

MA Social Justice and Education

Community Engagement – Opportunity or Obstacle?

An exploration into the nature and perceived impact of school-community relationships on the education of children at one secondary school.

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Abstract

‘Neither schools nor families alone [can] do the job of educating...children’ (Epstein, J., 2001, p38-9), instead ‘it takes a village to educate a child’ (The Third Teacher, 2010, p107). This dissertation considers this premise, exploring relationships between one secondary school (set in an area of less advantage) and its community, and asks whether these relationships enhance children’s education. Using theories from Epstein and Riley (Epstein, J., 2001, p28 & 31 and Riley, K., 2013, p272-274) to frame qualitative methodology, it seeks to unearth knowledge and experiences that provide insight into the nature and impact these relationships. Nine interviews and one focus group were conducted in this small-scale embedded case-study, revealing that relationships are emerging, with some perceived to positively impact children’s aspirations, broadening their worldview, increasing opportunities for building social capital and developing the broader scope of their abilities. However, participants bemoaned negative external perceptions of both Farm Hill School and its neighbourhood, citing the barriers this creates to developing relationships and accessing the community’s untapped potential. This research suggests that despite the lack of measurable impact, a child’s education can benefit from school-community partnerships, and that when barriers are removed and the whole ‘village’ collaborates, children’s physical, mental, social and emotional skills and individual talents can be developed more effectively steering children towards becoming active citizens in a global community - something schools cannot achieve in isolation.

Chapter 1: Rationale

1.1 Introduction

Schools are the principle means by which we educate the 8.5 million school age children in England (Department for Education, 2016, p3). While methods and curricula have changed over the past 100 years, pressure on schools to bear sole responsibility for education has not. But are our expectations too high? Can schools provide a balanced education in isolation - without assistance from communities or families? In this dissertation I explore external relationships built by one school in South East England, consider contributions made by the local community and families, and examine their respective impact on the education children receive.

Schools face increasingly daunting demands on their time and resources. Since the United Kingdom's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1989, the burden on schools to provide a broad and effective education has grown, yet evidence shows that they face growing financial pressures (Fasna.org.uk, 2016) alongside increasing political pressure to '[gear the school] towards meeting Government targets and OFSTED expectations' (National Union of Teachers, 2015). How then, are already over-stretched schools to provide a balanced education, whilst also meeting localised needs and the expectations of national education policy (Riley, K., 2013, p267)? An African proverb suggests that 'It takes a village to educate a child' (The Third Teacher, 2010, p107), and invites us to consider whether education is improved when the whole community contributes to and shares the responsibility for it. This is the principal question I explore in this thesis.

1.2 Defining terms

I should explain what I mean by 'education' and 'community'. The Oxford Online Dictionary defines education as 'The process of receiving or giving systematic instruction', whilst the OECD definition draws attention to education as an active process, that is 'organised' and 'brings about learning' through 'sustained communication' (Stats.OECD.org, 2016). This is consonant with Dewey's belief that education 'is a process of living and not a preparation for future living (The Third Teacher, 2010, p108), which Article 29 of the UNCRC develops further, stating that the goals of education are not only academic, but should be balanced to:

develop each child's personality, talents and abilities to the fullest;...encourage children to respect others, human rights and their own and other cultures; help [children to] learn to live peacefully, protect the environment and respect other people and to develop respect for the values and culture of their parents.

(United Nations, 2016)

Drawing on the UNCRC, I adopt the following definition of education, as the process of enabling others to live a purposeful life as active citizens in a global community, balancing development of their physical, mental, social and emotional skills and individual talents. This is a substantial undertaking for schools to achieve in isolation, and I explore whether this requirement can be satisfied more effectively in collaboration with their local community.

Turning now to the idea of 'community': who is this 'community' (or village) that schools may want to reach out to? Steiner suggests that 'community' is often defined in terms of its social or geographical demographic characteristics (Steiner, E., 2002, cited in Hands, C., 2005, p65), but in today's globalised society it can be unclear how these characteristics determine boundaries between communities. Contrastingly, discourse around school community often focuses on internal relationships within the school. While both descriptions have their merit, I suggest that a school's community is better conceived more broadly, so as to include 'school personnel and all of the individuals and organisations external to the schools with a common interest in education' (Hands, C., 2005, p65), 'working together with shared belief and goals' (Riley, K., 2008, p312). Accordingly, I shall adopt Epstein's broad concept of a school's community to include all 'those who are impacted by the effectiveness of the education and well-being of students in an established geographical area' (Epstein, J., 2001, p57).

1.3 Purpose of Research

This study, explores the view that to enable children to become active citizens through the development of their skills and talents, schools need to develop collaborative relationships with their community. It analyses a body of knowledge pertaining to school-community relationships and explores the nature and value of these relationships within the context of one secondary school, asking:

1. Is there a relationship between the secondary school and its community?
What is the nature of this relationship?

2. Do staff, parents and community representatives perceive these relationships have any impact on children's education?

Riley recommends that we need to reconsider these relationships (Riley, K., 2008, p315) and suggests an increase in their importance in areas of less advantage, considering them as key to the 'success' of schools in preventing children from 'disconnect[ing] with their educational experience' (Riley, K., 2008, p311). This small-scale study therefore explores these relationships in an area of less advantage, with the intention of adding to the body of knowledge that advocates schools working in community rather than isolation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The current body of knowledge concerning school-community relationships - their nature and value - reveals a small collection of published studies to draw on, mainly from the United States. I consequently examine a small sample of key authors on this theme, and draw out from each, their position on the construction and influence of these relationships.

Using keywords of school, community, relationships and related terminology, my initial search sought to discover whether the relationships between schools and their community was prevalent discourse. Subsequent searches explored how the current body of knowledge describes the topography of these relationships, and whether any discernible impact was identified. Using online library enquiries and contemporary search engines, a broad picture of the existing body of knowledge was established. Epstein and Riley are key authors in a seemingly ageing body of knowledge (from 1990's to 2005) and a subsequent bibliographic search revealed that recent studies primarily examined previous works.

Although my empirical explorations focus on secondary education, the limited body of knowledge did not permit this as a search constraint, instead as more studies were revealed, restrictions were placed around the types of relationships investigated, for example: charity, volunteer or family, aiming for a balanced overview. This proved to be a common separation, with studies exploring relationships amongst different external stakeholders in education - parents (or

families) and business recurring often, with wider community connections being considered by more researchers than first appeared.

2.2 Geography of Literature

In the United States, educationalists have considered the relationship between schools and their communities since the early 1900's. Dewey, an influential educational reformer in the first part of the 20th Century, stressed its importance in his 'Pedagogic Creed', acknowledging school as one part of a child's social life that extends from home through the community (Dewey, J., 1897, p78). Epstein picked up Dewey's thread over a century later, becoming a driving force behind the suggestion that school-community relationships play a key role in education. She explains, in 'School, Family, Community Partnerships', that schools and families were once considered separate fields of study, with academics debating who was more important (Epstein, J., 2001, p38), but goes on to explain that:

The debate changed as it became clear that neither schools nor families alone could do the job of educating and socialising children and preparing them for life. Rather, schools, families and communities share responsibilities for children and influence them simultaneously (Epstein, J., 2001, p38-9).

While Epstein brings our attention to these relationships within the US educational system, a significant lack of research surfaced with a UK bias, I therefore rely heavily on Kathryn Riley, an English researcher, in parallel with Epstein (often referred to in UK research) to provide theoretical framework.

2.3 Discourse

Epstein and Sanders provide an overview of how school-community relationship discourse has evolved - from a segregated model of schooling, subsequent recognition that various facets of community impact on education (in particular, parents) to Epstein's accepted 'overlapping spheres of influence' model (Sanders & Epstein cited in Bornstein, M., 2002, p407-437). These relationships however, are complex, with some occurring naturally while others are manufactured, some occurring within school time and buildings and others within community parameters - producing data that is difficult to extrapolate due to the number of influences on a child at any one time. This goes some way to explain why there is little literature on the impact of these relationships. Within the literature, opposing views exist of appropriate terminology for school-community relationships - 'parental involvement' and 'parental engagement' seem interchangeable for some, but are defined very differently by others and 'partnerships' being preferred in some contexts with 'relationships' elsewhere - this creates a confusing discourse that is hard to quantify.

2.4 Structure of the review

What then can be gleaned from the literature about the nature and impact of school-community relationships? Firstly I explore how the literature describes them - how they can be developed and sustained, and secondly I consider any quantifiable impact, found within the literature reviewed, of these relationships on the education of young people.

2.5 Nature of School-Community Relationships

Building on the premise that a community contains the necessary resources to provide a balanced education for children in its locality, some literature assumes that interactions between a school and its community occur naturally (Sanders & Epstein cited in Bornstein, M., 2002, p412). In contrast, Riley suggests the need for the organised construction of structures to develop purposeful relationships (Riley, K., 2013, p273-4). A lack of comprehensive studies on school-community relationships, however, leaves gaps in the understanding of the nature of these relationships. Hands regards schools and their communities as a type of eco-system, where relationships occur naturally, with success reliant on co-operation (Hands, C., 2005, p66). Yet while Riley agrees these relationships have a significant level of influence, she warns that with potentially differing values, school-community relationships may not be as symbiotic as Hands suggests (Riley, K., 2008, p313).

2.6 Types of relationships

A range of relationships exists between schools and their communities, but are rarely examined concurrently within the literature. Sanders, in her research into community involvement in schools, prioritises the connections that can be made between a school and individuals or organisations. Disregarding parents, she looks at 'business, universities, internship organisations and service professionals' (Sanders, M., 2003, p164) – a potentially unbalanced view of community that favours other professionals rather than citizens. Epstein and Hands take a broader view, with Epstein categorising families and community as the two other major influence on school-aged children, while Hands' definition of community as 'all of

the individuals and organisations external to the school' (Hands, C., 2005, p65) is clumsy and lacks the clarification useful for analysis.

Starting with a review of the literature surrounding community in its broadest sense, I highlight three distinct relationships between community and schools: neighbours, parents and local businesses and organisations. Other sub-categories were considered, including charities and volunteers, but with insufficient literature to review these groups specifically, I chose instead to integrate them into the business category, defined as groups that offer services or products to the school. Local authority and higher education relationships are also included in this section as they all take part in the empirical research.

Within the discourse, different values are highlighted that establish a broad understanding of the nature of school-community relationships and their value. Riley suggests community as an antidote to the individualistic society that we find ourselves in, bringing individuals together through 'shared beliefs and goals' (Riley, K., 2008, p312). However, the current neoliberal (or individualistic) construction of schools (pitted against each other through league tables and parental choice), which has been encouraged by consecutive governments, breeds the opposite. But by placing itself at the heart of the community, creating shared aims of 'developing successful students and good citizens' (Epstein, J., 2001, p470), Epstein and Sanders suggest that schools can provide a more balanced education, while the community itself can utilise its influence to invest in children and thus its own future development. (Epstein, J., 2001, p481; Sanders, 2003, p162).

2.7 Neighbourhood Relationships

While there is little research exploring relationships between a school and its immediate residential community (previously known as a school's catchment area) I chose to research relationships with this group as they naturally interact with children during everyday life, selecting the terminology 'neighbourhood' to encompass residents and local employees. As mentioned, until Riley picked up the baton in the early 2000's (Riley, K., and Stoll, L., 2004, p34-41), discourse around these relationships in the UK was sparse. The Labour Government's 'Every Child Matters' mandate, including introduction of Sure Start Centres (neighbourhood learning and support spaces) challenged schools and other public services to communicate more effectively around specific children in the neighbourhood (HM Treasury, 2003). However, a general community engagement ethos was not mandated until 'a new duty to promote community cohesion' (Department of Children, Schools and Families, 2007, p1) became government policy in 2007. After a period of unrest in the UK the Government wanted to encourage 'a society in which strong and positive relationships exist' (Riley, K., 2013, p269) - schools were presented with a renewed mandate to 'engage(ment) with the community and [encouraged to provide] extended services' (Riley, K., 2013, p269). Unfortunately there is little evidence this has become more than just another policy exercise in many schools, with subsequent governments reducing funding and therefore support for community engagement. Conversely, discourse in the United States presents an education system where neighbourhoods have 'always played a part' (Sanders, M., 2003, p161), with a steady stream of research into the field (Hands, C., 2005, p64). Starting with Dewey's advocacy of community schools in the early

1900's and developing into a desire by parents and community members for greater control over schools in the 1960's, the role of neighbourhoods in education has often been at the forefront of US education debates (Sanders, M., 2003, p161).

Historically, communities had great influence over education. 100 years ago church-led schools were common and with the majority of residents attending church at that time, neighbourhoods were involved with 'hir[ing] and fir[ing] of teachers, determin[ing] the school calendar and influenc[ing] the curriculum' (Epstein, J., 2001, p24). Within a school's community today, there still remain various stakeholders who are impacted by and able to influence the education of children in their locality, yet it's rare to see 'others in the community [teaching] children important skills and knowledge needed for success in adulthood' (Epstein, J., 2001, p24) as was previously common.

