increased prevalence rates of panic disorder and panic disorder and/or agoraphobia. There were two measures used in the study to assess the family associations; the Diagnostic Interview for Genetic Studies (DIGS) (Nurnberger et al., 1994) and the Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia-lifetime version (SADS-LA) (Mannuzza et al., 1986). These are clinical tools and although they seem to highlight an association between parent and child in terms of clinical diagnoses, no study was carried out to look at why there are these findings and how the parental phobias impact upon their children.

In addition Last and Strauss (1990) examined maternal histories of 63 school refusers and found that mothers of the children with separation anxiety were more likely to have experienced school refusal themselves. Last and Strauss also indicate that mothers of non-school refusing but anxious children showed rates of school refusal close to that of normal controls and therefore assert that 'maternal communication focusing on separation anxious concerns and reinforcement of dependent/avoidant behaviour in the child' (p34) may be producing these effects. This prior experience of school may impact upon their beliefs and attitudes towards school and the way they understand the notion of 'school' which may ultimately impact upon the way they communicate the concept of school and school attendance to their children. This may, in turn, impact upon the children's own understanding of school and school attendance.

Shilvock (2010) investigated young people's views of their school non-attendance using personal construct psychology (PCP) (Kelly, 1955). Shilvock (2010) described three main themes that emerged from the interviews conducted with the young people. Amongst them was the role of being a young carer to their parent, especially in regard to their mother. Although only three females were interviewed and therefore data was collected from a limited sample, the study highlights the impact that parental behaviour and illness can have upon their children's school attendance.

The guidance by West Sussex EPS (2004) described family based factors for EBSR, which included:

- A family history of EBSR;

- Exposure to high maternal levels of stress related hormones;

- Experience of loss through traumatic separation from a main attachment figure;

- Consideration of birth order suggests the oldest and youngest in the family are most at risk of developing EBSR; and

- Children from middle class families seem more at risk but this may be indicative that there is a greater tendency to seek help and therefore be more readily identified.

(West Sussex EPS, 2004, p9)

Kearney (2008) reports that parental involvement is a key aspect of a child's school attendance and presents reasons such as relaxed attitudes about developmental milestones or self-reliance skills, parental mistrust of school officials, past episodes of parent-school official conflict and cultural differences between school and home, for a lack of parental involvement in their child's education and attendance at school. Orfield, 2004 (as cited in Kearney, 2008) reports that students who drop out of school are also more likely than graduating peers to have parents and siblings who dropped out of school. Although this is based upon American data it is still an important point to consider when investigating parental impact upon children's school attendance.

In a study by Egger et al (2003), to examine the association between anxious school refusal and truancy and psychiatric disorders in a community sample of children, (previously described) the data collected provided support to the research into family impact that 'problematic family and social environments are associated with school refusal' (p806). However, it is again important to note that the data used to support this assertion was collected using the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment (CAPA) (Angold et al, 1995) which is a clinical and diagnostic assessment tool, rather than a qualitative examination of family behaviours or beliefs that may have had an impact upon their child's own beliefs and consequent behaviour.

A clear message is highlighted by Berg (1992) who asserts that:

> 'Time needs to be spent with parents to help them deal effectively with the problem. It is often only when the child becomes convinced that the parents are determined to bring about regular school attendance, whatever it takes, that progress is made. Some parents are more difficult to persuade that rapid return to school is the best course of action…' (p162).

In agreement with this, Elliot (1999) describe that 'it is only when a child realises that parents are determined to effect a return to school that real progress tends to be made' (p1006).

Kearney and Bates (2005) describe a range of family responses to treatment of school refusal behaviour. They describe parents who are receptive to feedback

about their child's behaviour and are willing to remediate the problem quickly, parents who are reluctant or ambivalent about their child's attendance and parents who are resistant to feedback regarding their child's attendance status. Kearney and Bates (2005) describe each of these responses in terms of how they can effect the engagement of the family with the assessment and treatment of the school refusal behaviour. Interestingly, if family members can demonstrate a variety of responses to the assessment of treatment of school refusal behaviour, can they also have a variety of responses to the behaviour itself, and also to the concept of school as well? If so, can this impact upon their child's behaviour and constructs of school?

Place et al (2002) examined the mechanisms used by a sample of 17 children (6 girls and 11 boys) who had established school refusal. The sample size is relatively small and therefore caution needs to be taken when interpreting and generalising the results. Place et al (2002) used semi-structured interviews with the family to gain information about their perceptions of the difficulties that had arisen, their views about their lives, family relationships and the family history and whether any mental health problems were present in the family. They also used the Adolescent Coping Scale (ACS) (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993), a self-report scale consisting of 80 items that assesses coping strategies in children using a five point Likert scales. A critique of this data collection method is that self-report scales can be subject to response bias (Robson, 2002) that could be avoided if an interview had been used. In addition, it is important to note that Likert scales do not allow the respondent to add any other comment they may wish to and that there is also a tendency for respondents to avoid the extreme ends of the scale and opt for the mid-point (Cohen et al, 2008) which

may impact upon the reliability of the findings and must be considered when using and interpreting the findings.

Place et al (2002) concluded that the parents' own difficulties (for example financial or health), and lack of wider emotional support, 'not only reduces the family as a source of protection to the adolescent but, by enmeshed patterns of functioning, exert a drain upon the young person's already reduced coping resources' (p6). This emphasises the impact parental behaviour and emotional well-being can have upon the child's own emotional well-being and their behaviour and that any intervention 'will be thwarted unless the issues of enmeshment within the family dynamics are addressed at equal pace' (p6) through, for example, family therapy offered at local authority Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

1.3 Factors not currently addressed within research about how the family impacts upon EBSR

From the discussion of the literature above it seems that the focus of most of the research into family and EBSR is from a clinical or a diagnostic perspective. However, Toplis (2004), cited in West Sussex County Council EPS Guidance (2004), used semi-structured interviews to gain parental views from seven mothers and one father on the issue of EBSR, rather than using clinical or diagnostic tools. This methodology appears to be adopted from a more constructivist epistemological stance, rather than a positivist viewpoint, as most research in this area seems to

adopt (see section 2.1, p43, for a discussion of different epistemological stances). The interviews explored parents' views of the causal and maintaining factors of school refusal. It gained a perspective on productive and unproductive intervention and the factors, which they believed, brought about a resolution of their child's difficulties. Toplis (2004) found that 'none of the parents…felt they were listened to and believed that their children had no one to talk to in school' (p64) Another issue raised by parents was the lack of clarity they had about the role of different professionals, e.g. Education Welfare Officer or Educational Psychologist. Although Toplis (2004) study provides an initial attempt into researching the effect of parents on EBSR without the use of a diagnostic or clinical tool, only a small number of parents were interviewed and therefore caution should be taken when generalising the findings to other children, parents and environments.

There appears to be a gap in the research that takes into account parental views and beliefs and the impact they may have upon their own behaviour and the EBSR behaviour of their children. Cooper and Upton (1990) highlighted, in line with an ecosystemic approach, that a) people behave in accordance with the way in which they interpret problem situations; b) there are often many different but equally valid interpretations of any given situation; c) if people change their interpretation they can change their behaviour; and d) change in a person's behaviour will influence the perceptions and behaviour of others (p312). This encompasses how parental perceptions can influence their own view of a situation, how they act in that situation and ultimately how they can influence the behaviour and perceptions of their children. Pellegrini (2007) identifies the 'bias towards a clinical construction of this behaviour *(school refusal behaviour)* in research and academic discourses' (p66).

Pellegrini (2007) does not deny that young people who display this behaviour may benefit from the support of mental health professionals, but states that 'to adopt a within child view of this issue would be extremely limiting' (p66). He cites Place et al (2000) who suggest that 'an understanding of the interaction between environmental factors and school non-attenders is necessary to promote effective and lasting change and generate alternative discourses around this issue (p 67).

Kearney (2000, is a leading researcher in this field and has done extensive work focusing on school refusal behaviour. He shifted the focus onto the function of the school refusal behaviour and devised the school refusal assessment scale revised (SRAS-R) (Kearney, 2002) in order to help professionals identify the primary function of a child's school refusal behaviour. Although this tool is widely used within research it is clearly a clinical and diagnostic based tool and has added weight to the positivist 'measurement' view of EBSR that is predominant in the research into EBSR to date. The SRAS-R does not account for any precipitating or predisposing family factors that may be present and impacting upon the child's EBSR.

Kearney and Albano (2004) point out that there are children who may exhibit more than one function for their school non-attendance history and the functional analytic model of school refusal (Kearney and Silverman, 1996) includes parent-motivated factors, which can precipitate school non-attendance. Kearney and Silverman (1996), however, do not focus on possible parental motivation for keeping their children away from school, but refer to parental training of child management, as an intervention for child-motivated non-attendance. Parent-motivated factors could

include parental beliefs or constructs and this will be explored more in the next section.

1.4 To what extent could parental and child constructs impact upon EBSR behaviour? (See section 2.2, p51, for an explanation of what a construct is.)

Reiss (1981) purports that 'the family has come to play a central role in providing understanding and meaning of the stimulus universe…. (it offers) a set of explanations of the world to each of its members that serves as the primary organiser of internal and external experience' (p155). It is relatively simple to see 'how the family members' constructs fit into and form a vital part of the interactional 'dance' that takes place in human relationships' (Procter, 1985, p218). In addition to this, Fonagy et al (1994) argue that 'the child's sense of psychological self is a direct function of the accuracy of the caregiver's perceptions' (p248). They report that it is through the caregiver's capacity to reflect the child's psychological experience that the child is 'provided with part of the mental equipment' (Fonagy et al, 1994, p248) necessary to establish their own reflective self. Thambirajah et al (2008) also acknowledge that 'parents' attitude towards the teacher and other educational authorities are usually coloured by their previous experience with teachers, authority figures and, especially, their own experience of schooling' (p84). This further highlights the impact that our own experiences have in shaping our perceptions and reactions to the world around us and it is important to ask whether these parental perceptions of school could impact upon their child's perceptions of school?

In addition, Brill (2009) used the SRAS-R and the Parental Authority Questionnaire (Buri, 1991) with 40 students and their parents to investigate child and parent perspectives of school refusal. It was found that both students and parents seemed to have the same perceptions regarding the primary function of the school refusal behaviour. Although this study was conducted in Philadelphia, USA and therefore there are differences in cultures, society and education systems to the UK, it is an important finding to consider and highlights the question as to what causes the similarities in perceptions and whether parental perceptions impact on their children's perceptions.

Carroll (1995) looked at pupil absenteeism in Germany, Sweden and UK using case studies, questionnaires and interviews. Carroll (1995) acknowledges that the results presented 'have to be treated with caution' (p241) because of the limitation associated with case studies, interviews and questionnaires (e.g. researcher bias, response bias) although it is also acknowledged that information was sought from multiple sources and therefore provides more credibility and confidence in the findings and conclusions made. There were differences found between pupil absenteeism in the different countries; in Germany it is not seen as a problem, in Sweden and Germany teachers deal with absenteeism, whereas in the UK Educational Welfare officers are the primary workers dealing with absenteeism, and finally school phobia has been the topic of far more research in the UK compared to Sweden where there is a focus upon truancy. This raises a number of interesting questions including 'are there differences between the countries with respect to the

attitude of parents and children to school…?' (p241). This question introduces an interesting concept regarding parental attitudes and beliefs and whether they can impact upon pupil school nonattendance. In addition to this, a study by Cooper (1984) found that:

> 'Of special interest are the attitudes of school refusers towards parents and teachers… the evidence presented here suggests that school refusers do not feel that their mothers or fathers have any especially high regard for them. What seems to be more important is what the parents and teachers will say about them to others' (p236).

This seems to indicate that the perceptions and beliefs about what others have said or may say have an impact upon the child's school refusal behaviour. This adds weight to the need to examine the beliefs, perceptions and behaviour of people around children and young people in order to understand the impact they may have upon children and young people's behaviour. In addition to this Kearney (2008) states that there needs to be more inter-disciplinary investigations into EBSR and that 'pertinent disciplines include psychology' which indicates that there is an acknowledged need for psychology to be used to investigate factors surrounding EBSR, of which parental constructs are one.

Head and Jamieson (2006) studied a group of young people in Scotland who experienced difficulty attending school, by using semi-structured interviews with four pupils, two parents and three teachers. The interview explored three main areas; the nature of support, the effectiveness of the support as perceived by the stakeholders

and the sustainability of the support. Although only a small sample size was used in the study, there are some key issues that were highlighted.

Head and Jamieson (2006) describe how 'each of the young people involved had constructed an identity for him/herself that was related to their reasons for non-attendance' (p38). Cummins (2003) argues that the dominant, powerful groups within education, for example teachers and Local Authority representatives, such as Education Welfare Officers, construct the differences that children bring to school as deficits and explanations for their poor performance. It should be noted that this may reflect local practice and should not be seen as reflection about any particular profession.

In addition to this, Head and Jamieson (2006) point out that 'the lived experience of the young people involved, of always being the target of the gaze, served to reinforce the identity constructed by those looking' (p38). Further to this, Procter (1996) highlights that 'from our earliest experiences our parents and teachers select, label and punctuate the data presented to us, influencing the way we see and value things' (p162). The family evolves a unique construct system that provides a structure for the family members' perceptions of their lives and also provides a rationale for their actions (Procter, 1996).

Importantly, however, this construction of experience and meaning allows for an approach where a change of attitudes is possible. As Head and Jamieson (2006) emphasise:

> 'The relationship between the self and the other in a concrete context such as this *(school)* is dynamic, interactive and organic. Therefore, not only are pupils afforded the opportunity to create a new identity for themselves, but teachers and adults too construct a new identity for themselves. This identity relates not only to their own experience of the context but in the attitudes that develop out of their sense of themselves in the presence of their students, a different sense of themselves as teachers and support assistants' (p40).

In accordance with this Lyon and Cotler (2007) also highlight the importance of viewing family factors in combination with contextual variables and suggest the need to assess 'broad constructs such as cultural variables regarding education, as well as more concrete variables like descriptions of schools settings… physical barriers to school attendance… and in-school discipline practices' (p561) in order to understand the complex interplay between all these levels.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory links well with this, communicating the associations between the family and school mesosytems. As important as the child's beliefs, attitudes and constructions of reality appear to be, and also the family and cultural context within which the child operates, Lyon and Cotler highlight the 'insufficient attention paid to cultural differences in family structure, values and behaviour' (p556).

Linked to this is Pellegrini's (2007) assertion that although Place et al (2000) identified work with parents and social/coping skills training as useful interventions to support pupils who reported bullying and social isolation as a maintaining factor in their non-attendance, 'these interventions may not be as successful unless coupled with strategies addressing the aversive stimuli in the child's environment' (p73). These aversive stimuli could be parental behaviour and/or parental beliefs and perceptions that underpin their interactions and conversations with their children. This could be included in the social skills training by explicitly acknowledging these parental perceptions and using CBT-like approaches to change the more negative and potentially harmful perceptions to more positive, constructive ones.

Alongside this, Pina et al (2009) reviewed empirical evidence for the efficacy of psychosocial interventions for school refusal behaviour. Data from 8 experimental single case and 7 group-design studies were examined and it was found that 'behavioural strategies alone and behavioural strategies in combination with cognitive strategies seem promising for reducing school refusal behaviour' (p18). Further studies to examine moderators of child behaviour, and therefore 'investigating the conditions under which interventions are least or most efficacious' (Pina et al, 2009, p18) were acknowledged to be needed. Further, Pina et al (2009) stated that studies were also needed to examine factors that mediate change in school refusal behaviour interventions. Amongst these mediating factors may be the child's construing of events and also their family members construing of events. Pina et al (2009) also acknowledge that the research evidence examined in their study

was largely based on samples of youth who met diagnostic criteria for mental health problems. As a result, further research is needed to examine the population of school refusers who do not meet criteria for a diagnosis at all to investigate the effects of the interventions on their school refusing behaviour.

From the above discussion it can be seen that parental perceptions may have a noteworthy impact upon children's perceptions and ultimately their behaviour, including, for some children, their EBSR behaviour. There is a dearth of research into this area and this study will attempt to provide an initial step into exploring parental constructs of school and whether they have an impact upon children's constructs of school and their EBSR behaviour.

1.5 The B Educational Psychology Service project into assessing the functionality of EBSR.

Within B City Council Educational Psychology Service there has been an interest upon EBSR and the 'Path to School' assessment tool has been developed, which assesses the functionality of school refusal and considers within child, home, school and community factors. The package of materials was developed in collaboration with Education Social Workers, for schools to use with children who are thought to be EBSR's after concerns with attendance, specifically at Secondary School, were highlighted from local performance data maps created from collected attendance rates (see Appendix 1, p164). Anecdotally, the materials have been welcomed within

schools, but the focus is mainly upon school and within child factors with only little focus upon the impact of home and parental influences on the children's behaviour.

The assessment tool involves the child being presented with a variety of labelled pictures and/or word cards showing different factors that could impact upon school refusal. The factors include school features, such as dinnertime; home features, such as a CD player; and community features, such as traffic. The child selects factors thought to be relevant to their non-attendance and places them on a line (or path) between home and school. The positioning of the pictures indicates their relative strength when 'pulling' the child home or 'pushing' the child to school. Since the child is in control of the assessment materials the tool attempts to redress some of the power imbalance between the assessor (e.g. teacher, teaching assistant, Educational Psychologist) and child.

This piece of small-scale research aims to extend this existing set of materials by investigating the impact parental constructs may have upon their children's school refusal behaviour (Head and Jamieson, 2006; Proctor, 1996) and includes more reference to these factors in the materials. The inclusion of primary caregivers in the assessment will be an important development if there is found to be an impact of parental constructs on children's emotionally based school refusing behaviour.

2. Methodology

2.1 Epistemology

Scott and Usher (1996) explain that:

> 'Epistemology traditionally has been concerned with what distinguishes different kinds of knowledge claims – specifically with what the criteria are that allow distinctions between 'knowledge' and 'non-knowledge' to be made. Ontology, on the other hand, traditionally has been about what exists, what is the nature of the world, what is reality.' (Scott and Usher, 1996, p11)

Burrel and Morgan (1979) explain epistemological assumptions as concerning the nature and forms of knowledge, how knowledge is gained and how it is passed on to others. Cohen et al (2008) suggest there are three main methodological approaches to research with varying underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions, and these are summarised in table 3.

Table 3: Ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning different approaches to research (adapted from Kelley, 2009)

Methodological Approach	Ontological Assumptions	Epistemological Assumptions
Scientific/ positivist	• Reality is external to individuals. • Reality consists of cause and effect and therefore events that are orderly and lawful (Usher, 1996). • Objects exits independently of the knower (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).	• Knowledge is 'hard', objective and tangible. • It is possible to transfer the assumptions and methods of natural science to social science. • Science separates facts from values and therefore is value free. (Cohen et al, 2008).
Naturalistic/ interpretative	• Reality is created in a person's own mind; 'people interpret events, contexts and situations' (Cohen et al, 2008, p21) • There is no independent thing that constitutes meaning, just sets of meaning and classifications that people attach to words.	• Knowledge is based in personal experience; it is subjective and unique. Human action is meaningful and has to be interpreted within the social context (Usher, 1996). • 'The social world can be understood only from the standpoint of the individuals' (Cohen et al, 2008, p19)
Critical Theory	• Shares the same assumptions as interpretive approaches. (Cohen et al, 2008)	• Rejects objective knowledge. • 'No neutral or disinterested perspective because everyone is socially located' (Usher, 1996, p22) and therefore knowledge produced will be influenced by this.

Moore (2005) seemingly offers a view of ontology and epistemology that is in line with the interpretative epistemological and ontological position of this piece of small-scale research. He states that:

'Increasingly it appears to be an acceptance that the social world and social reality, at least, might not be readily characterised by universally applicable and transcendent laws such as the naïve realism of positivism proposes and that although the world may exist physically independently of people, truth and meaning cannot' (p106).

The filter through which people perceive the world is the way they understand, construct and believe the events they witness. Truth and meaning cannot be an independent, objective entity apart from a person. A person's understanding of the world is entwined with their own understanding and their social experiences. Further to this, Kalekin-Fishman and Walker (1996) purport that 'seeing people as social beings, who share ways of making sense of things and differ from others in specifiable ways' (pxiii) is an important aspect of social constructionism. Whilst there is not a single theory of social constructionism, most ideas highlight social relationships as paramount to the process of construction of social reality (Shotter and Gergen, 1989).

Kelly (1955) identified that the philosophy underlying personal construct theory was 'Constructive Alternatism' (p3) and this provides three clear elements of the nature of the universe:

1) The universe is real and not composed by the thoughts of people and we are gradually understanding the universe.

2) The universe is integral and the parts are all linked and work together.

3) The universe can be measured on a time dimension, which involves the idea that the universe is constantly changing and individuals can engage in change.

