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**Activating School Bonds: A Study of Truancing Young People in the Context of the
Ability School Engagement Program (ASEP)**

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Abstract

Strong school bonds have three active components: commitment, attachment and belief (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Young people with strong school commitment engage in learning and consistently participate in various school activities (Catalano, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004). Strong school attachment also fosters a sense of belonging at school, preventing development of antisocial peer associations outside the institutional setting (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Young people with strong school belief also internalise institutional values and follow school rules (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). There is a paucity of research however, about how the school bonds of youth at risk can be strengthened (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008). Empirical studies have shown that school engagement interventions can enhance prosocial development (Catalano, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Hawkins, Guo, Hill, Battin-Pearson, & Abbott, 2001). Yet less is known about the mechanisms and processes fostering that change (Maynard, McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2013; Mazerolle, 2014).

This dissertation explores the mechanisms of a truancy intervention, the Ability School Engagement Program (ASEP), that activate school engagement. ASEP is a police–school partnership intervention delivered in the format of a family group conference. The intervention aims to reduce truancy among youth with histories of problematic school absenteeism. I apply the Social Development Model’s (SDM) hypothesis that strengthening school bonding is a social process involving the young person and significant others at home and school (Catalano et al., 2004). I explore the mechanisms of the ASEP process within the SDM’s school bond construct comprising of school commitment (investment in doing well in school), attachment (interpersonal relations at school) and belief (attitudes towards school rules). Using 47 transcripts from the ASEP family group conference proceedings, I conduct a thematic analysis of how the ASEP processes can activate school commitment, attachment and belief. In addition, I conduct a case study analysis to unpack how ASEP can activate school belief and how that impacts on school re-engagement and social relations over a two year period. I also examine data from the ASEP exit meetings that were conducted six months after the conference and interviews with the parents that I conducted two years after their recruitment into the project.

First, I find that the ASEP process differentially activates participants’ readiness for school re-engagement (or school commitment) depending on the young person’s willingness and

presenting capability. Activating the readiness for school re-engagement is a social process that is more complex for some than others. Some young people need more support and resources for school re-engagement than others. I identify five types of truants and find that the focus of the ASEP conference process shifts depending on the truant type. Second, I find that school-based peers can influence truancy through conflict (i.e. fighting and bullying) and attachment (i.e. co-truancy). In response, ASEP endeavours to encourage school-based selective peer socialisation among the young participants. I find that this approach is better aligned to targeting co-truancy which is characterised by the presence of affective peer relations than truancy due to school-based peer conflict characterised by the absence of such relations. Third, I find that the ASEP process activates shared school belief, shared responsibility and a new social contract among not just the young people and their parents but all of the ASEP members. I conclude that school re-engagement is a social process involving multiple stakeholders. The process can be linear, chaotic, or non-linear discontinuous. In my conclusion, I discuss how the ASEP process can activate the three elements of the school bond. I discuss the limitations of my dissertation and directions for future research.

Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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No publications.

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No publications included.

Contributions by others to the thesis

The data employed in my research was collected as part of the Ability School Engagement Program Trial. Professor Lorraine Mazerolle, Dr. Emma Antrobus, and Dr. Sarah Bennett contributed to this thesis in their capacity as advisors. They assisted with the development of ideas in the early phases of the PhD, during meetings and in giving written feedback on thesis drafts throughout my candidature.

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truancy prevention and intervention, family group conference, youth delinquency, school bonding, peer relations, family relations

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List of Abbreviations

ASEP	Ability School Engagement Program
CTCC	Communities That Care Coalition
DAT	Differential Association Theory
DETE	Department of Education, Training and Employment
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
QPS	Queensland Police Service
SDG	Social Development Group
SDM	Social Development Model
SSDP	Seattle Social Development Program
TPP	Third Party Policing
UQ	University of Queensland

Chapter One

Research Agenda

1.1 Truancy as a Social Problem

Truancy, or ‘problematic school absenteeism’ (Kearney, 2008a, p. 57), is a prevalent problem of the 21st century. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (2013) study, 15% of students across OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries reported that they had skipped at least an entire day of school without authorisation in the two-week period leading up to completion of the survey. Similarly, using Australian school engagement data, including school attendance rates, Hancock and colleagues (2015) estimated that one in five Australian students (20%) experienced school disengagement. In Queensland for instance, on any one day, approximately 40,000 students (around 10%) are absent from school, around 15,000 without a legitimate reason (Queensland Government, 2013). While the truancy rates subtly vary across locations, policy makers agree that too many students skip school (Hancock et al., 2015; Programme for International Student Assessment, 2013).

In the wider context, truancy is part of the bigger problem of educational underachievement and socioeconomic disadvantage across the lifespan (Gonsky et al., 2011; Hancock, Shepherd, Lawrence, & Zubrick, 2013; Programme for International Student Assessment, 2013). Skipping school is associated with poorer academic performance because students miss out on learning opportunities and later experience problems with catching up on the missed lessons (Arthur, Brown, & Briney, 2006). Truancy can in turn lead to educational disengagement and school dropout (Henry, Knight, & Thornberry, 2012; Lehr, Hansen, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2003; Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Its long term effects include poorer employment options and unstable employment (Hancock, Shepherd, Lawrence, & Zubrick, 2013; Rocque, Jennings, Piquero, Ozkan, & Farrington, 2016).

Under the Education Act 2006 (Queensland) truancy is responded to as a status offence (Dickson & Hutchinson, 2010). A similar response is applied in other Australian jurisdictions. Daily school attendance is compulsory until the age of 16 and parents have the responsibility to ensure that their children are at school each day. In the absence of a ‘reasonable excuse’, parents of truants face prosecution and fines as a last resort. The formal prevention method of reaching the last resort is a legal process. The process starts with the school issuing an information notice to the parents; if truancy continues the family attends a meeting with the school principal, and if the problem remains

the parents get a warning notice (Mazerolle, 2014). In other words, truancy is responded to primarily as a law enforcement matter rather than a complex social problem.

This chapter introduces my research agenda. After articulating how truancy is a contemporary social policy issue, in the next section, I turn my attention to the youth delinquency literature and prevention research to briefly assess the current understanding of the issue. I then introduce my research in the context of the Ability School Engagement Trial. I discuss the research aim, theoretical foundations and its design. I then consider the significance of my research. The chapter concludes with an outline of the structure of this dissertation.

1.2 Truancy as a Research Puzzle

As early as 1950, Glueck and Glueck found, in their pioneering study entitled ‘Unraveling the Causes of Delinquency’, that delinquent boys truant significantly more and with greater frequency in comparison to non-delinquent boys. The founders of the social control theory, including Hirschi (1969), emphasised that, other than the family, school instils prosocial values and beliefs that encourage youth to grow into law-abiding citizens. School bonding continues to be the focus of much contemporary research efforts because school engagement is a recognised precursor to future success (Hancock et al., 2013; Hawkins, Kosterman, Catalano, Hill, & Abbott, 2005).

The extant youth delinquency literature documents the relationship between truancy and other types of antisocial behaviours, including offending (Bobakova, Geckova, Klein, van Dijk, & Reijneveld, 2015; Cumming, Strnadová, & Dowse, 2014; Dembo et al., 2016; Maynard et al., 2013; Pelletier & Russell, 2015; Tanner-Smith, Wilson, & Lipsey, 2013). Truancy is ‘the first sign of trouble’ and the most powerful predictor of delinquent behaviour (Zhang, Katsiyannis, Barrett, & Willson, 2007). Truancy is also linked to drug use, particularly alcohol and marijuana (Dembo et al., 2016; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Henry & Thornberry, 2010). Henry and Thornberry (2010, p. 123) note that truancy is not only ‘associated with an increased odds of initiation of substance use, but once an adolescent initiates substance use, truancy is also related to a substantial escalation of use.’ Truancy is also linked to offences such as daytime burglaries, auto theft and vandalism (Gentle-Genitty, 2008). Scholars point out that truancy is the first stage of the ‘school to prison pipeline’ (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005). This pipeline is created through the substitution of school values with antisocial values (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996).

This pipeline, however, can be prevented. Maguin and Loeber’s (1996) meta-analysis showed that offending can be reduced by improving the academic performance of youth at risk. Maguin and

Loeber reviewed research on the academic performance–delinquency relationship and interventions designed to improve academic performance and reduce delinquency. They found that youth with lower academic performance offended more frequently, committed more serious and violent offences, and persisted in their offending (Maguin & Loeber, 1996). However, this negative relationship can be broken – improvement in academic performance is related to decline in delinquency (Maguin & Loeber, 1996). Among the intervention programs that showed significant effects for either academic performance or delinquency, improvement in either or both outcome variables was equally likely (Maguin & Loeber, 1996).

On a deeper level, truancy and delinquency share a common pool of risk factors that increase the likelihood of engaging in antisocial behaviours (Arthur et al., 2006; O'Donnell, Hawkins, Catalano, Abbott, & Day, 1995). Risk factors include a poor relationship with parents, teachers and prosocial peers at school (Frey et al., 2011; Huizinga, Loeber, Thornberry, & Cothorn, 2000; Loeber et al., 1993). While much research has focused on documenting the risk factors, less is known about whether school re-engagement interventions can reduce them (see Maynard et al., 2013; Sutphen, Ford, & Flaherty, 2010). Truancy reduction interventions predominantly focus on whether there are changes in pre and post attendance rates in favour of the intervention's mechanisms that target the risk factors (Blackmon, 2014; Maynard et al., 2013; Sutphen et al., 2010). Some research shows that school engagement interventions can have a positive effect that is not limited to school engagement behaviours (Maguin & Loeber, 1996; Maynard et al., 2013). In recent years, scholars have made a strong case for intervention research to expand its enquiry to an examination of the mechanisms of change (e.g. Lich, Ginexi, Osgood, & Mabry, 2013; Mazerolle, 2014). I will unpack the research findings in more detail in the upcoming literature review chapters.

School re-engagement is a more complex process than a simple adjustment of a young person's behaviour. In his highly influential ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 3) has highlighted that the individual's social environment is 'a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls.' Following this analogy, we can expect that introducing changes to one set of social structures can trigger changes in other social realms. Bronfenbrenner (1979) has identified four environmental systems which shape the young person's development. First, the microsystem comprising of family, school, peers has the most immediate and direct impact on young person's behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Second, the impact of the mesosystem or the interconnections between the microsystems, for example, the interactions between the family and teachers is more subtle (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Third, the exosystem comprising of the neighbourhood, social services also exerts influences on the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Fourth, the macrosystem or the cultural and political values and systems influence the interaction between the other three environmental system and the young person (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The four systems intermingle and either directly or indirectly shape how the young person interacts with the social environment. Scholars continue to emphasise that social structures can influence a young person's behaviour in complex and dynamic ways (Granic & Patterson, 2006; Kunnen & Metz, 2015). Scholars recommend studying the complexities and non-linearity by applying a range of methods, including examining moment-by-moment interactions (Granic & Patterson, 2006; Kunnen & Metz, 2015).

This thesis contributes to the truancy intervention and prevention scholarship. I examine the school re-engagement processes applied in the Ability School Engagement Program (ASEP) as the intervention unfolds, and consider how they foster school re-engagement for truanting youth. As recently as 2015, Hancock and colleagues (2015, p. 55) noted that despite the plethora of trialled school engagement initiatives, there is little understanding about the effectiveness of the programs in terms of 'what works' and 'what does not work'. In this thesis, I explore how intervention processes can be used to facilitate school re-engagement within the intervention setting, and post-intervention. In the next section, I introduce my research and describe its scope and design.

1.3 The Ability School Engagement Program (ASEP)

My research follows truanting youth and their families who participated in the Ability School Engagement Trial. The trial was delivered in a disadvantaged area of Brisbane where truanting youth were overrepresented in the local crime statistics. (Mazerolle, 2014). One hundred and two youth with histories of truancy and their parents/guardians were randomly allocated into either the experimental or control condition. The experimental participants took part in the Ability School Engagement Program (from now on referred to as ASEP). The control participants received a list of community resources, access to which was self-initiated, and their truancy was responded to through the business-as-usual approach. ASEP is an experimental intervention that aims to reintegrate the truants into a positive learning environment (Mazerolle, 2014; Mazerolle et al., 2012). The program's key intervention component is the family group conference, which is a platform for decision-making and problem-solving (Frost, Abram, & Burgess, 2014a). Other than the young people and their parents/guardians, the participants include police, and third party policing partners: school and community agencies. The families are regarded as experts on their own circumstances and the professionals assist with breaking down the problems into manageable elements (Frost et al., 2014a). ASEP is a third party policing intervention. In the presence of police,

school representatives communicate the escalation of the legal levers if truancy continues. In third party policing theory, mobilisation of third party policing partnerships increases awareness of legal responsibilities and compliance with the law among the citizens (Mazerolle & Ransley, 2006). Six months after the conference, the participants attend the ASEP exit meeting, which evaluates the progress made and offers closure to participation in the project. Studies evaluating ASEP show that the intervention offers some promising outcomes (Mazerolle, Antrobus, Bennett, & Eggins, 2017; Mazerolle, Bennett, Antrobus, & Eggins, 2017).

My research focuses on the experimental group and how the ASEP intervention fosters processes conducive to school re-engagement. Using the ASEP data, I explore how the truanting youth engage with social control agents: parents, school staff and police, around issues related to school disengagement and engagement. While family group conferences are a common intervention in the youth justice and child protection services (Frost et al., 2014a; Frost, Abram, & Burgess, 2014b; Harris, 2008), there is a paucity of research examining how the intervention processes can also be used in school re-engagement (Strand & Lovrich, 2014).

The intervention proceedings are a recognised platform for eliciting change (Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2011). Hayes and Snow (2013, p. 6) have asserted that ‘conferences represent a reversal of the axiom that “actions speak louder than words”, because words are the means by which such conferences are transacted and are the key vehicle by which remorse, regret and accountability can be conveyed.’ Through the intervention’s dialogues, new meanings are created where the individual is repositioned in relation to the presenting problem (Cantwell & Stagoll, 1996). Less is known how intervention processes create ‘light bulb moments’ for truanting youth and how youth apply the new insights outside the intervention settings to change their behaviours.

1.4 Theoretical Foundations for the Thesis

I use the Social Development Model (SDM) as the guiding framework to explore the mechanisms of change. The model was originally developed by Hawkins and Weis (1985) to advance intervention science: it maps out how interventions can target the social domains of a young person’s life to reduce delinquency. The SDM, which I review in chapter 3, is a highly influential model that has informed much of the intervention research conducted by the Social Development Group for over 30 years. The SDM posits that school, family and peers are the key socialisation spheres for youth (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). The main premise of the model is that social bonding or connectedness to institutions of school and family are conducive to youth forming prosocial peer relations and engaging in prosocial behaviours (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). The model suggests that

introducing changes in one social domain offsets variations in another. In my thesis, I unpack how this can be the case.

The SDM as an intervention framework acknowledges that youth's prosocial and antisocial behaviours occur in social contexts involving the institutions and other social relations. The framework, therefore, is compatible with the ASEP intervention, a third party policing intervention, with its multiple participants, including the youth and the family members, as well as school, police and community agency representatives. The SDM has been tested on large scale prevention projects (e.g. Catalano et al., 2004) but has not been applied to individual- and family-centred school re-engagement interventions. The prior research that utilized the SDM focused on the outcomes rather than the change processes of the community-level interventions. Homel (2005) explains that a common trend across major interventions studies is to focus on results rather than processes.

In the SDM, the school bond is a key construct in explaining the aetiology of prosocial and antisocial development. The SDM adopts social control theory's school bond construct. Here, the school bond has three components: (1) *commitment* or investment in school, (2) *attachment* or close affective school-based relationships, and (3) *belief* or acceptance of school rules and values (Catalano et al., 2004). Simply put, commitment refers to the effort that the young person puts into their school work and school engagement; attachment refers to the interpersonal relations that the young person forms at school; and belief captures the young person's attitudes towards the school's expectations of the students. The model posits that strong school bonds relate to prosocial behaviours and prosocial peer relations. In contrast, weak school bonds relate to antisocial behaviours and antisocial peer relations. In my research, I am particularly interested in the school bond construct as I examine the school re-engagement processes of ASEP.

1.5 Thesis Aims

My thesis focuses on how the ASEP conference activates the school bonds of truanting youth. While much research has been conducted around the negative consequences of weak school bonds (Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Hirschi, 1969), there is a paucity of research examining how school bonds of youth at risk can be activated in an intervention setting (Appleton et al., 2008; Libbey, 2004; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). To close this gap, in this dissertation I explore how the ASEP conference affects the three components of the school bond: commitment, attachment, and belief to foster school re-engagement.