Epstein suggests decrease in these relationships is due to a clear division of responsibilities between parents and school, leaving neighbourhoods out in the cold (Epstein, J., 2001, p24). However, the literature suggests that relationships need to be rebuilt if we're to provide a balanced education - interactions between schools and their communities should be frequent and personal, led by senior staff who listen, accept and develop mutual respect (Riley, K., 2008, p314; Hands, C., 2005, p64; Epstein, J., 2001, p63). By making sense of their community context and re-defining educational success in conjunction with the neighbourhood (Riley, K., 2008, p315), school leaders are more able to respond appropriately to their needs. This time-consuming relationship construction requires commitment from all staff, with

experts conceding the need for staff training and visibility of leadership (Riley, K., 2008, p312). However, if education of children is the priority of a school, developing relationships with the neighbourhood and other community members should be a key emphasis. Keith (cited in Sanders, M., 2008, p164) and Hands suggestion that building 'horizontal' relationships creates a 'bi-directional flow' of communication and interdependence (Hands, C., 2005, p66) and demonstrates potential mutual benefit for communities and their children.

2.8 Impact of Neighbourhood Relationships

While an interdependent eco-system can be difficult to build and maintain, there is acceptance that neighbourhood relationships are potentially significant for the development of young people. With the opportunities provided by neighbours and the neighbourhood context, Keith argues that they can develop 'social networks, educational and economic opportunities and cultural richness' (Sanders, M., 2003, p164) - although perceived impact depends on a localised definition of success.

Providing context for a child's education, neighbourhoods can challenge inert curricula, bringing purpose and reality to learning and providing a way for young people to see greater purpose in their academic studies (Howe, B., and Covell, K., 2005; p111 and Johnson, L., et al, 2005, p4; Muji, D., et al, 2004, p154). Beyond the confines of curricula, student well-being, future employment and an 'expan[sion of]...networks and increased their social capital', are listed as key impacts from these relationships (Sanders, M., 2003, p162-4; Hands, C., 2005, p80), with greater interaction and therefore understanding of the wider community, showing an increase in children's sense of belonging (Howe, B. and Covell, K., 2005, p111). Riley,

however, sits alone, however, in her claims on the impact on attainment (National College for School leadership, 2007, cited in Riley, K., 2013, p267).

Social capital, 'the links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together' (Stats.OECD.org, 2016) is key to the development and success of young people. The 'positive, caring relationships' (Coleman, J., 1987, cited in Sanders, M., 2003, p163) essential for development of social capital are often missing in society today, due to the complexities surrounding families and a progressively globalised culture. School-community links, therefore, play an important role in creating opportunities for social capital to be constructed. Riley challenges schools not to consider their communities as low in social capital, and encourages leaders to actively view their community through a lens of social capital construction - a resource to draw on - arguing that it improves the way educators look at their working context and thus the students themselves (Riley, K., 2013, p271 & p314). This perspective may be magnified in disadvantaged communities where Shore identifies an increase in social and emotional needs due to entrenched poverty (Shore, R., 1994, cited in Sanders, M., 2003, p162). In fact, connection to the community becomes more important in these areas of society to prevent disconnection from education altogether (Riley, K., 2003, p311; Mujis, D., et al, 2004, p167), making community links all the more important.

Much of the literature presents a school's community as a valuable and 'untapped' resource, hiding 'invisible assets' (Riley, K., 2013, p314) that schools can utilise for

the benefit of their students (Mujis, D., et al, 2004, p166-167; Epstein, J., 2001, p4-5). From finance, resources, and manpower, to motivation, cultural advice and innovative learning experiences, the list appears endless, yet Epstein argues that schools first need to choose whether to see the community as a resource or an enemy. Many schools in the UK still seem to pick the latter, 'distan[c]ing themselves from the community' (Riley, K., 2008, p313) to enable them to meet the standards required by government policy. However, school leaders carry a responsibility to balance the needs of these national policies with those of the community, making it impossible to maintain the fortress mentality (Riley, K., 2013, p267) and essential to build meaningful partnerships with its community.

2.9 Parental Relationships

Parental involvement in school, a more prevalent discourse, is categorised by Desforges as spontaneous or enhanced (Desforges, C., 2003, p4). Spontaneous involvement relies on natural instincts of a parent to engage in their child's education, while enhanced involvement develops through structured interventions. This assumes that all parents will be involved at some level, whether by intuition or encouragement. Vorhaus and Goodall's broader definition suggests parental engagement occurs in three fields: at home, through communication and collaboration between home and school; and on school premises (Vorhaus, J., and Goodall, J., 2010, p4). I will focus on the final two fields.

Parents should be viewed as an integral part of a school's community (Hands, C., 2005, p66) - having the closest link to the child, their interdependence is vital for

healthy functioning of the eco-system. Finnish education presumes that parents play a central role in their child's education (Risku, M., et al, 2012, p18), with an assumed understanding that they carry ultimate responsibility for educating their own children (Risku, M., et al, 2012, p3). English parents, however, have only recently been encouraged to engage with their child's education and until the 1970's were kept away from school (Lucas, B., 2013, p6) by the home-professional divide. 'Home-school cooperation' appears to be a recognised factor in Finland's high OECD ranking (Risku, M., et al, 2012, p13), mandated to principals and expected by parents. With the multitude of research available, this should also be highly developed in England, however, the level of trust needed to assume involvement is not fully developed here. Schools should start, then, by taking responsibility for ensuring their strategies 'recognise the contribution parents can make and aim to empower them' (Vorhaus, J., and Goodall, J., 2011, p10). Enabling parents to realise the importance of this relationship and its impact on well-being and learning outcomes, they may start to value their stake in the school, and increasingly expect to be involved the decision-making process (Risku, M., et al, 2012, p3).

While US discourse suggests that many schools are able to engage parents (Mujis, D. et al, 2004, p164), Becher argues that schools across the world must pay more attention to the 'extensive, substantial, and convincing evidence [that] suggests...parents play a crucial role...[in] facilitating the development of intelligence, achievement, and competence in their children' (Becher, R. 1984, p39 cited in Henderson, A., and Berla, N., 1994, p30). Perhaps this gave rise to the US

Government's encouragement to develop these links in its 'No Child Left Behind' policy (Lucas, B., 2013, p7). In the UK, Lucas reminds us, parent-school relationships were encouraged through the 'Every Child Matters' white paper (Lucas, B., 2013, p7), yet few schools seem to engage parents effectively, even discouraging some parental interactions if their influence is considered negative, and leaving bridges to be built across this cultural divide (Johnson, L. et al, 2005, p1; Mujis, D. et al, 2004, p164). Without the natural bridges built by the positive attitudes of Finnish Schools towards parents, bridge-building at secondary school becomes very difficult (Mujis, D. et al, 2004, p165; Risku, M. et al, 2012, p14). Even in Finland with well-developed parental relationships at an early age (as most studies also show for the UK) parental engagement wains as children age (Risku, M. et al, 2012, p15; Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A., 2003, p30). Whether a side-effect of maturation or whether schools do not understand how to develop parental relationships as children grow, is unclear. Studies of children aged 12-18 years reveal that they only require parents to motivate, encourage and set high expectations (Mujis et al, p159; Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A., 2003, p27), potentially dismissing any need for parent-school relationships at secondary level and pushing Epstein's spheres of influence apart.

Schools often unwittingly perpetuated this cultural divide: terminology, structures, lack of staff training and attitudes towards parents can all prevent interaction between the two parties. With parental access blocked through conventions of school culture or a lack of consideration towards costs or time required to attend school functions, relationship development can be prohibitive (Mujis, D. et al, 2004, p164; Vorhaus, J. and Goodall, J., 2011, p6). While there appears to be overall

agreement of teacher's pivotal role in the development of these relationships, most studies (including Risku's evaluation of Finnish parental involvement – Risku, M. et al, 2012, p13) agree that teachers need training to become experts in doing this successfully (Vorhaus, J. and Goodall, J., 2011, p5; Hands, C., 2005, p81; Sanders, M., 2003, p173). Rodriguez and Villarreal conclude that schools with successful parental partnerships identify and remove these barriers, selecting principles to prevent further hurdles, and integrate these findings into their school development plan to create a foundation of 'mutual benefit, respect and accountability' (Idra.org, 2002).

2.10 Impact of Parental Relationships

Parents, a unique resource not fully harnessed in the UK, are considered to 'create positive impact' in the classroom (Idra.org, 2002), with their involvement predicting a child's achievement more than socio-economic factors (Idra.org, 2002; Vorhaus, J. & Goodall, J., 2011, p3). By enabling parental involvement and supporting relationships between parent and child, schools can compensate for a lack of spontaneous parental involvement, which is usually prevalent for children from higher social classes or an educated family (Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A., 2003, p16).

However, measured impact on children's attainment as a result of parent's activity in school is hard to ascertain - Desforges argues that we have yet to see evidence that it actually contributes towards achievement (Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A., 2003, p30). Despite potential added-value that parents bring to school through skills

and experience, multiple interactions and variables make it problematic to confirm cause and effect. However, the bulk of literature still assumes 'positive impact on children's learning' from school-parent relationships, outweighing any insecurities Desforges highlights (Vorhaus, J. and Goodall, J., 2011, p3; Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A., 2003, p14).

Singh et al consider parental aspiration as having the greatest impact on a child's education, which could suggest why a cycle of lower educational achievement continues for a significant proportion of children from low socio-economic backgrounds (Singh, K., et al, 1995, Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A., 2003, p25). Engaging these parents may not be straightforward, but the perpetuating cycle of injustice demands schools make this a priority. Mujis et al cite Barth's survey which profiles schools who break this cycle by increasing parental 'knowledge of curriculum' and their 'capacity to help [and thus motivate] offspring' (Mujis, D. et al, 2004, p164), agreeing with Vorhaus and Goodall, who suggest that family literacy and numeracy programmes deliver more durable impact than some personal interventions (Vorhaus, J. and Goodall, J., 2011, p8). Considering the overwhelming evidence, could schools be deemed irresponsible not to engage parents in this way? Not necessarily, as it can be argued that school-parent relationships are not as essential as it first seems, with many studies suggesting it's actually interactions between a child and its parent at home that are the most influential (Zellman, G.L., and Waterman, J.M., 1998, cited in Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A., 2003, p32). Therefore, to develop true partnerships with parents, as consensus in the literature suggests (Epstein, J., 2001, p403), 'teachers [need to] recognise and value th[is]

informal learning that takes place in the home' (Idra.org, 2002), stop following a 'compensatory model', counterbalancing perceived inadequacies at home (Mujis, D. et al, 2002, p152) and build trust through meaningful home-school connections, ensuring they: listen to and utilise knowledge from parents about their child; link home-life to activities at school; keep up to date on community issues and showing parents practical ways to help children learn at home, while sharing how their children are developing in school (Henderson, R.W., 2013, p8). With these strong ties, Henderson suggests that children may incur a four-fold increase in mathematical and reading abilities (Henderson, A. & Mapp, K., 2002, p28).

To be successful, however, a 'needs analysis' conducted with a parental and community viewpoint, and resulting in a structured parental engagement strategy is required (Vorhaus, J. and Goodall, J., 2011, p5-7; Idra.org, 2002) - generating a proactive approach, empowering parents and valuing their contribution (Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A., 2003, p89). Research on parental involvement should not be considered in isolation, though, but as part of the body of knowledge on a community's multidimensional involvement.

2.11 Business Relationships

School-business relationships (with business defined as: organisations which provide goods or services) are the most prevalent link schools have outside of familial involvement and are included here because of the perceived wealth of opportunities that exist. The world is changing fast, technology and expectations of a globalised culture bring new economic pressures and societal demands - schools

need to be able respond quickly to the changes (Ehlen, C et al, 2015, p61). This is where business can help.

Froese-Germain and Moll define school-business partnerships by listing examples rather than portraying characteristics, including a variety of schemes such as school-work programmes and the creation of specific business curricula (Froese-Germain, B. and Moll, M., 1997). Although a fairly new model, these relationships 'are increasingly seen as a key source of generating valid knowledge' (Ehlen, C. et al, 2015, p62) for creating engaged citizens. While there is little formal research on these relationships as a whole (Cobb, C. and Quaglia, R., 1994, p11), distinct initiatives are analysed and provide data for researchers to evaluate (Cobb, C. and Quaglia, R., 1994, p2).

CBI's 2014 education and skills survey states that 80% of businesses now have links with schools (two-thirds with secondary schools) - most offering work-experience or careers advice (CBI/Pearson, 2014, p8) - yet there remains untapped potential in these relationships. One suggestion is that they are 'uniquely equipped' to prepare the future workforce (Sanders, M., 2003, p 163), while others cite additional funding for school equipment and relevant technological resources as a benefit. Strong relationships between school and business can also open doorways to employment and ease transition from school to work (Cobb, C. and Quaglia, R., 1994, p1; Froese-Germain, B. and Moll, M., 1997). In the case of charity partnerships, however, Ruggenberg insists that the deeper integration and cooperation required between partners brings the curriculum alive through

meaningful and active tasks (cited in Sanders, M., 2003, p169). The most successful school-business relationships take a more pedagogical approach though (Froese-Germain, B. and Moll, M.; Eyre, L., 2002, p63), setting educational objectives within a clear strategy for communication and leadership (Sanders, M., 2003, p175; Cobb, C. and Quaglia, R., 1994, p6-10).