These three elements seem to reflect a realist ontology. Kelly (1955) highlighted that it 'emphasises the creative capacity of the living thing to represent the environment, not merely to respond to it' (p8). This also indicates a constructivist position.

Procter (1996) gives a description that fits with the fundamental beliefs of this piece of research. It states:

> 'While I would want to assert that no direct knowledge of the world is possible- it is always seen through the spectacles of constructs- Kelly's original assertion (1955) that the external world exists (and that we are gradually coming to know it better) remains fundamental for me. We are not free to simply dream up a different set of events from those that occur, although the construction we make of them is all we can know' (p176).

Therefore within this constructivist position events cannot affect people except through the way they are construed by them (Procter, 1996).

It is the aim of this piece of research to investigate whether the way primary caregivers construe the world, specifically school and school related elements, affects the way their children construe school and school related elements and therefore impacts upon their EBSR behaviour. This is in line with Pellegrini (2007) who, as discussed earlier in section 1.3, noted the need to adopt a less clinical construction of EBSR. Place et al (2002) illustrate the need to acknowledge parents' own difficulties and the impact this has upon their children's EBSR and Lyon and

Cotler (2007) highlight the need to view family factors in combination with other variables such as constructs. Importantly, it is key not to see these constructions as fixed and ultimate, but to believe they can be re-constructed to have a more positive impact upon behaviour. In line with this Burr (1998) states that 'if we take ourselves and others to be constructions and not objective descriptions, then it is (at least in principle) possible to re-construct ourselves in ways in which might be more facilitating for us' (p13). If a link between parental constructs and their children's EBSR behaviour is found then a new avenue for intervention is opened up to potentially alter not only the child's behaviour but also to positively impact upon the parental constructs. This is reflected in Head and Jamieson (2006) who emphasise the link between experience and identity and the dynamic, changing nature of this relationship and Cooper and Upton (1990) who state that if we change our interpretation we can change out behaviour.

2.2 Personal Construct Psychology (PCP)

Kelly's (1955) Personal Construct Theory links to the epistemological and ontological stance of this study. Kelly's (1955) fundamental postulate of PCP stipulates that 'a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events' (Kelly, 1955, p32) which argues that individuals use their own personal constructs to understand and interpret events that occur around them and that these constructs are tempered by the individuals' experiences. Thus, individuals come to understand the world in which they live by developing a personally organised system of interpretations based on their experiences. The function of a

personal construct system is to interpret the current situation and to anticipate future

events. Kelly's fundamental postulate is organized into eleven corollaries (see table

4).

Table 4: Kelly's fundamental postulate and 11 corollaries (adapted from Kelly, 1991, p4-5).

Corollary	Definition according to Kelly (1991)
Fundamental postulate	A person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events.
1. The construction corollary	A person anticipates events by construing their replications (1991, Vol.2, p4)
2. The individuality corollary	Persons differ from each other in their construction of events
3. The organisation corollary	Each person characteristically evolves for his convenience in anticipating events, a construction system embracing ordinal relationships between constructs
4. The dichotomy corollary	A person's construction system is composed of a finite number of dichotomous constructs.
5. The choice corollary	A person chooses for him- or her- self that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he or she anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his or her system
6. The range corollary	A construct is convenient for the anticipation of a finite range of events only
7. The experience corollary	A person's construction system varies as he successively construes the replication of events.
8. The modulation corollary	The variation in a person's construction system is limited by the permeability of the constructs within whose ranges of convenience the variants lie
9. The fragmentation corollary	A person may successively employ a variety of construction subsystems which are inferentially incompatible with each other
10. The commonality corollary	To the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person
11. The sociality corollary	To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another he may play a role in a social process involving the other person

Furthermore, Kelly contends that personal constructs are bipolar in nature, e.g. worried-calm (see corollary 3 in table 4). Fransella et al (2004) explain that it is 'the bipolarity of a construct that distinguishes it totally from a concept' (p16). They give an example of 'by stating that something is a tree, we are also stating specifically what a tree is not, for instance, it is not a bush' (p16). By investigating these constructs we begin to understand the way an individual interprets the world and therefore the way they behave in that world. If we can understand this behaviour we can begin to explain and ultimately positively change behaviour, such as EBSR.

One personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955) technique is the Repertory Grid Technique (RGT).The RGT contains three major components: a) elements, b) constructs and c) links as shown in the figure 2 below. Each of the components will be described further in the following sections and an example of the RGT interview can be found in appendix 2 (p168). A description of how the RGT will be used in the current study can be found in section 2.4 (p52).

Figure 2: A pictorial representation of the three components of the RGT

Construct
e.g. worried ---------- calm

Links
e.g. how does this link to my child's teacher or my child's school?

Element
e.g. a picture of a school or the word 'teacher.'
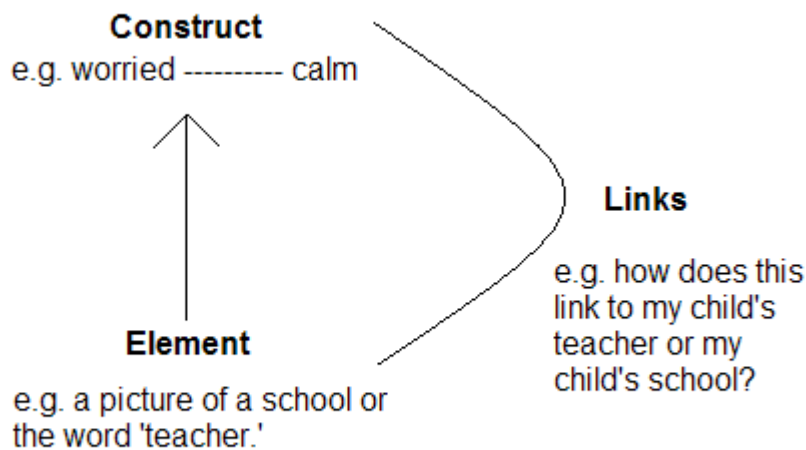
a) Elements

Elements are defined by Kelly as 'the things or events which are abstracted by a construct' and are seen as one of the 'formal aspects of a construct' (Kelly, 1955, p137). The elements are the objects used for eliciting the individuals' constructs and therefore were related to school and EBSR. The elements can be presented in many different formats such as photographs (Lynch, 1995), pictures (Hick and Nixon, 1989), or lists of people or objects (Ryle, 1967).

b) Constructs

It is difficult to define what a construct is, but Fransella (2004) states that 'personal constructs are bipolar dimensions which each person has created and formed into a system through which they interpret their experiences of the world' (p16). The constructs represent the research participants' interpretations of the elements.

c) Links

Finally, the links are the ways of relating the elements and the constructs.

2.3 Purpose of the study and research questions

This piece of small-scale research aimed to investigate the impact of parental constructs on children's constructs of school and their subsequent EBSR behaviour using PCP as a framework. The researcher aimed to work in partnership with one of the main teaching sites of the JB school in B to investigate the impact of parental constructs upon children's own constructs of school and their emotionally based school refusing behaviour. The research was centered on the following research questions:

1. What constructs do parents of children presenting with EBSR have about school and school related elements?
2. What constructs do children described as having EBSR have about school and school related elements?
3. Do parental constructs influence/ have an impact upon their children's constructs of school?
4. Do parental constructs influence/ have an impact upon the children's emotionally based school refusal behaviour?

An additional aim of the current research was to disseminate the findings to the children, their parents and the staff at the JB School. As a result it is hoped that the findings can be used to inform and develop practice within school and with the family. The public domain briefing documents that were used to disseminate the findings to the school, the parents and their children can be found in Appendix 14 (p224).

2. 4 Research Design

The RGT was chosen as the method for data collection to answer the research questions stated in section 2.3 (p51). The RGT provided a structured way of eliciting each participant's particular subsystems of construing around EBSR and therefore provided a standard method to use with all participants, reducing the level of researcher bias and increasing reliability. The RGT also formalised the process and provided a way of assigning mathematical values to the relationships between a person's constructs, which allowed for a more reliable form of comparison between the constructs of parent and child and also between parents.

A script was used (see appendix 2, p168) to introduce the technique to each participant, so that a uniform approach was used with each participant. However, it is important to consider Procter (1985) who cautions that by its very nature 'the grid tends to over-emphasise the construct and construct system as attributes of individuals' (p219). Filling in the grid is in itself a series of social actions made in relation to the person's network; it is part of a conversation with the researcher, an

encounter involving much mutual elaboration and reconstruction-learning. The grid is, therefore, a measure of this social process, and this itself is embedded in a specific ecological context. It is important to note that this may impact upon the reliability of the grid as the ecological context may be different from one day to the next depending on a range of factors, for example, any events occurring prior to the interview for the researcher or participant or the mood of the participant or researcher during the interview. This needs to be considered when generalising any results obtained from the RGT.

Ryle (1967) used the RGT to explore the meaning and consequences of suicide with a 19 year old girl and her boyfriend. Although Ryle only used the RGT with two people he stated that the RGT has much to offer 'the research worker seeking to confirm or amplify assessments of … the nature of patients' relationships with others' (p1402). Hick and Nxon (1989) used the RGT to assess the self-concept of children in Local Authority foster care. They reported that:

> 'Since no direct questions and transparent questions are addressed to the subject, answers cannot be modified to satisfy the perceived needs of the questioner. In the same way, the technique offers enormous potential for dealing with children who have experienced trauma of some sort, since it is clearly not a threatening activity' (p214).

This is an important consideration when interviewing parents and children about EBSR as many will have found the experience of EBSR traumatic or emotional. Hick and Nixon (1989) further state that 'the elements and constructs provided can be

varied to suit any situation or individual' (p214) making the RGT a useful, flexible tool to use with a variety of participants, yet the quantitative recording of how the elements and constructs link allows for a comparison to be done between participants.

In a study conducted by Lynch (1995) RGT was used to elicit personal constructs about smoking with a group of 17-18year olds. Lynch (1995) noted that 'repertory grids are not off the shelf' products, they must be tailor-made for different situations' (p104) and that it is important to note that the repertory grid is only a 'partial record of a person's perspectives' (p104). These are important issues and the need to ensure the elements of the grid are tailored to the subject under exploration is discussed further below.

The following sections provide further explanation of how the RGT was adapted for use within this particular study.

2.4.1 The Elements

For the purposes of this study, the elements were presented as words or phrases, printed in black ink, on strips of laminated white paper to ensure uniformity across all elements and therefore reduce any bias towards certain grouping of elements. The elements were also read to the participants to ensure any literacy difficulties the participants may have had did not impact upon their understanding of the elements.

Fransella et al. (2004) state that 'for a given act of construing at a given time, the range of convenience of our constructs is always limited' (p9) which relates to Kelly's (1955) Choice Corollary (see table 4). Kelly derived a rule for grid construction stating 'for given individuals completing a grid, all elements must be within each person's range of convenience otherwise we are inviting that individual to commit a nonsense' (Fransella et al., 2004, p9).

In order to use elements that would be within the participants' range of convenience, yet were the same elements in each grid for each participant, a focus group was used with parents who had children who were EBSRs. Robson (2002) highlights that focus groups can be used as a 'precursor to the development of a more structured instrument' (p287) and therefore it was felt a focus group would be effective in developing what the elements should be. It is acknowledged, however, that for some participants the elements used may still not be in their range of convenience as it is reliant on researcher subjectivity to extract the elements from the answers and discussions during the focus group. In addition, 'focus groups explore collective phenomena, not individual ones' (Robson, 2002, p289) and whilst this is advantageous when developing a set of elements to be used with a group of parents, it still highlights that for individual parents the elements may not be in their range of convenience. This must be taken into account when interpreting the results obtained from the repertory grid (see section 4.5, p135, for discussion about this in relation to the present study).

2.4.1.1 Focus Group

Krueger and Casey (2000) define the intention of a focus group as 'not to understand, not to generalize but to determine the range, not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people perceive a situation' (p87). This was particularly important for the purposes of this study, as it was the words, phrases and objects that people discussed and used in the focus group that became the elements for the RGT.

In order to conduct an effective focus group Krueger and Casey (2000) state that 'the group must be small enough for everyone to have the opportunity to share insights and large enough to provide a diversity of perceptions' (p10). According to Robson (2002) 'figures of eight to twelve are usually thought suitable' (p285) whereas Krueger and Casey (2000) identify that smaller groups of 4-6 are 'becoming increasingly popular because the smaller groups are easier to recruit and host and are more comfortable with the participants' (p74). However, the disadvantage of having a smaller group is that it 'limits the total range of experiences simply because the group is smaller (Krueger and Casey, 2000, p74).

Krueger and Casey (2000) identify five categories of questions that all have a distinct function in the flow of a focus group discussion. These are: opening, introductory, transition, key and ending. The following questions were used within the focus group discussion in accordance with these five categories (see appendix 4, p172, for more details):

1. State the purpose of the focus group: to use your ideas to generate the elements to be used in the RGT technique so that they are meaningful for parents.

2. Generation of ground rules (to be discussed collaboratively) e.g. respect other people's opinions, what is said will remain confidential unless something is said which puts yourself, or someone else at risk of harm, listen to other peoples' ideas, don't interrupt.

3. Problem free talk to build rapport between everyone in the group: Tell us your name and one interesting thing about yourself.

4. What words come to mind when someone says the word 'school'? (introductory question)

5. What led to your child attending this school? (transition question)

6. What does the term emotionally based school refusal mean to you? (key question)

7. Describe what things come to mind when some one says 'school refuser?' (key question)

8. I wanted you to help me generate words and ideas around the topic of emotionally based school refusal. Is there anything you think I have missed? Is there anything you came wanting to say that you didn't get the chance to say? (ending)

2.4.2 Construct Elicitation

The participants' constructs were elicited through a method called 'triadic opposite' (Fransella et al, 2004, p29) where three elements were presented to the participant each time with the question 'how are any two of these alike in some way' followed by

'what is the opposite of that?' Epting et al (1971) suggested this form of question, as opposed to 'how is the third element different from the other two?' because the interviewee may give the pole of another construct instead of the contrast to the elicited pole if they are asked about the 'difference' rather than the 'opposite.'

However, Hagans et al. (2000) highlighted that asking for the opposite of the elicited pole of a construct may mean that the rating is more likely to be extreme than if the person was asked to state how the third element was different and the spread of ratings may not be as wide. This is something that needs considering when interpreting the results of the RGT (see section 4.5, p135, for further discussion about this).

Laddering (introduced by Hinkle in 1965 as cited in Fransella et al, 2004) was used in the current study in order to elicit constructs that were more meaningful and pertinent to the participant rather than constructs the participant thought the researcher wanted to hear. Laddering was done through the use of questions such as 'why' or 'can you explain more about …' in order to elicit more superordinate constructs from the initial answers given by the participants. Appendix 10 (p190) presents the notes taken during the RG interviews and shows the laddered constructs for each participant.

Fransella (1972) and Button (1980) (as cited in Fransella et al, 2004) conducted research that illustrated that a laddered construct produced constructs that have more implications, have more meaning and are more superordinate to the individual,

in general, than the constructs from which the ladder started. In addition, Neimeyer et al (2001) conducted a study to validate the technique of laddering by conducting laddering interviews with a diverse group of 103 university students, analysing the structure, process, and content of the ladders they produced. To assess construct ladders originating from more concrete prompts, 51 of the participants were randomly assigned to a group where they were asked first to nominate three recent films or movies they had seen. They were then requested to compare and contrast these describing how two were alike and how the other was different to generate the initial construct dimension from which laddering began. To assess construct systems originating from a more abstract prompt, 52 students were assigned to a group where they were asked to consider three elements—their mother, their father, and themselves—and describe a way in which two were alike and different from a third.

Neimeyer et al (2001) found that the laddering technique does indeed access more superordinate or core features of personal meaning systems. It is important to note, however, that laddering is not an exact science and the researcher needs to acknowledge the difficulty in putting his or her own values to one side in order to understand how the participant sees the world. There will also be the social constraints on the constructs elicited as they are determined by how the participant construes the situation (Fransella, 2004). One way of minimising these distortions was to listen carefully, write exactly what the participant said and check with the participant that what was said was what they had meant.

2.4.3 The Links

In order to examine the links between the elements and the constructs the participants rated each element along the 10 polar constructs that had been elicited. Ratings were used as it provided the participant freedom when sorting the elements and did not force the research participant to make discriminations that did not exist, and therefore invalidate the results, as can occur with ranking techniques. If a ranking technique had been used it would have meant the participant had to choose which element was a 1 on the scale, which element was a 2 on the scale and so on until all elements had been ranked. This may have forced the participant into a choice between elements that did not exist within their construct system.

A 7-point rating scale was used in this piece of research. Metzler, et al (2002) investigated whether the length of the scale affected the grid measures. They used grids with 3-point, 7-point, and 13-point scales, with all scales ranging from a minus point, through zero to a plus point. They found that more zero ratings were produced using the 3-point scale, but there was no difference between the 7-point and 13-point scales. This seems to reflect the reduced choice a person has in a shorter, 3-point scale. Fransella et al (2004) concluded that 'at the present time, it does not appear to matter greatly what length of scale is used' (p63).

2.4.4 Alternative PCP techniques

Constructs could be elicited using other techniques such as self-portraits, drawings in context, storytelling, and self-characterisation, (Butler and Green, 2007) however, these are less structured techniques and would allow for more researcher bias and less reliability between participants. Advantages of these alternative methods include:

- Self portraits: allow individuals to express themselves through drawings and therefore might be a preferred method for people who prefer to express themselves visually. Drawings may also encourage individuals to make statements about themselves without having to talk about themselves in the first person which may be embarrassing for some (Butler and Green, 2007).

- Drawings in context: using Raventte's (1977) 'artfully vague cartoons' (Butler and Green, 2007, p60) may provide individuals with an effective stimulus to support them in providing a detailed account of their construing.

- Elaboration of complaints: using sentence completion may provide a structured format to help individuals highlight any issues they may have with particular situations or scenarios and help them to explore their reasoning and understanding for their construing (Butler and Green, 2007).

- Storytelling: pictures are used to help the individual produce a story around a particular concept or situation. From this story the individual's constructs are teased out. This may be a less threatening method to use with individuals who may find discussing their own constructs in the first person difficult (Butler and Green, 2007).

- Self-characterisation: the individual writes about himself or herself as a character in a play and therefore writes about himself or herself in the third person. Through this it is thought that individuals may provide a fuller and more honest description of themselves (Butler and Green, 2007).

As shown above, there are advantages to all of the alternative techniques, including that they allow the participant to respond in a more creative, individualised and less constrained way. However, these techniques rely more on researcher interpretation of the responses made and therefore there is more opportunity for researcher bias and misinterpretation of the responses. Further to this, due to the more individualised answers that can be given using the above techniques, it would be more difficult to accurately compare the constructs between parent and child, which is the aim of the current research.

2.4.5 Setting and Context

In order to access children who were described as EBSR's and their respective parent/carer there were three options available:

1. Make links with Education Social Workers (ESWs) so that they could identify children who were EBSR's.

2. Contact a range of schools so that pupils who were EBSR at particular schools could be identified.

3. Make links with the specialist provision in the authority that catered for children who were EBSRs.

Children identified through options 1 and 2 would be on roll at different schools and therefore have varying experiences of other children, professionals, school environments and expectations. By accessing children through option 3, it meant all the children and parents/carers who participated in the study were exposed to the same school ethos and structures at that particular time. Although children identified through option 3 would have, in the past, experienced a range of different schools, at the time of data collection all children and parents were within the same provision and therefore this reduced the threat to validity and bias when comparing parents' constructs. Therefore, the participants used in the present study were recruited through their connection to one of the main teaching sites, P, of JB specialist provision that caters for children aged 11-16years. The JB specialist provision is set over thirteen different sites across the authority and educates pupils who are unable to attend their local school due to a wide range of medical and social and emotional needs. The teaching site P was chosen due to the location of the home teaching section of JB provision that meant pupils could participate even if they did not attend a main teaching site within the provision.

2.4.6 Participants

2.4.6.1 Focus group

Seven parents were contacted by SB (SENCo of home teaching at JB) and gave

verbal indications that they would attend the focus group, however, only three

parents attended on the day and completed the consent forms (see appendix 3,

p170). Although this is less than the group sizes discussed above, there was still a

long and detailed discussion between the parents and commonalities were identified

between the parents' experiences in order to develop the elements for the RGT.

During the discussion parents talked in depth about their experiences as a parent of

a child who is an EBSR and also about their child's experience. Due to the nature of

this topic there was lots of emotional content in the parents' discussion and Krueger

and Casey (2000) highlight that 'smaller groups are preferable when participants

have a great deal to share about a topic or have had intense or lengthy experiences

with the topic of discussion' (p74). Although the focus group only offered three

parents experiences and ideas and therefore could be viewed as a narrow sample,

the quality of the discussion and the dynamic of the group may have been altered

with more parents present.