My exploration of how the ASEP conference activates school bonds includes examination of the roles of individual youth, family members, peers, school staff and representatives from other agencies contributing to the process. In the SDM, development of either prosocial or antisocial behaviour is a social process. The SDM integrates three dominant youth delinquency theories: social control, social learning, and differential association, to explain the mechanisms responsible for adolescent behaviours (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Catalano, Kosterman, Hawkins, Newcomb, & Abbott, 1996; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). I will discuss the theoretical tenets of the model in Chapter 2. In my thesis, I will examine the role of the social actors in fostering and restraining the school bonds as I examine the ‘how’ of successful school re-engagement.

1.6 Research Design

My research follows an exploratory design. I examine three elements of the school bond in the context of the ASEP intervention. First, I explore how the ASEP conference activates truanting youth’s school commitment to foster school re-engagement. Commitment is an important concept in the study of delinquency and delinquency prevention (Jimerson, Campos, & Greif, 2003; Libbey, 2004). Fredericks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004, p. 59) view the concept’s potential as an ‘antidote to declining academic motivation and achievement’. Scholars recommend examination of school commitment in solution-focused terms to enhance educational outcomes (Appleton et al., 2008). In this thesis, I conduct a thematic analysis of 47 ASEP conference transcripts to examine how the young person, along with the adult ASEP participants, can strengthen school commitment as the intervention unfolds.

Second, I explore how the ASEP conference activates young participants’ attachment to peers at school. In the youth delinquency literature, peers have been blamed for much of adolescent antisocial behaviours (Haynie & Kreager, 2013; McGloin, Sullivan, & Thomas, 2014). The assumption that prosocial and antisocial peers are two distinct groups is also pervasive (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Conger, 1991). Yet, peer influence as a delinquency prevention mechanism has been underexplored in intervention studies. I again use the conference transcripts and identify how the peer issues are identified and targeted to foster school re-engagement.

Third, I explore how the ASEP conference targets participants’ school belief to activate school re-engagement. Belief is a less explored aspect of the school bond (Jenkins, 1995; Krohn & Massey, 1980). According to the SDM, belief is a consequence of social bonding and a mediator between the effect of bonding and behavioural outcomes (Catalano et al., 2004). In exploring school belief of ASEP participants, I focus on the school re-engagement processes that play out over a two-year

period, starting at the ASEP conference. Rulison, Gest and Osgood (2015) observe that a two-year post-intervention period is appropriate for examination of enduring intervention effects. I utilise the case study approach to compare and contrast three different ways that ASEP can activate belief. Lipsey and Cordray (2000) observe that ‘by focusing on individual differences in susceptibility to the intervention we can get closer to the goal of understanding how programs affect individuals, who is most affected, and under what circumstances’ (p. 362). For case analysis, I use three data sources: ASEP conference transcripts, ASEP exit meeting data, and two-year follow up interviews that I conducted with the parents.

1.7 Significance of the Research Project

The key sources of data for my dissertation are the ASEP proceedings transcripts. The transcripts contain per verbatim accounts of the intervention, capturing the dialogues between the participants, including the truants, on understanding how truancy is a problem and how it can be solved.

Intervention research typically uses data that is collected outside the proceedings of the interventions, for example, numerical data, interviews, and surveys (Maynard et al., 2013; Sutphen et al., 2010). This is partly due to the proceedings containing sensitive and confidential material. Yet, interventions are the moments when change takes place, and focusing on them can illuminate new insights into how that happens (Damasio, 2008; Egan, 2013).

My research examines change processes as the intervention unfolds. There has been some prior research that draws on intervention proceedings data. For example, Rossner (2008) conducted an analysis of a video recording of a family group conference that contributed to the formulation of her micro theory of how a restorative justice conference can facilitate production of positive emotions and group solidarity in mediation between the victim and the offender. Using transcripts as a non-traditional data source, I explore how prosocial change can be generated through the ASEP family group conference to foster school re-engagement. Identifying the mechanism of change is a crucial step towards more effective interventions (Granic & Patterson, 2006).

My research also contributes to the study of youth development by focusing on how moment-by-moment interactions within an intervention setting can foster changes in a young person’s behaviour and social interactions. The moment-to-moment interactions are what Granic and Patterson (2006) call ‘the proximal causal generators of development’ (p. 112). Similarly, Kunnen and Metz (2015) assert that developmental processes in adolescence take place at high speed, across

different but interconnected domains of the young person's social environment that are both complex and changing. As a result, development is non-linear, with fluctuations, bumps and other seemingly chaotic patterns (Kunnen & Metz, 2015). Common research methodologies, however, are based on the assumption that development has a linear progression (Kunnen & Metz, 2015). Kunnen and Metz (2015) make a strong case for studying youth development with different research approaches to understand the non-linearity of development that traditional quantitative research methodologies are not able to examine.

One way to study the non-linearity and complex interactions of adolescent development is by examining changes in development across brief time periods (Kunnen & Metz, 2015). My first two studies do exactly that by examining the interaction between the young person and the adult ASEP participants. Granic and Patterson (2006) have argued that the moment-to-moment of real-time processes is critical for understanding the large-scale developmental progression. Individuals live in the here and now, and it is moment-to-moment interactions that 'grow' developmental outcomes (Granic & Patterson, 2006). Yet, most youth delinquency research has overlooked the real-time processes and focused on developmental risks and outcomes (Granic & Patterson, 2006).

Studying a population of truants participating in an experimental trial contributes to the youth delinquency and prevention scholarship. Truancy has been traditionally overlooked in the study of youth delinquency (Christle et al., 2005; Rocque et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2007). Zhang et al. (2007) observe that because truancy is generally seen as less serious than other types of delinquency, the problems associated with it tend to be minimised in youth delinquency research. While social scientists have advanced distinct theories on youth delinquency and school misconduct, minimal work has been conducted to integrate the two (Weerman, Harland, & van der Laan, 2007). Henry and Huizinga (2007) strongly assert that more youth delinquency research efforts should focus on truancy prevention because truancy is a gateway to other antisocial behaviours.

Youth delinquency theories are applied to antisocial behaviours that youth actively seek out and engage in (Haynie, 2002; Reiss & Farrington, 1991; Warr, 1993a). For instance, much youth delinquency research focuses on substance use (Catalano et al., 1996; Oxford, Oxford, Harachi, Catalano, & Abbott, 2001; Valente, Gallaher, & Mouttapa, 2004), which involves youth finding access to illegal substances and consuming them. In contrast, truancy is an act of resistance; it is a passive form of behaviour characterised by avoidance of the legal expectations of going to school each day. Reynolds and Crea (2015) have argued that each type of delinquency is driven by

different factors and for that reason, they should be examined in isolation from the broader cohort of delinquent behaviours.

Thesis Overview

This introduction is a brief prelude to the major theoretical issues, key concepts and research objectives of this thesis. My thesis is divided into eight chapters. The next two chapters comprise of literature reviews that form the theoretical background to my research. Chapter 2 provides a detailed discussion of the SDM and its tenets. In particular, I examine how past scholars have linked the role of school, family and peers to prosocial and antisocial behaviours and critically assess how the relationship is depicted in the SDM. In chapter 3, I turn to delinquency prevention and intervention efforts. I review the influential studies that have informed our current thinking on prevention, intervention and behaviour modification. I also examine the gaps in research on the role of interventions in behavioural change and how that applies to truancy reduction.

Chapter 4 presents the methodological framework for my thesis. I situate my research in the Ability School Engagement Trial. I describe the trial together with the ASEP intervention as well as clarify my niche within the project. I discuss the stages of the research process, including data collection and the analytical approach. Further, I provide operationalisation of the key concepts employed, outline the development of themes, and the data collection processes.

The chapters that follow present the empirical data from the research and discuss the emergent themes in reference to the literature. Chapter 5 presents my first set of results. I discuss how the ASEP conference affected the young participants' school commitment. In chapter 6, I examine the young participants' peer relations and how the ASEP conference targeted them. In chapter 7, I consider how the ASEP processes fostered school belief.

The findings from the data are integrated together in the conclusion of the thesis (Chapter 8). The theoretical, methodological and empirical findings of the previous chapters are reflected upon. This chapter also considers wider policy implications and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two

School, Family, and Peers in Theory and Research – Introducing the Social Development Model

2.1 Introduction

It is well established that school is a prosocial institution preventing delinquency, and truancy is an antisocial act (Catalano et al., 2004; Glueck & Glueck, 1950; Reid, 2008). Despite research advances, school absenteeism remains a contemporary research puzzle (Rocque et al., 2016). In this chapter, I will review the literature about the aetiology of youth's prosocial and antisocial behaviours to assess the state of contemporary knowledge about prevention. In particular, I focus on the SDM and its theoretical tenets because for over thirty years the model has informed prevention initiatives (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). I critically examine the SDM's main propositions about school, family, and peers in influencing youth behaviours in the context of other theories and research. This chapter forms a theoretical background informing my analysis. Drawing on the literature review, I highlight important tensions and empirical shortcomings that constitute the basis of my dissertation.

The chapter is organised as follows. I first introduce the SDM and describe its theoretical underpinnings. The remainder of the chapter offers a critique of the model's main premise that a young person's bonding to school, family and peers influences that young person's behaviours. One by one, I assess the empirical research and theories on the role of school, family and peers in fostering prosocial and antisocial behaviours. This review permits me to identify gaps, tensions, and debates related to these social forces. I conclude with a summary of the findings and gaps in prior research.

2.2 Social Development Model

The SDM is a theory about the aetiology of both youth antisocial and prosocial behaviour (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Its main premise is that behaviour is learned through social bonding to school, family and peers. Strong bonding with prosocial others and institutions provides rewards for prosocial behaviours (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Conversely, bonding with antisocial others offers rewards for antisocial behaviours (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). The model posits that behaviours rewarded by prosocial others, and those rewarded by antisocial others, are incompatible (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). The SDM has been applied to investigate a range of antisocial behaviours, but not truancy (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Catalano et al, 2004; Hawkins et

al 2001). In this review, I interrogate the SDM's propositions about the function of school, family and peers because in my thesis I apply the model's concepts to truancy reduction and prevention.

The SDM is an integrated framework that synthesises key themes from three influential youth delinquency theories: social control theory (e.g. Hirschi, 1969), differential association theory (DAT) (e.g. Sutherland, 1973), and social learning theory (e.g. Akers, 1977; Bandura, 1977). The SDM follows the social control theory proposition that strong bonds to school and prosocial others inhibit delinquency (Catalano et al., 1996; Cullingford & Morrison, 1997; Hirschi, 1969). The SDM also adopts DAT's proposition that antisocial and prosocial behaviours stem from different social processes that follow similar but parallel pathways (Sutherland, 1973). In addition, the SDM accepts social learning theory's position that behaviour is acquired and maintained through social reinforcement (Akers, 1977).

In contrast to the three theories informing the SDM, which focus on the causes of youth delinquency, the SDM is foremost concerned with prevention. Hawkins and Weis (1985) concede that prevention must be informed by empirically tested theories of why problems emerge. In chapter 3, I consider prevention projects developed by SDM's founders and scholars. However, for now, I focus on the model's theoretical underpinnings.

2.3 School

A key proposition of SDM is that youth with strong school bonds tend to engage in prosocial behaviours and have prosocial peer relations. At school, youth learn and get reinforcement for following the values of conventional society, as well as form social relations with conventional others (Catalano et al., 2004). Teachers and school peers also act as prosocial models.

Unsurprisingly, the model posits that youth with weak school bonds tend to engage in antisocial behaviours and have antisocial peer relations (Catalano et al., 2004). These youth do not get consistent reinforcement for abiding by conventional values and are at risk of falling into peer groups that model antisocial behaviours.

SDM adopts social control theory's school bond construct as commitment, attachment and belief. *Commitment* focuses on youth's investment in school, which includes a commitment to learning or taking school seriously, and commitment to a place that involves participating in extracurricular activities (Jimerson et al., 2003, p. 9). In other words, commitment is concerned with the effort that the young person applies to school related matters. *Attachment* refers to 'affective relationships' (Catalano et al., 2004, p. 252) or interpersonal relations with others at school, typically peers or

teachers (Erickson, Crosnoe, & Dornbusch, 2000). Some attachment measures also include assessment of the young person's sense of belonging at school (Jimerson et al., 2003). *Belief* examines individuals' acceptance of and obedience to societal rules and values (Erickson et al., 2000). It is concerned with the young person's attitude towards school. Hirschi (1969) proposed that *involvement* or participation is also part of the school bond. However, this element is not included in the SDM's school bond. This is because researchers have found weak support for the inclusion of that element with school bond (Agnew, 1993; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). When Hirschi (1969) theorised about the importance of bonding in his social control theory, he believed that all elements of the bond were equally influential. Hirschi (1969, p. 27) has argued that 'the more closely a person is tied to conventional society in any of these ways, the more closely he is likely to be tied in the other ways.' Hirschi's (1969) argument implies that commitment, attachment and belief complement each other and that activation of one triggers the activation of another.

In research, school bond sub-constructs tend to be investigated together. For example, Hawkins and colleagues (2001) applied a 20 item scale of school bond that included measures of commitment to school, relationships with teachers, relationships with peers, opportunities to participate, and belonging. They used their scale to investigate how school bond is a mediator for school engagement and delinquency prevention. In reviewing the use of school bond in empirical studies, Maddox and Prinz (2008) observed variations in its conceptualisations and measurement. They noted that measurement of school bond is usually derived from items in the survey rather than from theory. Consequently, investigation of school bond is tied to the broad aims of research projects but not to theoretical advancements (Maddox & Prinz, 2008).

The exception is Jenkins' (1997) study of the relationship between school delinquency and school bond. Using data from 754 young participants in grades 7 and 8, Jenkins investigated the independent effects of components of the school bond on school delinquency and school non-attendance. She found that some school bond sub-constructs are more important than others in controlling for school delinquency and that low commitment to school and low belief in the fairness and enforcement of school rules were the most important predictors of school delinquency. Noteworthy for my research, Jenkins found that low school commitment and low attachment were the strongest predictors of school non-attendance. In addition, she found that family involvement in schooling and young person's academic abilities have differential effects on the strength of the participants' reported school bonds. This study showed that the school bond is a significant mechanism in explaining school delinquency and non-attendance.

Other research studies examining the link between school bond and delinquency tend to focus on selected aspects of school bonding. For example, Wiatrowski and Anderson (1987) focused on attachment and belief. They found that strong attachment and belief were related to lower rates of delinquency. However, in other empirical studies belief is typically less examined (see Jimerson et al., 2003; Libbey, 2004; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). Prior research has identified that other aspects of school bond are better predictors of delinquency than belief (Jenkins, 1995; Krohn & Massey, 1980). Given the different focus of the studies and the various datasets used, it is challenging to integrate these research findings to see how the components of the school bond interact together.

The blurring between school commitment (or taking school seriously) and school involvement (or participation in activities) is another trend in school bond research (see Maddox & Prinz, 2003). This ambiguity is not well reconciled in the SDM, where involvement precedes school bond (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). No prior research has examined how the school bond can be strengthened to promote involvement. In other words, little is known how the school bond can be used in responding to the truancy problem.

So far, I have identified that school bond is a multidimensional construct with no agreed on definition (Jimerson et al., 2003; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). However, school engagement is school bond's more contemporary iteration (Archambault, Janosz, Fallu, & Pagani, 2009). Engagement typically comprises of a behavioural component related to participation in school activities, and a psychological component associated with a sense of belonging at school and a feeling of attachment (Jimerson et al., 2003; Programme for International Student Assessment, 2013). The school engagement construct further exemplifies the use of interchangeable definitions of school bond in research.

Putting aside the controversies related to the terminology, research has suggested that school bonds are necessary mechanisms in preventing delinquency and fostering positive outcomes. Strong school commitment raises conformity to the institutional norms and aids students in self-regulation (Henry & Thornberry, 2010). School attachment also has a protective role (Henry & Thornberry, 2010; Jenkins, 1995). Researchers have identified that school attachment contributes to student self-esteem, motivation, effort, behaviour and academic achievement (Mouton, Hawkins, McPherson, & Copley, 1996). School attachment drives school engagement and decreases the probability of youth engaging in delinquency (Attwood & Croll, 2006; Hancock et al., 2015; Henry, 2010; Staff & Kreager, 2008). Reviewing 45 articles on school bonding, Jimerson et al. (2003) noted that almost

all descriptions of bonding included a theme of attachment focusing on a broad range of school-based relationships and exploring a young person's sense of belonging in the school setting.