Two types of partnership emerge from the data: 'static...driven by the structure of the organisation' and 'dynamic...designed to accommodate individual...as well as organisational needs' (Cobb, C. and Quaglia, R., 1994, p5. Static could be quantified in public service or institutional partnerships working within restrictive guidelines, or large companies that dictate rather than partner; dynamic partnerships represent smaller organisations or individuals that are more adaptable. In concurrence with other partnerships evaluated here, most researchers necessitate that relationships be based on trust, led by senior staff with mutually established goals (Ehlen, C. et al, 2015, p62; Sanders, M., 2003, p175; Cobb, C. and Quaglia, R., 1994, p6).

Some literature shows concern for the static model, warning schools to check business motives before partnering, as some may offer delights that mask their true objectives (Froese-Germain, B. and Moll, M., 1994, p3). Sanders agrees, conceding that issues such as financial controversies or ill-prepared volunteers may arise, but also reassures us that with clear procedures and shared vision established early on, partnerships can enable positive transformation of 'relations between schools and communities' (Sanders, M., 2003, p165-6 & p173-5).

2.12 Impact of Business Relationships

The success of business relationships is measured by productivity and the reach of influence on the wider community, rather than in specific development of individuals (Sanders, M., 2003, p165). Public service partnerships that enable intensive support are noted to improve behaviour, attendance and parental involvement - all keys for ultimately improving academic attainment; social action tasks in partnership with local charities can develop citizenship, strengthen the community and bring classroom learning alive through a deeper understanding of academic content, with a more positive stance in self-reflection (Sanders, M., 2003, p169). While good practice encourages setting objectives for partnerships, defining success at the start may limit potential influences. Ehlen et al explain there are often more 'incidental' outcomes than 'intended' ones (Ehlen, C. et al, 2002, p78), however, this is not well documented, as only intended outcomes are evaluated, then reported. In fact, she clarifies that even when intended outcomes are not met children may benefit anyway, even though these results may not be tangible (Ehlen, C. et al, 2002, p79).

There were no reports showing negative impact of school-community relationships on children's education, however, some literature showed concerns around the nature of school-business relationships. In particular, there was concern about the current discourse (both US and UK) of work-ready students which could, Sanders suggests, cause further narrowing of the curriculum conducted through more factory-style schooling (Sanders, M., 2003, p163). Other potential pitfalls were mentioned, including partners being so absorbed in the task that they prioritise

projects rather than people, (Cobb, C. and Quaglia, R., 1994, p6; Froese-Germain, B. and Moll, M., 1997, p1) and schools not understanding how to collaborate with business (Sanders, M., 2003, p171). If established correctly, though, adhering to the cultural norms of schools, and involving key stakeholders from the start, tensions down the line can be avoided (Cobb, C. and Quaglia, R., 1994, p7; Sanders, M., 2003, p165) and both schools and business partners can profit.

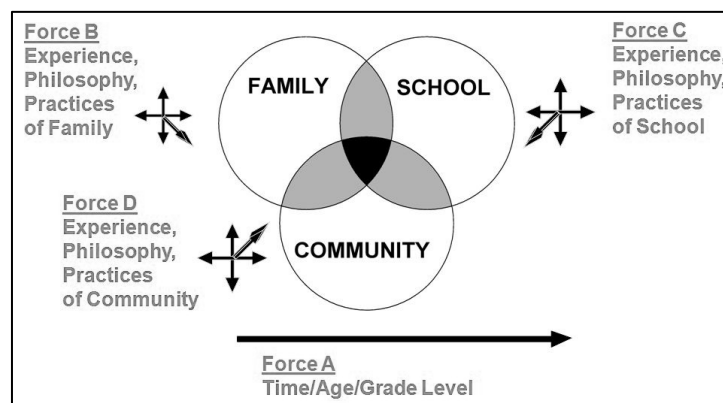
2.13 Theories

School-Community relationships are complex. While they can be defined and structured around the child, the extent to which they carry responsibility or influence varies greatly. To provide structure to this analysis, two theories from the literature are used concerning the construct of school-community interdependence: Riley's 'Theory of Action' (Figure 2.1) and Epstein's 'Overlapping Spheres of Influence' (Figure 2.2).



Figure 2.1: Theory of Action – Creating a sense of shared community. (Riley, K., 2013, p272-274)

Figure 2.2: Overlapping Spheres of Influence of Family, School and Community on Children's Learning
(External Structure of Theoretical Model) (Epstein, J., 2001, p28 & 31)



Together they suggest a simple model that schools and communities could adopt - Epstein's spheres of influence demonstrate interactions that should be naturally occurring around a child between three spheres - family, school and community - while Riley's Theory of Action provides a framework whereby schools can enhance and develop these interactions - through bridging, challenging and building (Riley, K., 2013, p272-4; Epstein, J., 2001, p404).

Epstein, suggests that responsibilities of the spheres of school, family and community have areas of overlap and non-overlap, dependent on time and experience. Each sphere also maintains distinct practices that cannot be shared, with partnership created through 'frequent cooperative efforts' between them. When all three of Epstein's spheres are engaged, she argues that it creates ideal circumstances for providing a 'caring educational environment' (Epstein, J., 2001, p406), caring for the whole child, rather than compartmentalising school and home (Epstein, J., 2001, p5).

Riley's Theory of Action suggests three stages of development in school-community relationships. Bridging, the first stage, is defined as 'reaching out to make links and develop relationships' (Riley, K., 2013, p272). This linking between spheres contributes both to school improvement (where it suggests these links become a stabilising force) (Mujis, D. et al, 2004, p167) and in creating essential partnerships with 'important people in students' lives' (Epstein, J., 2001, p5). At this stage schools should take responsibility for 'reaching out' - as the main provider of education, they hold liability for the success of their students. The literature suggests that by creating links between the spheres of influence schools are able to 'creat[e] a sense of place for children, young people and adults' (Riley, K., 2013, p272) - an extension of the community to which they belong, and perhaps emulating neighbourhoods of old.

Once relationships are instigated, Riley's 'challenging' phase necessitates 'setting boundaries' (Riley, K., 2013, p272). Perhaps this more difficult stage is why there is little evidence of successful school-community relationships. By encouraging Epstein's spheres of influence to overlap, schools must widen children's existing schema and worldview (Howe, R. and Covell, K., 2005, p93), while allowing the community equal voice on what educational success looks like (Riley, K., 2008, p315) - they must agree 'mutually desirable goals' for education within the community (Hands, C., 2005, p67). In answering the question 'Can schools meet their aims without communities?', Riley acknowledges that setting boundaries is complicated and involves schools knowing where the parameters of its values

should lie, and where it should be calling into question community values (Riley, K., 2008, p313). This is risky and has potential to alienate rather than embrace.

The development of trust is therefore the linchpin that holds this process together (Riley, K., 2008, p314). In the building phase of Riley's theory, trust building is a core element - enabled by building capacity (recognising the potential within a community) and building partners (alongside the school, to create networks and opportunities) (Riley, K., 2013, p273). If a school-community eco-system is to function and Epstein's spheres to overlap, each party must be able to depend on the other. Hands agrees that without cooperation relationships cannot be built (Hands, C., 2005, p67), but maintains that when successfully established they can improve and widen the breadth of learning experiences and gives a platform for developing productive networks that develop an individual's social capital (Hands, C., 2005, p80).

2.14 Summary

The breadth of literature reviewed here, mainly from the UK and US, reveals an evolution of discourse with growing consensus around the vital role that a community can play in the education of its children. By developing relationships with various educational stakeholders (namely parents, neighbours and businesses) schools can become the heart of a thriving eco-system where children flourish within a symbiotic relationship.

Communities offer a wealth of untapped resources for educating children, at home and school, and the literature reviewed here identifies five significant outcomes of successful school-community relationships: providing a bridge between school and the real-world; increasing self-interest and thus attainment; community cohesion and reform; personal empowerment, and social capital construction.

Epstein and Riley shed light on the school-community eco-system, stating that because 'all students and their families live in communities...[and therefore] share responsibility for children's futures' (Epstein, J., 2001, p4), all stakeholders have a responsibility to reach out and develop them, placing schools at the heart of the process. By suggesting theories and models of how this can be developed, they leave schools leaders little room for discussion.

However, while there is sufficient literature to suggest the importance of these relationships, there appears to be little evidence of action from schools and their communities to build these partnerships on a significant scale, and with anecdotal observations, combined with personal experiences as a teacher and parent suggesting schools favour a fortress that presumes communities have little to contribute to education (Riley, K., 2008, p313-4), I felt that current research has been shelved as a good idea rather than being put into action.

By opening the doors onto one school and its community this research aims to explore the wisdom donated by the African Proverb stating that 'it takes a village to educate a child' (cited in *The Third Teacher*, 2010, p107) and provide additional

analysis in this field using a disadvantaged UK context, providing fresh evidence to the current body of knowledge.

Chapter 3: Methodology

My research explores the education provided by schools through the lens of their relationship with the community, and enters this discourse using qualitative methods to engage with individuals, examining the construct of school-community relationships. Discussing the methodology employed, this chapter describes how the research was conducted and subsequently how it was analysed.

Embarking on this research I began with 2 presumptions: firstly that there is already a social construct of relationships between a school and its external community, and secondly that the school and its community are 'knowing beings' (Magoon, A.J., 1977, p652) - a valid and relevant source of data.

3.1 Introduction

A qualitative methodology was selected for two main reasons - this is not an area that schools report statistically on, nor one that has been quantitatively researched, and research undertaken in the literature review itself demonstrated a mainly qualitative methodology. Both the school and its community provide a gateway to potential knowledge about the existence, nature and impact of such relationships, and establish an auto-ethnographic knowledgebase of experiences and perceptions to draw from.

Having considered and evaluated the current body of knowledge surrounding relationships between a school and its community, there appeared to be a shortage of research demonstrating the nature of these relationships in a UK context, and

little discussion around their impact on the education of children today. The theories presented by Epstein and Riley persuade us of the need for these relationships and create a lens through which to explore how these relationships are practiced. By engaging with one specific school and its community, this research aims to build meaning through dialogue with relevant parties and analysis of the context.

3.2 Design and Data Collection

This research explores the connectivity between schools and their communities, investigating how they work and what value they hold. Choosing a case study design aimed to provide a framework to explore Epstein and Riley's theories in reality, while answering key questions around the nature and impact of these relationships.

Case study findings can rarely be generalised across different contexts and so I did not set out to provide conclusive findings about relationships between a school and its community, nor was there an expectation that concurrence could be presumed across the breadth of secondary schools in England. This would require, at minimum, a multiple-case study design conducted consecutively across the nation over a lengthened period of time using designated types of students as subjects to compare, as well as access to before and after statistical evidence on the development of young people. Instead, considering the time constraints and my experience as a beginning researcher, a single-case design was chosen, with three embedded units of analysis, providing space for different perspectives to be

triangulated into an overall picture of the nature and perceived impact of school-community relationships within a localised context.

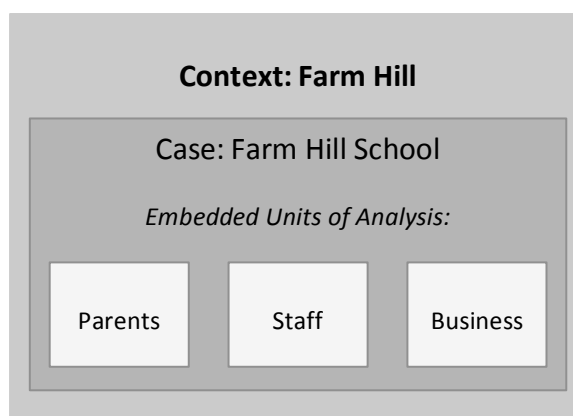
Often used as an example to 'illustrate a more general principle' (Nisbet, J. and Watt, J., 1984, p78 cited in Cohen, L. et al, 2011, p289), this case study provides an opportunity to examine the characteristics of these relationships, but it is only 'a study of a case in a context' (Cohen, L. et al, 2011, p289) and therefore I tried to maintain a holistic element to the design. Spending time establishing the real-life context gives perspective to the answers given by the participants, as well as providing significance to the findings.

To establish context, Yin's 'six sources of evidence' (Cohen, L. et al, 2011, p299) were consulted as a point of reference, and three were selected as essential methods for gathering data - documents, archival records and interviews (for this study, there was no requirement to undertake direct or participant observation, or to study any physical artefacts). Documents included newspaper articles and school and community organisation websites, while archival record research comprised the latest OFSTED report and historical maps - the latter to gain understanding of the development of the community in its wider context. Interviews form the backbone of research methods though, and anecdotal information from each of the participants clarified their knowledge of the school and its context.