The three parents involved with the focus group discussion were 2 mothers and 1

father, 2 of white ethnic origin and one of a Pakistani ethnic origin. All the parents

had children who were of Secondary School age and were accessing the JB

provision as a result of difficulties accessing their local, mainstream provision due to their anxiety around school attendance. An important consideration to make is that the three parents who participated in the focus group will not be representative of all parents with children who present with EBSR and therefore caution needs to be taken when generalising the results.

2.4.6.2 RGT interviews

Consultation occurred between the researcher and SB (SENCo of Home Teaching at JB) to explain the purpose of the research and the type of participants needed for the interviews. Parents were then contacted by phone by SB to explain the research and their consent was sought for participation in the interviews. The parents and children were seen separately, but on the same day, so that their responses were not influenced by the other's presence and could not be discussed or answers corroborated after one of the interviews. However, child 2 insisted on being in the room with his mother, due to anxieties about being left on his own. As a result, the parent and child completed the RGT interview after each other but so that they could hear each other's answers. This needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the results as it may have influenced the responses given by the child after listening to the parent responses or the parent may have altered their responses due to the presence of the child.

Consent was gained from the primary caregivers for their own involvement through a consent letter (see appendix 5, p173). The primary caregiver's consent was also

gained for their children's involvement through an information leaflet and consent

form (see appendix 6, p175). The children gave consent through an information letter

and tick box form to say they had understood all the aspects of the research (see

appendix 7, p177).

Five parents (P) and child (C) dyads were interviewed in total. See the table below

for participant characteristics:

Table 5: RGT interview participant characteristics

	P1	**P2**	**P3**	**P4**	**P5**	**C1**	**C2**	**C3**	**C4**	**C5**
Gender	M	F	F	F	F	F	M	F	F	F
Ethnicity	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British
Year group						9	9	10	8	11

2.5 Ethical Considerations

Throughout the research there were ethical considerations to made and the table

below highlights the ethical principles highlighted by the British Psychological Society

(BPS) (2009) and the Health Professions Council (2008) and how these were

addressed during the research.

Table 6: Ethical considerations (BPS, 2009 and HPC, 2008)

Ethical principle	*How it has been addressed*
2.1 The essential principle is that the investigation should be considered from the standpoint of all participants; foreseeable threats to their psychological well being, health, values or dignity should be eliminated… It should be borne in mind that the best judge of whether an investigation will cause offence may be a member of the population from which the participants in the research are to be drawn.	The focus group allowed the researcher to explore what constructs parents may have about EBSR and use this information to inform the RGT so that it was as valid as possible to the participants using the grid. The contact details of the researcher were given to the school, parents and students involved so that they were able to contact them at any point during the research. This is particularly important in case 'stress, potential harm, or related questions or concern arise despite the precautions' taken (BPS, paragraph 8.2, 2009).
3.1 Whenever possible, the investigator should inform all participants of the objectives of the investigation. HPC 7: You must communicate properly and effectively with service users…	The objective and background to the research was explained in the consent forms and also the objectives were explained at the beginning of each session with the participants.
3.3 Where research involves any persons under 16 years of age, consent should be obtained from parents or from those in loco parentis. HPC 9. You must get informed consent…	Consent forms were signed for participation in the focus groups (see Appendix 3), for adult completion of the RGT (see Appendix 5) and consent from the parent and young person for the young person to complete the RGT (See Appendices 5, 6 and 7).
5.1 In studies where the participants are aware that they have taken part in an investigation, when the data have been collected, the investigator should provide the participants with any necessary information to complete their understanding of the nature of the research.	Participants were given time straight after the data collection for a debrief, where their elicited constructs were discussed and the impact they may have upon their own and others' behaviour. A letter was sent to the parents and the children explaining the findings of the current study (see appendix 14) and a presentation was given to key members of staff within JB provision to ensure the school were informed of the research. In addition, a copy of the

	full report was sent to the JB provision where the children attended.
6.1 At the onset of the investigation investigators should make plain to participants their right to withdraw from the research at any time.	This was stated in the consent forms (see Appendices 3, 5, 6, and 7) and also stated again at the beginning of each session with parents and child. There was no attempt to coerce or persuade individuals to continue to participate, and offers to withdraw were accepted without question (BERA ethical guidelines, 2004).
7.1 Subject to the requirements of legislation, including the Data Protection Act, information obtained about a participant during an investigation is confidential unless otherwise agreed in advance. Participants in psychological research have a right to expect that information they provide will be treated confidentially and, if published, will not be identifiable as theirs. HPC 2 and 10: You must respect the confidentiality of service users and keep accurate records.	Data was kept and stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act, (1998, modified, 2003). Data was collected using hand written notes and this was not attached to any individual details. Names were only stored on consent forms, and initials were used against participants' responses, e.g. 5P (parent 5) Whilst the data was active it was stored in a locked cabinet, in accordance with B Educational Psychology Service's confidential file procedures. Only authorised personnel had access to the raw data (Trainee Educational Psychologist, Claire Smith and Huw Williams, Educational Psychologist). Consent from participants was gained to share data with the authorised personnel only (see consent forms in Appendices 3, 5, 6, and 11). Data will be kept for 10 years following the research and will be kept in a locked cabinet in accordance with B Educational Psychology Service's confidential filing procedures (as above). Once 10 years has passed the notes will be shredded and destroyed.
8.1 Investigators have a primary	The contact details of the researcher were given to

responsibility to protect participants from physical and mental harm during the investigation. Normally, the risk of harm must be no greater than in ordinary life, i.e. participants should not be exposed to risks greater than or additional to those encountered in their normal lifestyles. HPC 1: You must act in the best interests of service users.	the school, parents and students involved so that they are able to contact us at any point during the research. This was particularly important in case 'stress, potential harm, or related questions or concern arise despite the precautions' taken (BPS, paragraph 8.2, 2009). One possible detrimental effect could be that students and parents were asked to discuss issues that may be particularly emotive or sensitive. Students and parents were asked about their own constructs about a topic that they may already be anxious about and therefore this may have raised issues that were sensitive to them. There have been several studies that have indicated the presence of parental anxiety (Egger et al, 2003; Martin et al, 1999; Last and Strauss, 1990) and/or depression (Bernstein and Borchardt 1996) in parents of children with emotionally based school refusal and therefore there was a possible risk of increasing this anxiety through the data collection process. The following safety procedures were therefore put into place to prevent any detrimental effect from this: The focus group was clearly planned for, with example questions and phrases used to explore each construct within the group. The RGT method was a structured approach and the same introduction was used with each participant and a set number of phrases used to elicit the constructs. This was to ensure the purposes and boundaries of the discussion were clearly communicated (Nesbitt, 2000). See Appendix 4 for the focus group outline. If any emotive issues arose during the data collection, time for debriefing was planned within the

	data collection and a follow up session was offered if the parent or student wished. This possible detrimental consequence was communicated to all stakeholders (parents and students) alongside the proposed protective measures (BERA ethical guidelines, 2004). The contact details of other support agencies were given to parents, if it was deemed to be appropriate, or a referral would have been made on their behalf.

3. Results

3.1 Thematic Analysis

Yin (1984) stated that data analysis 'consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence, to address the initial propositions of a study' (p99). The purpose of the focus group was to identify the elements to be used in the RGT interview with parents and children and therefore the data collected from the focus group discussion needed to be analysed for common themes or 'elements' in the parents discussion points.

Thematic analysis was used to identify and analyse these patterns (themes) within the data collected. The steps within thematic analysis, as highlighted by Braun and Clark (2006) (see table 7) were used to analyse the data.

Table 7: Phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006, p87)

Phase	Description of the process	Description of how it was completed in this study
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.	The notes taken during the discussion (see appendix 8) were read through three times.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.	Letters were assigned to the recorded comments as an initial set of codes (appendix 8, p180)
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.	The comments were grouped into themes (see appendix 9, p189)).
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.	The themes were re-read and reviewed to ensure the themes reflected the content of the discussion.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.	The final themes were labelled and used as the elements (see p77).
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.	

Thematic analysis was used because it has a theoretical freedom and the flexibility to provide a rich and detailed account of data. However, it is important to recognise that the absence of clear and concise guidelines around thematic analysis can mean that the 'anything goes' critique of qualitative research (Antaki et al., 2002) could be applied to this method. Further to this, the flexibility of the method could mean that the potential range of things that can be said about the data is broad and can make developing specific guidelines for higher-phase analysis difficult, which can be potentially inadequate to the researcher with lots of data trying to decide what aspects to focus on.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is another method of analysis that could have been used, instead of thematic analysis. However IPA would not have been an appropriate method of analysis because it requires a homogenous sample (Lander and Sheldrake, 2010) that was not present in the group of parents that attended the focus group, as there was a mixture of men and women, of differing ages and ethnicity. IPA is ideally suited to research exploring individual's experiences and whilst that is central to this piece of research, the participants views were elicited using donated topics and questions. This, therefore, would not fit well within an IPA framework that emphasises a non-directive approach (Smith et al, 2009). One of the benefits of IPA is that it donates a social constructivist epistemological stance (Lander and Sheldrake, 2010), however, thematic analysis is flexible and fits within a social constructivist stance, as has been taken with this research.

Decisions and boundaries about how thematic analysis is used to analyse data in the research are essential to avoid the criticism that Antaki et al (2002) level at qualitative research methods. Details about these decisions and the processes involved in the analyses are presented below to demonstrate the active role the researcher has played in the analysis. To reduce the impact of researcher interpretation of the views of others, Fielding (2004, p302-304) recommends that the following questions need to be addressed.

(i)   Resisting redescription in our own interests

The research is being used to support the development of an existing package of materials developed within the local authority EPS on EBSR. The researcher was not involved in the initial development or the subsequent development of the materials and therefore does not have a vested interest in the findings with regard to desiring specific responses. The notes taken during the focus group will be presented in the appendices in order to show the reader the raw data from which the themes were derived.

(ii)   Interrogating the impulse to control. How clear are we about the use to which the depth and detail of data is likely to be put? Is our more detailed knowledge of what students think and feel largely used to help us control them more effectively?

There are limitations with regards to how much the findings from this study can be used to change local authority or government strategies. However, the findings will be used to develop the set of materials used within the EPS service and will be presented to staff at JB provision in order to raise awareness with professionals working there and impact upon their practice with children and their families experiencing EBSR.

(iii)   *Facing up to issues of power and the necessity of being open to criticism. To what extent are we willing to not merely accept responsibility for what we say, but be genuinely attentive to criticism from those for whom we speak?*

The aim of the research is to look at parental constructs and the impact upon their children's constructs of school and their EBSR behaviour. The research findings will be presented to the JB provision and the participant's will be given the opportunity to criticise the findings which will inform any development of the EBSR materials within the Local Authority.

(iv)   *Understanding the dangers of unwitting disempowerment. Are we aware that, despite our best intentions, our interventions may reinforce existing conceptions of students that tend to deny their agency and capacity to take responsibility for what they do?*

It is acknowledged that by focusing on individual's constructs there may be a tendency to remain focused on a within child approach to interventions that have earlier, within the literature review, been criticised. It is hoped that by discussing the results from the study in relation to intervention design and implementation this will be avoided and a more ecological approach to interventions adopted.

Although Fielding (2004) focused specifically on the issues around gaining the voice of students, it is equally as important to this study that is focused upon the parents' views of school and EBSR, as it is important to acknowledge the subjective interpretation of the findings by the researcher.

3.2 Raw Data

The following sections present the raw data collected from the focus group and from the RGT interviews.

3.2.1 Elements from the Focus Group

Seven key themes were derived from the data collected during the Focus Group discussion. These were:

1. Feelings/emotions

2. Family

3. The school system

4. The school building

5. Break time

6. Professionals

7. Holidays

These seven themes formed the seven elements used in the RGT to elicit the participants' constructs. Only 10 triadic groupings were used to generate bipolar constructs from all the possible triadic groupings and can be seen in the table below. Fransella et al (2004) highlights that ' the number of triads used will often be determined by the time available' (p27). In order to keep the interview to under an hour for the participant, it was felt that 10 triads should be used.

The 10 groupings were developed randomly, however, the number of times each element was used was checked to ensure no one element was used considerably more times than others.

Table 8: Triadic groupings used to elicit constructs in the RGT

Number	Elements used in triadic grouping
1	Professionals - Family – Holidays
2	School building – Holidays – Break Time
3	Feelings/Emotions – Family – School rules/routines
4	Holidays – School rules/routines – Break time
5	School building – Feelings/emotions – Professionals
6	Holidays – Professionals – School rules
7	Break time – Family – Professionals
8	Holidays – Feelings/emotions – School Building
9	Feelings/emotions – Family – Holidays
10	Family – Professionals – break time

3.2.2 Generated Repertory Grids

Each of the generated grids from the five parents and their children can be seen below. Appendix 10 (p190) shows the laddering that took place with all participants to elicit the recorded constructs on the grid. The construct that was elicited from the two similar elements was placed on the left hand side of the grid and the opposite construct was placed on the right hand side of the grid. The 7 elements are presented along the top of the grid, with the rating given for each of them along the construct poles presented in the subsequent space.

The grids are presented under the heading of the parent-child dyad number and the parent's generated grid is presented before the child's generated grid for all five parent-child dyads.

Parent-Child 1

Figure 3: RG for Parent 1

Construct	Professionals	Feelings/Emotions	Family	Holidays	School rules/routines	Break Time	School Building	Construct
Flexible	1	1	1	1	7	1	7	Inflexible
Compulsory	7	4	7	6	1	4	1	Freedom
Relaxed	1	4	1	1	7	4	1	Uniformity
Daunting	7	1	7	4	1	4	1	Relaxed
Logical	1	1	1	1	7	7	7	Emotionless
Discipline	1	4	7	7	1	7	1	Relaxing
Pleasure	7	4	1	1	7	4	4	Focused
Free	4	4	1	1	7	1	7	Empty
Vulnerable	4	1	1	7	4	7	1	Learning
Focus	1	4	7	7	1	4	1	Relaxed

Figure 4: RG for Child 1

Construct	Professionals	Feelings/Emotions	Family	Holidays	School rules/routines	Break Time	School Building	Construct
Unhappy	7	7	7	7	4	7	7	Happy
Tense	4	7	7	7	1	7	7	Relaxed
Easy	4	1	4	1	4	1	1	Not easy
Irritated	7	7	7	7	4	7	7	Relaxed
School	4	7	7	7	1	1	1	Personal
Nervous	7	7	7	7	4	7	7	Relaxed
Forced	7	7	7	7	4	7	7	Freedom
Happy	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	Sad
Good	1	1	1	1	7	1	1	Hard
Sad	7	7	7	7	4	7	7	Happy

Parent- Child 2

Figure 5: RG for Parent 2

Construct	Professionals	Feelings/Emotions	Family	Holidays	School rules/routines	Break Time	School Building	Construct
Strict	2	6	7	7	4	5	3	Relaxed
Boring	2	5	6	6	3	4	2	Fun
Comfortable	5	5	2	2	4	3	5	Tense
Stability	3	5	6	6	4	7	3	Fun
Inviting	5	5	2	2	3	2	4	Scary
Work	2	6	6	6	3	4	2	Play
Support	1	5	4	6	4	5	3	Relaxed
At ease	4	4	3	1	5	3	4	Anxious
Secure	2	4	6	7	3	4	2	Release
Not important	5	7	7	7	4	5	2	Precious

Figure 6: RG for Child 2

Construct	Professionals	Feelings/Emotions	Family	Holidays	School rules/routines	Break Time	School Building	Construct
Strict	3	6	7	5	2	4	1	Relaxed
Boring	3	5	6	7	2	3	2	Relaxing
Relaxed	6	2	2	1	7	5	6	Strict
Agitated	3	5	6	6	2	4	1	Relaxed
Do nothing right	2	5	6	7	3	3	2	Feeling good
Bored	3	6	6	7	3	5	2	Relaxed
Being professional	1	6	6	6	1	4	2	Happy
Be yourself	7	1	2	4	6	4	6	Not being yourself
Being open	6	1	1	4	6	5	7	Not being yourself
Unhappy	3	5	7	7	1	4	1	Happy

Parent- Child 3

Figure 7: RG for Parent 3

Construct	Professionals	Feelings/Emotions	Family	Holidays	School rules/routines	Break Time	School Building	Construct
Expectations	6	2	3	5	5	6	5	Autonomy
Freedom	7	2	3	4	6	7	5	Complying
Relaxed	7	3	3	1	5	1	5	Anxious
Worried	7	5	5	5	1	7	5	Relaxed
Complying	1	7	7	7	1	1	1	Being you
Restricted	6	7	6	6	1	1	1	Freedom
Rigid	6	6	6	6	1	1	1	Relaxed
Exciting	5	5	4	1	2	4	7	Boring
Comfortable	6	4	1	1	4	2	6	Trying hard
Rigidity	4	7	7	7	1	1	1	Flexible

Figure 8: RG for Child 3

Construct	Professionals	Feelings/Emotions	Family	Holidays	School rules/routines	Break Time	School Building	Construct
Happy	6	5	1	1	6	5	6	Anxious
Closed in	3	5	7	7	2	5	5	Fun
Relaxed	5	5	1	1	7	5	5	Tense
Trapped	4	6	7	7	4	5	5	Relaxed
Who you are	6	1	1	1	5	3	4	Not who you are
Fun	5	4	1	1	7	3	5	Boring
Relaxed	5	4	2	1	6	4	5	Stressed
Exciting	5	5	1	1	7	4	5	Boring
Happy	4	7	5	7	5	4	4	Unpredictable
Happy	5	5	2	1	6	4	5	Stressed

Parent- Child 4

Figure 9: RG for Parent 4

Construct	Professionals	Feelings/Emotions	Family	Holidays	School rules/routines	Break Time	School Building	Construct
Authority	1	5	7	7	3	6	2	Relaxed
Relaxed	7	4	1	1	6	3	7	Serious
Anxious	1	5	7	7	6	6	6	Happy
Relaxed	7	5	1	1	6	3	6	Strict
Not being yourself	1	1	7	7	3	6	2	Being yourself
Strict	1	1	7	7	2	6	1	Relaxed
Relaxed	6	6	1	1	6	2	5	Uncomfortable
Relaxed	7	6	1	1	6	3	5	Serious
Relaxed	7	6	1	1	6	3	5	Serious
Relaxed	7	6	1	1	6	3	5	Serious

Figure 10: RG for Child 4

Construct	Professionals	Feelings/Emotions	Family	Holidays	School rules/routines	Break Time	School Building	Construct
Have to follow rules	3	2	6	7	3	5	2	Be yourself
Happy	4	6	1	1	4	2	6	Scary
Hurtful	7	1	5	6	5	6	5	Respect
Happy	3	5	1	2	4	2	6	Sad
Anxious	3	4	7	6	5	6	2	Happy
Worried	3	5	7	6	4	5	2	Relaxed
Not happy	4	3	7	6	4	4	2	Relaxed
Happy	5	6	1	6	4	3	6	Worried
Relaxed	5	4	1	1	5	4	7	Scared
Comfortable	4	5	1	2	5	5	7	Worried

Parent- Child 5

Figure 11: RG Parent 5

Construct	Professionals	Feelings/Emotions	Family	Holidays	School rules/routines	Break Time	School Building	Construct
Stability	7	5	4	1	1	3	1	Not coping
Relaxed	7	4	4	1	1	3	1	Stressed
Coping	3	4	4	1	5	3	7	Education
Working	1	3	4	7	5	7	4	Relaxing
Coping	7	7	4	1	1	1	1	Not coping
Learning	1	3	4	1	5	3	7	Relaxing
Relaxed	7	4	4	1	1	2	1	Not coping
Learning	1	3	4	1	5	3	7	Relaxing
Unsettled	1	2	4	7	7	7	7	Relaxed
Relaxing	7	4	4	1	1	2	1	Not coping

Figure 12: RG for Child 5

Construct	Professionals	Feelings/Emotions	Family	Holidays	School rules/routines	Break Time	School Building	Construct
Stressful	1	1	6	5	3	4	3	Relaxing
Relieved	7	7	2	3	6	4	7	Angry
Happy	7	7	4	3	6	3	7	Pressured
Pressured	1	3	6	6	1	5	1	Relieved
Being judged	1	1	5	7	1	6	1	Being you
Stressed	1	1	6	6	1	5	1	Relaxed
Calm	7	7	4	1	7	5	7	Upset
Worried	1	1	1	4	1	4	1	At peace
Supported	7	7	1	1	7	1	7	Worried
Angry	1	1	4	7	1	6	1	Calm

3.3 Data Analysis

Boyle (2005) (p184-185) summarises the way data from repertory grids can be compared and anlaysed to determine any individual or common themes. Common techniques used to analyse repertory grid data include frequency counts, content analysis, visual focusing, and statistical analysis (Tan and Hunter, 2002; Stewart and Stewart, 1981). These data analysis techniques are summarised in the table below.