Research has produced mixed results on whether attachment to teachers or school peers is more important in fostering school engagement. According to some researchers (Attwood & Croll, 2006; Obsuth et al. 2016), the quality of the student–teacher relationship drives positive peer relations. Based on their study that was part of the longitudinal Zurich Project on the Social Development of Children and Youth, Obsuth and colleagues (2016) found that youth with strong relationships to authority figures, including teachers, were more likely to talk to them and rely on them for problem resolutions. Obsuth and colleagues (2016) linked their findings to the SDM's (Hawkins, 1999) proposition that youth who develop close attachments to their teachers are motivated to behave in a prosocial manner, consistent with the teachers' professional school-based values and conduct. In contrast, other research has shown that school-based peer relations foremost shape students' school experience (Cullingford & Morrison, 1997; Risi, Gerhardstein, & Kistner, 2003). For example, Risi and colleagues (2003) found that youth with problematic peer relations had less favourable school perceptions, poorer scholastic performance, and higher levels of school avoidance.

So far, the reviewed research shows that school bonds affect young persons' school behaviours, feelings and social relations in either a positive or negative way. School bonds are thought to comprise of different aspects that are loosely defined around commitment, belief, and attachment. There has been little research that has examined how aspects of school bonds interact together or how they can be activated to increase school engagement (Jenkins, 1997). Noteworthy, research also suggests that other facets of a young person's social life influence the quality of school bonds. In particular, parents are regarded as the key moderators of a young person's school bonds (Dodge, Dishion, & Lansford, 2006; Gerrard, Burhans, & Fair, 2003). In the next section, I examine the contribution of the parental bonds.

2.4 Parents

The SDM adopts Hirschi's (1969) proposition that youth who have a strong attachment to parents are less likely to engage in delinquency. Parents embody conventional values, and they communicate these values to their children (Hirschi, 1969). Parental attachment influences a young person's commitment to societal institutions, and beliefs in the legitimacy of those institutions (Kandel, 1996; Oxford et al., 2001). Youth with a strong attachment to their parents are more likely to care about and less likely to violate parental expectations (Hoeve et al., 2012). So strong

attachment to parents acts as a protective factor, decreasing the probability of youth engaging in delinquency. Young people who are well-adjusted at home are also well-adjusted in their interactions at school with teachers and peers (Stormshak, Connell, & Dishion, 2009).

In Hawkins and Weis's (1985) SDM, the social bond considers attachment to parents and school commitment as a single construct. The model proposes that strong attachment to parents and strong school commitment shield against delinquency. However, more recent research applying the SDM has separated out the social bond into the 'school bond' (Catalano et al., 2004; Herrenkohl et al., 2003) or the 'family bond'. Other youth delinquency research conducted outside the realm of the SDM demonstrates the usefulness of examining school and family independently (e.g. Appleton et al., 2008; Jang, 1999; Thornberry, Lizotte, Krohn, & Farnworth, 1991).

The SDM's integration of attachment to parents and school commitment into a single social bond echoes social control theory's assumption that all social bonds constrain delinquency and impose behavioural self-control (Costello & Vowell, 1999; Hirschi, 1969). However, Thornberry and colleagues (1991) found that the relationship between social bonds and individual behaviour is more complex. Using the first three waves from the Rochester Development Youth Study, Thornberry and colleagues (1991) examined responses from 867 youth on self-reported engagement in delinquent behaviours, attachment to parents and school commitment. In line with prior research, they firstly found that school commitment and family attachment tended to reduce delinquency. However, while attachment to parents had an effect on commitment to school, commitment to school did not exert a significant effect on attachment to parents. In other words, parents can influence a young person's school commitment but not vice versa. Extending on prior research, Thornberry and colleagues (1991) also found that a young person's engagement in delinquency attenuates the strength of family and school bonds. This study shows that young people also have an active role in forming attachment to parents and commitment to school.

In addition, Thornberry and colleagues (1991) found that the relationship between youth delinquency and parental attachment is more complex than the relationship between delinquency and school commitment. In the latter case, commitment to school and delinquency are involved in a mutually reinforcing causal relationship that is stable over time (Thornberry et al., 1991). Low school commitment increases delinquency, and delinquency, in turn, reduces commitment to school. The interaction between parental attachment and delinquency follows a somewhat different trajectory. Low parental attachment is related to increased delinquency, and conversely, delinquency is related to lowered parental attachment (Thornberry et al., 1991). Then, as youth get

older, delinquency has an adverse impact on attachment, but attachment to parents does not have a significant effect on delinquency (Thornberry et al., 1991). This finding suggests that parental influences in accounting for delinquency diminish considerably over time as youth gain independence.

More recent research focused on the role of parental attachment on youth behaviours further supports the notion that attachment is dynamic rather than static (Hoeve et al., 2012; Sampson & Laub, 2005a). Hoeve and colleagues (2012) found that the strength of the association between attachment to parents and delinquency was negatively related to age. The research showed that the influence of attachment to parents on delinquency weakened as youth became older. This means that relations with parents are more significant moderators of behaviour for younger than older youth. In their Age-Graded Theory of Informal Social Control – a variant of social control theory – Sampson and Laub (Laub & Sampson, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 2005b), posit that as the youth become older, normative transitions, including entry into employment and romantic relationships, exert a strong influence on behaviours. The strength of attachment to parents changes over the course of youth development.

While not made explicit in the SDM, parental control is implicated in the parental bond (Hoeve et al., 2009; Walters, 2015). Parental control refers to a range of parental behaviours focused on supervision, including consistent discipline, rule setting and parental monitoring (Hoeve et al., 2009). Wright and Cullen (2001, p. 681) note that the effects of attachment are ‘seen to operate by making control possible’. Walters (2015) further differentiates between attachment and control. He notes that attachment to parents has an indirect effect on youth behaviours whereas control exerts a direct effect. Unsurprisingly, some studies show that low parental control is associated with delinquency (Harris-McKoy & Cui, 2013; Hoeve et al., 2009). In their meta-analysis, Hoeve and colleagues (2009) examined 161 studies about the relationship between parenting and delinquency. They found that low parental control was related to delinquency. These results mirror Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber’s (1986) findings from 23 years earlier, in which parental rejection and poor supervision were the best predictors of delinquency (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986).

Youth delinquency scholars recommend further research on parental control to aid prevention efforts (Wells & Rankin, 1988; Wright & Cullen, 2001). The benefits of studying parental control are explicated in education research. For example, Kearney (2008) identified that parental control, also labelled as parental involvement, is conducive to school engagement. Similarly, in another study by Epstein and Sheldon (2002), parental behaviours such as assistance with homework,

school-related discussions with children and participation in parent–teacher interviews were linked to school engagement. However, researchers have identified that parental control or involvement in school is influenced by parents’ own beliefs about the value of education (Strand & Lovrich, 2014). For parental involvement to be effective, parents must convey the same messages that youth are exposed to at school (Strand & Lovrich, 2014), and this is not always the case.

Contrary to the SDM’s assumption about the value of strong bonds to parents, research also shows that parents do not always emulate conventional values, which impacts on youth behaviours. In another study using data from the Rochester Youth Development Study of both parents and their children, Thornberry and colleagues (Thornberry, 2005; Thornberry, Freeman-Gallant, Lizotte, Krohn, & Smith, 2003) found some evidence of intergenerational continuity of antisocial behaviours: parents can directly increase their child’s exposure to antisocial norms and serve as models for antisocial behaviour. In particular, parental criminal involvement and substance use are risk factors for youth embarking on a similar trajectory (Thornberry, 2005; Thornberry et al., 2003). However, Thornberry and colleagues (2003) noted that the dominant pathway for intergenerational transference is indirect and mediated by the quality of parenting styles. Thornberry and colleagues (2003) found that ineffective parenting styles characterised by low affective ties, inconsistent monitoring and poor standard setting can contribute to youth delinquency. Parents with ineffective parenting styles tend to experience difficulties responding to emerging adolescent behaviours (Thornberry, 2005; Thornberry et al., 2003). These parents tend to not have access to the social supports and resources (Thornberry, 2005; Thornberry et al., 2003). In turn, in the absence of effective parental input, youth’s antisocial behaviours continue.

In a meta-analysis of 74 studies looking at the relationship between parental attachment and delinquency, Hoeve and colleagues (2012) reveal similar insights to those of Thornberry and colleagues (2003, 2005). They found that parents can jeopardise the prosocial bond with their children through maladaptive parental practices, including rejection, neglect, and hostility (Hoeve et al., 2012). In line with the study conducted by Thornberry and colleagues (1991), the researchers noted that attachment is created through reciprocal interactions between the parent and the youth (Hoeve et al. 2012). So, youth engaging in delinquency contribute to the weakening of their attachment with parents and an increase in parental negativity (Larsson, Viding, Rijdsdijk, & Plomin, 2008). In addition, parental punishment delivered in response to youth antisocial behaviours can precipitate further delinquency (Cohen & Brook, 1995; Rebellon & Van Gundy, 2005).

In this section, I reviewed empirical research on how parents directly and indirectly influence their children's behaviours, including school engagement. While the SDM focuses on the primacy of parental attachment, the research that I considered points to other parental factors, including control and parenting styles. At times parents can find it difficult to promote their children's prosocial behaviours, and parent-child relations can be far from ideal. Yet, the parental bond is a well-recognised mediator of adolescents' antisocial behaviours, which means that it can serve as a mechanism for delinquency prevention (Bobakova et al., 2015; Hoeve et al., 2009). However, one scholarly controversy is whether it is parents or peers who have more influence on youth behaviour. I consider the literature in this field next.

2.5 Parental Bond vs. Peer Relations

Warr (1993b) has observed that the peer and parent influence on youth behaviours have been traditionally investigated in isolation. The classical assumption in criminological research is that parents constrain delinquent peer influence as per the social control theory, whereas peers socialise youth into delinquency as per the social learning theories that I am yet to discuss in this chapter (Hirschi, 1969; Walters, 2015; Warr, 1993b). Consequently, one scholarly controversy is whether parents and peers are competing or complementary sources of influence (Walters, 2015; Warr, 1993b).

In a meta-analysis study, Kandel (1996) found that the relative impact of peers (as opposed to parents) on delinquency has been overestimated in research. Kandel (1996) noted that the common use of perceptual measures of friends' behaviours in empirical studies leads to self-projection biases in reporting. In addition, parental contributions to peer selection are often not explored or given sufficient weight (Kandel, 1996). Research has shown that parents can, directly and indirectly, contribute to how peers influence youth behaviours (Walters, 2015; Warr, 1993b). Using data from the third wave of the National Youth Survey, Warr (1993b) found that direct parental supervision that was related to the young person spending more time with the family reduced peer influence. Similarly, parental attachment indirectly inhibited the formation of delinquent peer associations because youth were less likely to associate with antisocial others (Warr, 1993b).

More recent research has produced similar findings, pointing to the reciprocal interaction between peer associations and parental attachment and monitoring. Parental monitoring is a more indirect form of parental control, which includes parental knowledge of the child's whereabouts through active tracking and child disclosure (Kerr & Stattin, 2000). Fosco and colleagues (2012) found that attachment to parents was positively related to increased time spent with the family, decreasing the

opportunity for unstructured and unsupervised socialising with peers. Cernkovich and Giordano (Cernkovich & Giordano, 1987) also found that intimate communication in the family helped prevent peer problems and involvement in delinquency. However, Kerr and Stattin (2000) found that the moderating effect of parental monitoring depended on the quality of the relationship between parents and youth. Parental knowledge of a young person's whereabouts is more a result of youth sharing the information with parents rather than the physical act of monitoring. Kerr and Stattin (2000) noted that parents' physical monitoring of their children decreases as adolescents increase their independence and spend less time at home. So, the level and quality of monitoring depends on the child's age.

Recent research also suggests that excessive parental monitoring and supervision can have unintended risks. Keijsers and colleagues (2012) found that parent-reported prohibition of peer relations positively predicted youth contacts with delinquent peers and indirectly predicted higher youth delinquency. When parents ban contact with certain antisocial peers, these peers can become the 'forbidden fruit' that the young person is tempted to associate with and copy their behaviours (Keijsers et al., 2012, p. 651). Similarly, Tilton-Weaver and colleagues (2013) found that youth who reported low levels of delinquency but high levels of parents' communicating disapproval and enforcing monitoring rules were likely to form friendships with delinquent peers. These youth also reported feeling over-controlled by their parents (Tilton-Weaver et al., 2013). Reynolds and Crea (2015) observe that parental monitoring cannot erase or replace peer influence. In sum, the research does not produce conclusive findings about how parents are effective social control agents in guarding against delinquent peers. In the next section, I review the research on how peers can influence behaviours.

2.6 Peers

Peer relations are one of the SDM's tenets. To recap, the model posits that youth with strong social bonds also have prosocial peer relations and display prosocial behaviours; conversely, young people with weak bonds have antisocial peer relations and display antisocial behaviours (Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Catalano et al., 2004). Hawkins and Weis (1985) identified that social bonds to family and school decrease the likelihood of youth developing attachments to delinquent peers because the behaviours rewarded by family and school and those likely to be rewarded by delinquent youths are not compatible. However, if the process of developing a prosocial bond has been interrupted, the young people are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviours and more likely to come under the influence of peers who are in the same situation (Hawkins and Weis, 1985).

One of the most persistent findings in criminological research is the association between individuals' delinquency and that of the person's peer group (Cloward & Ohlin, 1960; Goldweber, Dmitrieva, Cauffman, Piquero, & Steinberg, 2011; Haynie, 2002; Shaw & McKay, 1942; Sutherland, 1947; Van Mastrigt & Farrington, 2009). As individuals mature into adulthood, they transition to spending less time with their families and more time with peers (Brown, 2004; Crosnoe, 2000). Adolescents place great importance on peer groups and are more strongly influenced by their peers than at any other life stage (Brown & Larson, 2009; Crosnoe, 2000; Erikson, 1968; Haynie & Osgood, 2005). However, as recently as 2013, Boman observed that despite the wealth of research, there is still no consensus about which peers influence behaviour, how this influence operates, and why it exists (Boman, 2013).

Sutherland's (1947, 1973) differential association theory (DAT) is incorporated into the SDM to emphasise how differential but parallel processes shape youth behaviours and peer associations. Sutherland (1947, 1973) proposed that both prosocial and antisocial behaviours are socially learned. Through peer interactions, youth learn 'definitions' or attitudes that can be prosocial and antisocial. Delinquency, Sutherland (1947) has argued, results from a differential learning process whereby the youth are exposed to more delinquent than non-delinquent models of behaviour. Sutherland (1947) identified four mechanisms through which peer associations condition social learning processes: (1) *frequency* (the amount of contact with peers), (2) *duration* (the length of association with delinquent peers), (3) *priority* (whether the respondents' earlier or later friends were delinquent), and (4) *intensity* (degree of attachment to friends) (see Agnew, 1991). In other words, the greater the time spent with peers, the longer the period of interactions, particularly if the peer relations were the youth's first formative friendships, and the greater the attachment, the more significant impact the peers will have (Boman 2013).

Warr (1993a) applied the four DAT mechanisms to explain the age distribution of crime. The age distribution of crime – also known as the age-offending curve (Reiss & Farrington, 1991) – shows that delinquency increases sharply from early adolescence until late adolescence, when it then tapers off. Warr (1993) found that increases in delinquent involvement run parallel to exposure to delinquent peers, time spent with peers and attachment to peers. He labelled his finding the 'sticky friends' effect and concluded that delinquent peers 'once acquired...are not quickly lost' (Warr 1993; p. 17). Warr (1993) found that sticky friends are stable across adolescence, but he did not provide a detailed theoretical explanation of why this is the case. In addition, Warr (1993) considered the sticky friends' affect on offending behaviours, including theft, vandalism, and drug use, but excluding truancy.

Very little empirical research has tested the merits of Warr's (1993) hypothesis. Research by Beaver and colleagues (2009) appears to be the only published test of sticky friends. This study examined the relative effect in sibling pairs of genetic and environmental factors on delinquent peer affiliations (Beaver et al., 2009). Beaver and colleagues (2009) found that genetic factors accounted for between 58% and 74% of the variance in the association with delinquent peers, with the remaining variance being attributable to environmental factors. We do not know what environmental factors contribute to the continuity of sticky friends and whether sticky friends are prevalent across different populations.

Much literature focuses on *homophily*, or similarities, among peers in both delinquent and non-delinquent groups (Haynie, 2002; Matsueda, 1988; Megens & Weerman, 2011; Nguyen & McGloin, 2013; Warr, 1993a). Glueck and Glueck's (1950, p. 164) use of the adage 'birds of a feather flock together' remains a research topic in the study of youth peer relations (Carrington, 2002; Carrington & van Mastrigt, 2013; Reiss & Farrington, 1991; Van Mastrigt & Carrington, 2014; Weerman, 2003). Reviewing the literature on peer influence, Brechwald and Prinstein (2011) noted that homophily in peer groups is found on a range of characteristics, including school engagement and delinquency.