Data collection occurred mainly through face-to-face interviews, with one focus group. Three embedded units of analysis (figure 3.1) were selected to reflect

significant areas of community identified through the literature review, and to create a triangulation of data: school staff, parents and community representatives. With each group I explored their experiences of the dynamics of the school-community relationships as well as their perception of the resultant advantages and disadvantages.

Figure 3.1: Case Study design



A total of three school staff were interviewed, representing mainly the senior tier, with one staff member responsible for attendance. Eight parents were invited to attend a focus group, however, only three turned up on the day and were mainly representatives of the Parent Council (PTA). The community representatives could be sub-divided into two groups: institutional representatives, such as local authority or other educational establishments and grassroots community representatives, such as charity workers and resident groups. It was only revealed through the interview process that a third sub-division, businesses in the locality, could have been approached, as there were clear connections to the school. However, these connections were not revealed at the start of this process, so time did not allow for this. The narrow breadth of participants clearly limits the quality of evidence and subsequent analysis and future research into this area should allow time for a wider

breadth of opinion, including the business community, additional parental voice and a greater number and variety of staff.

I put much consideration into whether children at the school should be interviewed. However, I decided that while it would be prudent to reflect all voices in the findings, unless there was a key school-community relationship that they were knowingly involved in, their perception could be skewed by how knowledgeable they were about the wider school and its activities. Instead, an alternative study could be conducted about the nature and impact of school-parent relationships from the perspective of the child at secondary school which could inform a parental engagement strategy at an age when parental involvement tends to decrease. (Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A. (2003, p41).

3.3 The Subject

Farm Hill school was selected for several reasons. I already knew the school in a work context, allowing for easier access to staff and the community and, I believe, a greater openness, as there was already trust between us. In previous conversations, leadership had indicated that they would like to develop greater community links - however the research was done at their request, but rather assured me of their willingness to take part. Finally, set in a less-advantaged area, the school's population contains a higher than average percentage of children from homes with lower incomes, as defined by FSM status (Dashboard.ofsted.gov.uk, 2014). Consequently there is a greater requirement for meeting additional, non-academic needs.

After initial discussions with the head teacher, existent community links were suggested for exploration, and parents who already engage with the school were invited to a focus group, as well as staff being provided for interview. While this was helpful, unfortunately it may have limited the potential of the study by designating the role of sampling to the school and therefore placing trust in the school's understanding of the research and in the presumption they would provide links that fairly represent the cross-section of opinion. While these connections were necessary to establish current school-community relationships, a more representative sample could have been gathered with a broader invitation or an initial survey if links.

3.4 Methods

Face to face interviews provided an opportunity to meet members of the school and community and to use participant's body language and intonation of voice to help establish meaning in their answers. It also allowed for deviation from scripted questions, as led by the direction of the conversation. As the process of interviewing, transcribing and coding is time-consuming, using interviews thus limited the breadth of perception that could be gathered in the time allowed. The small number interviewed did not allow for generalisation of their opinions across to other schools, or even other community members or school staff, although many perceptions were similar.

Structured interviews were not used because restrictive questioning would have provided a more formulaic response, not in tune with the exploratory nature of this research. Instead, I felt that unstructured interviews would allow for some comparison of answers, while providing space for exploration of new avenues. In this case it proved to be the right choice, as I discovered that many answers were subject to an underlying influence, which I explored in more detail. To provide an element of comparison between the interviews though (as well as a stepping stone for conversation), three statements were given to which participants were required to state the level to which they agreed or disagreed (by use of a numbered scale):

1. There is value in the community of Farm Hill contributing to the education of its children
2. Farm Hill School is viewed as a positive influence by the community of Farm Hill
3. The relationship that Farm Hill School has with its community has a positive impact on the education of young people in the community of Farm Hill

These statements were composed to provoke a response from the participants, giving them something to react to, in the hope that deeper perceptions could be drawn out. Most respondents were able to clarify a judgement on these, apart from the second statement, where two respondents did not give a number as they felt their involvement in the local community was too narrow to provide a well-informed answer.

While questionnaires were considered to gather data from parents, it was hoped that by speaking to them face-to-face, questioning could be more effective, providing opportunities to drill down into their answers, giving greater clarity. However, as I was only able to gather a small group of parents, a follow-up questionnaire or survey to all parents may have given a wider breadth of perceived impact that I could not draw out through the focus group.

Parents that attended the focus group were well-educated, articulate and did not live in the immediate neighbourhood of Farm Hill (all being drawn in from the surrounding villages). It would be fair to say that these parents represent a small proportion of those whose children attend Farm Hill. As explained in the findings, a growing number of parents now attend official school meetings, but involvement in other events is still very low - these parents, while not truly representing the whole spectrum of parents, do typify those who currently engage with the school. Future research would need to engage a wider spectrum of parents to establish more accurate perceptions, rather than using others to represent their presumptions.

3.5 Question Design

Following the literature review, Riley's Theory of Action for relationship building between a school and its community stood out as a useful framework for how to develop relationships (Riley, K., 2013, p273-4). Questions were therefore designed around her three stages of development, with the aim of establishing where the school is in this process: bridging - reaching out to the community; challenging - setting boundaries and establishing aims and building - creating a mutual trust. In

both interviews and focus group, questions were designed to explore three key areas: context, nature of relationships and perceived impact.

Using open-ended questions, interviews began by asking about the participant's role and how they fitted within the context of the school and its community.

Subsequent questions were devised to give an opportunity to establish knowledge of the school, how they view it and the local community, and also to give perspective on their later answers. This line of questioning, while not adding specifically to the findings, added to the contextual knowledgebase and informed reasoning behind attitudes or perceptions. When conducting the interviews, care was taken to phrase questions so that no predicted perceptions were overlaid onto the participant, although occasional hints as to the type of content were provided when clarification was required.

Being a semi-structured interview, the next two phases of questions were used as a basis to stimulate dialogue around the nature and impact of any relationships that may be in existence. This meant that sometimes questions were not asked in the order they were written, sometimes additional questions were asked to clarify or draw out more detail, and sometimes questions were missed out altogether if it was felt the participant had already answered in a previous response, or that their role or previously established knowledge would not allow them to answer with any conviction. One example of this was when interviewing staff - the same questions were prepared for all levels of staff, yet it quickly became apparent that knowledge and experience would preclude some staff from answering some questions. In this

case, questions were adapted as the interview proceeded, following the established structure of context, nature and impact and using Riley's framework.

Questions around the nature of relationships were designed to establish the participant's connection with the school and what this looks like, as well as the nature of other relationships they may have observed between the school and its community. One question, asked to both interviewees and focus group participants was: 'In ideal circumstances, what do you think the relationship between a school and its community should look like?' – and aimed to clarify how they would like to develop relationships, identifying future hopes for the school and its community. Whether the school has reached the challenging phase of relationship development was explored through questions about expectations and reasons for their relationship with the school - motives and expectations were considered as potential keys to the success and impact of these relationships.

Further questions around the perceived impact of relationships (most likely to occur during the building phase of Riley's theory) aimed to establish what impact they perceived on the education of young people through their own or other community relationships with the school.

In each set of interviews, questions followed the same format, with alterations dependent on the participant's role - for instance, school leaders were asked specifically about relationships with parents, as well as the wider community, and about strategies in place to engage with these groups. On reflection, this method of

questioning could be perceived as presuming the school to undertake bridging (rather than the community), which may have skewed the findings. However, knowing this was an area the school wanted to develop, I based questions on the knowledge that they have placed an expectation on themselves in this area.

Questions on the measurement of impact were only addressed to representatives of organisations that would normally use measurement of impact as a tool in their working life. For the focus group, while using the same framework, I concentrated on the parent-school relationship more than other relationships that may exist with the wider community, with the aim of ensuring that parent voice was clearly established within the findings.

3.6 Data analysis

The exploratory nature of this research called for an exploratory type of analysis, and this led to a variety of methods being used, to view the data from different angles. All interviews and the focus group session were recorded and subsequently transcribed to ensure the greatest level of accuracy when analysing responses. Riley's theory of bridging, challenging and building was used to frame the concepts drawn out from the transcripts and to inform how relationships were created, developed and sustained, however, this was not used in deference to open coding, rather as a guide to allow open-coding to occur.

Analysis began with an initial open-coding exercise conducted on each transcript and concluded with a summary of all analysis into 6 clear categories (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1: Findings Analysis Sub-groups

Nature of Relationships			Impact of Relationships		
Nature of Involvement in school	Nature of Barriers that prevent relationships forming	Nature of Responsibility of school or partners	Impact on young people's worldview	Impact on young people's development	Impact on the added value of young people's education

3.7 Coding

I conducted four types of coding on the data collected (Table 3.2):

1. Open-coding, the process by which 'categories and...properties and dimensions' (Cohen, L., 2011, p561) are generated, formed an exploratory starting point.

Looking for broad concepts and similarities or patterns that stood out from the data each transcript was read and coded with colours and labels (see Appendix 1). From this, around 10 key concepts emerged retaining some similarity between concepts from both interviews and the focus group.

2. Selective-coding was next, based on the original research questions. This provided two core variables for discourse - the nature and the perceived impact of relationships between a school and its community.

3. In tandem with selective-coding, axial codes were denoted through grouping open codes according to connections I observed. Three axial codes were then designated to each variable (Table 3.1), to which open codes were then assigned.

While this process felt a little out of order, it permitted the exploratory nature of research to prevail rather than subjecting the data to a formulaic coding process.

4. At the same time eight 'abstract' concepts were selected (according to initial explorations conducted before the research questions were chosen) as lenses through which to view the data. One of these (engagement in school), as explained later in the findings, revealed unexpected thoughts around parental (rather than student) disengagement from school, which may not have come to light with just open coding. The lens of 'community development' also revealed expectations placed on the school, namely their presumed responsibility towards it - this abstract coding enabled lateral analysis to occur in conjunction with linear analysis.

Table 3.2 – Different stages of the coding process

Coding	Results	
Abstract Coding	Lateral analysis linked to axial coding groups below	
Open Coding	Multiple Variables, e.g.: choice, support, access, self-worth, respect and social capital	
Selective Coding	Nature	Impact
Axial Coding	Involvement / Barriers / Responsibility	Worldview / Development / Added Value

3.8 Scale questions

Three questions required interview participants to state their level of agreement or disagreement on a specific statement, creating a numerical response and analysed as quantitative data. The scale allowed for a 10 point flexibility in levels of agreement so as not to limit or influence the participants (see Appendix 2). For

analysis purposes, though, this scale was overlaid by the Likert 5 point scale (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 – Scale Question Analysis

Disagree									Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree or disagree		Agree		Strongly Agree	

Percentages of responses were calculated at each level and charts used to demonstrate the spread of opinion across participants. While statements were positive in their wording, they did not create bias towards agreement, because of the breadth of choice between agreement and disagreement. This was borne out by the results, which favoured disagreement more than agreement in places. The three statements are not comparative, but rather created a broad picture of opinion, opened dialogue and enabled further insight into the nature and perceived impact of relationships.

3.9 Research journal

A research journal was kept in the latter stages of the process (once it had been presented as a useful tool) and was used to record and draw from in the writing up process. This proved beneficial in accurately representing procedures and processes followed, as well as in developing thoughts, and would be a tool I would use in future research from conception to completion.

3.10 Limitations

Being a first time researcher creates many limitations to this research, not least the element of trial and error that is inevitable in a new researcher's work. There are two key limitations I would like to highlight here: the number of participants and the scope of participants. Nine interviews and one focus group were conducted over a three-week period, engaging with a cross-section of people currently in relationship with the school, and allowing space for them to share their viewpoint on the relationships between the school and its community. While much data was drawn from these, the use of an initial survey amongst parents and local businesses may have established a wider breadth of input and identified a greater number of potential participants. Spreading interviews over a longer time-scale more doors could have been opened for research, as during conversation, some participants drew my attention to other community members or organisations that could have been included. As it was, interviews were conducted as a result of initial recommendations through email and face-to-face conversations with senior staff at the school - this in itself may have limited the findings to a narrow population of the community.

3.11 Summary

In this research I explore what the nature of the relationship between one school and its community is, and whether there is any resultant perceived impact on children's education. By using a mainly qualitative methodology, I created open dialogue with a variety of key local figures and with the chosen methods of analysis, allowed a picture to emerge providing insight into these questions.

As is often a criticism of case studies, it was difficult to create a rigorous structure within which to collect and analyse data. However using an embedded case study provided structure through the context, subject and units of analysis. The three units of analysis selected also gave opportunity for all three voices of Epstein's spheres to be represented. While all three spheres were represented, data collection could be seen as unfairly weighted towards community, with two-thirds of the interview participants in that category. However, that was partly because the category is broad and itself needed sub-dividing into representatives from institutions and grassroots groups.