Table 9: Data analysis techniques for repertory grids (adapted from Boyle, 2005, p184)

Data analysis	Description
Frequency counts	Count the number of times particular elements or particular constructs are mentioned. Frequency counts are most often used to find common trends from a sample of individuals.
Content/Thematic analysis	Select a series of categories into which elements or constructs fall and then assign the elements or constructs to categories.
Visual focusing	The use of a check/cross system instead of a scale. Elements are compared for common checks or crosses.
Statistical analysis	Examples include cluster analysis and principal component analysis.
Combination of techniques	Using a combination of the above data analysis techniques in the same study.

In order to analyse the data from the RGs a combination of frequency count, thematic analysis and statistical analysis was used and each is described in further detail below. Robson (2002) stated that 'analysis… is necessary because, generally speaking, data in their raw form do not speak for themselves. The messages stay often hidden and need careful teasing out' (p387). In order to 'tease out' the messages presented within the RGT data as thoroughly as possible, a combination of data analysis techniques was used and will be explored further in the following sections.

3.3.1 Frequency counts

'A frequency count is a simple data analysis technique where the number of times a particular element or individual construct is mentioned is recorded. This method is often used when looking for a common trend among a small number of respondents' (Boyle, 2005, p184). Frequency counts are an easy and accessible method of analysing data however, it is worth noting that detailed information can be lost through this method (Robson, 2002) which is why frequency counts have been used alongside other data analysis methods in the present study.

The number of triadic grouping of elements that were the same, (e.g. parent and child 1 both grouped breaktime and school building as similar and holidays as opposite) was counted for each parent-child dyad and the table below illustrates the findings.

Table 10: The number of triadic groupings of elements that were the same for the parent-child dyad

Parent –Child dyad	Number of groupings the same (out of 10)
1	7
2	8
3	3
4	6
5	6

It can be seen that, apart from parent-child dyad 3, the number of times the same triadic groupings was arranged was over half for all of the parent-child dyads. This indicates some commonality between the way the parent and child categorised the elements and therefore may indicate a commonality in their constructs around school and EBSR. Further data analysis is detailed below to explore this commonality.

In addition to this frequency count, the number of times a construct was elicited from the parents and children was counted. The table below indicates the results found:

Table 11: Frequency count of constructs elicited

Construct Dyads	Number of Parents	Number of Children	Total
At ease – anxious	1		1
At peace – worried		1	1
Autonomy – expectations	1		1
Be yourself – have to follow rules		1	1
Be/ing yourself – not be/ing yourself	1	1	2
Being open – not being open		1	1
Being you – being judged		1	1
Being you – complying	1		1
Calm – angry		1	1
Calm – upset		1	1
Comfortable – tense	1		1
Comfortable – trying hard	1		1
Comfortable – worried		1	1
Coping – education	1		1
Coping – not coping	1		1
Easy – not easy		1	1
Exciting – boring	1	1	2
Feeling good – do nothing right		1	1
Flexible – inflexible	1		1
Flexible – rigidity	1		1
Free – empty	1		1
Freedom – complying	1		1
Freedom – compulsory	1		1
Freedom – forced		1	1
Freedom – restricted	1		1
Fun – boring	1	1	2

Fun – closed in		1	1
Fun – stability	1		1
Good – hard		1	1
Happy – anxious	1	2	3
Happy – being professional		1	1
Happy – pressured		1	1
Happy – sad		3	3
Happy – scary		1	1
Happy – stressed		1	1
Happy – unhappy		2	2
Happy – unpredictable		1	1
Happy – worried		1	1
Inviting – scary	1		1
Learning – vulnerable	1		1
Logical – emotionless	1		1
Personal – school		1	1
Play – work	1		1
Pleasure – focused	1		1
Precious – not important	1		1
Relaxed – agitated		1	1
Relaxed – anxious	1		1
Relaxed – authority	1		1
Relaxed – daunting	1		1
Relaxed – focus	1		1
Relaxed – irritated		1	1
Relaxed – nervous		1	1
Relaxed – not happy		1	1
Relaxed – rigid	1		1
Relaxed – scared		1	1
Relaxed – serious	4		4
Relaxed – stressed	1	2	3

Relaxed – strict	3	1	4
Relaxed – support	1		1
Relaxed – tense		2	2
Relaxed – trapped		1	1
Relaxed – uncomfortable	1		1
Relaxed – uniformity	1		1
Relaxed – unsettled	1		1
Relaxed – worried	1	1	2
Relaxed/ing – bored/ing		3	3
Relaxed/ing – not coping	2		2
Relaxing – discipline	1		1
Relaxing – learning	2		2
Relaxing – stressful		1	1
Relaxing – working	1		1
Release – secure	1		1
Relieved – angry		1	1
Relieved – pressured		1	1
Respect – hurtful		1	1
Stability – not coping	1		1
Supported – worried		1	1
Who you are – not who you are		1	1

From this frequency count it can be seen that both parents and children elicited certain dyad of constructs frequently, indicating some common constructs between the parents and children. The dyads 'relaxed- strict' and 'relaxed – serious' were elicited the most times from both parents and their children. Although this frequency count provides some data about which construct dyads were elicited most commonly from the parents and their children, there are some that were elicited only once that could be grouped in terms of similar meaning. For example, 'being you – not being

you,' 'who you are – not who you are' and 'being you – complying' could be seen as being similar in meaning.

Boyle (2005) states that the main advantage of frequency counts are that they are effective for identifying the elements from free-response questions (i.e. where the respondents are not specified the elements by the researcher), however, using frequency counts for analysing constructs are more difficult because people may apply a different meaning to a particular construct. Stewart and Stewart (1981) recommend content analysis to analyse elements or constructs that are not well defined. Content analysis involves developing a series of categories that elements or constructs may fall into and then assigning the elements or constructs to a specific category. In line with this, to investigate whether there were any themes within the elicited construct dyads from parents and their children a thematic analysis, which is a form of content analysis, (see section 3.1, p71, above for a description of thematic analysis) was conducted.

3.3.2 Thematic analysis of the elicited constructs

The following tables illustrate the themes that the researcher identified from analysing the construct dyads elicited from the parents and from the children. The number against each construct dyad illustrates which parent (table 12) or child (table 13) the construct was elicited from. All of the construct dyads have been presented

with the positive construct on the left, and therefore some of the dyads have been

reversed to those recorded in the relevant repertory grid.

Table 12: Thematic analysis of the construct dyads elicited from the parents

Theme	Construct dyads
Relaxed – Structure	Relaxed – support (2)
	Relaxed – uniformity (1)
	Relaxed – authority (4)
	Relaxed – rigid (3)
	Relaxing – discipline (5)
	Relaxing - discipline (1)
Relaxed – Anxiety	At ease – anxious (2)
	Relaxed – anxious (3)
	Relaxed – worried (3)
	Relaxed - uncomfortable (4)
	Relaxed – daunting (1)
	Relaxed – stressed (5)
	Relaxed – not coping (5)
	Relaxed – unsettled (5)
	Comfortable – tense (2)
	Happy – anxious (4)
Being you – not being you	Being you – complying (3)
	Being yourself – not being yourself (4)
Freedom – restriction	Free – empty (1)
	Freedom – compulsory (1)
	Freedom – restricted (3)
	Freedom – complying (3)
	Release – secure (2)
	Autonomy – expectations (3)
	Flexible – inflexible (1)
	Flexible – rigidity (3)
	Relaxed – rigid (3)
Relaxing/fun – work/learning	Relaxed – strict (4)
	Relaxed – Strict (2)

	Comfortable – trying hard (3)
	Fun – stability (2)
	Fun – boring (2)
	Exciting – boring (3)
	Play – work (2)
	Relaxing – learning (5)
	Relaxing – working (5)
	Pleasure – focused (1)
	Relaxed – focus (1)
	Relaxed – serious (4)
Other	Coping – not coping (5)
	Stability – not coping (5)
	Logical – emotionless (1)
	Learning – vulnerable (1)
	Inviting – scary (2)
	Precious – not important (2)
	Coping - education (5)

Table 13: Thematic analysis of the construct dyads elicited from the children

Theme	Construct dyad
Happy - anxious/sad	Happy – anxious (4) (3)
	Happy – scary (4)
	Happy – worried (4)
	Happy – stressed (3)
	Comfortable – worried (4)
	Calm – upset (5)
	Happy – unhappy (1) (2)
	Happy – sad (1) (4)
Relaxed – anxiety/stress	At peace – worried (5)
	Relaxed – scared (4)
	Relaxed – worried (4)
	Relaxed – not happy (4)
	Relaxed – agitated (2)
	Relaxed – stressed (3)
	Relaxed – tense (3) (1)
	Relaxed – trapped (3)
	Relaxed – nervous (1)
	Relaxed – irritated (1)
	Relaxed – stressed (5)
	Relaxed – stressful (5)
Being you – not being you	Being you – being judged (5)
	Being open – not being yourself (2)
	Who you are – not who you are (3)
	Be yourself – have to follow rules (4)
	Be yourself – not be yourself (2)
	Personal – school (1)
	Happy – being professional (2)
Freedom – restriction	Freedom – forced (1)

	Fun – closed in (3)
	Relaxed – trapped (3)
	Relieved – pressured (5)
	Happy - pressured (5)
	Relaxed – strict (2)
Calm – emotional/anger	Relaxed – agitated (2)
	Relaxed – irritated (1)
	Calm – angry (5)
	Relieved – angry (5)
	Calm – upset (5)
Fun – boring	Exciting – boring (3)
	Fun – boring (3)
	Relaxed – bored (2)
Other	Easy – not easy (1)
	Good – hard (1)
	Feel good – do nothing (2)
	Happy – unpredictable (3)
	Respect – Hurtful (4)
	Supported – worried (5)

The two tables above indicate the themes identified from the elicited constructs from the parents and the constructs elicited from the children. There are noticeable similarities between the parent themes and the children themes and Table 14 illustrates the commonalities.

Table 14: Comparison of parent and child construct themes

Parent Construct Themes	Children Construct Themes
Relaxed – Structure	Happy – anxious/sad
Relaxed – Anxiety	Relaxed – anxiety/stress
Being you – not being you	Being you – not being you
Freedom – restriction	Freedom – restriction
Relaxing/fun – work/learning	Calm – emotional/anger
Other	Fun – boring
	Other

It can be seen from Table 14, that both the parent themes and children themes included a 'relaxed – anxious' theme, a 'being you - not being you' theme, and a 'freedom – restriction' theme. The parent constructs illustrated a theme of 'relaxing/fun – work/learning,' whereas the children's elicited constructs illustrated a 'fun – boring' theme. The constructs from the children also seemed to indicate a theme of 'happy – anxiety' that was seen to be distinct from 'relaxed – anxious' and there was another theme of 'calm – emotional/anger' that emerged. These two themes seem to have more emotional connotations and may be a result of the children themselves being an EBSR and consequently their own emotions and anxieties around school may have been more influential upon their responses to the RGT.

The similarities in the themes between parent constructs and children constructs may indicate an impact of parent constructs on children constructs of school and their subsequent EBSR or it may represent a shared language used between the family members about school and school attendance. This will be examined more closely in the discussion section below.

3.3.3. Content comparison of the constructs in each parent-child dyad

The table below illustrates the construct dyads that can be considered similar between each parent-child dyad. The similar constructs from the parent and child have been clustered into themes.

Table 15: Similar constructs between parent-child dyads

Dyad	Parent constructs	Child constructs
1	Freedom – compulsory Free – empty Relaxed – discipline	Freedom - forced
	Relaxed – daunting	Relaxed – tense Relaxed - nervous
2	Relaxed – strict	Relaxed - strict
	Comfortable – tense At ease – anxious	Relaxed - agitated
	Release – secure	Being open – not being yourself Being yourself – not being yourself
	Play – work	Happy – being professional
3	Exciting – boring	Fun – boring Exciting - boring
	Freedom – complying Freedom – restricted Autonomy – expectations Relaxed – rigid	Fun – closed in Relaxed - trapped
	Being you – complying	Who you are – not who you are
	Relaxed – anxious Relaxed – worried	Relaxed –tense Relaxed – stressed Happy – anxious Happy - stressed
4	Relaxed – serious Relaxed – strict Relaxed – authority Relaxed – uncomfortable	Relaxed – scared Relaxed – not happy Relaxed – worried Comfortable - worried
	Happy – anxious	Happy – anxious Happy - worried Happy - scared
	Being yourself – not being yourself	Be yourself – have to follow rules

5	Relaxed – stressed Relaxed – not coping Relaxed - unsettled	Relaxed – stressed Relaxing – stressful
	Coping – not coping Coping – education	At peace – worried Calm – upset Calm – angry Supported – worried
	Relaxing – working Relaxing – learning	Relieved – pressured Happy – pressured

Following these identified similarities it is possible to examine whether the parent and their child rated elements in a similar way by calculating the average rating attached to each element from the clustered bi-polar constructs. The ratings were deemed to be similar if they were within 2 ratings of each other (i.e. 1 and 3 were deemed similar but 1 and 4 were not) and are highlighted in red. The following tables illustrate the results from this:

Table 16: Comparison of element ratings between parent and child 1

Construct Dyad: parent 1	Elements: average scores							Construct Dyad: child 1
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Freedom – compulsory Free – empty Relaxed – discipline	4	4	1	2	7	2	7	
	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	Freedom – forced
Relaxed – daunting	1	7	1	4	7	4	7	
	2.5	1	1	1	5.5	1	1	Relaxed – tense Relaxed – nervous

Table 16 indicates that parent and child one rated elements 3, 4 and 5 similarly for the constructs clustered in theme one and rated elements 1 and 3 similarly for the constructs clustered in theme 2. It is interesting to note that although parent and child one only rated 5 elements similarly across the two themes of constructs, both parent and child one used mostly extreme rating during the RGT, i.e. they used ratings of 1, 4 and 7 rather than any other rating.

Table 17: Comparison of element ratings between parent and child 2

Construct Dyad: parent 2	Elements: average scores							Construct Dyad: child 2
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Relaxed – strict	6	2	1	1	4	3	5	
	6	2	2	1	7	5	6	Relaxed – strict
Comfortable – tense At ease – anxious	4.5	4.5	2.5	1.5	4.5	3	4.5	
	5	3	2	2	6	4	7	Relaxed – agitated
Release – secure	6	4	2	1	5	4	6	
	6.5	1	1.5	4	6	4.5	6.5	Being open – not being yourself Being yourself – not being yourself
Play – work	6	2	2	2	5	4	6	
	7	2	2	2	7	4	6	Happy – being professional

The table above seems to indicate that parent and child two rated elements very similarly and only differed on 4 element ratings across the four themes of constructs. This seems to suggest that parent and child two share a similar view of the seven elements and their link to the elicited constructs. As discussed in section 2.4.6.2 (p65), however, the parent and child could hear each others responses and this may have impacted upon the similarity of their ratings.

Table 18: Comparison of element ratings between parent and child 3

Construct Dyad: parent 3	Elements: average scores							Construct Dyad: child 3
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Exciting – boring	5	5	4	1	2	4	7	
	5	4.5	1	1	7	3.5	5	Fun – boring Exciting – boring
Freedom – complying Freedom – restricted Autonomy – expectations Relaxed – rigid	3.3	2.8	4	2.8	5.8	5.8	5.5	
	4.5	2.5	1	1	5	3	3	Fun – closed in Relaxed – trapped
Being you – complying	7	1	1	1	7	7	7	
	6	1	1	1	5	3	4	Who you are – not who you are
Relaxed – anxious Relaxed – worried	4	3	3	2	6	1	4	
	5.3	4.8	1.5	1	6.3	4.5	5.3	Relaxed – tense Relaxed – stressed Happy – anxious Happy – stressed

From the table above it can be seen that parent and child three rated most elements similarly across the four themes of constructs. However, the results indicate that

there was some difference in the way elements 6 and 7 were rated on 3 out of the four themes of constructs and 3 and 5 on 2 out of the four themes.

Table 19: Comparison of element ratings between parent and child 4

Construct Dyad: parent 4	Elements: average scores							Construct Dyad: child 4
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Relaxed - serious Relaxed – strict Relaxed – authority Relaxed - uncomfortable	6.9	5.4	1	1	5.9	2.6	5.8	
	4.5	4.3	1	1.8	4.5	4	6.5	Relaxed – scared Relaxed – not happy Relaxed – worried Comfortable – worried
Happy - anxious	7	3	1	1	2	2	2	
	4.7	5.3	1	3	3.7	2.3	6	Happy – anxious Happy – worried Happy - scared
Being yourself – not being yourself	7	7	1	1	5	2	6	
	5	6	2	1	5	3	6	Be yourself – have to follow rules

Analysis of the results in the table above indicates that parent and child four rated most elements similarly across all the three themes of constructs, however there was some difference in only two element ratings.

Table 20: Comparison of element ratings between parent and child 5

Construct Dyad: parent 5	Elements: average scores							Construct Dyad: child 5
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Relaxed – stressed Relaxed – not coping Relaxed - unsettled	7	4	4	1	1	2.3	1	
	7	7	2	2.5	6	3.5	6	Relaxed – stressed Relaxing - stressful
Coping – not coping Coping - education	5	5.5	4	1	3	2	4	
	7	7	4	1.8	7	3	7	At peace – worried Calm – upset Calm – angry Supported - worried
Relaxing – working Relaxing - learning	7	5	4	5	3	3.7	2	
	7	6	3	2.5	6.5	3	7	Relieved – pressured Happy pressured

The table above indicates that parent and child five rated most of the elements similarly across the three identified themes of constructs, however, element 5 and 7 were consistently rated differently. This may indicate a different perception of break time and holidays between parent 5 and child 5. Element 2 was also rated differently on theme one.

It can be seen that the parents and their children rated most of the elements in a similar way across all the identified themes of constructs. It should be noted, however, that the constructs have been grouped into themes according to the researcher's interpretation of the meaning and therefore this may not be an accurate clustering of constructs. This will have an impact upon the comparison of the elements and their rating and therefore any interpretation of the results needs to be completed with caution (see section 4.5, p135, for further discussion).

3.3.4 Statistical comparison of the two repertory grids from each parent-child dyad

Since repertory grids produce a matrix of data, data analysis can also occur using traditional statistical techniques (Boyle, 2005).

Alongside the constructionist position of this particular study, as described in section 2.1, (p43), is the statistical data analysis used in this piece of small-scale research. The RGT uses the same procedure, with a script, with each participant and mathematical values are assigned to the responses in order to compare responses between parents and between parent-child pairs in a quantitative way. This attaches an almost positivist element where 'science is largely based on quantitative data, derived from the use of strict rules and procedures,' (Robson, 2002, p20). Statistically comparing the responses between the parent and child within each dyad

will give added data to help answer the question about whether parental constructs have an impact upon their child's constructs and subsequent behaviour.

Two of the common statistical techniques used to analyse repertory grid data are cluster analysis and principal component analysis. These techniques however require a large amount of data and require both elements and constructs to remain constant across the RGs. In order to illustrate whether the RGs within each parent – child dyad could be seen as being statistically similar, 20 adults were asked to choose the pairing of grids that were most similar from a choice of 2 pairs; one pair was the 'real' parent and child repertory grid pairing and the other pair were randomly paired parent and child repertory grids (e.g. parent 2 with child 5). The participants completed this task for each parent –child dyad. Each participant signed to give consent to complete the activity (see appendix 11, p216) and the results can be seen in the table below. If the pair of 'real' parent and child repertory grids was chosen as the most similar pair a number 1 is indicated, whereas a number 2 is indicated if the randomly paired set of grids was chosen as being most similar.

Table 21: Results from the similarities activity

Participant	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3	Activity 4	Activity 5
1	1	2	1	2	2
2	1	2	1	2	2
3	1	1	2	1	2
4	1	1	1	1	2
5	1	1	2	1	2
6	2	1	1	1	1
7	1	1	2	1	2
8	1	1	2	1	2
9	2	2	1	2	1
10	1	1	1	1	2
11	2	1	1	1	1
12	1	1	2	2	2
13	1	1	1	2	1
14	1	1	1	2	1
15	1	1	2	1	2
16	1	1	1	1	2
17	1	1	2	1	2
18	2	1	2	2	1
19	1	1	1	2	2
20	1	1	1	1	1

The results from all 20 participants were analysed using a chi-squared methodology (see appendix 12, p217, for the calculations and appendix 13, p220, for the critical values of the chi-square distribution table). From these calculations it was found that for parent-child dyads 1 and 2, participants were more likely to choose the 'real' parent-child repertory grids as more similar than the random pairing of parent and child repertory grids; that is there was a significant difference (x^2= 7.2 for dyad 1 and x^2= 9.8 for dyad 2, df = 1, p<0.01) between the observed and expected frequencies. For dyads 3, 4 and 5 there was no significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies and therefore it can not be concluded that the 'real' parent child repertory grids were more likely to be seen as more similar than a random pairing of parent and child repertory grids. However, it should be noted that for parent-child dyads 3 and 4, the real pairing was chosen as being most similar 12 out of 20 times and therefore over 50% of participants identified them as being similar. Although this is not statistically significant at p<0.01 or p<0.05, it does indicate that over half of the 20 participants identified the 'real' pairing of grids as being similar.