From a social learning perspective, peer relations are social environments in which behaviours are learnt. Akers and colleagues (Akers, 1985; Akers & Jennings, 2009a; Akers & Lee, 1996) identified that reinforcement (instrumental learning through rewards and punishment) and imitation (observational learning by copying the behaviours of others) are the main social processes through which all behaviours are learnt. Youth are likely to engage in behaviour, be it social or antisocial, when it is socially rewarded by peers, and less likely when it receives social sanctions (Akers, 1977, 1985; Akers & Jennings, 2009b; Lanza-Kaduce, Akers, Krohn, & Radosevich, 1984). Akers and Jensen (2006) also identified the social conditions that increase the likelihood of a young person engaging in a delinquent act. They argued that 'the greater the value, frequency, and probability of reward for deviant behaviour (balanced against the punishing consequences and rewards/punishment for alternative behaviour), the greater the likelihood that it will occur and be repeated' (Akers & Jensen, 2006, p. 40). In other words, youth are more motivated to copy delinquent behaviours, the more they perceive the behaviours as socially desirable.

Peer group homophily touches on the socialisation versus selection debate that has been ongoing for at least six decades (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; TenEyck & Barnes, 2015). The debate emerged from theoretical tensions between social learning theories and social control theory in explaining

behavioural similarities among peers. According to social learning perspectives, peer similarities are due to peer socialisation or influence. The peer group socialises the individual into acting out certain behaviours (Haynie, 2001). Close relations are most influential because the more time the young person spends with close friends, the more the person internalises friends' attitudes and copies friends' behaviours (Erickson et al., 2000; Sutherland, 1973). In contrast, social control theory posits that similarity is due to peer selection. That is, peer homophily is a result of the individual seeking out similar others and selecting them as the peer group (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Haynie, 2001).

However, the socialisation versus selection debate is absent from the SDM literature. The SDM integrates social control with social learning theories so that they complement each other in explaining the relationship between peer relations and a person's own behaviour (Borden, 2000; Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). Yet, the two theories offer contrasting perspectives about the quality of delinquent peer associations. According to social control theory, delinquent youth have 'fragile and brittle' peer relations characterised by weak attachment and high conflict (Giordano, Lonardo, Manning, & Longmore, 2010; Hirschi, 1969). These relations are not highly durable. In contrast, social learning theories posit that delinquent peer relations are affective to the extent that Warr (1993a) refers to them as 'sticky' to emphasise their high durability. It is possible that the two competing perspectives have implications on how delinquent peer associations can be targeted through prevention and intervention.

While peer influence research tends to focus on delinquency, there is some evidence that peers also influence prosocial behaviours (Barry & Wentzel, 2006; Schunk, 1987). This is not surprising considering that social learning theories stipulate that similar but differential processes are involved in learning either prosocial or delinquent behaviour (Akers & Jennings, 2009a; Akers & Lee, 1996). Lanza-Kaduce, Akers, Krohn and Radosevich (1984) found that youth's cessation of alcohol and other drugs is related to reinforcement and exposure to abstinence models. Barry and Wentzel (2006) similarly found a relationship between peers displaying prosocial behaviour and their friends modelling these behaviours (2006). This relationship is most likely to occur when attachment, interaction frequency, and friendship stability are high (Barry & Wentzel, 2006). There is limited research however, as to how peers can promote prosocial behaviours and discourage antisocial behaviours (Barry & Wentzel, 2006; Lanza-Kaduce et al., 1984).

Developmental research also shows that peer groups change as part of normative transitions. Some research (e.g. Haynie, 2002; Haynie & Kreager, 2013; Matsueda & Anderson, 1998; Warr, 1998)

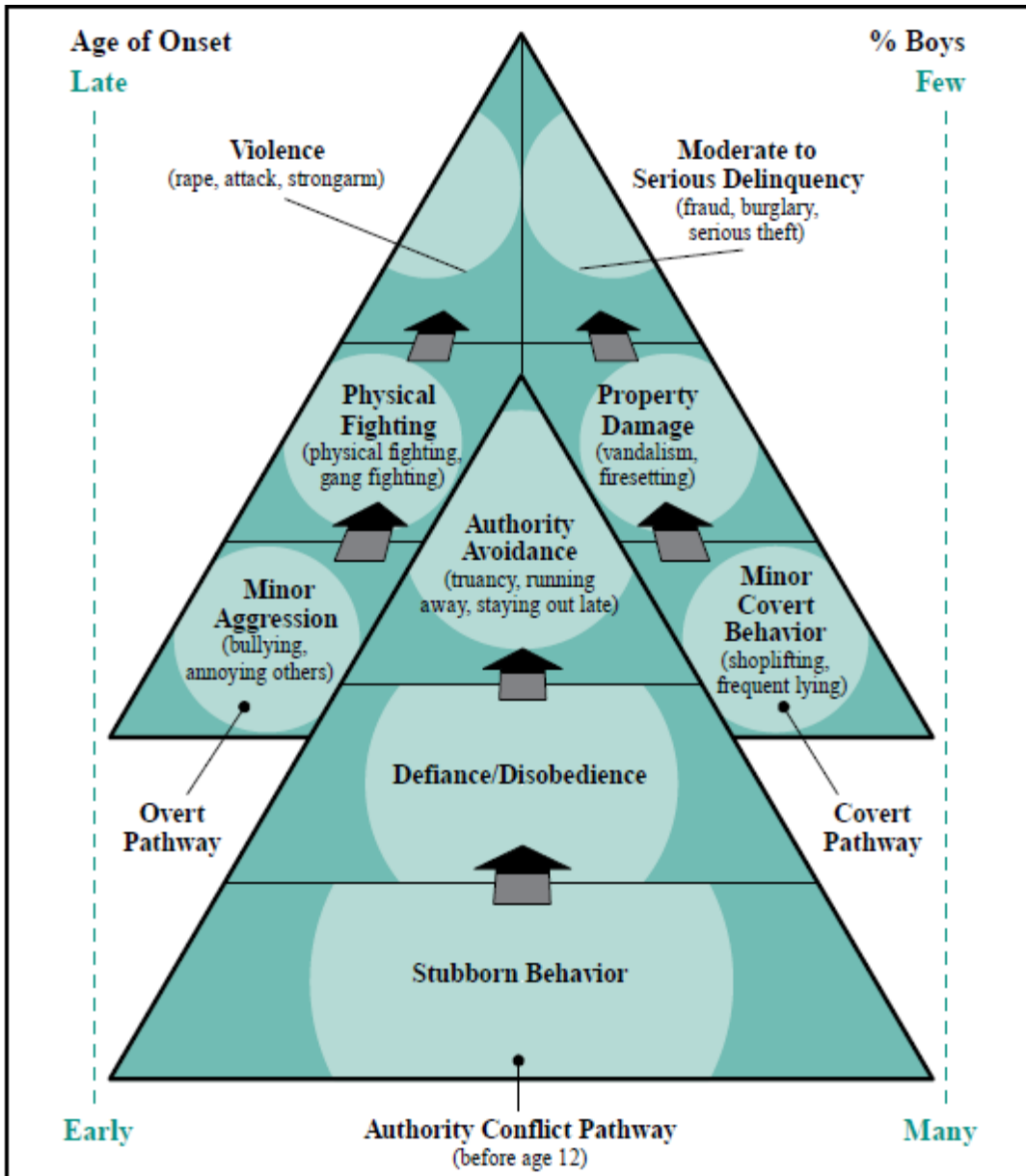
shows that young people in late adolescence change peer groups due to completing their education, starting a job and entering into romantic relationships. Changing peer groups is positively related to desistance from delinquency (Warr, 1998). Warr (1998) found that new peer relations reduced interaction with former peers and also decreased the opportunities and motivation for delinquency (Warr, 1998). However, less is known whether peer relations of truants follow the same trajectory. The empirical studies did not examine the stability of peer relations of truants and whether new friendships discouraged truancy behaviours.

2.7 Individual

Youth delinquency theories, including the SDM, emphasise the social nature of delinquency (Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Moffitt, 1993). From that perspective, youth behaviours are influenced by their social environments. The complex relationship between the social environment and behaviour was also emphasized in a series of longitudinal studies conducted as part of the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency Project (Farrington, 2010, 2011; Huizinga, Loeber, & Thornberry, 1993; Huizinga et al., 2000; Rocque et al., 2016). As the name suggests, the project's aim was to uncover the root causes of delinquency. The participants were inner city youth identified as being at risk for involvement in delinquency, who were followed over time. The key finding in the studies was that childhood risk factors, which included social factors, increased the likelihood of adverse adolescent outcomes. Risk factors have a cumulative effect over time, increasing the likelihood of experiencing other risk factors and of engaging in antisocial behaviours (Huizinga et al., 1993; Lacourse et al., 2002).

In one of the project's studies, Huizinga and colleagues (1993) modelled the cumulative effects of risk factors from childhood to adolescence. Following 1,527 children from the age of seven to 15, they identified three pathways (see Figure 1) to delinquency: (1) authority avoidance, (2) overt, and (3) covert. Figure 1 shows that the pathways are formed in the social environments of family, school and peer groups. For example, the earliest onset pathway is the authority conflict one, characterised by truancy and defiance towards parents at home and teachers at school. An overt pathway starts with minor aggression and bullying, follows with physical fighting and escalates to serious violence. A covert pathway commences with minor covert behaviours (e.g. frequent lying), progresses into property damage, which leads to moderate to serious delinquency (Huizinga et al., 1993). Youth can embark on more than one pathway because problem behaviours share risk factors. Youth that embark on all of the three pathways exhibit the highest rates and more severe types of delinquency (Huizinga et al., 1993).

Figure 1 - Three Pathways of Delinquency



(Source: Huizinga, 1993, p. 12)

Huizinga and colleagues (1993) also found that not all children at-risk follow the delinquent pathways. In fact, this was the case for 39% of the children in the sample (Huizinga et al., 1993). They found that the children who did not become delinquent were exposed to protective factors linked to school, family and peers, which buffered against the adverse effects of risk factors. The protective factors included stable family, parental monitoring, prosocial peers and young person's

career aspirations (Browning & Huizinga, 1999; Huizinga et al., 1993). Huizinga and colleagues (Browning & Huizinga, 1999; Huizinga et al., 1993) noted that the number of protective factors needs to outweigh the number of risk factors so that they can protect against the risk of adverse outcomes. Conversely, when the number of risk factors exceeds the number of protective factors, the probability of a successful adolescence that includes graduation from high school and minimal involvement in delinquency diminishes (Browning & Huizinga, 1999).

The educational research further emphasises that an array of individual-level factors impacts on school disengagement. Researchers have noted that students with disabilities, learning difficulties and mental health disturbances are overrepresented in the samples of participants in truancy studies (see Kearney, 2003; Kearney, 2008a; Ready, 2010). Reid (2002, 2008) points out that truants are typically isolated students who experience problems at school. It is possible that the protective role of the school, family and prosocial peers may not play out in their case as the delinquency theories predict.

Other educational studies identify individual-level factors related to school engagement. For example, students' scholastic abilities and agreeable temperament are strongly related to school engagement (Joseph, 2008). There is mixed support across studies as to whether gender matters (see Arthur et al., 2006). Self-report studies, however, show that students predominantly truant due to school-related factors, including poor relationships with teachers and peers (Kreps, 1999). There is no consensus in the literature whether school, family, peer or individual factors are the most significant contributors to truancy (e.g. Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Hartnett, 2007). Instead, educational research, similarly to the SDM, considers the influence of social factors in precipitating truancy (Kearney, 2008a).

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed theories and research related to the concepts presented in the SDM. I outlined prior research about the role of school, parents and peers in influencing adolescent behaviours including school engagement and delinquency. I argued that the research has not yet provided conclusive responses to how the three domains influence and constrain behaviours.

I identified core research gaps in the literature. First, the SDM and other youth delinquency research focus on delinquency as an umbrella term for a range of misconduct. Truancy tends to be omitted from the investigated behaviours, so we do not know whether the theoretical propositions are equally applicable to truancy. Second, strong school bonds are recognised precursors to achievement

and delinquency prevention (Bond et al., 2007; Catalano et al., 2004; Hancock et al., 2013; Hart & Mueller, 2013; Hawkins et al., 2005; Hirschi, 1969; Jenkins, 1995; Obsuth et al., 2016). However, the definition of school bonds varies across studies, and there has been very limited research examining how the elements of school bonds interact together to foster school engagement (Maddox & Prinz, 2003). Third, in SDM, parents are thought to restrain delinquency, and delinquent peers are a risk for antisocial behaviours (Walters, 2015; Warr, 1993b). Research, however, shows that parents do not always emulate conventional values. Similarly, the link between peer relations and behaviour can be more complex than what the SDM proposes, and there is limited theoretical understanding about how peer relations can be enhanced to promote prosocial behaviours. In other words, the focus is on how family and peers can contribute to the youth delinquency problem rather than how they can be activated to be part of the solution.

I also introduced the notion that individual-level risk factors increase the risk of the young person engaging in delinquent behaviours, while protective factors act as a buffer. So, these factors can be used as a foundation for formulating prevention and interventions to encourage positive development and reduce the risk of delinquent behaviours. In the next chapter, I review existing research to understand how interventions can influence behaviour and the young person's social environment. Chapter 3 moves away from the theoretical to the more applied research. Given that I apply concepts from the SDM to ASEP – a truancy reduction intervention – the next chapter also considers how theories can inform intervention initiatives.

Chapter Three

Delinquency Prevention, Interventions and Drivers of Behavioural Change

3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter, I considered how bonding to school, family and peers could influence the aetiology of prosocial and delinquent behaviours. This chapter focuses on delinquency and truancy prevention through the use of formal interventions. In the youth delinquency literature, truancy is ‘the first sign of trouble’ (Zhang et al., 2007) in the ‘school to prison pipeline’ (Christle et al., 2005). However, research also shows that this pipeline can be prevented through interventions (Hawkins et al., 2015). In this chapter, I review how interventions can activate mechanisms to enhance prosocial behaviours, and also consider the role of school, family and peers in the process. In contrast to the previous chapter, which examined youth delinquency theory and research, this review focuses on applied prevention efforts. Reviewing applied research enables me to explore tensions and gaps between youth delinquency theories and applied intervention research. Understanding this interface allows me to position my research.

The chapter is organised as follows. I firstly review how the SDM has been applied in designing and implementing interventions. I then turn my focus specifically to truancy reduction studies to understand the modalities via which school engagement can be improved. I examine the role that school, parents, peers and the individual truanting youth play during those interventions. Given that my dissertation is based on a third party policing family group conference, I also review the use of law enforcement in truancy reduction and review the applicability of restorative interventions.

3.2 Prevention Interventions

The Social Development Group (SDG), who developed the SDM, uses insights from the risk and protective factors research to develop interventions (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). The premise of the SDG’s research is that delinquent behaviours stem from shared risk factors, so targeting common correlates can help prevent multiple behavioural problems (Hawkins et al., 2001). Hawkins and colleagues (2015) argue that well-designed prevention programs can enhance protective factors and reduce risk factors.

In their research design, the Social Development Group also applies the SDM to aid their prevention efforts (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996). The Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP) is an example of a large-scale prevention project built around concepts from the SDM to reduce childhood risk factors for school failure, drug abuse, and delinquency (Hawkins et al., 1992;

Hawkins et al., 2005). The SSDP aimed to enhance bonding to school, family and prosocial peers (Hawkins et al., 1992). The project assigned 808 primary school students from 18 Seattle schools to either intervention or control classrooms (Hawkins et al., 1992). The project involved a full intervention group (grades 1–6), a late intervention group (grades 5 and 6 only) and a control group (Hawkins et al. 2001). The experimental interventions consisted of classroom instruction and management, parent intervention and child skill development (Catalano et al., 2004; Hawkins et al., 1992; Hawkins et al., 2001). In each year through the elementary grades, parents and teachers of the children in the intervention classrooms learned how to actively engage children in learning, strengthen bonding to family and school, and encourage children's positive behaviours (Hawkins et al., 2001).

The SSDP is an example of how the SDM can be applied as a general intervention framework. School bonding was targeted by involving the children at risk, their parents and the school. Each of the stakeholders had an active role to fulfil and received training around how to do it. The SDM is not a prescriptive guide on how to do prevention; rather, it explicates the domains that need to be targeted. The SDM constructs were then incorporated into SSDP surveys to assess the effect of the intervention longitudinally. The participants were followed over time and completed a range of surveys. From the quantitative data collected, the researchers examined the impact of the intervention by comparing and contrasting the experimental groups.

The SSDP's findings show the importance of strong school bonding in fostering positive outcomes during adolescence (Catalano et al., 2004; Hawkins et al., 2001). School bonding, measured from the age of 10 to 18, was significantly and negatively associated with substance use, delinquency, gang membership, violence and academic problems (Catalano et al., 2004, p. 255). The SSDP's findings also show that the intervention project, built around the SDM's concepts, helps prevent risk behaviours over time. By the age of 21, experimental group participants reported engaging in more safe sex practices in comparison to the control group participants, and the female experimental participants had lower pregnancy rates than their control group counterparts (Lonczak, Abbott, Hawkins, Kosterman, & Catalano, 2002). From the results, Catalano and colleagues (2004) concluded that a theory-based school engagement program that promotes academic success, social competence, and bonding to school during the early years can enhance positive development in early adulthood.