Methods used to capture data enabled open dialogue which most participants enthusiastically engaged in; some were even hopeful that subsequent analysis and reporting of data would ensure that their contribution would enable on-going development of school-community relationships. While there are clear findings and some recommendations, direct observation of certain aspects of the relationships (e.g.: parent-teacher interactions) may have provided greater depth.

Overall, the framework of questions and depth of coding enabled a variety of voices to speak into the research. It set out to be an exploration and followed that course through research design, data collection and analysis, and subsequently allowed for findings to be drawn, providing some insight into the nature and impact of school-community relationships in one school.

Chapter 4 - Nature of Relationships

My case study focused on one secondary school, within the context of its neighbourhood, providing data on existent and potential relationships between the school and its community. Examining relevant literature and analysing empirical data generated sub-groups for each research question, three concern the nature of school-community relationships and three categorise the perceived impact of these relationships on the education of young people. The next two chapters are dedicated to presenting these findings. First, though it's important to establish the context itself, as this is key to the development of relationships and their success.

4.1 Context

Crewbridge is a large town in the south east England. The context of the school within this town is of central importance to the research presented here, because the cultural and historical background impacts heavily on the development of school-community relationships. Situated within the commuter belt of London, it is an affluent area with nearly 50% home ownership and 67% employment (ukcensusdata.com, 2011) - a highly sought after location. Nestling within this conurbation, however, are pockets where statistics show residents have a reduced advantage in life. It is to one such pocket that I draw your attention. Farm Hill is a sprawling residential area that houses a population of around 10,000 people - 7% of the overall population of Crewbridge (ukcensusdata.com, 2011). In the 1920's in response to a national housing shortage, this new development began two miles from the town centre, gradually expanding into the open countryside. Since the

1970's, other major developments have taken place, bringing a hospital, superstore, leisure centre and business park to the edge of this community, but accessible to all of Crewbridge's residents.

The housing stock in Farm Hill was originally social housing, however, since the Government's 'Right to Buy' policy began in the 1980's, the demographic has changed. Farm Hill though, is still not representative of the overall population of Crewbridge though. Here we find 20% lower home ownership and 20% higher social housing than in the town as a whole, along with 10% lower employment (ukcensusdata.com, 2011). What is most striking, though, is the comparative difference in educational achievement, with the general population of Crewbridge boasting an 11% higher accumulation of 5+ GCSE grades A*-C (or equivalent) and a 12% higher level of degree qualification compared to the residents of Farm Hill (ukcensusdata.com, 2011). In apprenticeship qualifications, they are evenly matched, but Farm Hill has 9% less professionally qualified residents and 8% more that have never achieved a qualification at all (ukcensusdata.com, 2011).

Farm Hill Secondary School is clearly visible in the heart of this sprawling suburb, situated close to other community venues including a primary school and community centre. In the last 15 years the buildings have been gradually upgraded to create an open and tidy school environment. At its peak it can accommodate 1000 students in a large campus containing much outdoor and indoor learning space and boasts a wide variety of facilities, however actual numbers on roll have been much lower in recent years, Currently at less than 600, 43% of students are

eligible for free school meals (14% higher than the national average) and over 3% are on the SEND register (nearly double the national average) (Gov.uk, 2015).

The school's facilities are currently used by some outside groups, including a church and sports teams; in recent years a community library was developed within the school campus, run by volunteers, but folded due to lack of take-up from the community itself. Placed next to its main feeder school, Farm Hill would be the obvious choice for local residents for secondary education, but it's claimed that about 50% of local children select other schools in preference. Anecdotally, senior staff suggest that their cohort comprises local students whose parents want the easy option, keen parents who want to support their local school, or prefer the smaller class sizes Farm Hill is currently able to offer, and children who join as part of a managed move across town, or county. This is a poor foundation for development of community links around the school.

Currently part of a localised academy chain, Farm Hill School left local authority supervision over 15 years ago changing name several times and becoming an early test-bed for schools run by trusts and business. Though successful, external circumstances brought this phase to an abrupt end, leaving leadership and the school in a place of insecurity until it was brought into a local family of schools.

Epstein encourages us to consider 3 key influences on a child's educational development: school, family and community (Epstein, J., 2001, p28), but leaves the definition of community up to each localised situation. The geographical boundaries

of the community of Farm Hill are spread over 2 square miles, and consist of mainly residential buildings, with some local shops and other basic amenities. Cut off from the rest of the town by a bypass and railway it can appear isolated. The boundaries of this community however, are not confined within Borough Council's allocation, and those I interviewed liked to consider the businesses and facilities on the more affluent edges of this ward as part of the community too. Senior staff characterised their community as "the people in (Farm Hill), the people that have come to this school in the past..., people that might come in the future, current parents and students, and our neighbours and neighbouring schools and businesses" encompassing people, businesses and institutions in all geographical directions. In fact, for the senior staff at Farm Hill School, community goes beyond the narrow geographic view as defined by council wards, stretching to include aspirational elements just beyond the physical boundaries, including further education institutions and high profile places of work.

4.2 Overview

Epstein's view that schools need their community to educate children effectively (Epstein, J., 2001, p38-9) concurs with the African proverbial statement put before each interviewee, that: 'It takes a village to educate a child'. In most cases participants agreed with this concept and were keen to expand their reasoning. Amongst the organisations interviewed there was an acceptance that school should not bear sole responsibility for educating children in their community and some felt this already occurred naturally through family experiences, or simply by living in the local community. Senior staff however, were unsure if there's sufficient sense of

community to enable this to occur naturally, and doubted whether the neighbourhood felt the shared responsibility required to be suitable role models. They did agree, however, that teachers cannot work in isolation, needing parents and the wider community to help guide young people through life. There was a sense, from both parties, as in Dewey's pedagogic creed (Dewey, J., 1897, p78), that the 'social life' children exist in can provide learning linked to non-curricula education, concurring that "the school gives the education that's in the curriculum, and the reading and writing and everything like that", while the community can assist with "the other skills that a child needs to learn".

Participants were also asked what an 'ideal school-community relationship' would look like. Rather than viewing relationships from an ideological perspective though, most participants seemed to consider this through their own lens, with community representatives desiring a more open relationship and putting a high expectation on the school to be a hub for community activities, providing community cohesion, while parents immediately discussed their latest bugbears with the school. Staff themselves agreed that they should be more integral to the community, but also challenged the community on its own responsibility to take care of and support the school. Apart from the school's reference to both community and parents, no participants considered other interrelationships modelled by Epstein, leaving the perspective skewed and young people out of the equation altogether.

While most agreed the community hold responsibility to help educate local children, the division of authority implied, between curricula and non-curricula

learning begins to erase the sense of shared responsibility and mutual benefit that the original statement implied. The school believes that the community should take it's responsibility for educating children seriously but both community and school appear to unwittingly reinforce a 'them and us' attitude existent in many schools across the UK today, rather than a mutually responsible and collaborative attitude necessary to make this statement a reality. One senior staff member even clarified that while there was agreement with the premise, it was more of metaphorical than literal. Further questions enabled details to emerge about whether this statement is acted out in the context studied.

4.3 Nature of Involvement in school

Senior staff at Farm Hill School insist that the school has a relationship with its community, citing Community Governors, feeder schools, Council projects and neighbouring businesses and institutions, as well as parents and neighbours who are involved with the school, and stating categorically there is no-one they won't engage with. However, community representatives interviewed, while content with the level of interaction they have developed over time, were hazy about other relationships that exist with the school. While this may not matter in the short-term, if any benefit is to be seen from developing external relationships, it may be useful for all parties to be listening to and learning from each other and ultimately saving time and resources. School staff gave many examples of different levels of relationships that exist with the community, from daily phone calls with parents, to a calendar of parent meetings and events, as well as Parent Council and Parent Governor roles. Resident relationships however, are only mentioned positively by

one staff member, who recalls times when neighbours have helpfully informed them of local issues. With this wide variety of links in existence, at first glance it appears to be a school interacting successfully with its community, however, just scratching beneath the surface I discover a much more complex story. This chapter examines the school's relationship with the three distinct community groups identified in the literature: neighbourhood, parents and businesses.

4.4 Neighbourhood Relationships

In my original proposal, I did not opt to interview neighbours specifically. However, many of the community interviewees were also residents of Farm Hill, giving them dual perspective and the ability to speak on behalf of their neighbours, in addition to their specific role. The use of the school by the neighbourhood has decreased over the years. Where once it was a buzzing hub of social activity, following a ban from previous leadership of alcohol consumption on the premises, usage fell rapidly to virtually nothing. However, resident participants expressed a desire to see the school as an integral part of the life of the community once again.

The school has good facilities for sport and events, leading many to view it as a potential central venue, or as a resource for other groups within the community. This is not just a income generating stream though, as it was felt that by bringing residents in it acts as an advertisement to potential parents. However, apart from the previously mentioned hirers it is no way used to its capacity and although there is desire from school, residents and community organisations for it to be a central aspect of community life, there is a question over whether the mere fact that it is a

school puts people off. A variety of people expressed a desire to be involved in helping the school to use and promote its assets to the best of their capacity, but if, as is explained later, the community is disengaged from itself there is even less chance of it being engaged with events within the school.

Staff cited times when some neighbours had come to school to provide information on local issues, but it appears that the neighbourhood as a whole still does not see it as a place where they are welcome, despite various projects hosted by the school to engage them. Many references were made to a community library once housed in the school's community room, set aside for residents to use and run by volunteers from the school - there was much anticipation at its development and initial usage was good, but numbers soon dropped and while it still physically exists, is no longer manned. No-one seemed to be able to shed any light on why it was not successful, but there was suggestion that there was a lack of desire from local people to cross the threshold of the school.

4.5 Parental Relationships

Farm Hill School, proud of recent achievements in improving parent relationships, are also realistic about the work still to be done. Aligned with Vorhaus and Goodall's suggestion (Vorhaus, J. and Goodall, J., 2011, p3) that this connection is a more reliable predictor of success than socio-economic factors, Farm Hill School agrees with relationships with parents are central to a young person's success; they disclosed "a very strong correlation" between positive educational engagement of young people whose parents partner with the school, and reduction in engagement

with those whose parents are harder to reach - senior staff tell of an increase in behaviour logs and exclusions with the latter. This small group of parents that the school struggles to engage, can be so “wrapped up in their own problems”, (including mental health issues, alcoholism and poverty) that it becomes time consuming for staff, leading to a skewed view of the parental community. These disengaged parents are described as following a generational line of disengagement and don't see school as a positive option for their children - if they didn't flourish there or didn't engage with school themselves why would they desire to engage with school as a parent?

While there is an apparent increase interest in parental engagement (maybe due to improvements in parent-school relations at the main feeder school), to become a mutually beneficial two-way relationship, parents need to change how they view the school, seeing it not just as a place where children become educated, but as the heart of the community. To help parents understand this two-way relationship the school offers one-to-one meetings with each new parent before the child starts in Year 7, aiming to ensure they understand their responsibility towards the school (such as speaking well of it) and what they can bring to the relationship - this new initiative has already resulted in parental reading support and carpentry skills.

While Epstein and Risku suggest that parents, like businesses, should be seen as partners (Epstein, J., 2001, p403; Risku, M., et al, 2012, p18), Farm Hill's experience of dialogue developed with those parents that do engage positively, differs to that which exists with the business community. While operating an open-door policy

where “it’s very rare that someone comes into the front of school to talk to somebody and they are not seen”, dialogue mainly exists either at the invitation of the school or by outward information-sharing. Parents I spoke to agreed that “communication is the key to everything” but that it “needs to be improved”, as the school “expect quite a lot to come via the children”. Epstein’s overlapping spheres of influence (Epstein, J., 2001, p28) show the need for this approach to change, modelling that the spheres need to overlap for relationships to be beneficial, rather than the child being a conduit for information. As these parents pointed out, children are not always best placed to carry information effectively anyway, resulting in potential disconnect between parents and the school.

Attendance at parents meetings has risen by nearly 25% in the last 3 years, and a calendar of celebratory and informative events, accompanied by a regular newsletter. While the school tries to create a dialogue and thus relationship between itself and parents, some feel that it takes a long time to feel part of what’s going on - one parent, of two years, still did not feel she knew the school well. On the other hand, they had all witnessed the open-door policy, instigated by the school, and felt their child was supported.

There was a sense of frustration from parents at the differences in expectation, for parents and staff - parents are expected to be involved with whatever the school organises, but when parents try to arrange an event on the school’s behalf they were not seeing the same expectations of commitment beyond senior staff. This may have assisted in the dwindling membership of the Parent Council (or PTA) over

recent years, in fact some community interviewees were under the impression that it had folded altogether. However, many felt that this group was still a key player in developing the school's relationship with the wider community - a portal for making it more visible, providing feedback to the school and raising funds. Desforges might challenge the school to value parent's contribution more highly, explaining that only when they feel empowered will this relationship be truly effective (Desforges, C. and Abouchaar, A., 2003, p13).