As discussed in section 2.4.6.2 (p65) parent and child 2 were in the room together when they were interviewed and therefore this may have impacted upon the similarity of their responses. This needs consideration when interpreting the results from parent and child 2.

4. Discussion

The results will be discussed in relation to the four research questions that guided the current study.

4.1 What were the elicited constructs from the parents and their children?

Two research questions were posed to investigate the constructs that parents and their children, who present with EBSR, have about school.

What constructs do parents of children presenting with EBSR have about school and school related elements? & What constructs do children described as having EBSR have about school and school related elements?

Using the RGT, the following Key Construct Themes were elicited from the parents:

- Relaxed-anxiety;
- Relaxed-structure;
- Fun-work;
- Freedom-restriction; and
- Being-yourself-not being yourself

In addition, the following Key Construct Themes were elicited from the children using the RGT:

- Happy-anxiety;

- Relaxed-anxiety;

- Calm-anger;

- Fun-boring;

- Freedom-restriction; and

- Being you-not being yourself.

From this it can be seen that there were three themes that emerged that were shared between the parents and their children. These were:

- Relaxed-anxiety;

- Freedom-restriction; and

- Being you-not being yourself.

This current study is the first to elicit constructs from parents of children who are described as EBSR and from the children themselves around school and school related elements. As a result, the key construct themes highlighted above need to be acknowledged as being one possible part of the 'combination of various factors and their interaction' (Thambirajah et al, 2008, p33) that can impact upon EBSR.

As discussed in section 1.2.2 (p27), Kearney (2008) reported, amongst other reasons, that parental mistrust of professionals associated with school and cultural differences between home and school may impact upon a child's school attendance. The 'freedom-restriction' and 'being yourself- not being yourself' themes that have emerged within this current study may echo these reasons stated by Kearney (2008)

as parents may feel that their children and themselves cannot be themselves if the culture in school differs from their own. Also, a mistrust of school officials may result in the parents and children feeling restricted about what they can or cannot say or do within school.

In addition, Toplis (2004), as discussed previously, found that parents highlighted the lack of clarity they had about the role of different professionals and that they did not feel listened to. These may also be reflected in the 'freedom-restricted' theme and also within the 'relaxed-anxiety' theme found within this study, as parents may feel restricted by their lack of understanding and their feelings of not being listened to. Equally this may also result in an increased feeling of anxiety by the parents.

The shared 'relaxed-anxiety' between parents and children and the children's 'happy-anxiety' theme is reflective of the anxiety around school that is widely associated with EBSR (Broadwin, 1932; Johnson, 1957; Hersov, 1960; Kearney and Silverman, 1990; Place et al, 2000; and Egger et al, 2003).

The themes derived from the parent and child constructs are indicative of where the focus for interventions, to improve school attendance, need to be for this particular group of parents and children, in order to have a positive impact upon their constructs of school and school related elements. Kelly's (1991) choice corollary indicates that:

> 'A person chooses for him- or her self that alternative in a dichotomized construct through which he or she anticipates the greater possibility for extension and definition of his or her system.'
>
> (p4-5)

In order to develop the parents' and children's thinking interventions need to facilitate them to choose the more positive construct within the bipolar constructs highlighted above. The generated constructs indicate that interventions need to focus on the following areas:

- Developing the parent's and children's sense of freedom;

- Supporting the parents and their children to feel that they can be themselves within the structures of school and work; and

- Reducing the levels of anxiety felt by parents and children by including activities that promote a sense of feeling calm and relaxed.

In addition, 'anger' and being 'sad' were highlighted as being distinct themes from the children's elicited constructs. It should be considered that, if these emotions are explored with the children, by staff at JB provision and other appropriate outside agents, for example Educational Psychologists, the children might begin to understand their emotions more clearly and ultimately begin to develop alternative strategies to deal with them, rather than EBSR. The development of interventions will be discussed in more detail in section 4.4 (p124).

As mentioned in section 2.4.2 (p58) Hagans et al. (2000) highlighted that by asking for the opposite of the elicited pole of a construct it may mean that the

rating is more likely to be extreme than if the person was asked to state how the third element was different and the spread of ratings may not be as wide. The results presented in the current study indicate that a range of ratings was used by the participants during the RGT, with parent and child 1 being the exception to this where 1, 4 and 6 were predominantly used. This seems to suggest that using the 'opposite' technique to elicit the pole of the construct did not impact upon the ratings given by parent and child dyads 2, 3,4 and 5, although they may have impacted upon the ratings given by parent and child dyad 1, as suggested by Hagans et al (2000).

4.2 Impact of parent constructs of school on their children's constructs of school

The following two research questions consider whether parental constructs have an impact upon their children's constructs of school and whether there is an impact upon their school attendance:

Do parental constructs influence/ have an impact upon their children's constructs of school? & Do parental constructs influence/ have an impact upon the children's emotionally based school refusal behaviour?

The qualitative and quantitative results above can be seen to indicate some similarity between parent and child constructs about school and EBSR:

- Four out of the five parent-child dyads grouped the triad of elements the same more than 50% of the time;

- 3 themes were identified as being the same between the constructs elicited from the parents and those elicited from the children;

- The ratings on shared bi-polar construct themes were mostly similarly within the parent and child dyad; and

- Two out of the five parent-child dyad repertory grids were deemed as being statistically similar, with another two identified as being similar by more than 50% of the participants.

These similarities could be linked to Reiss (1981) and Fonagy et al (1994) (discussed previously in section 1.4, p35) who both assert that the family plays a role in developing the child's meaning of the world and that the child's sense of psychological self is directly related to the caregiver's ability to reflect the child's experiences back to them.

The similarities identified between the parent and child constructs may suggest that parental constructs of school and EBSR may have an impact upon their child's constructs of school and EBSR. However, no conclusions can be drawn regarding the causal relationships between parent constructs and child constructs and their EBSR behaviour as comparison of the RGs can not illustrate causal relationships, simply similarities. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider the results from this study within the framework of PCP.

4.3 PCP as a framework for discussion

Kelly's (1955) commonality corollary states that 'to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person' (as cited in Fransella et al, 2004, p10). Bannister and Fransella (1987) highlight that this corollary illustrates that people are not similar because they have experienced the same event, or manifesting similar behaviour, or because they use the same verbal labels; people are only similar because they construe in similar ways. The aim of this study was to investigate whether parents' constructs of school and EBSR were similar to their children's constructs and if so, whether this had an impact on the children's EBSR behaviour.

Kelly (1930) stated that our construing, as individuals, is negotiated with those with whom we live. Similarly, Butler and Green (2007) state that 'as human beings we develop in a supremely social way, internalizing from the earliest age the local version of what the world is like from those around us' (p191). Butler and Green further elaborate by stating that 'as language develops, these meanings are labeled according to the social traditions and personal constructions of the child's principal carers' (p191). As described in the literature review earlier, Reiss (1981) purports that 'the family has come to play a central role in providing understanding and meaning of the stimulus universe…. (it offers) a set of explanations of the world to each of its members that serves as the primary organiser of internal and external experience' (p155). Reiss (1981) further stated that shared constructs are 'mental events that are shared by all members of the family which are felt to portray the

situation as the family defines it' (p173). In the present study, only one parent in the family was interviewed due to the time constraints, however, further studies should investigate the constructs of all the family members to ensure a wider understanding of the family context is understood (this is discussed further in section 4.5, p135).

Butler and Green (2007) acknowledge that children do not develop passively, and select labels according to their experience within their environment and their own personal construct system. However, they do state that 'we are defined and define ourselves in relation to members of the family and other figures in our lives in a dialectic of social and personal processes' (P191). In line with this, Bannister and Fransella (1987) suggest that 'the child's construing of the mothers construct system is the jumping –off ground for the development of it's own construing system' (p68). Further to this, as discussed in the literature review earlier, Fonagy et al (1994) argue that it is through the caregiver's capacity to reflect the child's psychological experience that the child is 'provided with part of the mental equipment' (p248) necessary to establish their own reflective self. In addition to this, Fransella (1972) offered a viewpoint of behaviour construed by society as abnormal, for example EBSR, as developing from the child's construing which in turn develops as it construes the construction processes of it's parent and as those of the child are construed by them.

Although similarities between the parent and child constructs have been identified, only two of the real pairings of the RGs were identified as being statistically similar and there were some differences highlighted in the ratings and bipolar constructs that were elicited. Bannister and Fransella (1987) highlight that although we 'come

to share certain constructs with others of our group... the implications of these constructs may not be identical – for construct systems are indeed personal' (p87). This links to Kelly's (1955) individuality corollary that states people differ from each other in their construction of events.

Although the use of PCP has provided a useful framework to explore the results from the current study, it is important to acknowledge that there are other theoretical frameworks that could provide an explanation for the similarities between parent and child constructs. It could be argued that there may be a shared family language instead of shared constructs between the family members.

Wittgenstein (as cited in Rhees, 1998) purported that our language determines our view of reality because we see things through it, therefore the language used by our family members will, according to Wittgenstein, affect the way we view the world and therefore behave in the world. The difference between shared language and a shared construct is difficult to distinguish, as we use a language label for our constructs in order for them to be communicated and explained to others (Butler and Green, 2007). Future studies should aim to investigate this further to explore the relationship between constructs and language within families. This could be done through a discourse analysis methodology. Cohen et al (2008) highlight that 'discourse researchers explore the organisation of ordinary talk and everyday explanations and the social actions performed in them' (p389). Through careful reading and interpretation of textual material and the researcher using the linguistic evidence and their understanding of the nuances of language, discourse analysis can be conducted.

4.4 Implications for practice

4.4.1 Implications for interventions

The results from the current study indicate that there seem to be similarities between the way parents and their children perceive and construe school and EBSR. This is the first study to investigate this similarity of constructs specifically, although authors have previously described the role the family may have upon the child's understanding and interpretation of the world (Reiss, 1981; Procter, 1985; Fonagy et al, 1994 and Thambirajah et al, 2008). From this it can be seen that there is a need for interventions that support children who are EBSRs, to take into account children and parental constructs. Interventions can be implemented at an individual, family, or organisational level but all must acknowledge the impact the children's and their parents' constructs have upon the way events are construed by the child and their subsequent behaviour.

4.4.1.1 Individual Level

As discussed in the literature review above, Pellegrini (2007) asserted that although Place et al (2000) identified work with parents and social/coping skills training as useful interventions to support pupils who reported bullying and social isolation as a maintaining factor in their non-attendance, 'these interventions may not be as successful unless coupled with strategies addressing the aversive stimuli in the child's environment' (Pellegrini, 2007 p73). These aversive stimuli could be the more

negative constructs elicited around school and the school related elements within this study. These constructs need to be acknowledged within any social skills training that is planned and implemented, by explicitly acknowledging the parental constructs and using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approaches to change the more negative and potentially harmful constructs to more positive, constructive ones.

In addition to this, as discussed previously in the literature review, Pina et al (2009) reviewed empirical evidence for the efficacy of psychosocial interventions for school refusal behaviour and found that 'behavioural strategies alone and behavioural strategies in combination with cognitive strategies seemed promising for reducing school refusal behaviour' (p18). One mediating factor that Pina et al (2009) highlight within their discussion as an area for further investigation, could be the constructs elicited from parents and their children around school within this study. These constructs could be the barrier, or facilitator to the effectiveness of the psychosocial interventions, and therefore initial work should be completed before implementation of a psychosocial intervention, to explore the child's and their families construing of school so that loosening of negative constructs can occur and more positive constructs are chosen (as described in Kelly's choice corollary). This could be done, for example, through the use of the 'Path to School' assessment package discussed previously.

Further to this, King et al (1998) found that families who were randomly assigned to a 4 week CBT intervention (with six sessions with the child, five with the parents and one with the teacher) exhibited clinically significant improvement in school

attendance (nearly all attained 90% or more school attendance) compared to families assigned to a waiting list control condition. King et al (1998) also found improvements on the children's self-reports of fear, anxiety and depression and developed confidence, as measured by a self esteem questionnaire, in their ability to cope with anxiety provoking situations such a parental separation. In addition, maintenance of these gains was demonstrated at 3 month follow up. King et al (1998) used 34 EBSRs, aged between 5 and 15years and the study was completed in America. The small sample size and the American participants are points to consider when generalising the results to UK studies and interventions however, the findings from the study can be used to show the use of CBT approaches with EBSR. Further to this, as discussed in section 1.4 (p35), Pina et al (2009) reviewed empirical evidence for the efficacy of psychosocial interventions for school refusal behaviour and found that 'behavioural strategies alone and behavioural strategies in combination with cognitive strategies seemed promising for reducing school refusal behaviour' (p18).

Stefan (1977) defines people from a construct theory point of view as either being experimenters or non-experimenters. Stefan (1977) stated that:

> 'The non-experimenting person operates from a fixed, tightly defined core structure which subsequently leads him to a reflexive view of himself as an accomplished, complete product. In contrast, the experimenter operates from a core structure less rigidly defined and more permeable, which results in a reflexive view of himself as incomplete and engaged in an ongoing process' (p287).

Bannister and Fransella (1987) remind us that Kelly stressed that 'we can always reconstrue that which we cannot deny' (p158). In addition to this, Kelly (1970)

described how events that people face every day are subject to as great a variety of constructions as our mind will enable us to contrive. This reminds us that 'all our present perceptions are open to question and reconsideration, broadly implying that even the most obvious occurrences of everyday life might appear utterly transformed if we were inventive enough to construe them differently' (Butler and Green, 2007, p138).

Further to this is the idea of 'tightening and loosening' constructs. This is a 'process whereby we can elaborate our construct systems and deal with the kaleidoscope of events that confront us; it is not any kind of choice between a right and a wrong way of doing things' (Bannister and Fransella, 1987, p20). A tight construct is one that leads to unvarying predictions, whereas loose constructs are those that lead to varying predictions and can be identified as continuing interpretation (Bannister and Fransella, 1987). Kelly's (1991) experience corollary summarises this by stating that 'a person's construction system varies as they successfully construe the replication of events' (p4-5). Schools and outside agencies could strive to work with children and their families to change and loosen any negative constructs they may have around school through activities that expose the children and their parents to alternative behaviour and thought patterns. This could occur through open days, collaborative activities between parent and child within the school environment, and facilitated family discussions about school, by a professional such as an Educational Psychologist, so that a change in their construction of events can be facilitated, as long as a change is what the parent or child wants.

In addition, 'behaviours, if viewed as questions, are the youngster's means of testing the social environment for predictability' (Butler and Green, 2007, p138) and therefore any intervention needs to encourage individuals to ask innovative questions and conduct new experiments that will invoke imaginative solutions and ultimately develop and sustain a new conception of the self and of the world around them. Butler and Green (2007) further state that:

> 'Any valuable movement ought to encompass changes in what is our current view of self. Thus, although youngsters may be 'taught,' 'coached' or 'treated' to act differently, unless such behaviours are incorporated into the individual's view of self, they remain just that – acts.' (p137)

It is only when an individual makes the connection between their newly gained wisdom from any intervention with their construction of the self that they understand their behaviour as being meaningful and purposeful (Butler and Green, 2007). Individuals need to be given time to process, reflect and accommodate their thoughts and behaviour following any intervention, and therefore 'follow-up' sessions need to be planned into any intervention so that individuals have the opportunity to make the connections between themselves and their gained knowledge.

4.4.1.2 Group level

The results from this study highlight that although each of the children within the current study construed the elements using differing construct labels and have constructions of events that are unique and individual to them, there were similarities and themes within the way they constructed school, which Kelly (1955) argues is

indicative of the commonality corollary; to the extent that one person employs a construction of experience which is similar to that employed by another, his psychological processes are similar to those of the other person. From this it could be argued that the school, as an organisation, could play an important role in facilitating opportunities to bring young people, who are EBSR's together, as they may find it beneficial to share their common experiences and receive support from peers who share their difficulties. As discussed in section 1.3 (p32), Toplis (2004) found that parents believed their children had 'no one to talk to in school' (p64) and therefore an intervention to promote peer support would begin to address this.

Equally, it is important that parents receive similar peer support and the focus group that was conducted as part of this study, illustrated to staff at JB provision that support for parents is an area that needed to be developed within the organisation. All the parents commented to staff, following the focus group discussion that they had found it useful to discuss their situations with other people who had had similar experiences and could empathise with them. Within JB provision consultation has occurred, with the EP and SENCo, to develop a regular coffee morning for parents to attend. Through this they will be able to receive peer support through informal discussion and also signposting and awareness raising opportunities through outside agent speakers attending the group.

In line with this, Cohen (2004) stated that 'social connections benefit health by providing psychological and material resources needed to cope with stress' (p677). Cohen (2004) further explained that 'the critical factor in social support operating as

a stress buffer is the perception that others (even one reliable source) will provide appropriate aid' (p677) and also that the belief that others will provide necessary resources may improve a person's perceived ability to cope with demands and stressful events, therefore changing the appraisal of the situation and lowering its possible stress inducing effect.

Further to this, Taylor et al (2000) proposed a theory of female responses to stress that is characterised by a pattern termed 'tend-and-befriend' (p422). Specifically, Taylor et al (2000) proposed that women's responses to stress involved, amongst other activities, joining social groups to reduce vulnerability, and contributing to the development of social groupings, especially those involving female networks, for the exchange of resources and responsibilities. Although the focus group involved one male who acknowledged the benefit of the social interaction with others, it is interesting to note the impact that social support has in reducing stress within females, as described by Taylor et al (2000). School staff had highlighted the opportunities to promote the coffee morning to parents, for example at the induction meetings and at the termly reviews.

4.4.1.3 Family and School level

Butler and Green (2007) illustrate the importance of involving family members and people central to the child's environment within any intervention. They stress that 'involving family members in work with children and young people is a matter of central concern' (p191) because the origin of the issues themselves may very often

exist in problematic family situations such as break-up, abuse and neglect, sibling issues or attachment difficulties. In line with this, through consultation with the SENCo and Deputy Head at the JB provision, where the results from the current study were explored, the school staff highlighted the need for them to include parents in order to support the emotional, social and educational progress of their pupils. The staff identified the importance of developing a rapport with the parents so that they feel trusted and so that the school environment could become a trusted place. It was suggested that by building this rapport, parents would be more likely to engage with the school and begin to change their own constructs of school to be more positive and helpful. In line with this, Beaver (2003) stated that:

> 'Where rapport is well developed people will work well together, share objectives and attain solutions. Probably more than any other conceptual framework for changework, rapport is the most influential factor in determining the attainment of a satisfactory solution' (p2).

This highlights the importance of showing the parents that they are valued and listened to; a factor previously highlighted by Toplis (2004), as a factor contributing to EBSR. As a result of this, a more collaborative, family led, and hopefully more effective approach to the child's education would be facilitated.

Butler and Green (2007) also highlight that any particular developmental or psychological difficulty a child may have, could in turn, affect family relationships as a result of the associated stress, jealousies and rivalries. This has implications for the need for universal and targeted interventions to support social and emotional

competence in pupils and their family network. This could be achieved via the universal social and emotional curriculum within school to develop the child's understanding of their own and others emotions and the emotional consequences on others of their own behaviour. In line with this, Durlak et al (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 school-based, universal social and emotional learning (SEL) programs and found that SEL programs 'yielded significantly positive effects on targeted social-emotional competencies and attitudes about self, others and school' (p417). Alternatively, targeted intervention at school or at home could be completed, which might use personal construct psychology as a therapeutic framework for intervention (delivered by educational psychologists or other qualified professionals).

Further to this, school staff at JB provision stated the positive impact a 'Team Around the Family' (TAF) (Kendall et al, 2010) approach could have upon the parents and children. Kendall et al (2010) state that the Team Around the Family (TAF) approach, is where 'professionals and families meet to set targets/goals, identify additional support, and monitor and review progress' and is delivered most effectively when the TAF is multidisciplinary in nature and therefore draws on support from a range of professionals. School staff felt that this approach would be ideal in order to adapt the child and parent's constructs around school and school related elements.

It can be seen, from discussion in the previous sections, that the key construct themes and the similarities between the parent's and child's constructs of school found in the present study can inform interventions at the individual, group and whole

family and school level. The following section highlights the specific implications the findings from the present study have upon the practice of Educational Psychologists.