The SDG also applied the SDM concepts to other large-scale prevention trials. The Community Youth Development Study is an example of how the SDM can be used as a guide to different types

of interventions (Hawkins, Oesterle, Brown, Abbott, & Catalano, 2014; Hawkins et al., 2009). In this project, interventions were delivered through Communities That Care Coalitions (CTCCs) or working groups focused on bringing the community together to develop local solutions to target prevalent childhood risk factors (Hawkins et al., 2014). The interventions included community-based early prevention programs for large groups of children (Hawkins et al. 2009, 2014). The project did not focus so much on school bonding per se, but on the premise that risk factors, if not addressed, can develop to multiple behavioural problems in adolescence (Hawkins et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2009). A panel of 4407 fifth graders participated in the project, and then were surveyed through 12th grade. Within four years of implementing the project, the experimental communities experienced a significant reduction in youth delinquency in comparison to the control group (Hawkins et al., 2009). Another four years later, young people in the experimental communities were more likely to abstain from substance use, violence, and other delinquent behaviours than their control counterparts (Hawkins et al., 2014).

The SDG projects exemplify how the SDM can be applied in a flexible way to intervention research. However, the SDG research predominantly focuses on the intervention's outcomes. I note that truancy was not incorporated into the projects' designs nor the measures. The interventions also were focused on early prevention programs for children attending primary schools (Hawkins et al. 2009, 2014).

A gap exists where, although truancy is a precursor to delinquent behaviours, the study of truancy reduction is not integrated with the prevention scholarship. In research, truancy tends to be overlooked in favour of other delinquent behaviours (Akers & Lee, 1996; Haynie & Kreager, 2013). In recognition of this trend, Henry and Huizinga (2007) strongly assert that more research on truancy is needed in the youth delinquency prevention scholarship because it is a behaviour that leads to a range of negative outcomes.

On a positive note, there is a plethora of truancy research. For example, Maynard and colleagues (2013) identified 8,771 truancy articles during the early stage of conducting a meta-analysis. They observe that much truancy research focuses on the risk factors at the individual, family, and school levels. Consequently, research depicts truancy as a complex social problem influenced by multiple and interacting factors (Kearney, 2008a, 2008b; Maynard et al., 2013; Reid, 2008). Researchers commonly comment that integrating existing truancy studies to inform prevention and intervention efforts is challenging (Blackmon, 2014; James, 2012; Maynard et al., 2013; Sutphen et al., 2010). For instance, James (2012) points out that the research is multidisciplinary and the documented

interventions are practice rather than theory oriented. In reviewing truancy interventions literature, I also have noted that pre- and post-test analysis in school attendance rates is the dominant focus of research (Maynard et al., 2013; Maynard, Tyson-McCrea, Pigott, & Kelly, 2011; Sutphen et al., 2010). The intervention studies, however, do not articulate a theory of change and replicating intervention studies in different jurisdictions is highly challenging because truancy is regulated by local laws that differ across geographical locations (Blackmon, 2014; Maynard et al., 2013).

3.3 Truancy Interventions

In this section, I review influential truancy reduction studies to assess the current knowledge of how interventions facilitate change. I examine how school, family, peers and individual youth are positioned in the intervention research. As I identified in Chapter 2, school, family and peers influence youth behaviours. Here, I examine how this proposition applies to how truancy intervention targets the different stakeholders and how this is reflected in the research studies. From the outset, however, the practical approach of truancy interventions limits the extent to which social influences are considered in the literature. The focus is on the different program deliveries. Given that truancy is a status offence and ASEP is a third party policing intervention, I also examine the use of law enforcement and restorative approach interventions in addressing truancy.

3.3.1 School

In the intervention studies, schools are the main sites for delivering truancy reduction interventions (Arthur et al., 2006). This is unsurprising considering that schools are the main institutions for managing school attendance, and alongside parents, schools are responsible for promoting the prosocial development of their students (Arthur et al., 2006). The truancy interventions are either administered by school staff (such as the welfare officer) or have teachers and other school figures as participants (Maynard et al., 2013; Sutphen et al., 2010). Again, this is a highly expected trend because school staff have a thorough knowledge of the students' school engagement needs. So, the truancy intervention studies are designed around the concept of school bond as they seek to involve school staff to help the student reconnect with school.

The *Check and Connect* model is an example of an influential truancy reduction intervention (Lehr et al., 2004). The model started as a quasi-experimental pilot at the University of Minnesota and became a standardised program delivered across schools in the United States (Dembo & Gullledge, 2009a). The pilot participants were 147 students aged 5 to 12 with histories of frequent truancy and other behavioural problems, low parental support, and low academic achievement (Lehr et al., 2004). In other words, the participants had weak social bonds with both school and parents. The

program sought to improve both school engagement and family relationships, as well as build ties between school and families. The program required close parental engagement alongside enhanced student participation in school activities (Lehr et al., 2004). Findings showed that students in the experimental groups were significantly less likely to drop out of school and significantly improved their school attendance compared to students in the control groups (Dembo & Gulledge, 2009a; Lehr et al., 2004). The results were attributed to the formation of closer bonds between the young person, parents and school (Dembo & Gulledge, 2009b). However, changes to the social bonds were not measured in the study.

Intervention research suggests that truants can benefit from truancy reduction initiatives, yet systematic reviews conclude that no program stands out as most effective (Maynard et al., 2013; Sutphen et al., 2010). A range of interventions have been assessed: warning letters (McCluskey, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004), individual behavioural contracts (Brooks, 2001), counselling (Ford & Sutphen, 1996), and case management (Fantuzzo, Grim, & Hazan, 2005), as well as behavioural support and mentoring (DeSocio et al., 2007). These interventions vary in complexity from simple to multi-modal (Maynard et al., 2013). In their systematic review, Maynard et al. (2013) suggested that the more complex interventions, which also tend to be longer in duration, target several risk factors, increasing the likelihood of successful school re-engagement. However, no prior research has examined this proposition. Also, no truancy research has examined the long-term effects of short-term interventions, so little is known about whether they present an efficient alternative to the more complex interventions (Maynard et al., 2013).

Truancy intervention research tends to focus on individual students and changing their problematic behaviours, to the exclusion of institutional school factors. Yet, studies about causes and correlates of truancy research suggest a relationship between institutional school factors and school absenteeism (Reid, 2008; Teasley, 2004). Schools with negative school cultures (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014), schools with punitive policies (Gentle-Genitty, 2008) and schools that inconsistently respond to absenteeism are associated with higher levels of truancy (Dodge, Dishion, et al., 2006). Self-reports from students also indicate that social relations with school staff and peers, or strong school attachment, encourage school attendance (Hancock et al., 2015). Kearney and Graczyk (2014) argue that ideally, truancy reduction should integrate individual-level interventions with whole-of-school prevention initiatives focused on promoting positive school cultures and students' sense of belonging. This argument reflects the authors' view that truancy is an individual level problem tied to structural factors.

As discussed in chapter 2, in the SDM, school bonding has a protective role. The framework, however, acknowledges that weak school bonding can arise in schools that experience structural challenges (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Yet, programs developed on the premise of the SDM, such as the SSDP, have applied the model to reduce such challenges. The SSDP was conducted in schools in highly disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and the program's initiatives had school staff, students and parents participating in strengthening school bonds (Catalano et al., 2004). In other words, interventions applying the SDM focus not so much on why problems exist but rather on strengthening school engagement by bringing together different stakeholders to create change.

3.3.2 Parents

Truancy intervention research is consistent with the SDM's proposition that parents help foster bonding to school. Most truancy interventions are based on parental participation (Maynard et al., 2013; Sutphen et al., 2010). Parents are considered to be moderators of their children's behaviour (Dodge, Dishion, et al., 2006; Gerrard et al., 2003), and school reinforces parental care (Gerrard et al., 2003), so school and parents need to work together to help youth resolve school problems. In their systematic review of truancy interventions, Ford and Sutphen (1996) pointed out that the interventions have two parallel goals: school re-engagement and targeting family issues that precipitate truancy.

One focus of truancy interventions is on increasing parents' involvement in their child's school engagement. As discussed in chapter 2, while parental attachment is a feature of the SDM related to school commitment (Hawkins & Weis, 1985), other research shows that parental involvement is also critical because it can control child behaviours directly (Hoeve et al., 2009; Kearney, 2008b). Reviewing the literature, I note that there is no uniform approach for enhancing parental involvement. The documented studies applied different practical strategies, aligned with the scope of the interventions, to increase parental involvement. The common trend is that by participating in the interventions, parents will identify how truancy is a problem and be provided with strategies and support to work through the challenges (Maynard et al., 2013). Skills training is also common (Kearney & Beasley, 1994). At the training, parents are taught to give clear commands to their children on school-related issues and implement daily school routines (Kearney, 2003). In other interventions, parents are taught to use incentives to reward their children's positive behaviour (Sutphen et al., 2010). Research provides some support that such training helps reduce truancy (Kearney, 2003; Sutphen et al., 2010).

Research suggests, however, that the age of the young person can also influence how receptive the youth is towards parental guidance (Gerrard et al., 2003; Warr, 1993b). Parental involvement in addressing truancy appears highly beneficial for middle school students but less so for the older cohort (Gerrard et al., 2003). Truancy among younger students is related to family issues, whereas truancy among the older age group is linked to a wider range of factors (Gerrard et al., 2003). Examination of similarities and differences in how parents can support their children towards school re-engagement across the different age groups is one gap in research.

While parental involvement is required in most truancy interventions, there is limited evaluation research on how interventions enable parents to facilitate positive change (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Some universal parenting program research suggests, however, that families can experience difficulties complying with interventions' requirements (see Dishion & Andrews, 1995; Sanders, Markie-Dadds, Tully, & Bor, 2000). Sanders et al. (2000) observe that this can be particularly the case when families experience complex problems. The implication is that interventions should be attuned to family circumstances so that families are supported in making changes that are realistic for them (Huey & Henggeler, 2001). So, family dynamics appear to drive the young person's behaviour, but how the family dynamics change through truancy intervention processes is not well understood. In the next section, I examine how peer issues are targeted in intervention studies.

3.3.3 Peers

As discussed in Chapter 2, it is well established that peers influence youth behaviours. Intervention studies do not typically target peer relations or focus on how interventions can change them (see Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Ford & Sutphen, 1996; Sutphen et al., 2010). Youth are recruited to truancy research projects due to their truanting behaviours rather than the reasons for school absenteeism. To date no research has reported truancy interventions that specifically target peer issues. I, therefore, review delinquency intervention research about peer effects to assess the knowledge about the peers-interventions interface.

Delinquency prevention research shows that targeting peer relations through interventions can be tricky. Dishion and colleagues (Dishion & Andrews, 1995; Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999) developed the Adolescent Transitions Program, which is a 12-week group program focused on the enhancement of prosocial goals and self-regulation. Youth at-risk and their families (n = 119) were randomly assigned to one of four conditions: parent only, youth only, both parent and youth, or control. Dishion et al. (1999) found that participation in the youth group program led to peer contagion, where peers would informally reinforce their antisocial values among each other. In turn,

peer contagion overrode the prosocial messages of the intervention and increased the risk of engaging in delinquency.(Dishion et al., 1999; Dodge, Dishion, et al., 2006; Gifford-Smith, Dodge, Dishion, & McCord, 2005). Three months after random assignment, participants in the youth intervention group had increased their tobacco use (Dishion et al., 1999). This trend was still evident one year later (Dishion et al., 1999). In the one year follow-up, teachers reported higher levels of externalising behaviour for youth participating in the intervention group than for the control participants (Dishion et al., 1999). Random assignment to the youth intervention group was associated with long-term increases in tobacco use regardless of whether or not the parents participated in the parental program (Dishion & Andrews, 1995). These findings are congruent with the theoretical propositions discussed in the previous chapter that delinquent peer associations are a competing source of influence with that of responsible adults.

On a positive note, Vitaro and Tremblay's (1994) research shows that interventions for delinquent children can have a positive impact on peer relations. The participants in that study were aggressive boys between the age of 8 and 9. There were 46 boys in the experimental group and 58 in the control group. The experimental group participated in an intervention comprising of social skills and problem-solving training. The experimental group's parents also attended parent training. Three years after the intervention, experimental participants associated with less disruptive friends than did the control counterparts (Vitaro & Tremblay, 1994). The authors attributed the improvement in the experimental participants' behaviours to their modelling prosocial friends' behaviours and receiving positive reinforcement for these prosocial behaviours. (Vitaro & Tremblay, 1994).

In an innovative recent study, Rulison and colleagues (2015) also found that peers can be indirectly impacted by their friends' participation in interventions. They used panel data from 5,449 youth participating in the PROMoting School-community-university Partnerships to Enhance Resilience community intervention trial (2001–2006). Some of the youth were part of the experimental group who, with their parents, took part in a 7-week long Strengthening Families Program, which focused on prevention of substance use. Rulison and colleagues (2015) found that three years post-intervention, non-participants who had no friends in the experimental group were more likely to get drunk and smoke cigarettes than non-participants with three or more friends in the experimental group. They attributed the differences between the two groups to the diffusion effects of the intervention, which spread from the individual to the peer group. Rulison and colleagues. (2015) found that after the intervention, the experimental parents increased their monitoring of their children. Consequently, the young participants spent less time in unstructured socialising with friends. This study shows that individual-level interventions can alter peer relations by imposing

limits on unstructured socialising. Rulison and colleagues (2015) recommended that further research should explore how individual-level interventions can create change in the peer group.

So far, I have discussed the role of school, parents and peers in truancy interventions and identified significant gaps in how truancy interventions target these social domains to foster school re-engagement. Congruent with the chapter 2 literature review, the research that I reviewed so far shows that school, parents and peers influence youth behaviours. However, little is known about how interventions change the relationship between individual behaviour and these social bonds. In the next section, I examine the role of the individual.

3.3.4. Individual

As I have already pointed out, truancy intervention research mainly assesses whether the truants have increased their attendance rates after participation in the respective programs. In their meta-analysis, Maynard and colleagues (2013) found that the 28 truancy intervention studies they examined showed significant but moderate effect on attendance rates. On average, experimental participants would increase their school attendance by 4.69 days in comparison to the control group participants (Maynard et al. 2013). This modest difference begs the question of what individual-level factors contributed to the success of the interventions. The truancy intervention research has not examined this issue.

In their Transtheoretical Model of Stages of Change, Prochaska and DiClemente (1986, 1992) propose that an individual's motivation can account for why interventions are successful for some people but not others. The main premise of the model is that behavioural change is a stage-like process and individuals are at different motivational stages to make a change. Prochaska and DiClemente (1986, 1992) posit that behavioural change involves a progression through six stages: (1) *precontemplation* (no wish to change/no recognition of a problem), (2) *contemplation* (intention to change), (3) *preparation* (intention to take immediate action), (4) *action* (engagement in making modifications), (5) *maintenance* (relapse prevention), and (6) *termination* (completion of change process) (Day, Bryan, Davey, & Casey, 2006). Prochaska and DiClemente's model is based on an analysis of over 150 different psychotherapies and was originally developed to examine smoking cessation among adults in a voluntary treatment. Day and colleagues (2006) describe the model as 'perhaps the most influential model of behaviour change' (p. 476).

There is limited research that applies the Stages of Change Model to truancy reduction. In a small experiment in Romania, Enea and Dafinoiu (2009) tested whether school attendance would increase

for truants who participated in an intervention informed by the Stages of Change Model. The experimental participants were 19 youth between the ages of 16 and 17 who received eight sessions of weekly counselling and information provision. Enea and Dafinoiu (2009) reported a 61 percent decrease in truancy rates towards the end of the program for the experimental group, which was a significant difference in comparison to the control group where no changes in truancy rates were noted.

Research on the interaction between youths' motivation to change and the impact of interventions is likewise limited. Fitzpatrick and Irannejad's (2008) study is an exception. The study, however, in examining the relationship between youths' readiness to change and the quality of their working alliance with the counsellor, focused on generic school-based counselling. Working alliance refers to a partnership between the young person and the counsellor based on mutual trust and agreement about the shared goals and tasks of the intervention (Fitzpatrick & Irannejad, 2008). Fitzpatrick and Irannejad (2008) followed 51 students between the ages of 14 and 18. The authors found differences between how motivated and resistant youth engaged with the counsellor. Young people who were motivated to change were more likely to develop positive alliances with their counsellors and were more in agreement with their counsellors on the goals and tasks of counselling than youth who were resistant to change (Fitzpatrick & Irannejad, 2008). Little is known, however, about how truants' motivation impacts on their engagement with truancy reduction interventions.