None of this frustration seemed to affect parent's positive opinion of the school though and overall, from speaking to both parents and school staff, the majority of parents seem supportive of the school and trust them "to get on with it". Parents felt that because the school "know...the students" this demonstrated that they've "got a good relationship anyway", so while there is work to be done (mainly with other demographics of parents), foundations are in place for further collaboration, potentially using supportive parents as advocates into the community.

4.6 Business Relationships

Business and local organisational links with the school are varied, existing at a variety of levels of integration, each with their own motivation for developing and progressing these relationships. Most 'bridging' occurs through informal conversations, or formal meetings within larger groups. However, individual relationships appear to develop at different speeds and in different directions according to time and resources available on both sides, as well as the energy behind making action occur. It's unclear who directs these relationships or sets

boundaries, but there seems to be a hierarchal system in place where higher level links are prioritised, with the school maintaining control - this is something the school recognise needs to change if truly “open or mutual relationship(s)” are to develop.

There was overwhelming support for the school from the organisations interviewed, with many wanting to partner - to be more involved, know staff better and support them where they need it - the motive for some being, as Riley suggests, (Riley, K., 2013, p273) to aid regeneration of their community. Larger, more established institutions showed greater confidence in reaching out to engage with the school, naming what they can and can't offer and describing terms of partnership from the start - they know they have something to offer and are confident to put this forward (some by invitation). The school were keen to name these relationships in their answers, but did not mention many smaller organisations. When interviewed, smaller organisations, while recognising their capacity to build, were unclear of their offer, or how to initiate. This highlighted the need for assisting some to find their niche within the school system, or to give them a specific role. One interviewee, despite being in an influential position expressed feeling powerless without a hierarchal role that would allow her to be influential for the school both inside and outside the system. This was evidenced with another interviewee who was invited to become a Governor because their opinion and influence from their other roles in the community was valued. Without an invitation though, its not clear if they would have offered, or have had the same influence, despite their standing in the community. This hierarchal relationship structure,

while necessary in some senses, could be detrimental to the establishment of mutually beneficial collaborations taking place with grassroots organisations, as they may never find their niche within the current structure. If the school is to establish effective mutual collaboration with businesses, they must be prepared to partner at all levels and create a simple structure within which this can happen.

Motivations for involvement vary between businesses and organisations, some wanting to use the school as a conduit to parents, or children, through sponsorship or work experience placements, while others offer support to young people with no expectations attached. While the former could be viewed negatively, by playing the role of a connecting point to enable groups to engage with the schools own community, businesses can provide links which ultimately benefit children, thus reflecting well on the school. Senior staff, however, must judge each relationship and request on its merit and measure it for mutual benefit. Others, such as residents associations and those who provide opportunities for volunteering were motivated by a desire to develop community spirit in young people and were seen by parents as an asset to the development of their children.

Relationships with larger organisations, however, are currently more mutually beneficial, with examples given of higher education opportunities provided for children in exchange for the school's time in assisting development of the overall offer. This clear leadership from an external partner can be helpful for a school whose staff don't always have time to instigate or generate ideas that lead to mutually beneficial links. However, it could become detrimental if the business or

organisation dominates the school's time or resources, thus preventing a wide variety of links and therefore opportunities.

Senior members of staff at Farm Hill School understand the importance of their role in connecting with the business community, as it gives value to the partnership, and the current headteacher was often praised for the progress they'd made in this area. To truly represent the community in its business links, though, the school needs to have dynamic relationships which provide a niche for the grassroots organisations as well as the static, more structured relationships of institutions as described by Cobb and Quaglia (Cobb, C. and Quaglia, R., 1994, p5). All groups who desired to be involved with the school need to have their motivation clarified at the start, so that the school only builds with those who have a mutually beneficial outcome as priority. Collaboration between multiple parties and the school could provide a way of ensuring mutually beneficial motivations. Some participants who hold a dual role in relation to the school (including being a resident) felt clarity was needed around permissions and expectations of different groups, as sometimes lines became blurred and motivations confused, leaving potential collaborations behind.

Many participants showed a desire for the school to be at the heart of the community - a physical core acting as a hub for all community life, not just education in the academic sense. A picture began to emerge, from answers given, of a vision of the school as a place buzzing with life, with the community 'crossing the threshold' for a myriad of reasons (social and educational), where local needs

are met as well as support for the school shown. This picture of relationships at the building phase of Riley's theory (Riley, K., 2013, p272-4) may seem idealistic at the moment, when even the bridging phase has been unachievable, but there appears to be enough momentum and goodwill for this to develop.

4.7 Nature of Barriers that prevent relationships forming

Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence assumes some natural tendency to reach out and build relationships but, as Hornby and Lafaele explain (Hornby, G. & Lafaele, R., 2011, p39), there are many barriers that can block successful collaboration. In the case of Farm Hill School the barriers that exist between the school and its community can be summarised as: perception, capacity and access.

Perception

If Farm Hill School is to create an environment to which the whole community senses belonging, it must first address negative beliefs held by local residents and the wider town - this is the dominating barrier. No-one seems to know where it began - whether it's the frequent change of name, headteacher, or ownership, or a rollercoaster of GCSE results over the years ([dashboard.ofsted.gov.uk](https://www.ofsted.gov.uk/gcse-performance)), Farm Hill has been left with a reputation, amongst some, of failure and inadequacy. One senior staff member identified "a real problem with...the community's perception of us, and a wider [negative] perception of our community" within Crewbridge itself – something, which everyone who was interviewed was keen to express, and which led to Farm Hill residents having low aspirations for themselves. In fact, this became

an underlying discourse, arising early in each interview with participants returning to throughout the dialogue - a massive stumbling block in the development of relationships with different parts of the community.

This negative perception held by many in Farm Hill (and Crewbridge itself) and introduction of greater parental choice into secondary school selection, has seen school roll drop to current levels of about two-thirds capacity. The element of choice has created an additional barrier for the school to connect with its community, as about 50% of local students now travel to schools further afield. Fewer students mean fewer parents, and a subsequent reduction in potential positive connections into the local neighbourhood. However, while none of the parents I spoke to lived within the geographical boundaries of Farm Hill they all commuted their children into the school for positive reasons, such as smaller class sizes.

While there are those, like these parents, choosing Farm Hill school through considered judgment, a proportion select the school by default. Some parents cannot engage with the system due to their own issues, and others do not value education due to their own experiences. Many comments were made about parents or community members who “don’t want to step back over the threshold of somewhere (they) had a bad time” while others simply “didn’t have good experiences in school themselves (and) don’t understand actually how much they have to contribute” due to other people’s views of them. While this is a minority, it appears that negative attitudes and perceptions spread faster than positive ones,

leaving the school viewed from within a cloud of negativity. This disconnect between the school and parts of its community seems to suggest why Riley used the analogy of a bridge (Riley, K., 2013, p273-4) to connect the two - providing a way over a moat of negativity around the school to engage with those who are willing.

When giving their opinion on the statement that the “...school is viewed as a positive influence by the community of Farm Hill” (Table 4.1) most were unable to agree with it at any level, either disagreeing or being unsure. One participant felt unable to give a definitive answer, citing their lack of relationship within the community itself. However, all went on to relate this to the perception and experiences of a large section of the neighbourhood, rather than the actual capability of the school. Most felt, that because people only talk about the lows, “fewer people see it as a positive influence”, but were confident in the “potential (for it to be seen as) a positive influence on the community” if perception of Farm Hill and the wider Crewbridge community could be brought into line with reality.

Table 4.1 – “Farm Hill school is viewed as a positive influence by the community of Farm Hill”

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
22%	11%	44%	0%	0%

But relationships are two-way, and when asked how well staff know the community, the school recognised that with very few staff being part of the local community themselves “there is a danger of having some semi-understanding that sometimes people think is a full understanding”. Frequent interactions with parents

who are reactive towards the school and infrequent dialogue with parents who are supportive, also skews their impression of the community as a whole, becoming 'well-versed' only in the problems. This can lead staff to build their own judgment of the value of home-learning and "base their aspirations on the lower quarter of aspirational and aspiring students", potentially perpetuating external perceptions.

Capacity

Businesses and organisations however, seem able to look beyond local perception, engaging with the school in spite of entrenched attitudes towards the school and its community. This does not mean there are no barriers for businesses building relationships with the school though. For many, capacity is the issue - both theirs and the schools. While shrinking school budgets pushes Farm Hill School to seek support from its community, this can also be a barrier to the success of relationships. Downsizing staff, caused by budget reassignment, has created reduction in time available and a workforce who are "busy" and "tired", with one staff member explaining "there's not been that same energy" to contribute to community life. While research shows successful interactions between parties need to be: led by senior staff, carefully selected, frequent, personal and involve listening, acceptance and the development of mutual respect (Riley, K., 2008, p314; Hands, C., 2005, p64; Epstein, J., 2001, p63), decreased capacity means that while senior staff at Farm Hill are keen to follow these guidelines, they are not sure "how realistic (it) is".

Hands makes clear that mutually desirable goals are established through dialogue, which takes time (Hands, C., 2005, p6). While staff generally honour invitations to business steering-groups, developing the same level of relationship with a much larger section of the community, including parents and the neighbourhood, is unrealistic in this format, even with a small cohort. Add to this the fact that some of the community are “hidden...through apathy, through fear, through lack of self-esteem...[and] don’t see the point in engaging”, it leaves relationships between the school and its community (especially parents) as a one-way information-download.

Access

When the school was pulled out of special measures by an external body, they invested heavily in improving the building. However, despite the improved public areas, and a more welcoming facade, it is the invisible walls that prevent some from entering, and therefore engaging with, the school. In fact, there are still some that “walk past (the) school and make a comment of something [negative] that happened 20 years ago”. The “rules-based confined space” inhabited by the school is not always seen as a place to have fun, and many commented that they did not want to interrupt the work of the school by engaging with them. The school also believes this structure puts many parents off coming through the door as they don’t always understand how it works or the role they play in the success of their child. School leadership, therefore, needs to make clear how they can get involved.

Time also creates a barrier to access, even when dialogue has occurred and mutually beneficial goals established, if the onus is on the school to deliver them

(which it often seems to be), as increasingly busy schedules may prevent action. One interviewee recognised how disruptive this lack of completion can be and when explaining that the community will be asked about potential future developments, was clear that “they’re to be acted on”.

Data gathered suggests that while all parts of community can help to improve the relationship between Farm Hill School and its neighbourhood, it’s the school that bears responsibility for change. With the struggle to get people across the school threshold, negative perception of the school, and apathy towards engagement, it could seem impossible to ensure Epstein’s spheres of influence overlap at all. These barriers, while influential, only involve a small minority of the population though. There are some links occurring naturally, as predicted by Epstein, but to build on these requires visible leadership. As Rodriguez concludes, it is schools that should lead on the removal of these barriers and the provision of a structure within which to develop healthy relationships (Idra.org, 2002).

4.8 Nature of the school’s responsibilities in community relationships

Farm Hill School acknowledges its responsibility towards the community and the importance of developing effective relationships, but while the school is supportive of the community it has not always found it easy to engage. The data showed four key responsibilities that the school should carry to enable sustainable collaborative relationships with its community: support, welcome, empowerment and visibility.

Support

With its facilities, and as a designated authority, the school is in prime place to develop a basic infrastructure around which relationships can be developed to benefit the whole community. However, a consistent team in school allocated to the role of community engagement (currently in the embryonic stage) would show dedication to the process. With high staff turnover and subsequent responsibilities shifting, some members of the local community feel it has been difficult to “really create that strong firm foundation” needed to bring leadership for community relationships - although larger organisations appear to have been better looked after with “immediate replacement(s) identified to take over” when staff moved on. While changes are inevitable behind the scenes, the community needs ongoing sustainability for it to trust the school with its children and accept motives for community interaction. While Vorhaus and Goodall suggest the necessity of a structured parental engagement strategy (Vorhaus, J. and Goodall, J., 2011, p5-7), this data suggests the need for one which goes much broader, encompassing parents as one strand in a structured community engagement strategy. Continuity of staff and infrastructure for maintaining partnerships forms part of this, and while the leadership admit they just have “a lot of ideas” at the moment, they were quick to clarify the importance of this in their development strategy.

One way the school can demonstrate its support of local community development is to highlight and utilise the value that lies within the community itself. The first statement participants commented on was: ‘There is value in the community of Farm Hill contributing to the education of its children’, (Table 4.2) met with

overwhelming agreement. Some referred to specific activities that occur within the community, contributing to “help(ing) children from all walks of life and...teach them...respect”, while others explained their reasoning with values such as “inter generational work” and “building a better social perspective”. School staff were keen to point out that they recognised the community’s value in social education - “we see kids for such a small proportion of their lives...and they are out and about in the community a lot, interacting with [other] people”. They also acknowledged though, that the community needs support “to be confident, to understand...how they can play a part in educating young people in the community” and that this support should come from the school.

Table 4.2 - “There is value in the community of Farm Hill contributing to the education of its children”

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
0%	0%	0%	67%	33%

The idea of the school as a hub is not new, in fact Bagley and Hillyard undertook ethnographic studies, studying the school as the heart of a village (Bagley, C. and Hillyard, S., 2011, p37-49). This idea kept appearing throughout the interviews, not that it is already achieved, but presenting it as a way the school could show its support for the community. Whether linking with other key services, such as health and sport, or by using its facilities to provide space where positive interactions can occur, the school is central to the delicate eco-system of community.