4.4.2 Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs)

Personal construct psychology has provided a theoretical framework for this research, supporting the understanding of the way in which the parents and their children construe school and EBSR. Similarly, as described in the literature review above, Shilvock (2010) used PCP to explore school refusers' constructs and stated that 'therapeutic interventions, based on personal construct psychology, could be used, for example, to support developments of more adaptive construing through further developing the submerged poles of constructs to bring balance within the choice corollary. For example, developing the poles of 'being yourself' and 'relaxed' in relation to school (see the results in section 3 for more details of the constructs elicited).

As briefly highlighted in the above section, the results from the current study may have an impact upon educational psychologists in their assessment and targeted intervention with young people at risk of developing EBSR, which may complement the work of other professionals involved in school attendance issues, such as education welfare officers (EWOs).

When working with children and families it is important to consider their views of the agencies involved. Campbell (2001) highlighted that an 'issue is the apprehension of some students and their families in accessing' agencies. From the RG interviews it

was highlighted that constructs such as 'not who you are,' 'stressed, 'not coping,' 'uncomfortable' and 'worried' were associated with 'professionals.' This needs to be taken into consideration when EPs are working with children and families as it will have an impact upon how effectively children and families engage with the EP and ultimately the shift in behaviour and/or thinking that will occur. This may link to the findings of Toplis (2004) who used semi-structured interviews to gain parental views from seven mothers and one father on the issue of EBSR, rather than using clinical or diagnostic tools. It was found that 'none of the parents…felt they were listened to and believed that their children had no one to talk to in school' (p64). Another issue raised by parents was the lack of clarity they had about the role of different professionals, e.g. EWO or EP. The negative constructs elicited around professionals in this study may be linked to these feelings of 'not being listened to' and the lack of clarity around professionals' roles. These negative constructs need to be altered to be more positive before children and/or families can effectively engage with outside agencies, including EPs. This could be done through preparation interviews or activities, such as solution focused questioning, evidence finding activities to alter constructs or CBT-like techniques to shift the person's thinking.

Specifically, with regards to the Path to School assessment discussed previously in the literature review, EPs should adjust the tool so that it takes into consideration the parental constructs of school and the possible influence upon the child. This is to ensure that all mediating factors are taken into consideration when devising a hypothesis and intervention around the child's EBSR behaviour.

4.5 Methodological challenges and future studies

There are a number of methodological considerations that need to be acknowledged within the current study. The findings from this study build upon the existing research by investigating parents' and their children's constructs about school and school related elements for the first time. However, the findings from the study can be at best considered to be preliminary, due to the small sample size, and require replication with a larger sample to further develop the findings.

The parents who participated with the focus group and the parents and children who participated with the RG interviews were all participants who were willing to engage with the research. This may have an impact upon the type of data that was collected and therefore the results that were presented, as the parents were positively involved and engaged with JB provision. They were also interested in the topic of the current research and therefore wanted to participate.

Different data may be collected from parents and children who are not as engaged with JB provision, or who are not as interested in the topic of research and therefore this needs to be considered when generalising the results from this study. It is the parents and their children who are more difficult to engage that could be the focus of future studies to ensure their constructs are sought and used to inform future interventions. This may be done through collaborative work with schools and other professionals and would need to be done over time in order to establish trust and rapport with the families to alleviate any anxieties (Siegman and Reynolds, 1984).

As discussed in section 4.2 (p119) in relation to Reiss (1981), only one parent within the family was interviewed for this study and therefore it is important to consider that in a 2-parent household differing data may have been collected from the 'other' parent. Future studies should investigate both parents' constructs and also consider sibling constructs so that a more in-depth view of the family construct system around the EBSR can be examined. Giles (2003) (as cited in Butler and Green, 2007), for example, asked family members to draw pictures of each member and of the family as a whole using the perceiver-element grid (PEG) in order to investigate similarities and differences, agreements and disagreements and relational patterns. The PEG is a qualitative method where a person, or group of people, writes or draws pictures in the spaces that correspond to different people and the relationships between people in the group (Butler and Green, 2007). The PEG technique could be used with a family in order to investigate the family members constructs of school.

The subjectivity of the researcher when interpreting the data from the focus group discussion and when analysing the construct dyad for themes should be further highlighted, as previously stated in section 3.3.3 (p101). Bannister and Fransella (1987) state that 'we can not apprehend reality directly we can only construe and interpret it' (p30-31). This illustrates the lens of the researcher's own constructs through which the parent and child constructs were analysed. The development of the themes and the interpretation of the constructs have been done by a subjective researcher and therefore this needs to be taken into consideration when the identified themes of constructs, and illustrated similarities between parents and children are discussed. Future studies might consider the use of a second researcher in order to provide peer support and 'de-brief' opportunities to 'guard

against researcher-bias' (Robson, 2002, p175). Cohen et al (2008) also highlight the role of 'inter-rater reliability' (p148) indicating the possibility of a second researcher examining the data and extracting themes, which could then be compared with the original themes. If there was similarity between the two sets of themes it can then be argued more firmly that the themes are representative.

Another form of researcher bias is that of the effect of the researcher on the participant during the interview. The way the researcher asked the questions, laddered the constructs and influenced the answers given by the participant needs to be acknowledged. Although the RGT was used because it had a structured nature to the interview and therefore reduced some of the researcher bias, the effect of the researcher needs consideration. For example, Robson (2002) states that 'the respondent tries to give the answers or impressions which they judge that the researcher wants' (p172). Further to this, Bannister and Fransella (1987) highlight that Kelly's (1955) sociality corollary illustrates that any method of data collection will take place within a social setting. Therefore the participant will be trying to construe the construction processes of the experimenter to establish 'just what is he after?' (p90). This may impact upon the type of responses the participants give. In order to try and reduce this effect, the participants were regularly reminded during the focus group and the RGT that there was no right or wrong answer and that the researcher was exploring their view of school and EBSR.

In addition to this, Rosenthal (1966) illustrates that 'the kind of person the researcher is, how they look and act may by itself affect the subject's responses' (p109). It was Owen (1995) refers to Nietzsche's idea of knowledge as 'disinterested, which

attends the epistemological enterprise and claim(ed) that the activity of knowing is rooted in our affective constitution' (p33). The goals, values, beliefs and motivation of the researcher, and of the object of the research, are interlinked with their past and present experiences and also their understanding and experience of the research itself. Those involved with the research have a 'consciousness that is neither disembedded nor disembodied; knowing, like seeing, is an activity, which attends the embedded and embodied character of human subjectivity' (Owen, 1995 p33). Whatever those involved with the research experience, observe, report or interpret will be bound up with their own subjectivity, and this has been recognised and made explicit in this current study.

Although a focus group was conducted with parents to ensure the elements that were used in the RGT were in the range of convenience for the parents, it needs to be acknowledged that the elements may not have been in the children's range of convenience. In order to ensure this in future studies, a focus group could be used with children and the data collected compared with the parents focus group discussion. The elements could then be derived from shared themes across the two sets of data to ensure the children's range of convenience is considered.

Another area for future study could be to examine the constructs of school from a sample of school attenders and their parents. The results from the current study could be compared to the results from school attenders and their parents and any difference in constructs of school could be used to inform interventions at an individual, school, family and organisational level. The constructs elicited from the school attendees may give us additional clues as to what the focus of interventions

to support EBSRs should be. There is currently, no existing research that focuses specifically on this area.

Finally, a discussion about generalisation of the results is needed. A key consideration for the generalisability of the results from the RGT is that there were only white British participants interviewed. It is therefore essential that future studies investigate the constructs of participants from differing cultures and ethnicities to ensure any interventions take account of the differing parent and child constructs of school and EBSR. As previously discussed, a small sample size of participants was used in the current study and therefore future studies need to include larger sample sizes.

In addition to this, Bannister and Fransella (1987) highlight Kelly (1969) who describes the process of generalisability of results and what the purpose of findings from particular studies should be. He stated that:

> 'When a scientist propounds a theory he has two choices: he can claim that what he says has been dictated to him by the real nature of things, or he can take sole responsibility for what he says and claim only that he has offered one man's hopeful construction of the realities of nature. In the first instance he makes a claim to objectivity on behalf of his theory, the scientist's equivalent of the claim to infallibility. In the second instance he offers only a hope that he may have hit upon some partial truth that may serve as a clue to inventing something better and he invites others to follow this clue to see what they can make of it. In this latter instance he does not hold up his theoretical proposal to be judged so much in terms of whether it is the truth at last or not- for he assumes from the outset that ultimate truth is not so readily at hand- but to be judged in terms of whether his proposition seems to lead toward and give way to fresh propositions; propositions which, in turn, may be more true than anything else has been thus far.'
>
> (Bannister and Fransella, 1987 p1)

Any generalisations of findings from this study are difficult to claim as the constructs elicited are content and individual specific. However, Pawson and Tilley (1997) state that 'what are transferable between cases are not lumps of data, but sets of ideas' (p120). This current small-scale study offers a preliminary study into the constructs of EBSRs and their parents. It is hoped that as a result of the presented findings, further studies will be conducted to examine an individual's constructs around school and EBSR behaviour, and inform the design, implementation and evaluation of interventions and professional practice within schools, organisations and communities.

5. Conclusion

The critical literature review highlighted the difficulties surrounding the identification and definition of EBSR (Archer et al, 2003; Thambirajah et al, 2008). Kearney (2008) also highlighted the complex nature of EBSR by stating that 'multiple predictors compound over time' (p465) and Thambirajah et al (2008) also described the search for 'one factor (the main effect) responsible for school refusal' as 'insufficient' (p33) and that for each child there will be a unique combination of factors that lead to non-attendance at school.

It has been noted that the family can be one of the impacting factors upon the child's EBSR behaviour (Hersov, 1960; Berg and McGuire, 1974; Last and Strauss, 1990; Kearney and Silverman, 1995; Martin et al, 1999; Place et al, 2002; Archer et al, 2003; Kearney and Bates; 2005; Kearney, 2008; and Shilvock, 2010) and their understanding of the world around them (Reiss, 1981; Fonagy et al, 1994; and Lyon

and Cotler, 2007). Exploration of the existing research into EBSR also highlighted the dearth of literature around the constructs of school and school related elements that parents and their children, who present with EBSR, have and the impact of parental constructs upon their children's constructs.

The present study aimed to investigate what parents and their children's constructs around school and school related elements were, whether parental constructs had an impact on their children's constructs of school and whether parental constructs had an impact upon their children's EBSR behaviour. Using a PCP technique called the Repertory Grid, parent and child constructs were elicited and explored, using seven elements that were developed from a focus group with parents. The results seem to indicate that there are similarities between the parent and child constructs around school, which, with further studies, may illustrate that parental constructs do have an impact upon their children's constructs relating to school.

Methodological challenges within this study were discussed, including the sample size, researcher bias through their own subjective view of the data, and the limitations associated with the range of convenience (Kelly, 1955) of the elements presented to the participants during the RGT. The implications of the findings for Educational Psychologists were discussed, alongside the possibilities for future research. Within this small-scale study it was not possible to draw any causal conclusions about the impact of parental constructs on their children's EBSR behaviour, however, it is hoped that future studies will examine this more closely to

ensure interventions are designed to account for all mediating factors around a

child's EBSR behaviour.

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Appendices Contents Page

Appendices

Appendix 1: Data maps

birmingham localperformance

Theme: Children & Young People
Indicator: Secondary School Attendance
Time Period: 2007
Level: Ward

Constituency Boundaries
Ward Boundaries
Background Map

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PERFORMANCE BANDS	DEFINITION
■ 93.3% to 95.2%	Secondary school attendance rates
■ 92.1% to 93.3%	**EXCEPTIONS**
■ 90.7% to 92.1%	None for this indicator.
■ 0.0% to 90.7%	**OTHER INFORMATION**
☐ No Data Displayed	Data for this indicator is based on pupils' home postcodes, not school postcodes.

If a box is unchecked, that colour is not shown on the map.

birmingham localperformance

Theme: Children & Young People
Indicator: Secondary School Attendance
Time Period: 2008
Level: Ward

Constituency Boundaries
Ward Boundaries
Background Map

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PERFORMANCE BANDS	DEFINITION
■ 93.5% to 95.2% green	Secondary school attendance rates
■ 92.5% to 93.5% yellow	**EXCEPTIONS**
■ 91.4% to 92.5% orange	None for this indicator.
■ 0.0% to 91.4% — red	**OTHER INFORMATION**
☐ No Data Displayed	Data for this indicator is based on pupils' home postcodes, not school postcodes.
If a box is unchecked, that colour is not shown on the map.	

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birmingham **localperformance**

Theme: Community
Indicator: Teenagers on the Streets (AOS)
Time Period: 2008
Level: Ward

Constituency Boundaries
Ward Boundaries
Background Map

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PERFORMANCE BANDS	DEFINITION
■ 0.00% to 26.42%	Indicator devised from the Annual Opinion Survey. The percentage is based on the number of respondents who stated that they felt teenages hanging around the streets was a fairly big problem / a very big problem.
■ 26.42% to 42.21%	
■ 42.21% to 57.14%	**EXCEPTIONS**
■ 57.14% to 79.61%	None for this indicator.
	OTHER INFORMATION
☐ No Data Displayed	No additional information to be displayed for this indicator.

If a box is unchecked, that colour is not shown on the map.

Appendix 2: The Repertory Grid Technique

This outlines the:

- Introduction of the technique to be used with each participant
- An outline of how the RGT method will be used.

Introduction:

A Psychologist called George Kelly (1955) believes that individuals understand and interpret events that occur around them according to their own views, or constructs. Individuals come to understand the world in which they live by developing a personally organised system of interpretations based on their own experiences. The function of these personal constructs is to help us understand the current situation we are in and to help us anticipate future events.

Today we are going to look at your constructs and we will be using something called The Repertory Grid Technique to organise your beliefs and constructs. The RGT contains three major things, which are called: elements, constructs and links.

The elements are going to be different words that I will show you. I will show you three words at a time and I'm going to ask you how two of the words are alike and how the third word is different from them. After we have done that we will have made a set of constructs. I will then ask you to rate a range of different things across the constructs we have generated, on a 1-7 scale.

Have you got any questions?

If you want to stop at any time you may. There will be time at the end to discuss anything you have said, or any questions you may have after we have completed the RGT.

Example of the RGT method:

1. I will say to the participant 'Here are three words. Can you tell me how two of the words go together and why the third word is therefore different?' This instruction will be the same for each set of three words for every participant. The technique of using three items to elicit constructs is called 'triadic elicitation.'

   e.g. break time, holidays, professionals

   'The break time and holidays go together because they can be relaxing, and the professionals are different because they can cause worrying.'

   The constructs that would be elicited from this would be bipolar:

   relaxing …………………………………………. worrying

   (Emergent pole)   (Implicit pole)

   I will use 7 elements, or words, that have been identified through the focus group work, which will elicit 10 sets of constructs.

2. After the constructs have been elicited the participant will be asked to rate each element against each of the constructs. The constructs will be awarded a numerical rating scale from 1 to 7, e.g. angry is 1 and calm is 7 and the participant asked to rate along this scale.

The elements for my research will be:

8. Feelings/emotions
9. Family
10. The school system
11. The school building
12. Break time
13. Professionals
14. Holidays

The responses made by each participant can be presented in a table and then compared. An example of the type of information that will be presented is shown below:

Emergent pole	Self	My father	An old flame	An ethical person	My mother	A rejected teacher	As I would like to be	A pitied person	Implicit pole
Clever	2	1	6	3	5	7	1	5	Not bright
Disorganised	6	6	4	5	2	2	5	2	Organised
listens	3	1	6	3	3	7	1	4	Doesn't hear
No clear view	5	6	3	3	3	5	7	3	Clear view of life
Understands me	3	2	6	2	2	6	2	5	No understanding
Ambitious	6	3	5	4	7	3	3	5	No ambition
Respected	2	2	4	2	5	6	1	4	Not respected
Distant	3	3	7	3	5	1	6	5	Warm
Rather agressive	1	3	3	3	5	2	5	7	Not aggressive

An example of a ratings grid matrix from Fransella et al (2004), p60.

Each table can be statistically and qualitatively analysed to explore any significant similarities between parental responses and also between parent and child responses.

Dear……………………,

My name is Claire Smith (Trainee Educational Psychologist) and I work as part of B City Council's Educational Psychology Service. Educational Psychologists work with parents and schools to try to improve situations for young people. One area we work on is ensuring children and young people feel happy to attend school. The Educational Psychology Service is currently interested in children and young people's views about school attendance and also parental views about school attendance and how we can work together to encourage children and young people to attend school regularly.

School attendance is seen to be important because it provides an opportunity for children and young people to learn and attain in different subject areas and to socialise with different people and develop friendships with others. However, some children and young people find it difficult to attend school for lots of different reasons. I am hoping to do some research that will help us begin to understand what can make going to school difficult for children and young people and be able to find ways to support these children and young people to go back into school regularly.

I would like to invite you to a focus group, along with a few other parents, where we will discuss different topics about school and school attendance. Everything that you say will remain confidential, so that when your views are reported back to the local authority, they will not be stated as having come from you. I will be writing down what is said in the group but this will be kept in a locked cabinet and the only people who will be allowed to read it is me, Claire Smith (trainee Educational Psychologist) and HW (Educational Psychologist). I will not be storing your name with the work, so no one will be able to identify the work as yours. The only time we cannot keep your views confidential is if you say something that suggests you or someone else is at risk of harm. If this is the case we would have to talk to the child protection officer at your child's school.

If you decide that you would like to participate in the work with me, but then change your mind, you can stop the work at any point and I will not ask you why. If you want to have your work removed from the research after we have worked together it will not be possible to do so as your name will not be stored against individual comments. Before you participate in the work I will need you to sign a consent form to say you understand what the work is about and that you are happy to participate.

The research will finish in July 2011 and I would like to meet with you again to feedback what I found out about parental views and young people's views on school and school attendance.

If you would like any further information on the research, please contact Claire Smith on ….
Please complete and return the enclosed consent slip to SB by 14th September 2010.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Smith

(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Appendix 4: Format and questions:

9. State the purpose of the focus group: to use your ideas to generate the elements to be used in the RGT technique so that they are meaningful for parents.
    a. Welcome, give name and reason.
    b. You have been chosen as you who have experience of EBSR.
    c. State no right or wrong answers and different view points are ok: interested to hear from all of you.
    d. Feel free to get up for refreshments at any time.
10. Generation of ground rules (to be discussed collaboratively) e.g. respect other people's opinions, what is said will remain confidential unless something is said which puts yourself, or someone else at risk of harm, listen to other peoples' ideas, don't interrupt.
11. Problem free talk to build rapport between everyone in the group: Tell us your name and one interesting thing about yourself.
12. What words come to mind when someone says the word 'school'? (introductory question)
13. What led to your child attending this school? (transition question)
14. What does the term emotional based school refusal mean to you? (key question)
15. Describe what things come to mind when some one says 'school refuser?' (key question)
16. I wanted you to help me generate words and ideas around the topic of emotional based school refusal. Is there anything you think I have missed? Is there anything you came wanting to say that you didn't get the chance to say?

Prompting questions:

Thank you: does anyone else feel differently/ have another point of view?

I don't want to leave you out, what do you think?

Dear………..,

My name is Claire Smith (Trainee Educational Psychologist) and I work as part of B City Council's Educational Psychology Service. Educational Psychologists work with parents and schools to try to improve situations for young people. One area we work on is ensuring children and young people feel happy to attend school. The Educational Psychology Service is currently interested in children and young people's views about school attendance and also parental views about school attendance and how we can work together to encourage children and young people to attend school regularly.

School attendance is seen to be important because it provides an opportunity for children and young people to learn and attain in different subject areas and to socialise with different people and develop friendships with others. However, some children and young people find it difficult to attend school for lots of different reasons. I am hoping to do some research that will help us begin to understand what can make going to school difficult for children and young people and be able to find ways to support these children and young people to go back into school regularly.

I would like to invite you to do some work with me that will look at what your understanding of school is and also what your beliefs and opinions are about attending school. We will be doing something called the 'Repertory Grid Technique' which is a way of organising your answers into a grid to help us understand more about how you feel in different situations.

Everything that you say will remain confidential, so that when your views are reported back to the local authority, they will not be stated as having come from you. I will be writing down what you say but this will be kept in a locked cabinet and the only people who will be allowed to read it is me, Claire Smith (trainee Educational Psychologist) and HW (Educational Psychologist). I will not be storing your name with the work, so no one will be able to identify the work as yours. The only time we cannot keep your views confidential is if you say something that suggests you or someone else is at risk of harm. If this is the case we would have to talk to the child protection officer at your child's school.

If you decide that you would like to participate in the work with me, but then change your mind, you can stop the work at any point and I will not ask you why. If you want to have your work removed from the research after we have worked together it will be possible to do so. I shall be doing work with other parents and children. Before you participate in the work I will need you to sign a consent form to say you understand what the work is about and that you are happy to participate.

The research will finish in July 2011 and I would like to meet with you again to feedback what I found out about parental views and young people's views on school and school attendance.