Atkinson and Woods (2003) have observed that in responding to truancy, the impetus for behavioural change often comes from a third party: school, home or another external party, rather than the young person. The authors argued that the intervention's focus should be on activating social control rather than the youth's motivation, because the third parties drive change (Atkinson & Woods, 2003). Bond and colleagues (2013) also have suggested that when dealing with resistant youth in an intervention setting, change is a group process involving different stakeholders. They reviewed how solution-focused brief interventions for children and families can help with overcoming challenging behaviours other than truancy to draw this conclusion. Bond et al. (2013) found that utilising school and community resources can promote change. The research, however, did not investigate how the student's compliance was elicited in the process. Nonetheless, the implication is that well-designed school re-engagement interventions with multiple participants can drive behavioural change despite the young person's resistance (Bond et al., 2013).

Research focused on the voluntary nature of addressing problematic behaviours emphasises the role of the individual's motivation in making prosocial change through the use of interventions. In

contrast, research focused on dealing with the individual's resistance emphasises the role of other stakeholders in driving the change process. In chapter 1, I argued that truancy is a form of resistance, and so far I have identified that the truancy interventions that focus on the individual initiating change are only moderately effective in responding to it. In the last part of this chapter, I review traditional law enforcement strategies as well as restorative approaches to examine how they respond to truancy.

3.3.5 Law enforcement

Most of the law enforcement truancy intervention literature is US based (Maynard et al., 2013). These interventions tend to be a mix of social support and law enforcement delivered through partnerships between schools, law enforcement agencies and other community agencies (Dembo & Gullledge, 2009b; Strand & Lovrich, 2014). Fantuzzo and colleagues (2005) have noted that the US truancy interventions literature reflects an evolution from a one-dimensional correctional model to a hybrid of law enforcement and community-based interventions. This shift is due to truancy being recognised as a complex social issue rather than simply a criminal justice matter (Fantuzzo et al., 2005; Lindstadt, 2005; Petitclerc, Gatti, Vitaro, & Tremblay, 2013).

The Project START (Stop Truancy and Recommend Treatment) is an example of a hybrid community-based intervention (Fantuzzo et al., 2005). The study followed a quasi-experimental design, with 567 truants drawn from three categories of intervention: no court referral, traditional court referral, and court referral with community-based services (Fantuzzo et al., 2005). The three groups were compared on truancy rates at three intervals post-intervention: 30 days, 60 days and one year. After 30 days, participants in the traditional court referral and court referral with community-based services showed a reduction in truancy rates (Fantuzzo et al., 2005). After 60 days post intervention, the community-based court intervention group showed most rates in truancy reduction (Fantuzzo et al., 2005). After one year, truancy rates increased for the three groups (Fantuzzo et al., 2005). Truancy rates rose at sharper rates for the two comparison groups than for the group with court referral and community-based services (Fantuzzo et al., 2005). The study suggests that it was the community-based services that contributed most to truancy prevention. The shortcoming was again that the only measures examined were changes in school attendance rates.

Other research also suggests that the use of law enforcement in responding to truancy needs to be treated with caution. Bazemore and colleagues (2004) compared 350 formally processed (charged and sentenced) truants to a control group of 200 truants who were questioned and released. After 30 days, the formally processed group showed significantly decreased truancy rates in comparison to

the control group (Bazemore et al., 2004). Bazemore and colleagues (2004) suggest that participants in the former group were ‘shocked into increased school attendance’ (p. 291) because the formal processing initially acted as a deterrence strategy. Truancy rates were also assessed through the end of the school year. Multiple linear regression models indicated significantly worse truancy rates for the formally processed group in comparison to the control group (Bazemore et al., 2004). Bazemore and colleagues (2004) assert that perhaps the processed group participants became accustomed to ‘the threatened punishment that it no longer generated fear’ (p. 292). So, this study again suggests that truancy as a form of resistance behaviour is not necessarily best responded to through traditional law enforcement means. The challenge with applying insights from law enforcement interventions from the US into Queensland is that truancy legislation and statutory responses differ across the locations (see Nitschke, Mazerolle, & Bennett, 2013; Sutphen et al., 2010; Zuel, 2011); the US literature can serve as a general guide only.

3.3.6 Restorative approach

In contrast to the traditional law enforcement model concerned with punishment, the restorative approach focuses on repairing harm and restoring interpersonal relations (Weitekamp & Kerner, 2012). The interventions seek to hold the youth accountable for their misconduct, which is seen as ‘a violation of individuals, relationships and communities’ (Bazemore, 2001, p. 1058). Braithwaite and Mugford (1994, p. 142) argue that restoration ideally follows ‘the sequence of disapproval-nondegradation-inclusion’ as opposed to ‘the sequence of disapproval-degradation-exclusion’ that is prevalent in the criminal justice interventions. The restorative approach is based on the premise that people are motivated to change and can do so with support (Bazemore, 2001, 2012). One of the primary aims of the restorative justice approach is to ‘give offenders an opportunity to tell their own story about how and why they committed the offence(s)’ (Hayes, McGee, & Cerruto, 2011, p. 135). Hayes and colleagues (2011) propose that this approach is a constructive means for the wrongdoers to take responsibility for their actions. The model aligns with the earlier discussed proposition that behavioural change is a social process involving an individual’s motivation and others’ support. The approach originates from the Maori cultures of New Zealand.

Restorative interventions are commonly used to respond to school misconduct in the US but not in Australia (Schiff, 2013). They are often used as an alternative to the more punitive and exclusionary approaches such as suspensions and expulsions, to promote engagement between the young person and the necessary structures of support (Stutzman Amstutz & Mullet, 2005). Schiff (2013) identified that restorative interventions are premised on some core principles, which include (1) focusing on relationships first and rules second, (2) giving voice to the person harmed and the

person who caused the harm, (3) collaborative problem solving, (4) enhancing personal responsibility, (5) empowerment; and (6) development of action plans for reparation. Examples of the interventions include family group conferences, restorative mediation, restorative meetings, classroom circles and peer mediation (Schiff, 2013). Some evaluations showed that these interventions were related to better teacher–student interactions, increased satisfaction with disciplinary school outcomes, and improved academic achievement, as well as decreased suspensions, expulsions and youth justice system entry (Schiff, 2013).

The use of the restorative approach to reduce truancy has received limited attention (Gunderson, 2000; Strand & Lovrich, 2014). Ohio State’s Truancy Prevention through Mediation Program is an example of the more prominent state-wide exception (Kimberly, 2007). The program targeted students who had at least ten school absences in one school year. During the 2000–2001 school year, 1,700 mediation sessions were held in 58 schools. Kimberly (2007) held focus groups with school representatives to evaluate the program’s effectiveness. The respondents commonly reported that students who participated in the program subsequently attended school more (Kimberley, 2007). The respondents also noted that by taking part in the program, the teaching staff had a better understanding of the students’ family circumstances and felt less frustrated with the students (Kimberley, 2007). However, the long-term effects of the project are unknown as the only evaluation data that was collected from the focus groups by a consultant (Malmberg-Heimonen & Johansen, 2014).

The participants of the restorative school interventions are commonly the affected students, parents and school representatives. Schiff (2013) argues that inclusion of law enforcement agencies into the proceedings could foster school–law enforcement partnerships and enhance participants’ compliance. In other words, the family group conferences can be a platform for not only providing support, but also exerting control (Frost et al., 2014a). ASEP, as an example of a third party policing (TPP) intervention involving the police and schools was designed to elicit both (Mazerolle, Bennett et al. 2017). Mazerolle and Ransley (2006) explain that TPP interventions require police to harness the legal powers possessed by third parties to create a response to the presenting problem that is otherwise unavailable to police. In the context of ASEP, Mazerolle, Bennett and colleagues (2017) theorise that police-school partnerships can co-produce truancy reduction by increasing parental and youth knowledge of truancy laws and thus foster youths’ willingness to attend school. ASEP, as a family group conference, is also built around the restorative processes and the literature has not provided conclusive responses on how the different intervention processes interact with participant-level factors to reduce truancy.

The restorative approach literature assumes that the interventions' processes drive the individual towards making a behavioural change (Bazemore, 2001; Braithwaite, 2001). In an effort to explore how conference dynamics and offenders' characteristics can predict future offending, Hayes and Daly (2003) conducted observations of the youth justice conferences in Adelaide, South Australia. They found that youth offenders who were observed to be remorseful and whose outcomes were reached by consensus were less likely to reoffend (Hayes & Daly, 2003). Hayes and Daly's (2003) study suggests that by examining the dynamics and processes of conferences, we can learn how conferences influence offending.

In her research, Rossner (2008) strongly asserts that studying conference processes is as important as studying its outcomes. Rossner (2008) demonstrates that conferences are a form of interaction ritual and their processes serve both restorative and deterrent functions. Conference dynamics can generate positive emotions and group solidarity. At a five-year follow-up, Rossner (2008) found that high solidarity conferences resulted in significantly fewer arrests than less successful conferences. Rossner's (2008) research focused on dynamics rather than the content. I argue, however, that focusing on the content is equally important to understand how different theoretical processes informing the conference can contribute to truancy reduction.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I reviewed prevention and truancy intervention research. The key finding is that early prevention initiatives can promote positive youth development. The interventions have the potential to activate childhood protective factors and decrease the severity of risk factors. Prevention research applying the SDM concepts that was conducted by the SDG has produced some sophisticated longitudinal projects where the focus is on measuring outcomes. However, the research did not examine whether the interventions were also able to reduce truancy.

I have identified that the study of truancy reduction is not particularly well integrated with the prevention scholarship. The merit of truancy intervention research has been much more modest and focused on pre and post changes in rates of attendance. Consequently, there are significant research gaps in understanding how truancy interventions can foster school engagement. Congruent with the SDM, truancy research acknowledges that school and family are important in re-engaging truants back to school but the literature does not consider how these institutions can facilitate change in the intervention context. Surprisingly, peers are also absent from truancy intervention research. This is perhaps because peer group interventions can unintentionally lead to what Dishion and colleagues (1999) call the 'contingency effect', where the young participants informally learn antisocial

behaviours from each other. However, emerging research examining intervention diffusion effects among peer groups suggests the usefulness of studying how interventions foster shifts in interpersonal social relations (Rulison et al., 2015).

Truancy interventions rely on the participation of multiple stakeholders. It has been suggested that it is the stakeholders, not the young person, that drive the process of school re-engagement (Atkinson & Woods, 2003). Yet, there is a paucity of research about how they can successfully work with the young person to reduce truancy. The research examining the changes in attendance rates also shows that the interventions have a limited and modest impact on attendance rates (Maynard et al., 2013). Truancy as a status offence, if ongoing, carries the risk of bringing the young person and the family within criminal justice system. The law enforcement interventions targeting truancy trialled in the U.S. show that the official sanctions do not effectively address the truancy problem. I have identified that interventions based on a restorative approach could be a promising alternative given that the focus is on enhancing a person's motivation through group processes and support. In assessing current knowledge about the use of the restorative approach, it had a limited use in responding to truancy. Based on its other applications to school misconduct, Schiff (2013) advocates for the incorporation of law enforcement to aid compliance. The ASEP project, a TPP family group conference, fits into that the gap. Scholars recommend examining the processes of how family group conference can foster change, rather than looking at outcomes per se (Hayes & Daly, 2003; Rossner, 2008).

My dissertation seeks to examine how the ASEP process can activate the school bonds of truants in responding to truancy. I examine how the ASEP process engages with the young person, parents, and schools to foster school re-engagement and how the process responds to potential peer issues identified along the way. In the next chapter, I describe the methods that I applied in exploring my research aims.

Chapter Four

Methodology

4.1 Introduction

My dissertation explores how ASEP activated the school bonds of truanting youth and the role of the individual youth, family, peers and school in the process. Prior research shows that social relations at school can either foster or obstruct school engagement. There is a paucity of research on how truancy reduction interventions can facilitate change across social relations. My research is exploratory as I examine the mechanisms of change, focusing on school engagement and social relations in the context of the ASEP intervention. Giordano and colleagues (2002) assert that a qualitative approach enables the examination of social processes that would be difficult to elucidate using quantitative means.

This chapter sets the research scene. I firstly provide an overview of the broader ASEP Trial. I describe the participant recruitment process and provide a detailed description of the ASEP intervention. I then introduce my research project. I outline my qualitative research design with its ontological and epistemological paradigms. I then introduce my research questions and the data sets. I discuss the thematic analysis approach that I adopt to analyse the empirical data. In the final part, I discuss consent and privacy considerations related to ASEP and this dissertation.

4.2 The Ability School Engagement Program Trial

4.2.1 Overview

The ASEP Trial is a randomised field experiment involving 102 young people with histories of problematic school absenteeism and their families (Mazerolle et al., 2012). The trial was developed in a region of Brisbane due to shared concerns among police and schools about high levels of truancy and inconsistent responses to target the problem (Mazerolle et al. 2017). The experimental group participated in ASEP, which aims to reintegrate the young participants into a positive learning environment and reduce delinquency (Mazerolle et al., 2012). The experimental intervention comprised of a family group conference, action plans tailored to individuals' needs, post-conference monitoring and support, and an exit meeting.

The ASEP Trial is a collaborative, multiagency project. The project was funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) Laureate Fellowship awarded to Professor Lorraine Mazerolle in 2010¹

¹ ARC Grant FL100100014

and led by a University of Queensland (UQ) research team. The UQ research team designed the experiment and collected the evaluation data (Mazerolle et al., 2012). The project officially commenced in October 2011 after successful completion of its pilot (Mazerolle, 2014). The project was delivered through partnerships with the Queensland Police Service (QPS) and the Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) (Mazerolle, 2014). The QPS and DETE recruited the participants and participated in the delivery of ASEP (Mazerolle et al., 2012).

4.2.2 Participants

Participant Selection

There were 102 cases of young people and their parents or legal guardians that participated in the project (Mazerolle et al., 2012). Participant recruitment took place from October 2011 to May 2013. It was a two-stage selection process. DETE and QPS staff identified potential participants through the Education Queensland database (see Mazerolle et al., 2012, pp. 7–8). Eligible young participants were required to meet the following criteria:

- be enrolled in one of the 11 participating schools
- have a school attendance rate below 85 % over the previous three consecutive school terms
- be between 10 and 16 years old
- have at least one parent or legal guardian
- have no known legitimate explanation for absences (e.g. an ongoing medical issue)
- not be a participant in the Pathways to Prevention Project (Homel et al., 2006)²

The young person and the parent (from here on, I use the term ‘parent’ to refer to either the biological parent or the legal guardian) were referred to the project officer once they expressed provisional consent to participating in the project (Mazerolle et al., 2012). In the second part of the recruitment process, the project officer and a uniformed QPS officer met with the families to provide further information about the project and the expected commitment. At that meeting, the families’ eligibility was further assessed (see Mazerolle et al., 2012, p. 8). The participating families were required to have:

- At least two presenting issues (e.g. bullying, problems in the family).

² Pathways to Prevention was a separate project administered through Griffith University that aimed at creating pathways to wellbeing for young people transitioning through developmental milestones .

- At least one issue involving the third party (e.g. the parent) and a legal lever (i.e. truancy)
- At least two people affected by the presenting issues agreed to take part
- No siblings already participating in either the project or its pilot

Randomisation and Demographics of the Young Participants

The young people and their parents who met the full eligibility criteria and who consented to participate in the trial were randomly assigned to either the control or experimental group.

Randomisation involved dividing the participants into two equal groups of 51 cases. Table 1 shows the demographics of the young participants in the control and experimental group at baseline. The young participants' mean age was 12.99 years. There were 54 males and 48 females, and 43 participants attended primary school and 59 participants attended secondary college. Some cultural data were also collected: 85.3% of participants were born in Australia, and English was their first language, and 13 participants were Indigenous. There was a high level of equivalence between the experimental and control groups in the age range, average age, female to male ratio, school level, country of birth and Indigenous status (Mazerolle, 2014).

Table 1: The Demographics of ASEP Youth at Baseline

	Control group	Experimental group	Full sample
Age range	10–16	10–16	10–16
Average Age	13.04 years (<i>SD</i> = 2.08)	12.94 years (<i>SD</i> = 2.11)	12.99 years (<i>SD</i> = 2.08)
Gender	28 male 23 female	26 male 25 female	54 male 48 female
School Level	23 Primary 28 Secondary	20 Primary 31 Secondary	43 Primary 59 Secondary
Indigenous	7 Indigenous	6 Indigenous	13 Indigenous
Country of Birth	84.3% Australia	86.3% Australia	85.3% Australia
Language Spoken at Home	80.4% English	90.2% English	85.3% English ³

(Source: Mazerolle 2014, p. 359)

The control participants received a resource package containing a list of community resources, access to which could be self-initiated (Mazerolle et al., 2012). The control group's truancy was responded to with the business-as-usual approach. This approach typically involved the school

³ Other languages = Samoan (n=3), Tongan (n=3), Maori (n=1), Vietnamese (n=1), Bandjalang (n=1), Sudanese (n=1), Persian/Arabic (n=2), Croatian (n=1), Dutch (n=1)

principal making ad-hoc decisions to initiate formal meetings with the truant's parent, issue warning letters via email, and in rare cases send letters of the impending prosecution to the parents of the truanting student (Mazerolle, Bennett et al., 2017, p.5). The control group is part of the larger ASEP trial. I do not use data for the control group in my thesis. Instead I focus on the experimental group that participated in the ASEP conference to qualitatively explore how the ASEP processes can foster school re-engagement. As there are no transcripts for the control group, I cannot explore their particular circumstances.