Welcome

With the ongoing difficulty of getting people across the threshold, even for a social occasion, Farm Hill School must be explicitly welcoming. The staff's knowledge of the local area appears to be limited - senior staff acknowledged that while they have an understanding of the needs in the community, they are less familiar with the positive aspects of the community. It is difficult to be truly open and welcoming to the community as a whole if most of your experience is negative. With clear values for welcoming the community set within a school strategy (including staff training on parent and community interaction), respect and potential welcome may increase. Several of the grassroots community organisations were keen to come in and update staff on local events and developments, and a return to social events (as suggested by senior staff) could make local residents more comfortable in the surroundings of the school. None of these changes will happen overnight as the negative perception is so ingrained, but small steps can go a long way.

For this school, though, welcome doesn't just start when the community approaches the school, but requires bridging, advocated by Riley (Riley, K., 2013, p272-4), with the school reaching out to a wide cross-section of people and organisations in the locality. Community organisations are not expecting the school to reach out only in the manner of provision, but want to be needed, to be useful - far more empowering than support coming just from the school. There was a sense that people and opportunities are waiting in the wings for the school to reach out and ask for their help.

Empowerment

Some of the interviewees suggested that the school holds a responsibility, through collaborative dialogue, to empower the community, make them stronger and more confident and able to make positive life decisions, to “be leaders in some of the decision-making” for the community itself. The current local authority scheme to catalyse community development has sustainability as a core value, requiring neighbourhoods to provide direction going forward, instead of relying on support from external organisations. They (alongside other key community organisations) it is suggested, have the ability to give the community a voice. Through open and constructive dialogue at a variety of levels the school can receive feedback from the community while bringing leadership and drawing out vision. This is a heavy responsibility to bear considering the school’s workload, but leaders accept this challenge stating the school “provide[s] leadership...[as] role models, leaders [and] educators...educating everybody”.

This must, though, be a two-way process, as the neighbourhood do not want to be dictated to - interviewees were clear that they need to be listened to and respected, that this should be a collaborative process and that they have as much to offer as they need to receive. One example of this already happening is a new development, which could provide much needed community resources and community space, while renovating an unused area. Senior staff from Farm Hill School have been instrumental in initiating and showing support for it, but does the neighbourhood know the school is involved?

Visibility

The final responsibility that the school holds in the development of school-community relationships is to be visible. Strategies and dialogue are of no use if nobody sees or experiences action. If the school aims to be more welcoming, senior leaders need to be visible at the gate as well as regularly providing a positive presence in the community - attending community organised events if they expect the community to attend theirs. Instances of negative PR, highlighted by many interviewees, need to reduce with the school taking responsibility to engage in sustained, localised and town-wide positive PR to help alter perceptions. Whilst the school continues to isolate itself, rumours and incorrect perceptions will flourish. But, it was suggested, by engaging local volunteers within the school and giving staff a more proactive role in day-to-day community life, the fortress that has been created may start to seem more approachable.

In return, for collaborative relationships to develop effectively, the data highlights responsibilities that the community has towards the school. Many of the organisations and individuals that were interviewed stated their desire to help the school wherever their expertise allowed - some considered it their role to stand up for the school against the perception of the community, others were presenting a channel by which the school could connect with residents and increase its positive visibility. All were supportive of the school and its aims and wanted to develop a deeper and more purposeful two-way relationship. However, the data shows that if the neighbourhood or businesses within the community choose not to interact with

them, collaboration is impossible. The process that the school has already begun in reaching out to and welcoming its community may prove slow because of the democratic nature of the interactions. However, as the interviewees show, when the choice is made to support the school, positive PR provided is high and perception of the school locally and across the whole of Crewbridge could improve.

4.9 Summary

The school-community eco-system in Farm Hill, judging by the enthusiasm of participants, has the potential to thrive. However, interviews diagnosed a divide between Farm Hill School and its community, caused by negative perspective, lack of capacity and barriers to access. Mutually beneficial relationships with the business and parental community are beginning to improve, but are still in their infancy, with school taking the lead to develop these further. However, challenging the perceptions of, and therefore engaging with, the neighbourhood is proving more difficult. This school however, accepts its responsibility to be more outward focussed, not to isolate itself in a protective bubble but to engage supportive community members to challenge external perceptions.

Chapter 5 - Impact of Relationships

5.1 Defining Impact

So far, I have analysed data through the lens of the nature of the relationships that exist between Farm Hill School and the community of Farm Hill and Crewbridge.

This section, seeks to draw from the data any perceived impact on children's education - present or potential.

In conversation with local businesses, residents, parents and the school itself several things became apparent - firstly, impact is difficult to measure, and second, perceived impact affects both children and the wider community. At the outset, while I do not wish to define what impact I am looking for, it is important to say what 'impact' is. In the case of the education of children I refer back to the UNCRC definition used at the start of this thesis, and consider impact to be any noticeable affect (positive or negative) on their mental, physical, social and emotional skills or individual talents.

All interviewees were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that: 'The relationship that Farm Hill School has with its community has a positive impact on the education of the young people of Farm Hill'. Table 5.1, shows the mixed response, with most either disagreeing, or not sure of any impact. Where a specific project was seen to have instant impact on attitudes or aspirations of a young person, there was agreement with the statement, for example "when the young people go up and...work at the (hotel) for a week". However, disagreement stemmed from the perceived impact that a parent's negative attitude has on a

child's perception of school, through "ranting and raving...done in front of the child". This was deemed to have "a knock-on effect" and therefore block any positive impact from relationships with the wider community.

Table 5.1 - "The relationship that Farm Hill School has with its community has a positive impact on the education of the young people of Farm Hill."

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
0%	33%	33%	22%	11%

Some hoped there was potential for these relationships to have a positive impact, but explained there wasn't enough happening at present, or that relationships were not developed enough, to agree with the statement. When pressed, examples did come to light of positive impact currently occurring, such as "raising aspiration" or developing "mental and social skills" through links with local leisure centres and sports teams. So, it may be that the impact is there, but not yet fully recognised.

5.2 Measuring Impact

When asked about measuring this impact, there was a mixed response. Some used pre-determined methods to enable measurement of a narrow outcome while others disagreed about the validity of any potential measurements. The latter group clarified that by doing so would require pre-determination of what impact you were looking for, which "limit[ed] things...[like the] exams defining education argument - but this isn't about outcomes, it's about people...you could kill things if you have to make it quantifiable". There is also an argument that when linking with the community, variables are almost endless and timescales for change are elongated,

so attributing measurable impact to any one particular source is difficult. However, that doesn't make this research, or the development of these relationships pointless, but instead gives opportunity to look at impact in a broader sense, to look at the day-to-day impact on the lives of individuals, and any subsequent ripple effects.

The main organisation that extracted measurables from their relationship with the school, did so around a specific event where they engage with children from Farm Hill school. This allowed them to use a logic-modelling framework, based on desired outcomes and conducted in conjunction with qualitative research, such as focus groups and paper-based evaluations. However, aside from parental feedback given to the school, these measurements served only to qualify the success of this outreach for internal purposes, rather than as an evidential tool for building more effective relationships. One senior staff member from Farm Hill School, while not claiming any statistical analysis, pointed to evidenced changes in children following or during their interactions with external community groups. Naming specific activities that children took part in, that enabled "a child to see a purpose to education" she cited visible improvements in behaviour, effort and self-esteem, with some "even talk(ing) about their future in a positive way".

Referring back to the responses to statement three, suggests that structures for measuring have not been established yet because of the lack of understanding of the type of impact that can be expected. While, as senior staff suggested, stating outcomes at the start could limit growth, perhaps broad categories, such as the

UNCRC ones used in this research, could provide some structure for knowing where to look.

While there is currently no accurate measurement for establishing the effect that school-community relationships have, these interviews provided insight into the impact that is perceived - the things that encourage business, neighbourhood, parents and the school to continue developing and progressing relationships. This analysis will, as outlined in the research questions, consider the observed influences the relationships already discussed have on children's education. The impact observed by the neighbourhood, parental and business communities can be divided into three broad categories: worldview, development and added value.

5.3 Worldview

A child's worldview is primarily shaped by attitudes, values and experiences within family life, which are shaped by the community in which they live and their time at school. If experiences as a child are limited - people they meet few, or places they go constrained, their worldview may be narrow. This is something that was a concern on behalf of children attending Farm Hill School. Senior staff explained that while there are some whose families can afford to go on holiday, many do not, and one shared a story of a 14 year old boy who they "took to the sea - (he'd) never been to the sea - walked into the sea with his shoes and clothes on, and [his] mobile phone, and went 'Oh, it really is blue!'" This may be an extreme case, but begins to explain the narrow worldview of some Farm Hill School children. This is one reason why the school takes its responsibility to "create global citizens" seriously, providing

weekly enrichment afternoons where children can experience non-curricula activities, and pursuing relationships beyond the school gates through mentors, further education experiences, trips and visitors who encourage them to look beyond their horizons. Two significant outcomes emerge from the data under the category worldview - perspective and aspiration.

Perspective

Perspective, a person's mental view, affects how they view themselves and the world around them. For the children of Farm Hill School, alteration of self-perspective, as well as that of their community and the world beyond, are considered key impacts from relationships built with the wider community. There were many examples of interviewees explaining how "various projects" that the school has undertaken with external businesses had "made (children) feel more worth...and buil(t) their whole...self-confidence up as well'. A week spent at a local further education establishment seemed to show immediate change to a child's opinion of themselves - from an "I don't want to take part in this" attitude at the start of the week, to an opportunity to showcase their individual talents at the end - the growth in their "self-belief and confidence" comes about because of new opportunities and fresh ways of looking at things, as well as at themselves. With conviction, one spokesperson stated that working with these children "enables them to be confident [and] to make informed decisions about their future", starting with a belief in themselves and an increase in self-worth.

This “is a very small community inside its head”, stated a senior staff member from Farm Hill School, making it difficult to create global citizens - if they struggle to leave the estate on a weekend, let alone Crewbridge, (except perhaps through the internet), how will they change their perspective of what they can be? Married with the perception that outsiders have of Farm Hill, this insular perception is detrimental to the perspective and potential development of this community. The impact of these relationships may therefore not be truly realised until others, and consequently the community, begin to view Farm Hill through a different lens. However, enabling a young person to connect with different types of people is still “an absolute rich source of seeing what life is like and how different people live their lives” which may, in time, change their worldview as well as their place in it. One example given was of a local charity that connects to the school to take children out and into the community for litter picking and other environmental exercises, this was perceived to have a positive impact on the children’s respect of the community they live in, “teach(ing) them, hopefully, respect and values on keeping the streets clean and then themselves”.

Confined within rules that a school environment dictates, school staff explained that children are limited in their growth. To become a global citizen, a child needs to “learn how to communicate, how to think outside the school environment and outside of the academic environment” - a school can therefore not provide the complete education a child needs - but, still sensing the responsibility for opening these doors, they are struggling to know how to increase engagement with the community to advance this.

One local charity, unable to suggest direct perceived impact from their involvement in school, viewed their role as encouraging the community to engage with itself and the school. Contributing to children's education, it was perceived that the community itself benefits through increased self-belief, confidence and respect for others - getting involved, they begin to understand the benefits that education brings, in turn increasing their respect for and belief in the school.

It was suggested, by several participants, that getting the community across the school threshold could serve as an antidote to negative perception - one local charity saw this as an impact of their relationship with the school. With local residents on the team, they can connect and encourage other neighbours to engage with community fun days, and other events held on school premises, which they hope may 'help (them) feel differently about it.'

Aspiration

A week of activities at a local University is high up on the school's list of successful school-community relationships (however, this experience is only open to a select group of students due to capacity restrictions). By increasing children's self-belief and confidence there is growth in aspiration with "all 30 (children) talking about going to University" when they returned – "...that would never have happened had we not sent them there". Stepping over the boundaries of a higher education institute and taking part in positive experiences, children are able to imagine themselves there in the future, lifting their aspirations - not only about what they can achieve, but about who they can be. This also impacts their academic potential,

as they begin to see purpose in education and return to school with changed attitudes, shown through increased attendance and application to their studies. Conversely, the impact also affects those who aren't invited to take part, with senior staff explaining that "you can see the effect it has on them as well, because it diminishes their aspiration, keeps them where they are, they don't have that growth mindset", while those who attended are "talking about their future in a positive way".

Work experience, while dwindling in other local schools due to pressure of exams, is (I was assured passionately by senior staff), essential in the life of Farm Hill School. A first experience of work for many, it provides an opportunity for "children that wouldn't imagine that they would be able, or employable" to get a taste of working life - opening a door that may have otherwise remained shut. For some, the impact has gone even further, with one student being interviewed for an apprenticeship as a result of her work experience week, making the relationship the school had with this community business fundamental in the increase of her aspirations and future employability - she now feels "wanted and valued". Positive impact is perceived to come too from a week spent in a local hotel where young people are engaged in a variety of roles during the week - the variety and team nature of the experience ensures that it is fun and presents work in a positive light, giving all children the chance to discover individual talents and aspire to find a way to use them in the world of work.