If you would like any further information on the research, please contact Claire Smith on …. Please complete and return the enclosed consent slip to ……… by………….

Yours sincerely,

Claire Smith

(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

Appendix 6

Dear ....,

My name is Claire Smith (Trainee Educational Psychologist) and I work as part of B City Council's Educational Psychology Service. Educational Psychologists work with parents and schools to try to improve situations for young people. One area we work on is ensuring children and young people feel happy to attend school. The Educational Psychology Service is currently interested in children and young people's views about school attendance and also parental views about school attendance and how we can work together to encourage children and young people to attend school regularly.

School attendance is seen to be important because it provides an opportunity for children and young people to learn and attain in different subject areas and to socialise with different people and develop friendships with others. However, some children and young people find it difficult to attend school for lots of different reasons. I am hoping to do some research that will help us begin to understand what can make going to school difficult for children and young people and be able to find ways to support these children and young people to go back into school regularly.

I would like to invite your child to do some work with me that will look at what their understanding of school is and also what their beliefs and opinions are about attending school. We will be doing something called the 'Repertory Grid Technique' which is a way of organising their answers into a grid to help us understand more about how they feel in different situations.

Everything that your child says will remain confidential, so that when I report back to the local authority, your child can not be identified from the work done. I will be writing down what is expressed by your child but this will be kept in a locked cabinet and the only people who will be allowed to read it is me, Claire Smith (trainee Educational Psychologist) and HW (Educational Psychologist). I will not be storing your child's name with the work, so no one will be able to identify the work as your child's. The only time we cannot keep your child's views confidential is if they say something that suggests they, or someone else is at risk of harm. If this is the case we would have to talk to the child protection officer in their school.

Your consent is required for your child to work with me. If your child changes their mind about participating, they can stop the work at any point and I will not ask why. It will be possible to remove your child's views from the research after the work has been completed.

If you would like any further information on the research, please contact me on …. Please complete and return the attached consent slip to …….. by………….

Yours sincerely,

Claire Smith

Trainee Educational Psychologist

………………………………………………………………………………………...

I **give** consent for my child……………………………………….to work with Claire Smith to discuss their views on attending school.

I **do not give** consent for my child……………………………….to work with Claire Smith to discuss their views on attending school.

Signed…………………………………………………….

(Parent/Guardian)

Relationship to child……………………………………..

Date……………………………………………………..

Dear

My name is Claire Smith (Trainee Educational Psychologist) and I work as part of B City Council's Educational Psychology Service. Educational Psychologists work with parents and schools to try to improve situations for young people. One area we work on is ensuring children and young people feel happy to attend school. The Educational Psychology Service is currently interested in how children and young people feel about school and how we can work together to encourage children and young people to attend school regularly.

School attendance is seen to be important because it provides an opportunity for children and young people to learn and attain in different subject areas and to socialise with different people and develop friendships with others. However, some children and young people, like you, find it difficult to attend school for lots of different reasons. I am hoping to do some research that will help other people begin to understand what can make going to school difficult for children and young people and be able to find ways to support these children and young people to go back into school regularly.

I would like to invite you to do some work with me that will look at what your understanding of school is and also what your beliefs and opinions about school are. We will be doing something called the 'Repertory Grid Technique' which is a way of organising your answers into a grid to help us understand more about how you feel in different situations.

Everything that you say in the work you do will remain confidential. This means that when I report your views back to the local authority, I will not say that they have come from you or your school. I will be writing down what you say but this will be kept in a locked cabinet and the only people who will be allowed to read it is me, Claire Smith (trainee Educational Psychologist) and HW (Educational Psychologist). I will not be storing your name with the work, so no one will be able to identify the work as yours. The only time we cannot keep your views confidential is if you say something that suggests you or someone else is at risk of harm. If this is the case we would have to talk to the child protection officer in your school.

If you decide that you would like to participate in the work with me, but then change your mind, you can stop it at any point and I will not ask you why. If you want to have your work removed from the research after we have worked together it will be possible to do so. I shall be doing work with other children and also some parents. Before you participate in the work I will need you and your parent or guardian to sign a consent form to say that they are happy for you to participate.

The research will finish in July 2011 and I would like to meet with you again to tell you what I found out about young people's views on school and school attendance.

If you are happy to do some work with me, please ensure you get your parent or guardian to sign the consent form at the bottom of their letter and also that you complete the consent form included in this letter as well. Once you have completed this please give it to…..

Yours sincerely,

Claire Smith

Trainee Educational Psychologist

My name is ………………………….

I would like to participate in the work with Claire Smith to discuss my views on school attendance. I have read the information sheet about the work and understand that:

	Yes/No
If I decide to, I can stop the work at any point.	
I will be able to withdraw my views after the work if I wish to do so	
My views will be used within doctoral research and may be used to develop interventions to support children and families who find attending school difficult.	
My views will be recorded and kept locked in a filing cabinet that only Claire Smith and HW have access to.	
My views will be kept confidential unless I say anything that suggests I or another are at risk from harm.	

Signed…………………………………………………………………………..

Appendix 8: Focus group data

These are the hand-written notes taken during the focus group.

9.10 930-1030 [Focus Group]

School- difficulty c
- regimental ss
- focused on education ss

lack of co-ordination btwn
school/CAD   A

Lack of empathy e

Lack of communication A
btwn health/education/soci

Labelling /grading - NC
- medical/socie
not listening to parents label ss

Stress   e

Severe anxiety e

Crowded/places SB

Shaking. P

fear of saying the wrong thing
SS

Pressure to conform ss

Buildings- cold   SB
reception nice +then go SB
& good it's not

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Primary - failed to assess rh
is needs SS

Transition to Sec SS

Became invisible: - face older
child P,SS,SS

Classroom (cosy) / family to
diff groups - moving classrooms
getting lost. c

- R toilet - only @ breaks t

- need breaks - so would disrupt
to get a break t

- Primary - small - everyone knows, then
Sec. lots of teachers - disseminating
the info btwn SS

- felt guilty / to blame e

Aeye   Driving - Transport to school.
↳behaviour to stop parents
e.g. kicking

Complying to school requirements.

failure of parents to manage
↳school staff saying

- Traumatic situation.
  ↓
  engrained fear /difficulties
     new phobia.   e

- professionals involved.
       - directing the school not
     child - no input as
       therapy for child. A

- Home tuition

- work arrangements. A

- ESW involved. - court threats   A
              - negative experience.

- pressure.

- regimental, non empathic, stressful

- not - concerned

- corridors - SB

- recreation time - difficult P

- R skilled up adults

- Controlled in clroom. clroom

- no where to go.

EBSR - anxiety e

- phobia . e

- parent stress
  family stress e

- dread a call e

- stress / distress e

- hard to keep away from
  child

- look forward to summer
  holidays - breath a sigh H

- not sleeping - dreading e

- routine - dread it e
  - ill, won't get dressed,
    eat

- sleeping in parents bed e

- not sleeping - coming in to
  room e

- excuses to keep parent awake

- wait for them - know they
  are coming.

- School is the trigger. SB   ③

- see the signs -

- didn't tell anyone about being
                              in bed.
- sleeping ⓒ sister now needs
  someone present

        have to be there

- if I get up for the loo he
  calls me in - can I have a cuddle

- comfort from JS due to anxiety

- after walk tries for sitt ⓒ ch. A

- won't walk past other children
          adult - adult   p

- re-clarifying things

- 'not normal'. stigma who tell
  people. ch. would be devastated

what would help?   People who understands and
               accept - A / ss / e

effects everything - social
- medication for sleeping P
- lack of empathy in front of child P

- not happy unless on tablets P

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- negative effects on ch. & medication.

- compassionate kave A/P

help - home education
- support for child. 1.1 directly

- recognition of word problem' e

ivip - talking

- see it in his eyes

"feeling sick" - had to go through
e   everything that had
happened / will happen

Clothes they want are sorted
Problems sorted as soon as possible

Give incentives - gets expensive
| - becomes habitual
doesn't work - anxiety too
much e

disadv- it's too hard.

More pressure - on them when professional
not careful about what say -
ple   bedroom furniture /
mum to court.

self - esteem   e

- Pointing finger @ parents e
- home environment - effect on
  siblings + parents. E
- employment - needs to be flexible
  a out of work   A/P
- pressure on family unit   E
- pressure on sibling in same sch
  ↳ teachers asking where
  sister was   E
  ↙
  effect relationship btwn
  siblings.
- reflection on self as parent +
  professional.
- mentally + physically exhausted.   e
  ↓
  no consideration from
  School, LEA/other professionals
  about this
- ch. didn't ask for this to be
  imposed
- 'all in ch's head'
- extended family doesn't understand E

- SBS- first time I realised
  someone understood SS.

- professionals to back you

- being

Appendix 9: Focus group thematic analysis

Theme/ Element	Supporting comments
Feelings/ Emotion	Difficulty. Lack of empathy. Stress. Severe anxiety. Felt guilt and to blame. Pointing the finger at parents. Traumatic experiences for the children are engrained in them. Pressure. Anxiety. Phobia. Parent stress. Family stress. Dread a call from school. Stress and distress. Not sleeping and dreading the routine ahead. Sleeping in parents bed and making excuses to keep the parent awake. Finds comfort from us (parent) due to anxiety. Feeling sick. There is a stigma when telling people. The child self-esteem is affected. Need people to understand and accept. Need recognition of the word 'phobia.' Giving incentives gets expensive and habitual and it doesn't work because the anxiety is too much for the child. Mentally and physically exhausted.
Family	Parent stress. Family stress. Dread a call from school. Stress and distress. Not sleeping and dreading the routine ahead. Sleeping in parents bed and making excuses to keep the parent awake. Finds comfort from us (parent) due to anxiety. Pressure on family unit. Pressure on siblings and sibling relationships. Extended family doesn't understand.
School system	Regimental. Focused on education. Crowded places. Labelling and grading' national curriculum levels and medical/social labels. Fear of saying the wrong thing. Pressure to conform. Primary school failed to assist in my child's needs. Transition. Child becomes invisible. At primary everyone knows the children but at Secondary there are lots of teachers and disseminating the information between them is difficult. Need people to understand and accept. At JB it was the first time I realised someone understood.
School building	Crowded. Cold. Reception area is nice then you go beyond and it's not. Child becomes invisible. Corridors. School is the trigger. Classroom is cosy and a family to different groups.(in primary). It is controlled in the classroom.
Break time	Shouting. Child becomes invisible. Recreation time is difficult. Children can only go to the toilet at break. My child needs a break and would disrupt to get a break. She won't walk past other children, she prefers going form adult to adult.
Authority/ professionals/ work	Lack of coordination and communication between health, education and authority. Professionals were directing the school and there was no input as therapy for the child. ESW was involved and court threats were made. Work times have had to be altered to sit with the child at school. Work arrangements. I had to have compassionate leave from work. Employment needs to be flexible. Need people to understand and accept. Professionals aren't happy unless they (the child) is on tablets. There is a lack of empathy in front of the child with what is said.
Holidays	I look forward to summer holidays- I breath a sigh of relief.

Appendix 10: RGT data showing laddering

These are the hand-written notes made during each of the RGT interviews.

O/P as
could all go together.

always treat people as you would want

1) flexible — inflexible
   r. P   ules

2) sch break   holiday

Compulsory   —   freedom.

3). Fam + feelings   —   rules
   relaxed   Uniformity.

4). B + sch   has

   Daunting   —   related

5). Pof + feelings   building
   Logical   Emotionless

6). Pof school   holiday
   Discipline   —   relaxing.

7) Family break   Pof
   pleasure   —   focussed.

8) feelings + hol   Sch building

    Free   —   empty

9) feel + fam   —   hols

    vulnerable   —   learning

10) lief + break   —   Family

    ~~independent~~   —   relaxed
    focus

A5   1-c

1). Pic + sch   —   Family
    Unhappy   —   Happy

2) Break sch building   holidays.
    Tense.   —   relaxed

3). Feelings fam   sch rules.
    Easy.   not easy

4) break school   holidays
    relaxed   —   relaxed

5) sch bu Pic
    School   Feelings
                             personal

6) Sch rules Pics   holiday
    nervous   —   relaxed

7) Break Pics   Family
    forced   Freedom

8). Feelings holiday —   Sch building
      happy   sad

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9) Family holidays   - feelings
   Good   - hard.

10) break prof
    Sad.   Family

                    —   happy

2. P.

1) Prof sch rules . Family
   strict. related.

2). He break sch but holidays
   boring / lose interest — fun.

3) Feelings / family sch rules
   be yourself
   comfortable — tense.

4). Sch rule break holidays
   stability — being diff
   normality fun.

5) Feelings Professionals building
   need to work as a team
   understand others stern / hospital
   connection overpowering
   inviting — scary.

6). sch rules Profe holidays
   working / learning break
   keep busy lack of routine
   don't get bored. related
   achievement
   work play

7). family pros
    always pros involved
    in family
    ↓
    busy always
    a worry but
    glad they are
    there
    ↓
    take strain off
    ↓
    [support]
    ↓
    release.

— break
    ↓
    weekend · no appointment
    being myself
    ↓
    chilled.
    ↓
    free thought
    ↓
    relaxed/happier.

8). feelings hols
    happier emotions
    ↓
    at ease

— sch build
    ↓
    sense of direc'
    ↓
    came down
    ↓
    reluctant
    ↓
    anxious.

9) feelings / family
    get to know each
    other
    be at ease
    ↓
    create a stronger bond
    ↓
    support each other
    feel safe + stronger.
    ↓
    secure
    ↓
    easier to cope.

— holiday
    ↓
    switching off
    don't have to deal
    with as many
    ↓
    release

10). break + prof
    ↓
    can get a break
    ↓
    switch off from
    ↓
    get a bit of your
    own time.
    ↓
    normality
    ↓
    can change
    ↓
    not important.

family
    ↓
real life   there all the time
    ↓
constantly dealing w
    life
    ↓
full time
    ↓
permanent
    ↓
precious

7). family, prof
  always, prof involved
  in family
    ↓
  busy, always
  a worry but
  good they're
  a there
    ↓
  take strain off
  [Support]
    ↓
  release.

break
  ↓
weekend. no apartment
being myself
  ↓
chilled.
  ↓
Free thought
  ↓
relaxed/happier.

8). feelings, hds
  happier emotions
    ↓
  at ease

Sch build'
  ↓
sense of direc'
  ↓
calm down
  ↓
reluctant
  ↓
anxious.

9) feelings / family
  get to know each
    other
    ↓
  be at ease
    ↓
  create a stronger bond'
    ↓
  support each other
  feel safe + stronger.
    ↓
  secure
    ↓
  easier to cope.

holiday
  ↓
switching off
don't have to deal
  with as many
    ↓
  release

10). break + prof
    ↓
  can get a break
    ↓
  switch off from
    ↓
  get a bit of your
  own time.
    ↓
  normality
    ↓
  can change
    ↓
  not important.

family
  ↓
real life there all the time
  ↓
constantly dealing w
  life
    ↓
  full time
    ↓
  permanent
    ↓
  precious

7) Prof   break   —   Family
↓   ↓
always cares   thinking about
for themselves   other
↓   ↓
caring for   care for others
yourself   ↓
↓   happier.
being professional

8) feelings / hols   —   5th building
↓   ↓
to be yourself   not be yourself
feel happier   ↓
↓   not showing
feel more relaxed   emotions
when be yourself

9) feelings / family   holidays
↓   ↓
share more   put feelings aside
w family   try to relax
↓   ↓
telling people   not thinking
↓   about real life
explaining   ↓
↓   scared about
showing how feel.   real life
↓   ↓
being open.   not wanting to
                                think about life
                                ↓
                                being different
                                person
                                ↓
                                not being yourself

10) break / professional   family
↓   ↓
not yourself   be yourself
↓   ↓
routine/get bored   feel happy/
↓   relaxed
dislike strict   ↓
job   feel best you
↓   can feel
unhappy   ↓
                                being happy

3.20

1) Sch rules   family — P.E.
                ↓   ↓
    working together today   own boundaries
    together having   ↓
    boundaries   accountable to
         ↓   self
    times to do   ↓
      things   autonomy
         ↓
    routines
         ↓
    function
     to a day
         ↓
    keeps you
    focused
         ↓
    on task
    know what is
    expected
         ↓
    expectations
         ↓
    functioning together

2) hols / break   —   sch building
         ↓   ↓
    social   rules built in
         ↓   have to comply
    freedom to chose   different
    what to do
         ↓
    happy + quality
         time

3). family / feelings   —   sch rules
         ↓   ↓
    show emotions   not showing
         ↓   emotions
    relaxed   ↓
         ↓   expectations
                             ↓
                         worried about
                         others think
                         effect canon
                         make you
                         anxious

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4) sch /break — holidays
   ↓   ↓
worried.   relaxed/happy
                    ↓
                 understood

5). sch build /Rlof — feelings
   ↓   ↓
losing sight   you as an
of bigger picture   individual
   ↓   ↓
unattached to   being you.
people's feelings
   ↓
having to comply
not viewed as
individuals

6) sch rules / Prof — hols
   ↓   ↓
decide on the   fun
rules - help   ↓
monitor   freedom
   ↓
being monitored
   ↓
restricted.

7). Prof + break — family.
   ↓   ↓
set time.   relaxed
   ↓
rigid

8) hols /feelings — building
exciting   boring

9) feelings + family — holiday
express the most   try to keep things
feel comfortable   on even keel
   ↓   ↓
                    calm
                    ↓
          making sit tyrander hoping to have a good
                              time

3 P

Prof + break $\longrightarrow$ family
  ↓   ↓
rules   flexibility
  ↓
clockingin
  ↓
rigidity.

3c.

1). fam role — Sch rules
   ↓   ↓
   happy   anxious.

2) sch building/break — Holidays
   ↓   ↓
   leaving + rules   can go out
   ↓   go abroad.
   smtimes it is   ↓
   fun but if you're   fun
   not allowed to go
   out it isn't.
   ↓
   closed in.

3) feelings/family   sch rules
   ↓   ↓
   happy   tense
   ↓
   relaxed

4) sch rules/break   Holidays
   have rules &   ↓
   breaktime.   relaxed.
   ↓
   Trapped.

5) sch building/feelings — Professionals
   ↓   ↓
   smtimes worried   have jobs
   smtimes excited   ↓
   good.   not who they
   ↓   are
   people can see   ↓
   who you are   being someone don't
                          want to be.

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6) Hols / Profs — Sch rules.
↓ ↓
people around in one place
you are on ↓
~~the~~ profs can leave behind
as well ↓
↓ don't want to
fun do the same
thing all the
time
↓
boring

7) Fam / break — professionals
↓ ↓
time to can make you
relax feel
↓ stressed.
won't feel
stressed
↓
relaxed

8) hols / feelings — building.
↓ ↓
can be happy every day is
at zoo similar + get
↓ used to it
every day is ↓
~~different~~ boring.
↓
exciting

9) fam / hols — feelings
go on holiday w can have feelings
family at any time.
↓ ↓
happy - be w can be sad as well.
people ↓
↓ unpredictable
know you want ↓
for ages
↓
happy

3c

fam / Pro
↓
Professionals have
familys + families
have professionals
in
↓
being together
↓
happy.

—

breaktime
↓
Family are
normally
around
↓
need a break
from them
↓
get boring to be
w family all
the time.
↓
more stressed.

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3 4 7?

1) Peer + sch rules   Family
                                                ↓
Ch. better behaved   —   relaxed
      ↓
   strangers
      ↓

   authority

2) Holidays + break   —   Sch building
         ↓   ↓
     happier   Dreadful
         ↓   ↓
     relax + pepare.   concentrating
     prepared   learning
     relaxed   ↓
                                          more serious

3) Sch rules + feeling   —   Family
         ↓   ↓
    feelings change   happier
    @ school   ↓
         ↓   close to mum
    very upset crying   ↓
         ↓   happy
    anxious

4) break + hols   —   Sch rules.
      relaxed   ↓
         ↓   have to abide by
    more not   rules
    so formal   ↓
                                       if you break rules
                                       there are consequences
                                            ↓
                                         respect.
                                            ↓
                                       strict / formal.

5) Prof + feelings — Sch building
↓ ↓
Different emotions only a building
w professionals ↓
↓ patience
on one level - cover ↓
up they are feeling learning make
↓ new friends, life
not showing true emotion skills
↓ ↓
not being yourself learning how to
show emotion
↓
being yourself

6) Prof + Sch rules — Holidays
↓ ↓
Strict stays more relaxed, happy
the same not so strict
↓ ↓
Strict relaxed

7) Family + break — Prof
↓ ↓
more relaxed Concentrating more,
thinking more,
↓
uncomfortable.