The ASEP Conference

The ASEP's key component was the family group conference (from now on, I use the term ASEP conference). The conference participants included the young people and the parents, as well as uniformed police, school and community agency representatives. A trained facilitator chaired the conference. The conferences were held up to six months after the families were randomised to the experimental condition. Each conference lasted approximately two hours (Mazerolle et al. 2012). The conferences were conducted from December 2011 to August 2013, prior to the commencement of my PhD candidature.

Each ASEP conference adhered to a standardised format and followed three stages. The first stage was the *problem identification stage* where the 'hidden injuries' (Slee, 1995, p. 76) or truancy-related reasons and problems were identified. The process began with an attempt to reach a shared understanding of why the young person did not attend school. The young person, the parent/legal guardian, the school and police representatives and other service providers sat in a circle and were prompted through the ASEP conference stages by a trained facilitator. The second stage was the *education stage*, in which the school, with the support of police, expressed concern about the young person's engagement in truancy. The TPP partnership, comprising of school and the police, was crucial in communicating the importance of daily school engagement (Mazerolle, Bennett, et al., 2017). In this part of the conference, the participants were informed how the school was mandated to apply legal levers to respond to truancy and how the legal levers are escalated to deal with ongoing truancy (Mazerolle et al., 2012). This is a significant stage of the ASEP conference because the communication of the legal consequences of truancy serves as an activation of the legal levers (Mazerolle, 2014). This activation is designed to act as a reinforcement encouraging school attendance as well as elicit willing compliance with the intervention's messages among the participants (Mazerolle, Bennett, et al., 2017). The third stage was the *solution stage*, where the conference participants explored solutions to identified problems. In this stage, action plans were formulated that stipulated school engagement oriented goals and projected outcomes.

The design of the ASEP conference was informed by the theories of restorative process and TPP (see Mazerolle, 2014). The restorative process is theorised to establish a shared concern among the conference participants about the problem behaviour and motivate the group to work together alongside the person who displays the behaviour towards change (Drewery, 2004; Mazerolle, Antrobus, et al., 2017; Wenzel, Okimoto, & Cameron, 2012). According to the theory of TPP, police mobilises a third party's legal powers, in this case, the school's, to increase deterrence of delinquency and raise awareness of legal responsibilities (Mazerolle, Antrobus, et al. 2017, Mazerolle & Ransley, 2006). Third party partners can underutilise their available legal levers in the absence of police involvement (Mazerolle, 2014). Yet, in responding to truancy, schools possess legal powers under Queensland's *Education (General Provisions) Act 2006* to promote school attendance that are not directly available to the police (Nitschke et al., 2013).

A six-month monitoring and support period that took place post-ASEP conference. During that time, young participants and their parents could gain support from the ASEP project officer and the QPS officer to implement their action plans. Exit meetings were held at the end of the monitoring period. The meetings provide closure to ASEP participation as they focused on reviewing the implementation of the action plans and recommendations of further community linkages for support if required (Mazerolle et al. 2012). The exit meetings were approximately one hour long. The participants included the youth, parent, school representative and the facilitator. The facilitator also gathered participants' feedback.

4.3 Current Research Project

4.3.1 Qualitative Research Design

My research seeks to understand how the ASEP conference affects young participants' respective elements of school bonds, namely school commitment, attachment and belief, to foster school engagement. I employ a qualitative research design to explore how ASEP can promote school engagement. Guba and Lincoln (1994) observe that social constructions of problems are dynamic and subject to change. Hence, investigating social constructions of truancy and school engagement can unveil insights about social processes responsible for creating shifts.

4.3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Haverkamp and Young (2007) have argued that qualitative research rigour lies in the consistency between the research objectives and the paradigmatic assumptions about the study of the social world informing the research. The paradigmatic assumptions refer to the ontological and epistemological positioning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ontology is concerned with the nature of

reality or *what is reality* (Gray, 2013, p. 19). Epistemology has a complementary function as it focuses on *what it means to know* or how we study that reality by providing a philosophical background for deciding what kinds of knowledge are legitimate and adequate (Gray, 2013, p. 19). Articulating my ontological and epistemological stance is the necessary starting point for clarifying my research design because it guides the type of data being gathered, from where, and how it is going to be interpreted (Gray, 2013).

I situate my research at the mid-point of the ontological relativism. At one end of the ontological spectrum is the notion that an external objective reality exists and can be measured; at the other end lies the view that reality only exists in the human mind (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ontology complements epistemology, and the two tend to merge (Morrow, 2005). The interconnectedness of the subjective and the objective reality is reflected in the epistemology of social constructionism which I adopt in my research. In social constructionism, people construct meanings from their social contexts and through social interactions (Creswell, 2013). My research focuses on the construction of meanings related to truancy and school engagement. In particular, I consider how the different ASEP stakeholders create shared meanings. Drewery (2004) has argued that conferencing mirrors social constructionist processes. Drewery (2004, p. 338) has observed that ‘the ways people speak, and the nature of the dialogue, can create different kinds of relationships, and different kinds of selves.’ The conference seeks to reposition the young person in relation to antisocial behaviour and the possible future self (Drewery, 2004).

4.3.3 My research project

In my thesis, I explore the theoretical link between the ASEP processes and the SDM’s construct of the school bond. The model has not been previously applied to a truancy reduction intervention in past empirical studies. Schwartz, Pantin, Coatsworth, and Szapocznik (2007) have observed that the SDM is based on the assumption of plasticity or the notion that developmental pathways can be redirected because people have the potential to make an adaptive change regardless of their developmental histories. The notion of plasticity is also compatible with the epistemology of social constructionism, where social interactions enable people to make new meanings of their circumstances. However, as I have identified, there is a paucity of research on how the intervention processes affect a young person’s perceptions about school engagement and how the processes then facilitate school re-engagement.

School commitment and ASEP

I begin my research by exploring how the ASEP conference targets young participants' school commitment to foster school re-engagement. I apply SDM's definition of school commitment: commitment to learning and taking school seriously to understand how it can be activated during the ASEP conference. I focus on the ASEP conference dialogues. I examine the factors that are identified as impeding the young person's school engagement efforts and how the conference processes target these factors. I consider the perspectives of the different stakeholders including that of the young person and the parent. In particular, I explore how the young person responds to the ASEP processes that seek to change young person's school commitment. My first research question is:

Research Question 1: How does the ASEP conference affect school commitment to foster school re-engagement?

School attachment and ASEP

As the second element of the project, I explore how the ASEP conference affects attachment to school peers to encourage school re-engagement. School attachment refers to close interpersonal relations at school and a young person's sense of school belonging (Catalano et al., 2004; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). As I identified in Chapter 2, research produces mixed findings about whether it is peers or teachers that are more influential in promoting school engagement (Cappella & Hwang, 2015; Obsuth et al., 2016). Youth delinquency research also assumes that prosocial and antisocial peers are two distinct groups (Barry & Wentzel, 2006; Warr, 1993a). Similarly, the SDM posits that antisocial peer relations are associated with antisocial youth behaviours (Catalano et al., 2004; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Considering that much research is concerned with understanding the relationship between peers and delinquency, I am interested in exploring how the relationship is articulated and responded to in the context of the intervention. I examine how the peer issues are identified as contributing to truancy and how they are targeted. As noted in Chapter 3, peer issues are omitted in truancy intervention research. Considering that I examine the ASEP conference dialogues, my exploration seeks to close the research gap. My guiding research question is:

Research Question 2: How does the ASEP conference affect attachment to peers at school to foster school re-engagement?

School belief and ASEP

As the third feature of the project, I explore how the ASEP processes target participants' school belief. The belief sub-construct of the SDM's school bond is concerned with the individual's degree of acceptance and obedience to institutional rules and values (Erickson et al., 2000). I unpack the SDM's hypothesis that belief is a consequence of social bonding and a mediator between the effect of bonding and behavioural outcomes (Catalano et al., 2004). First, I examine how the ASEP conference dialogues seek to influence the young person's attitudes towards daily school attendance and how the young person responds to the intervention processes. Second, I also consider the young person's school re-engagement efforts and social relations with family, school and peers six months after the conference and two years after joining the project. The time intervals correspond with the ASEP data that were collected at these particular intervals. My guiding research question is:

Research Question 3: How does ASEP affect school belief to foster school re-engagement?

4.4 The Research Data

I use three data sets to explore my research questions: (1) ASEP conference transcripts (for chapters 5,6 and 7), (2) ASEP exit meeting transcripts (chapter 7), and (3) 2-year follow-up interviews with parents. In this section, I describe the data collection methods used. I also describe the quality assurance measures that were applied to the data. Golafshani (2003) argues that this is a critical step in assessing the trustworthiness of the qualitative research design.

4.4.1. ASEP Conferences

The ASEP transcripts are the main source of data in my dissertation. I use the transcripts to explore the three features of my project. There are 47 ASEP conference transcripts for the total of 51 experimental cases. One family dropped out of ASEP before their conference. Two other young people declined to participate in the conference, and one family withdrew their participation from the project before the conference. In addition, one participant had a modified conference procedure that was not able to be audio recorded. The transcripts are between 38 and 92 pages long.

I was given access to the ASEP transcripts for the purpose of this thesis. Scholars recommend that the credibility of using a qualitative dataset for secondary analysis be assessed around two criteria: (1) the quality of the primary data, and (2) the fit between secondary analysis and the primary data (Heaton, 2008; Long-Sutehall, Sque, & Addington-Hall, 2011; Thome, 1998). Assessing the quality involves checking practicalities including the accuracy in transcribing the data and the consistency in the topics discussed in the interviews (Heaton, 2008). Evaluating the data fit requires checking

that the data contains thick enough descriptions of meanings to answer secondary research questions (Heaton, 2008; Thorne, 1998). Heaton (2008, p. 142) has observed that ‘the extent of detail in a given data set determines whether new and valid information can result from the secondary analysis’.

I was fortunate to receive the ASEP transcripts with the knowledge that the quality assurance checks were carried out at all stages of the data collection and transcription. As noted earlier, all ASEP conferences followed a standardised format. At each conference, an independent assessor (a member of the ASEP team who did not participate in the proceedings) was present and completed a checklist of whether or not the proceeding followed the standardised processes. Each conference was audio recorded. Two research assistants were then engaged in the transcription process. One person transcribed the audio recording. The second person then reviewed the transcript, checking it for accuracy against the audio recording.

In assessing the data-research fit, I reviewed the content of four randomly selected ASEP transcripts in reference to my research questions and the epistemology. Morrow (2005) argues that in qualitative research, it is the quality of data rather than the number of participants that matter most. I noted that the four transcripts contained lengthy, purposeful dialogues of multiple ASEP participants centred on truancy, school re-engagement and social relations. As noted earlier, my research questions focus on exploring those themes in understanding how interventions can foster change. As per the general recommendations, my research questions for the secondary analysis are aligned with the aims of the primary research (Long-Suthehall et al., 2011). Using the ASEP transcripts is also compatible with the epistemology of social constructionism, which proposes that meaning is mediated through social processes. Seale (2011) argues that the secondary data analysis is not merely a re-use of primary data but involves a process of recontextualizing and reconstructing. The data re-use is an original process leading to new findings that are independent but complementary to the objectives of the original project.

In optimising the credibility of secondary analysis, Morrow (2005) recommends consulting with the researchers who collected the primary data. As ASEP lead investigators, my supervisors, Prof Lorraine Mazerolle, Dr Sarah Bennett and Dr Emma Antrobus, had a thorough knowledge of the project’s idiosyncrasies. They shared their expert knowledge and answered technical queries during our regular supervision meetings. Throughout my PhD candidature, I worked alongside peer researchers who undertook extensive fieldwork, which included attending the ASEP meetings and

contact with the participating families. They were able to comment on the complexity of the cases and ASEP conferences.

4.4.2. ASEP Exit Meetings

As the exit meetings focused on the evaluation of ASEP participation, they present complimentary data to the ASEP conference transcripts. For the purpose of examining the third feature of my project, I was given access to three ASEP exit meeting audio recordings. I received the data as audio recordings simply because the proceedings have not been transcribed yet. As I apply a case study analysis to examine the third element of the project, I was granted access to audio recordings for the cases on which I focus. I again conducted the data-research fit assessment that I described earlier in deciding to use the exit meeting data. I then transcribed the audio recordings.

4.4.3. ASEP Parent Interviews

ASEP parent interviews are my third source of data. I conducted 15 interviews between mid-2015 to mid-2016, or approximately two years after the participants were recruited into the project. The interviews were conducted to obtain data for multiple studies including my chapter 7 analysis. I interviewed seven parents from the control group and eight from the experimental group because I intend to compare and contrast the perspectives of parents in the two conditions outside the thesis.

I decided to interview parents for theoretical and practical reasons. In the SDM, parents are the social control agents of their children's behaviours (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Similarly, in ASEP, parents are regarded as 'the proximate targets' of the intervention (Nitschke et al., 2013). In particular, the communication of the legal levers during the ASEP conference is designed to activate parents' willing compliance, so that they ensure that their children go to school each day (Mazerolle, Bennett et al, 2017). Given the complexity of the interview topics and the wide range of the young participants' age and developmental stages, I decided against interviewing young people.

I designed the interviews to be semi-structured. While some structure ensures consistency in themes that are explored through interviews, the open-ended questions encourage participants to construct their own stories and elicit deeper level meanings (Morrow, 2005; Seidman, 2013). The semi-structured format also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge and elaborate on an idea or a response (Morrow, 2005). The semi-structured interview is a tool that facilitates the production of socially constructed accounts, which is compatible with the social constructionist epistemology (Brinkmann, 2014).

My interview schedule (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) comprises of theory-driven topics. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) assert that the interview questions should be grounded in the literature, yet differ from questions asked in prior research to elicit knowledge for closing theoretical gaps. In drafting the schedule, I reviewed constructs and survey questions used in past research to examine school, family and peer bonds. I also reviewed research evaluating truancy reduction programs. I identified questions that traditionally were investigated quantitatively, which I modified for the purpose of the interview and contextualised within the ASEP trial. I also constructed additional questions to aid the exploration of my research themes.

Participant Recruitment & Data collection

The ASEP parents were recruited into my research project through ASEP research assistants who were administering a two-year post-randomisation ASEP survey (a survey that is independent of my research). During face-to-face contact, parents were informed and invited to participate in my project. The parents who expressed interest were asked for verbal consent that I contact them. I contacted the potential participants at the earliest convenience to explain the research project, and if they agreed, I organised the interview.

At the interview, the participants were provided with a plain language statement about the project, including my contact details (see Appendix 3). The participants signed a consent form (see Appendix 4). The interview lasted between 40 minutes to one hour. At the end, participants received a \$40 gift voucher. I conducted the interviews at participants' homes. As per the UQ safety protocol, I provided my designated supervisor for the task with the details of each interview and the address attended. I also texted her on my arrival and departure from the interview. Prior to each interview, I also had a briefing session with a research assistant who had recent contact with the participants to check whether there were any additional issues I needed to be aware of during my home visit (e.g. domestic violence, sensitive topics). This briefing was aimed to promote sensitivity during the interview and act as another safety precaution.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed to increase the rigour and reliability of the data and to avoid the bias inherent in discussions transcribed in situ or via dialogue summary (Buckley, Chapman, & Sheehan, 2010). I tried to transcribe the interviews on the same day as the interview. I transcribed the interviews per verbatim and then checked the transcripts against the audio recordings to reduce the likelihood of error. Transcribing enabled me to check that I covered all topics as per the interview schedule. Braun and Clarke (2006) observe that transcribing own data

facilitates the first stage of data reading and interpretation. I also replaced the participants' names with their assigned pseudonyms.