Senior staff were open about the fact that a significant proportion of their children do not see themselves as going on to a job after school. Believing in the positive impact of business relationships with school on children, they try to use these to broaden their horizons. Through talks on law or medicine and one-to-one tailored business mentoring, the school believe aspirations will be increased. It is clear that such specific investment cannot be achieved with teachers alone - specialists from the community are needed.

While Farm Hill School is working to raise aspirations of young people in their district of Crewbridge, there is still the issue of sustainability - if the community is not aspiring to become a better version of itself, or if a child's home-life is not encouraging aspirations, the work that the school does quickly dissipates:

the kids feel fantastic from 9 to 3, then they go home again and it is gone...by Friday they are on a high, they have a weekend at home, they come in on Monday and it is flat on the ground again, and that's the problem.

While this is not the experience for every child by any means, for those that this is a reality, aspiration can soon become disappointment and indifference, which is why increased community engagement with (and in support of) the efforts of the school, makes a child's education more effective - identifying another significant impact of engaging parents and neighbours in relationship. If a child goes home to a community that believes in what the school is achieving, aspirations becomes far

more sustainable, but as one interviewee pointed out the community don't always realise their own value in children's education.

5.4 Development

Education, as defined by the UNCRC (United Nations, 2016), is not solely about achievements measured by examination, but encompasses the development of an individual so that they can become an engaged citizen through the development of soft skills and discovery of talents. While direct correlation between school-community links and young people's educational development is hard to quantify, perceived impact was identified in the development of physical and soft skills such as: decision making, communication, leadership and problem-solving.

Only the further education representative suggested that by working with children from Farm Hill School over an extended period of time they could potentially see a "raise in their attainment", whereas most participants identified the development of soft skills as a perceived impact of school-community relationships. There was however, suggestion that the development of these soft skills has a knock-on effect on attainment - if (as one staff member commented) children return from interactions within the wider community with an increased commitment in class, there will be an effect on attainment, if it can be sustained.

An increase of opportunities for a wider variety of physical activity was brought to my attention during several interviews, all proud of connections that the school has made with locally-based County sports teams. However, many of these connections

exist only through the hiring of facilities, rather than interaction with children, so impact on education, apart from as a role model, is tenuous. Local children do however, have opportunity to be a part of a sporting initiative that takes place each week on school grounds - this not only provides the chance to gain physical skills, but a chance to invite non-school members across the threshold. A more concrete school-community link through sport takes Farm Hill School's young people out of the school environment and into the local Leisure Centre, where the gym is used as weekly enrichment.

It is the impact on soft skills, though, where attention should be given. Increased commitment, demonstrated through record 94% attendance, is an essential skill for children to learn for both relationships and work ethic. This increase, while difficult to credit to specific school-community relationships, is possible to attribute to the hard work of school staff developing personable open relationships with parents (particularly those that are hard to reach) - even to the point of "the Vice Principal (having) gone round home and found what's going on to get them back into school". This commitment from the school to the child and its families is beginning to reap commitment the other way - mutual benefit.

Within school, environments can be created whereby young people are required to work as part of a team, however, through attending University activities and working in a team with children you have never met, soft skills are really stretched - put out of their comfort zone, social skills of communication and team work become essential. One representative told me that here children begin to recognise

they “have got something to bring to the table” and comprehend that “there is an opportunity to use (their individual skills) in maybe a way they hadn’t seen before”. Activities which take them deeper into the community, such as the example given of working with a local charity litter picking perceived to have an even greater effect, developing their emotional recognition of what it means to be part of a team that is improving the lives of others.

5.5 Added Value

In addition to personal development and a change in worldview, other key benefits of school-community relationships became apparent through the research process, which I have categorised as ‘added value’. However, these are not add-ons but threads that run through the whole of a child’s education, and include: social capital production, creating opportunities and realising the value of education.

Social Capital

The more that Farm Hill School exists in isolation, the lower the social capital of its children becomes. Low social capital means that links, shared values and understandings in society needed for young people to become active citizens (Stats.OECD.org, 2016) are missing, yet by simply connecting children with their external community, the school can ‘expand(ed)...networks and increase(d) their social capital’ (Hands, C., 2005, p80), adding value to their education. Business mentors who listen and give advice about their options; local alumni who share experiences of going to college or starting businesses, and an increase in positive

role models are all connections that leave a positive impact on the lives and education of Farm Hill's children.

Opportunities

These connections also often open doors to an increase of opportunities for young people. From the girl whose work experience led to an apprenticeship, to parents on the PTA who open up new opportunities to their children through taking part themselves. However, while it was felt that there were far more "amazing opportunities right on the doorstep" currently untapped - the school also saw the importance of "trying to shrink the world for them" through conversations about jobs beyond Farm Hill or even foreign travel - places and opportunities that previously would have felt out of reach, or not even been on their radar, suddenly becoming a possibility.

Value of Education

For many children at Farm Hill School, the most significant added value is helping them and their families to understand the value of education itself. There was a sense that the community needs to understand "how beneficial education can be, not just for the individual, but for the whole community" and by providing increased opportunities for children to be out in the community, serving them and learning from them, they become more aware of the value of education - seeing how it can benefit them. Experiences at the university showed the impact this could have on a group of children and their parents who are now beginning to understand that education can be fun, and give hope for a better future.

5.6 Summary

There was an overwhelming sense that school-community relationships do have a positive impact on the education young people of Farm Hill, especially in terms of developing soft skills. While evidence for impact on educational attainment was not available, the increase in aspiration and commitment to schooling was considered as a pre-cursor. Most agreed that impact from these relationships is hard to measure as there are many variables and the evidence I collected came from a limited number of stories. However, if the strength of perception on the positive impact these relationships have on children can be so high with little experience it leads me to conclude that with a fully-flourishing school-community eco-system, the impact would be much more visible.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Overview

At the start of this thesis I set out to explore whether education is improved when the whole community contributes to and shares responsibility for it. Using a secondary school set in a less advantaged context I explored the nature of any existing school-community relationships and investigated whether there was any perceived impact on children's education. Through nine interviews and one focus group, alongside document, web and historical research, I established the school's context and gained a triangulation of perspectives from parents, neighbourhood and business, as well as listening to the views of the school. This was a very small-scale study and the results are not generalizable, however, I believe it presents a compelling argument, providing insightful outcomes that could be useful for Farm Hill School and potentially as a kick-start to other research in this field.

The current body of knowledge, while small in this field, concedes that communities have a vital role to play in the education of their children and that schools, families and communities need each other to provide a balanced education. Currently though, across the UK, there appear to be few evidenced examples of schools tapping into the wealth of resources that lie in the body of their communities.

I believe this research shows that there is merit in schools and communities cooperating to enhance children's education, and that when the whole 'village' collaborates children's physical, mental, social and emotional skills and individual

talents can be developed more effectively enabling them to become active citizens in a global community.

In the context studied, despite some effort by business and parents and much effort by the school, most relationships were still at Riley's bridging stage, with the school conducting most of the reaching out to various groups within the community.

However, even their efforts are limited, as this has been restricted to conventional relationships such as parents or other educational establishments, or smaller businesses that have approached them. From the limited conversations I had, and potential business conversations that I was unable to pursue due to time restrictions, I believe there are many more connections that could be made, creating a much wider web of opportunities. The biggest hurdle the school must jump through, is the negative perception that is found in Farm Hill and Crewbridge itself towards it - this was prevalent in every conversation and needs to be addressed head-on to enable maximum mutual benefit from future school-community relationships. This research suggests that if Farm Hill School takes responsibility for reaching out to the community through greater welcome and visibility, the resultant support and empowerment may enable the breakthrough required.

But is all the effort required is worth it? Throughout the research there was overwhelming agreement that school-community relationships were essential, not just for children's education, but for the whole community. Whilst there are no measurable impacts and no evidence of improved academic attainment, increase in

aspiration, broadened worldviews, development of physical, mental, social and emotional skills and individual talents were all cited as perceived impacts of these relationships. I would argue that whilst more work is needed to provide measurable data, the evidence provided here shows an acceptance that these relationships are essential, and that when a village educates a child social capital is increased.

6.2 Limitations

A limited sample of participants was used in this research due to time constraints, views represented here may not be representative of all businesses, all parents or all parts of the neighbourhood, which puts into question the reliability and validity of this study. However, by using Epstein and Riley's theories as a foundation for establishing the nature of relationships validity is given to the views.

Without measurable impact it is impossible to say that conclusions drawn are reliable, however, this research looks only at the perceived impact - what participants view to be a positive or negative consequence of school-community relationships - analysed here. Without the children's voice, though, conclusions can only be made from the perspective of their representative adults. A clearer picture, based on Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence should triangulate equal perspectives from school, community and family, together with the voice of the child - a large number of each would be required to gain representative samples of each group, though.

This research feels very much like an initial study, an exploration that dips its toe into the field of school-community relationships and their impact. I believe this study has established the need for more research into this area, as the potential impact shown here is massive. Disappointingly, with the time constraints and my own inexperience I wonder whether the imbalance of participants and small sample has skewed the results to a narrow group of those who want to see value in school-community connections anyway, leaving those parents, businesses or residents who may consider greater links to have a negative impact on both the community and children's education without a voice. Having not spoke to anyone with these opinions, it is difficult to tell whether this is an opinion is missing or not.

Overall, this study has highlighted key issues for Farm Hill School - areas where they are performing well, and areas that need improving - which I hope will enable them to grow their school-community links and become a model of how to empower a village to educate its children.

6.3 Recommendations for School

There are many specific recommendations that apply just to Farm Hill School, but I have selected two:

1. Implement a Community Engagement Strategy in conjunction with the community - parents, neighbours, business and the young people themselves. This strategy should show support for the community through continuity and increasing the school's capacity to act as a community hub, engaging with all spheres and

recognise and utilise the value lying dormant in the community, empowering and engaging the community to play its part.

2. Tackle negative beliefs about Farm Hill and the school by being more visible in the community in a positive manner, constructing a welcoming community-friendly environment; motivate staff to engage optimistically with the community, understanding the hidden value of collaborating; and pro-actively engage in positive PR, with the help of the community.

6.4 Recommendations for further research

I consider this study to be just the start of a growing conversation around how and why we should consider community as a vital asset in educating children. There are therefore many potential avenues for further research, for example:

- A study of the welcoming nature of the school to identify barriers that prevent the community from crossing the threshold.
- A multiple comparative case-study to explore whether the nature and impact of school-community relationships are similar elsewhere, and begin to identify any patterns across schools.
- A study into the power of school-community relationships to generate social capital.

In conclusion, from an initial question about whether schools limit children's potential by attempting to provide a balanced education on their own, this research considers that communities hold the key to widening worldview, increasing aspirations, developing the broader scope of a child's abilities and increasing opportunities for social capital production and that schools cannot achieve this breadth in isolation. This small-scale study hints towards the potential available when schools facilitate collaboration with their community – enabling the village to share responsibility for educating its children and invest in its future.

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Appendix

Sample Community Representative Interview Questions

Section 1: Context

1. Can you tell me who you are, and what your role is?
2. What do you know about the school?
3. What about the local context it's set in, how would you describe that?

Section 2 A: Nature of School-Community relationship

4. In ideal circumstances, what do you think the relationship between a school and its community should look like?
 - 5a) There's an age-old proverb that says that it takes a village to educate a child. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why?
 - 5b) On scale 1-10 (1 being least), to what extent do you agree with the statement that 'There is value in the community of Park Barn and Westborough contributing to the education of its children'. Can you explain why you chose that number?
6. Are there resources within the community that you perceive could benefit the education of young people in PB & W that are not currently being utilized fully?

Section 2 B: Nature of their relationship with the School

7. Do you have a relationship with the school?
8. Could you describe in as much detail as possible what this relationship looks like?
9. Have you experienced any challenges in engaging with the school?
10. Beyond your involvement with the school, what other relationships between the community and KC do you see evidence of?

Section 3: Perceived impact

11. On scale of 1-10, to what extent do you agree with the statement that 'KC is viewed as a positive influence in the community of Park Barn and Westborough'?

Can you explain why you chose that number?

12. Have you observed the school contributing to the life of the community?

13. What do you think the community expects from the school?

14. On scale 1-10, to what extent do you agree with the statement that 'The relationship that KC has with its community has a positive impact on the education of the young people in the community of Park Barn and Westborough'?

Can you explain why you chose that number?

15. Based on the UN Convention on Rights of the Child's definition that education should develop a young person's: physical and mental (academic) skills, as well as their social and emotional skills and their individual talents, are there any of these areas of a young person's education that you perceive your relationship with the school to have an impact on?

16. What do you hope to gain from your relationship with the school?