8) hols + feelings — building
↓ ↓
happy emotion entering where there
is more relaxed. are professionals +
↓ strict rules
more relaxed. ↓
↓ more sensible
be yourself ↓
↓ serious
relaxed

9) family + holidays — feelings
spend more time ↓
as a family serious
↓
no rules
↓
happy relaxed
↓
playful

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19) Family + break   —   Professionals
        ↓   ↓
    relaxed   serious / workplace
        ↓   ↓
    laughing quality   not yourself
    time   uptight
        ↓
    happy
        ↓
    forget serious stuff
    relaxed.

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4-C.

1) fam + sch rules — Professionals
   rules in both
   home + school   know more
   make you not do   don't need rules.
   things you shouldn't
   have to follow

2) Hols + break — Sch building
   have a break   not very happy
   happy   scary

3) fam + feelings — sch rules.
   everyone has feelings   simple rules most
   might hurt people's   people know
   feelings if say
   something horrible   rules stop people being
   hurtful   nasty
                           respect

4) Hols + break — sch rules
   happy   they are there whether you
                           like it or not.
                   Sad   my choice to follow them.
                           i decide what to do

5) sch buil / feelings — Professionals
   scared + worried.   there for you to
                            talk to
   anxious   understood
                            happy

6). school rules + Prof ———— hols
   both have rules   ↓
        ↓   happy, cheerful
   feel like they   ↓
   are pointless   doing something
        ↓   they like to do
   not happy/worried   ↓
        ↓   relaxed
   worried

7) Profess + Break ———— family
   professionals   ↓
   have a break   can feel good + bad.
        ↓   ↓
   need a break   more relaxed.
        ↓
   tired
        ↓
   moody
        ↓
   not happy

8) Hols + feelings ——— sch but
        ↓   ↓
   can still feel   feel different
    emotions e.g   ↓
    worried   scared / worried.
        ↓but more
   fun
        ↓
   happier

9) hols + fam ——— feelings
        ↓   ↓
   when go away   have diff feelings in diff
   with family it   places
   is good?   ↓
        ↓   scared
   relaxed

10). Fam + break ——— Prof
        ↓   ↓
   good to have   people expect them
   a break   to be smart
        ↓   ↓
   not worried   comfortable   being someone else.
   about what is going ↑   ↓
   to happen   be urself   worried
        ↓
   horrible - feeling   feel ↑
   always there → different

SP

1. fam + School — Professionals
   ↓ ↓
   you're involved in don't go near
   everyday life professionals
   ↓ ↓
   teach how not coping
   to be
   ↓
   both have
   rules + routines
   ↓
   stability

2. break + hols — Sch building
   ↓ ↓
   having a "everyday life"
   rest ↓
   recharge batteries need to back away
   to have a break
   not so worried ↓
   having a good too much
   time ↓
   ↓ stressed
   relaxed

3. feelings + fam — Sch rules
   ↓ ↓
   everyday life teaching education
   ↓ ↓
   ups + downs education
   ↓
   try to do right
   thing by ch.
   ↓
   decent human
   beings
   ↓
   doesn't lie steal
   ↓
   contribute to life
   ↓
   coping with life

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4. Sch rules + break ——— Holidays
         ↓   ↓
      School   relax
         ↓
      working.

5. Feelings + sch build ——— professionals
         ↓   ↓
   go through   not coping.
   emotions @ school
         ↓
   falling out
   friendships, boy trouble
         ↓
   learning about
   life + emotions
         ↓
   coping + enjoying
         ↓
   Fun building
   relationships
         ↓
   coping

6. Sch rules / professional ——— holidays
         ↓   ↓
      learning.   relaxing

7. Break time + family ——— Professionals
         ↓   ↓
   not as pressured   under pressure
         ↓   ↓
      relaxed.   not coping.

8. Sch building + feelings —— Holidays
         ↓   ↓
      learning.   relaxing

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9. Feelings + family —— Holidays
   ↓   ↓
   hardwork dealing   relaxing
   with emotions of
   ch – trying to
   do best
   ↓
   stressed
   ↓
   unsettled.

10 family + break —— Professionals
   ↓   ↓
   relaxing   not coping

SC

1. Picc + sch rules ——— family
   ↓   ↓
   Stressful   more laid back
   "on your back"   ↓
                       relaxing.

2. Hols + break ——— Sch building
   ↓   ↓
   "have a break"   hard
   ↓   ↓
   can be in   Schools push you +
   own little world push you
   ↓   ↓
   no one can hurt   upset - angry
   you or upset
   you
   ↓
   relieved

3. fam + feelings ——— sch rules.
   ↓   ↓
   families are feeling get told what
   + emotions   to do
   ↓   ↓
   have ups + downs   can't be yourself
   but always stick   ↓
   together   feeling pressured.
   ↓
   be there for each
   other
   ↓
   support / caring
   ↓
   feeling happy.

4. Sch rules + break — Holidays.
   ↓   ↓
   pressured   being yourself, not
   ↓   worried
   too many people   ↓
   there telling   relieved
   you what to do
   ↓
   pressured

5 sch building + prof — feelings
↓   ↓
being judged   being yourself
↓   ↓
look down at   can always help
you   yourself
↓   ↓
angry/worthless   being you
↓
feel like i'm nothing
good
↓
not listened to
↓
upset/angry
↓
being judged.

6. professionals + sch rules — Holidays
↓ its school   ↓
↓   being yourself
stressed.   ↓
                                   being relaxed

7. Break + family — professionals
↓   ↓
unstressful   'feel like crap'
↓   ↓
calm.   upsetting emotionally
↓   ↓
happier   upset.
↓
calm

8. feelings + sch building — hols
↓   ↓
lots of emotion in   on a break
school   ↓
↓   nothing to get you
worried   stressed
                              ↓
                           at peace
                           in my word

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9. fam + hols ——————— feelings
↓ ↓
amazing scary
↓ ↓
neith good + bad hurtful - no-one
↓ can help but
have support yourself but you
↓ don't know what
feeling someone to do
cares ↓
↓ angry
supported ↓
worried

10. fam + prof ——————— break
↓ ↓
mums + dads get away
act like professionals from it all
↓ ↓
on your back calmer/calm.
↓
horrible
↓
try to do them
proud but still
they see the
bad
↓
angry

Appendix 11

I'd like to invite you to complete an activity for me where you have to choose the pair of repertory grids that seem the most similar out of a choice of two pairs. You will do this five times.

The results will remain confidential as your name will not be stored against the answers given. The results will be kept in a locked cabinet and the only people who will be allowed to read it is me, Claire Smith (trainee Educational Psychologist) and Huw Williams (Educational Psychologist).

If you decide that you would like to participate in the work with me, but then change your mind, you can stop the work at any point and I will not ask you why. If you want to have your work removed from the research after we have worked together it will not be possible to do so as your name will not be stored against the work.

Appendix 12: Chi-Square calculations

These are hand written chi-square calculations.

$\boxed{\text{Chi square}}$ $\qquad x^2 = \Sigma \left(\dfrac{(O-E)^2}{E} \right)$

Dyad 1

$$= \dfrac{(16-10)^2}{10} \;\overset{①}{} \; + \; \dfrac{(4-10)^2}{10} \;\overset{②}{}$$

$$\dfrac{6^2}{10} \; + \; \dfrac{-6^2}{10}$$

$$\dfrac{36}{10} \; + \; \dfrac{36}{10}$$

$$= \quad 3.6 \; + \; 3.6$$

$$= \quad 7.2 \qquad\qquad \boxed{\text{Sig at 0.05}} \qquad df = 2-1 = 1$$

Dyad 2

$$= (17-10)^2 \; + \; (3-10)^2$$

$$= \dfrac{7^2}{10} \; + \; \dfrac{-7^2}{10}$$

$$= \dfrac{49}{10} \; + \; \dfrac{49}{10}$$

$$= \quad 4.9 \; + \; 4.9$$

$$= \quad 9.8 \qquad\qquad \boxed{\text{Sig at 0.05}} \qquad df = 2-1=1$$

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Dyad 3

$$\frac{(12 \cdot 10)^2}{10} + \frac{(8 \cdot 10)^2}{10}$$

$$= \frac{2^2}{10} + \frac{\cdot 2^2}{10}$$

$$= \frac{4}{10} + \frac{4}{10}$$

$$= 0.4 + 0.4$$

$$= 0.8 \qquad\qquad df = 1$$

not sig

Dyad 4

as above.

Dyad 5

$$\frac{(7 - 10)^2}{10} + \frac{(13 \cdot 10)^2}{10}$$

$$= \frac{-3^2}{10} + \frac{3^2}{10}$$

$$= \frac{9}{10} + \frac{9}{10}$$

$$= 0.9 + 0.9$$

$$= 1.8 \qquad\qquad\qquad df = 1$$

not sig

Appendix 13: Chi-Square critical values distribution table

Statistics Explained

**A guide for
social science students**

- Perry R. Hinton

A.7   Critical values of the chi-square (χ^2) distribution

df	0.05 Level of significance	0.01 Level of significance
1	3.84	6.64
2	5.99	9.21
3	7.82	11.34
4	9.49	13.28
5	11.07	15.09
6	12.59	16.81
7	14.07	18.48
8	15.51	20.09
9	16.92	21.67
10	18.31	23.21
11	19.68	24.72
12	21.03	26.22
13	22.36	27.69
14	23.68	29.14
15	25.00	30.58
16	26.30	32.00
17	27.59	33.41
18	28.87	34.80
19	30.14	36.19
20	31.41	37.57
21	32.67	38.93
22	33.92	40.29
23	35.17	41.64
24	36.42	42.98
25	37.65	44.31
26	38.88	45.64
27	40.11	46.97
28	41.34	48.28
29	42.56	49.59
30	43.77	50.89

The calculated value of χ^2 must be larger than or equal to the table value for significance.

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Appendix 14

The letter sent to the children who participated in the research

Dear……………………

I wanted to write to you to thank you again for taking part in the activity you did with me in October 2010 as part of my research project. We completed an activity together called the 'Repertory Grid Technique' where you had to tell me how two cards, out of a choice of three cards, were similar and why the third card was opposite to them. We repeated this 10 times and from it we were able to explore what you thought and felt about school and what your 'constructs' (words to describe how you view school) were. After this I asked you to give each word on the card a number from 1-7 according to the construct you had given me. For example one construct that was given was happy – scary and you had to say what number 'break time' would be if happy were 1 and scary was 7. From this a 'Repertory Grid' was made.

I also completed the same activity with one of your parents to find out what they thought about school and to find out their constructs. I completed the activity with four other parents and their children.

I have looked at what was said by the parents and the children and the constructs that came from the activity and there are a few things that I have noticed that I wanted to tell you about.

1. Some of the constructs that all of the parents and all of the children had about school were similar. I found that everyone's constructs about school could be grouped into different themes. There were four themes that were the same for both the children and the parents.
   - Relaxed – anxiety
   - Being you - not being you
   - Freedom – restriction
   - Fun – work/boring
2. I also looked at the answers from each of the parents and their child and they had some constructs that were similar.
3. The numbers (1-7) that the children and their parents gave to the words on the cards were similar. I found that there were lots of times when the children and their parent gave the same number, or a number that was one more or less, when they had to think about the construct as a scale from 1-7.
4. I asked 20 people to see if they could pick out the two Repertory Grids from the parent and their child out of choice of two possible pairs. Over 10 people were able to pick out the right pairing of the parent and child Repertory Grids for 4 out of the 5 parent and child pairs. This shows that the child's Repertory Grid was similar to their parent's Repertory Grid for 4 of the children.

These four findings seem to show that children think and feel about school in a similar way to how their parent thinks and feels about school. I have shared these findings with the people who work in your school and also with other professionals who might work with children who find going to school hard so teachers, mentors and all the other professionals might be able to do even more in the future to help understand why children find going to school difficult. I hope it will also help professionals to think about the types of things that they can do to support you and your family and to make going to school a bit easier for some children.

If you have any questions about anything that I have told you please do not hesitate to contact me on ……………..

Many thanks again for your help with my research.

Kind regards

Claire Smith

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 14

The letter sent to the parents who participated in the research

Dear……………………

I wanted to write to you to thank you again for attending the interview with me in October 2010 that was part of my research project. As part of the interview we completed an activity together called the 'Repertory Grid Technique' where I asked you to tell me how two cards, out of a choice of three cards, were similar and how the third card was opposite to them. We repeated this 10 times and from it we were able to explore what you thought and felt about school and what your 'constructs' (words to describe how you view school) were. After this I asked you to give each word on the card a number from 1-7 according to the construct you had given me. For example one construct that was given was happy – scary and you had to say what number 'break time' would be if happy were 1 and scary was 7. From this a 'Repertory Grid' was made of your constructs.

I also completed the same activity with your child, who is on roll at the JB provision, to find out what they thought about school and to find out their constructs. I completed the activity with four other parents and their children.

I have looked at what was said by all the parents and their children and the constructs that came from the activity. There are a few things that I have noticed that I wanted to tell you about.

5. Some of the constructs that all of the parents and all of the children had about school were similar. I found that everyone's constructs about school could be grouped into different themes. There were four themes that were the same for both the children and the parents.
    - Relaxed – anxiety
    - Being you - not being you
    - Freedom – restriction
    - Fun – work/boring

6. I also looked at the answers from each of the parents and their child and they had some constructs that were similar.

7. The numbers (1-7) that the children and their parents gave to the words on the cards were similar. I found that there were lots of times when the children and their parent gave the same number, or a number that was one more or less, when they had to think about the construct as a scale from 1-7.

8. I asked 20 people to see if they could pick out the two Repertory Grids from the parent and their child out of choice of two possible pairs. Over 10 people were able to pick out the right pairing of the parent and child Repertory Grids for 4 out of the 5 parent and child pairs. This shows that the child's Repertory Grid was similar to their parent's Repertory Grid for 4 of the children.

These four findings seem to show that children think and feel about school in a similar way to how their parent thinks and feels about school. I have shared these findings with some of the people who work at the JB provision and also with other professionals who might work with children who find going to school hard. It is hoped that by sharing my findings professionals might be able to do even more in the future to help understand why children find going to school difficult. I hope it will also help professionals to think about the types of things that they can do to support the child and their family and therefore make going to school a bit easier for some children.

If you have any questions about anything that I have told you please do not hesitate to contact me on ……………..

Many thanks again for your help with my research.

Kind regards.

Claire Smith

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Investigating the impact of parental constructs of school on children's emotional based school refusing behaviour

Claire Smith
5.4.11

Emotional based school refusal

- Thambirajah et al (2008) describe that:

'The search for one factor (the 'main effect') responsible for school refusal is insufficient...school refusal occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when 'pull' factors that promote school non attendance overcome the 'push' factors that encourage attendance. It is usually a unique combination of various factors and their interaction that leads to school non attendance, although one factor may be more salient to the problems than others in a particular child' (p33).

Why focus on the family?

- The complex nature of school refusal behaviour and the research highlighting the 'multiple predictors that compound over time' (Kearney, 2008, p465)
- The interplay between factors from the different systems around the child, i.e. school, family, community.
- 'An agreement between authorities that family is an important part of the context in which school refusal occurs' (Thambirajah et al, 2008).

Kearney and Bates (2005)

- Described a range of family responses to treatment of school refusal behaviour.
  - parents who are receptive to feedback about their child's behaviour and are willing to remediate the problem quickly,
  - parents who are reluctant or ambivalent about their child's attendance and
  - parents who are resistant to feedback regarding their child's attendance status.
- Each of these responses can effect the engagement of the family with the assessment and treatment of the school refusal behaviour.

Gap in the research?

- Pellegrini (2007) identifies the 'bias towards a clinical construction of this behaviour (school refusal behaviour) in research and academic discourses' (p66).
- Place et al (2000) suggests that 'an understanding of the interaction between environmental factors and school non-attenders is necessary to promote effective and lasting change and generate alternative discourses around this issue (p 67).

Influences on our behaviour

- Cooper and Upton (1990) highlighted, in line with an ecosystemic approach, that
  a) we behave in accordance with the way in which we interpret problem situations;
  b) there are often many different but equally valid interpretations of any given situation;
  c) if we change our interpretation we can change our behaviour; and
  d) change in our behaviour will influence the perceptions and behaviour of others (p312).

Family system

- Reiss (1981) purports that:

'the family has come to play a central role in providing understanding and meaning of the stimulus universe.... (it offers) a set of explanations of the world to each of its members that serves as the primary organiser of internal and external experience' (p155)

Family system continued

- Fonagy et al (1994) argue that 'the child's sense of psychological self is a direct function of the accuracy of the caregiver's perceptions' (p248).
- It is through the caregiver's capacity to reflect the child's psychological experience that the child is 'provided with part of the mental equipment' (Fonagy et al, 1994, p248) necessary to establish their own reflective self.

Family system continued

- Thambirajah et al (2008) also acknowledge that 'parents' attitude towards the teacher and other educational authorities are usually coloured by their previous experience with teachers, authority figures and, especially, their own experience of schooling' (p84).

Family system continued

- 'From our earliest experiences our parents and teachers select, label and punctuate the data presented to us, influencing the way we see and value things' (Procter, 1996, p162)
- The family evolves a unique construct system that provides a structure for the family members' perceptions of their lives and also provides a rationale for their actions (Procter, 1996).

Opportunities

- Head and Jamieson (2006) emphasise:

'The relationship between the self and the other in a concrete context such as this (school) is dynamic, interactive and organic. Therefore, not only are pupils afforded the opportunity to create a new identity for themselves, but teachers and adults too construct a new identity for themselves. This identity relates not only to their own experience of the context but in the attitudes that develop out of their sense of themselves in the presence of their students, a different sense of themselves as teachers and support assistants' (p40).

Research questions

1. What constructs do parents have about school and school related elements?
2. Do parental constructs influence/ have an impact upon their children's perceptions of school?
3. Do parental constructs influence/ have an impact upon the children's school refusal behaviour?

Participants

Focus group
- 3 parents

Interviews
- 5 parents and their children

How did I collect my data?

- A personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955) technique called Repertory Grid Technique (RGT) was used.
- Kelly (1955)
  - 'a person's processes are psychologically channelized by the ways in which he anticipates events' (Kelly, 1955, p32) which argues that individuals use their own personal constructs to understand and interpret events that occur around them and that these constructs are tempered by the individuals' experiences.

RGT

There are three aspects to the RGT:
1. Elements
   - 7 elements were used, in groups of 3.
   - Identified through a focus group with parents
2. Constructs
3. Links

Why RGT?

- Provides a structured way of eliciting each participant's particular subsystems of construing around EBSR and therefore provided a standard method to use with all participants, reducing the level of researcher bias and increasing reliability.
- RGT also formalised the process and provided a way of assigning mathematical values to the relationships between a person's constructs, which allowed for a more reliable form of comparison between the constructs of parent and child and also between parents.

Frequency count

- Bipolar constructs were counted
- Thematic analysis of bipolar constructs:

Parents Themes	Children's Themes
Related - structure	Happy - unconcerned
Relaxed - answer	Relaxed - anxiety/stress
Being you - not being you	Being you - not being you
Freedom - restriction	Freedom - restriction
Meaningful - non learning	Calm - emoticchallenge
Other	Fun - boring
	Other

Frequency

Number of times the same grouping of the 3 elements occurred within the parent/child dyads

Parent – Child dyad	Number of groupings the same (out of 10)
1	2
2	1
3	2
4	1
5	6

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Content comparison with parent-child dyad

- See results sheet

Examining the ratings

- See results sheet

Quantitative analysis

- 2 out of the 5 grids were seen as statistically similar
- Another 2 of the grids, the real parent-child pairing was chosen as similar over 50% of the time.
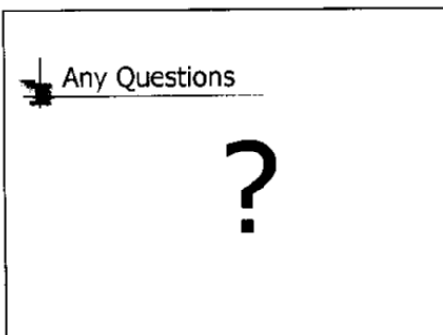
Conclusions

- Some similarity between parent and child constructs of school and school related elements.

What does this mean?

- What do you think this means for your setting?
- How might it change your practice?
- What impact do you think parental constructs of school have upon their children's constructs?

Points to consider...

- Gender of participants (mother vs father), age, and cultural effects need investigating
- Identification of parents: parents who wanted to and engaged with the provision
- Subjectivity of researcher when interpreting results of focus group.
- Questioning bias of researcher
- Bias of researcher presence during interview: anxiety raising?
- Thematic analysis of constructs through researchers own constructs
- Only white British participants for RGT therefore ability to generalize?
  - Generalisability: give reader enough contextual information they can decide about it's applicability to their study.
- Could compare constructs against sample of school attenders.
- Elements in child range of convenience?
  - A focus group could have been used with children and the results compared with the parents to ensure children's range of convenience was considered

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Any Questions

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