4.5 Analytical Approach

Buckley and colleagues (2010) observe that qualitative analysis involves managing, summarising and finding meaning in large semi-structured quantities of data. In my dissertation, I applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach to identify, analyse and report patterns within data, as the approach is both flexible and structured. Given that my dissertation aims to link ASEP processes with the SDM's school bond construct, my analysis applies both the theory-driven deductive approach and data-driven inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). In exploring the three elements of the school bond, I start my analysis with a deductive approach by applying themes from the SDM. Then, as I immersed myself into the data, I merged my analysis with the inductive concepts that emerge from the data. I conducted my analysis at the latent or interpretive level rather than semantic or explicit to examine the underlying ideas and assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

On a practical note, I manually conducted the data. I describe the process in the next section. I chose to embark on this time intensive endeavour rather than use a software program to immerse myself into the ASEP data (Wood & Kroger, 2000). It was my conviction that through careful and rigorous analysis of the transcripts, I would gain a greater understanding of the intricacies of the ASEP intervention than what a computerised analysis would enable me to do. The manual analysis involved using Excel spreadsheets to describe and track codes and themes, and also using Microsoft Word to catalogue the associated narratives.

4.5.1 Thematic analysis of ASEP conference transcripts

Braun and Clarke (2006) propose that thematic analysis comprises of six phases: (1) familiarisation with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) theme search, (4) theme review, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. I followed these stages for the three sets of analysis that I conducted.

I started my analysis with a set of research questions focused on making a link between the SDM's school bond and the ASEP process. In chapter 2, I identified theoretical SDM concepts related to school, family and peer bonds, which I use as deductive codes. I also generated inductive codes by reading ASEP transcripts. Table 2 lists and defines the deductive and inductive codes that informed my analysis.

Table 2: Initial Deductive & Inductive Codes

Code name	Inductive/ deductive	Definition/notes
School commitment	deductive	Young person's investment in school, commitment to learning or 'taking school seriously', and participating in extracurricular activities (Jimerson et al., 2003, p. 9).
School belief	deductive	Young person's acceptance and obedience to school rules and values (Erickson et al., 2000).
Attachment	deductive	Affective relationships (Catalano et al., 2004, p. 252) or ties to significant others, usually peers or school figures (Erickson et al., 2000).
Peer behaviours	deductive	Young person's perceptions of his/her friends' engagement in delinquent behaviours. In quantitative research, the 'peer behaviours' construct is used to assess whether the person interacts with prosocial or delinquent peers (Arthur, Hawkins, Pollard, Catalano, & Baglioni, 2002; McGloin & Stickle, 2011).
Time spent with peers	deductive	A measure of the amount of time spent with peers. Adolescents report greater frequency in observing their friends' behaviour than their non-friends' behaviour (Barry & Wentzel, 2006).
Peer influence	deductive	This construct is typically assessed through network analysis. I adapt the concept to a qualitative approach as I am interested to find out whether it is peers that influence truancy or the youth that influences the peer group towards truancy.
Friendship group stability	deductive	Friendship group stability construct that is typically measured through peer nominations in network analysis (e.g. Cairns, Leung, Buchanan, & Cairns, 1995). Peer groups can be (1) <i>identical</i> – if all members remain the same over the year; (2) <i>stable</i> – if at least 50% of members remain together over a one-year period; (3) <i>fragmented</i> – if at least two members of the original group remain together; (4) <i>dissolved</i> – if no pair of members remained together. I adopt the construct to my qualitative enquiry.
Young person's behaviours	deductive	Young person's behaviours construct is typically used to assess the types of behaviours that a young person engages in. In surveys, there is a list of antisocial and prosocial behaviours. Respondents indicate how many times they had participated in the listed behaviours in the past twelve months (e.g. Haynie, 1999). Prior studies demonstrate that adolescents do report their behaviours including the antisocial ones and that these reports tend to be internally consistent (Haynie 1999). In the thematic analysis, I note the types of additional behaviours other than truancy that are raised during the ASEP conferences.
Action plans	inductive	The latter part of all ASEP conferences was dedicated to formulating action plans
Reasons for truancy	inductive	During all ASEP conferences truancy reasons were explored
Reasons for going to school	inductive	During all ASEP conferences reasons for going to school were explored

Relationship with parents	deductive and inductive	The level of parental attachment, supervision and monitoring affect young person's behaviours (Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Walters, 2015). I also analyse how parents and the young people articulate their relationship during the proceedings.
Engagement in the conference processes	inductive	The extent to which participants vocally participated in the intervention based on their input at the ASEP conference
Barriers to changing truancy	inductive	Reasons identified at the formal proceedings that could impinge on addressing the truancy behaviours

I coded each ASEP conference transcript. I copied and pasted text extracts into the word document created for data analysis under the relevant coding categories. I also made a note of the meaning of the coded content in the context of the broader ASEP discussions. Through this labour intensive process, I organised data into categories which I then used to complete step 3 of my thematic analysis or search for patterns and themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

At this point, my analysis shifted from the practical task of conducting code search to the more conceptual exercise of theme development. This phase was again labour intensive and involved sorting data from different codes into potential themes. I also looked for patterns of plots and subplots across the various ASEP narratives (Baker & Bishop, 2015). In this stage of analysis, I constructed new Excel spreadsheets to document the tracking of the patterns. When uncovering what I thought were emerging themes in the data, I went back to reviewing the scholarly literature to check what had been written on the subject matter.

The theme review of phase 4 was a two-fold process. Firstly, I examined the themes at the level of the coded data extracts. I read the collated extracts for each topic and considered if they formed a coherent pattern. Secondly, I reviewed the themes in relation to the entire data set. I considered the validity of the individual themes in relation to the dataset and if the themes reflected the meanings evident in the data set. At this point, I re-read the transcripts to check if the themes worked.

In phase 5, I defined and named the themes. Part of this phase included further defining and refining the themes to best represent the data. I considered each theme in relation to the others, which aided in the process of theme refinement. The process involved going back to reading transcripts and checking the meaning. I also corroborated the themes in reference to the literature. Once I was satisfied with the themes that I identified, I moved on to the final phase 6 – the write-up.

4.5.2 Case Study Approach

Hunter (2010) observes that the analysis stage of qualitative research presents particular challenges. Finding the most suitable method of data analysis and presentation of the findings takes time and effort (Hunter, 2010). Utilizing a case study approach to explore school belief was a decision that I made at an advanced stage of my thematic analysis. Describing the process is thus part of the methodology.

After over a year of deep immersion in the ASEP transcripts for chapter 5 and 6, I commenced thematic analysis of the parent interview data, which I originally envisaged was going to be my only dataset for chapter 7. In deciding to conduct interviews, I embraced Giordano and colleagues' (2002) argument that interviews are life history narratives that provide retrospectives on mechanisms through which individuals indicate that changes have been accomplished. I designed the interview schedule around the themes of school engagement, social relations and change and these themes drove my analysis. In practice, however, I found that participants could not necessarily unpack how they made changes. ASEP parents expressed that ASEP helped their children re-engage with school but were not able to articulate how the specific aspects of the intervention fostered change. Going back to the intervention data was then required for triangulation. Consequently, the depth and volume of data for the experimental participants greatly outweighed what I knew about the control group.

To reconcile the challenge, I decided to apply the case analysis method, focusing on selected ASEP experimental cases. According to Bromley (1991, p. 302), the case study method is appropriate for a 'systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest.' Typically, this method requires analysis of data originating from multiple sources, which can include interviews as well as archival documentation (Rowley, 2002; Yin, 2009; Zucker, 2009). By selecting particular interviews with experimental parents, and combining them with other ASEP data for these participants, such as the ASEP conference and exit meeting transcripts, I had rich data that would allow me to trace how the participants' school engagement changed from the time of the ASEP conference to the time of the interview and identify how the intervention contributed to the change.

I utilized the case analysis method to explore the ASEP's mechanisms that influenced participants' beliefs around school engagement. In exploring school belief, I integrated the data from the parental interviews with the data from the ASEP conferences and the exit meetings. The case study method is suitable to investigate research questions concerned with tracing operational links over time to

answer the how and why questions that may be otherwise could be investigated through quantitative enquiry or through qualitative data gathered at one point in time (Yin, 1994, 2009). Yin (1994) explains that a case study method offers a deeper and more detailed empirical inquiry that is especially useful when the boundaries between a phenomena and its context are not clearly evident. By integrating multiple sources of data in the case study method, the proximal causes of the behaviour and circumstances can be traced (Bromley, 1991).

I purposefully chose three cases to explore the relationship between the ASEP process and school re-engagement and to demonstrate how a standardised ASEP process generates different school re-engagement pathways. Patton (2002, p. 47) points out that through purposeful sampling, information-rich cases are selected ‘from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.’ The sample size is not of fundamental importance here (Ashby & Schoon, 2012). Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) assert that the advantage of using multiple case studies is that they enable within and between case analysis and thus provide a strong base for theory building. I examined the participants’ beliefs at three points during a 2-year period: (1) the ASEP conference, (2) the exit meetings, and (3) at a 2-year follow up interview.

Zucker (2009) points out that mapping the data from multiple sources is an important task. I conduct a thematic analysis of my case study data following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach as described in an earlier section. This analysis is suitable for case study research (see Carlsson, Wängqvist, & Frisé, 2016; Vohra, 2014). I conduct the thematic analysis separately for the three sources of data. Then, for each case, I gather the data from the three sources together using tables and grids to assist with clustering concepts. I then describe the meaning in reference to the literature.

4.6 Ethics, Consent and Privacy

Before commencing ASEP, ethical clearance was successfully sought from the University of Queensland Ethics Committee. I also separately applied for and got ethics clearance to conduct the parent follow-up interviews. Studies involving at-risk populations pose a range of sensitive ethical issues. In preparing submissions to the Ethics Committee, consideration was given to the potential risk associated with uncovering a complex range of personal issues during the course of the research. My research project was assessed as low risk.

Participants also signed written consent to participate in the different facets of ASEP and the follow-up and agreed to share their information. Participants under the age of 18 also require a

parent/legal guardian's written consent. Through consent, the subject adopts the goals of the research program as a 'collaborator' and is not merely a means to someone else's ends (Capron, 1982). Pinkard (1982) argued that social scientists do not have a right to invade research participants' privacy and have no right to override their rights. In this research, the participants' identities are kept confidential, and data about the young person are de-identified. For record keeping, the participants' details were safely stored under their number, which they were assigned when joining the ASEP trial. I then applied pseudonym names to the de-identified list of participants using a list of popular children's names from 2004, a year which corresponds with the birth year of the 'average' participant calculated using the young participants' mean age. In this thesis, I refer to the ASEP participants by their pseudonyms.

Chapter Five

School Commitment and ASEP

5.1 Introduction

Research suggests that school bonds are an important part of the truancy puzzle: they foster school engagement and promote positive educational outcomes (Bond et al., 2007; Gentle-Genitty, 2008), as well as limit antisocial behaviours (Hawkins et al., 2001; O'Donnell et al., 1995). Yet, the extant literature lacks empirical exploration of how elements of school bonds: commitment (investment in school), attachment (affective relationships) and belief (acceptance of school rules and values), can be activated to foster school re-engagement among truanting youth (Libbey, 2004; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). Appleton, Christianson, and Furlong (2008) have recommended that further study of school bonds should be intervention-oriented and focused on enhancing educational outcomes. This dissertation examines how school bonds are activated through ASEP.

In this chapter, I examine how the ASEP conference activates the first element of the school bond, that of school commitment among the truanting participants. Simons-Morton and Chen (2009) note that while school engagement can be malleable, there is a paucity of research focused on conditions that encourage school re-engagement. I explore the malleability of the school commitment during the ASEP conference by conducting a thematic analysis of 47 conference transcripts. No prior research has reported examining an intervention's mechanisms for fostering change through moment-to-moment intervention interactions. According to Granic and Patterson (2006, p. 105), these micro-interactions act as 'the proximal engines of development' because they magnify learning and adaptation processes. Damasio (2008) also suggests that interventions elicit 'therapeutic moments' when perspective change takes place as a result of the intervention. In intervention settings, existing problems are redefined with new solution-focused meanings (Bohart & Tallman, 1996; Egan, 2013; Goldfried & Davila, 2005). The facilitator applies a range of techniques (e.g. active listening, reflecting) to elicit prosocial change in the process of interpersonal communication (Egan, 2013; Rollnick & Miller, 1995). In this chapter, I demonstrate how meanings change around truancy and school re-engagement as the ASEP conference unfolds.

This chapter is organised as follows. I introduce my research question guiding my investigation. I then briefly articulate the themes that emerge in my analysis in the context of the Truant Re-Engagement Readiness Typology that I develop. One by one, I discuss the five truant types that I identify and how the ASEP standardised processes differentially adapt to the types of truants. I conclude this chapter by integrating and discussing the themes.

5.2 Analytical Approach

I explore the SDM's hypotheses that youth who have strong school commitment engage more in prosocial behaviours than those with weak school commitment (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). As discussed earlier, the model has been used to inform the design of delinquency reduction and prevention initiatives (Catalano et al., 2004; Hawkins et al., 2001). According to the SDM, interventions that strengthen young people's school commitment also reduce the likelihood of youth delinquency (Catalano et al., 2004; Hawkins et al., 2001). The model has not been explored in the context of a family group conference. My research question is:

How does the ASEP conference activate young participants' school commitment to foster school re-engagement?

This question explores the 'face validity' of the ASEP conference in fostering prosocial change. I examine how the ASEP conference processes negotiate the tension between young participants' problematic school absenteeism and the mandatory requirement of daily school attendance. In my analysis, consistent with the social constructionist epistemology, I follow the assumption that there is 'an intimate relationship between language and cognition' (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002, p. 1019). Put differently, I make the assumption that the ways in which participants discuss truancy and school engagement is an accurate reflection of their thoughts and feelings about their school engagement.

For the purpose of this exploration, I redefine school commitment as readiness for school re-engagement. This redefinition reflects the ASEP's aim of fostering school engagement. Thomas (2006) observes that in qualitative analysis, key themes are often reframed. As I discussed in chapter 2, there is no agreed on definition of what school commitment entails and how it should be measured (Jimerson et al., 2003; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). School commitment broadly refers to the effort that the young person makes around school related matters and behaviours (Jimerson et al., 2003; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). Fredericks et al. (2004) argue that school commitment could be potentially activated to prevent school disengagement. Yet, there is a paucity of research as to how the concept could be utilised for that purpose (Appleton et al., 2008).

Before delving into the results, I briefly explain how I conducted the thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) note that thematic analysis does not merely involve applying their six-stage formula but also requires some degree of interpretation, which cannot be well captured in the methods chapter. In this analysis, I explored the readiness for school engagement using both a deductive and inductive approach. I coded the transcripts using the SDM's school commitment concept, defined as

commitment to learning or investment in doing well at school (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Applying an inductive approach, I noted different emerging patterns of how youth responded to the ASEP's processes.

In reviewing the identified themes, I examined literature on behaviour change and interventions (e.g. Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986) to aid me with theoretically interpreting the different patterns. I identified that the Stages of Change model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986) could partially account for the emerging themes. However, there were other trends that the model could not explain. To account for the shortcomings, I reviewed theoretical frameworks that are not integrated with interventions, and behaviour change literature about the impact of social relations and structures on the individual (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 2009; Sen, 1993). In particular, I reviewed the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2009) on the impact of social systems on young person's development. The review process enabled me to name the data patterns through a theoretical prism.

5.3 Results

One of the prominent themes emerging from my thematic analysis is that the ASEP youth are a heterogeneous group in their readiness for school re-engagement. Some, such as the 17-year-old Lachlan, changed schools prior to his ASEP conference. Lachlan's mother observes that the new school became an impetus for prosocial change: 'He's really willing to change his life, he's willing to give up his friends, really determined to go to school, and chooses to do his work.' In contrast, 13-year-old Joshua evaluates his school experience: 'I just don't like it... Everything...the teachers... the school... yeah I don't like the fact that I have the same people in my class most days and then I have the same classroom for different subjects on those days...it's boring... nothing that can be changed.'

I have identified five types of truants: reformed (n = 8), ready (n = 11), reluctant (n = 7), resistant (n = 16) and recalcitrant (n = 5) based on examination of the differences in how the participants responded to ASEP processes. Table 3 names the key concepts around the truant typology that I unpack in my analysis. The table shows that the five truant types are constructed on the basis of two dimensions: willingness and presenting capability. Willingness refers to students' motivation to be at school each day. The presenting capability refers to different levels of skills, resources and supports that ASEP youth have to help them re-engage into the learning environment. I examine in depth the willingness and presenting capability of the five types of truants and explore how the ASEP's focus can be either on maintenance, action, motivation, strengthening or reform depending

on the truant type. I start my analysis by introducing the reformed truants and end with focusing on the recalcitrant truants.

Table 3: The Five Rs of the Truant Re-Engagement Readiness Typology

Truant Reform Readiness Typology category	Total N	Willingness	Presenting capability	ASEP's focus
Reformed	8	+	+	Maintain
Ready	11	+	+	Action
Reluctant	7	-	+	Motivate
Resistant	16	+	-	Strengthen
Recalcitrant	5	-	-	Reform

5.3.1 Reformed Truants

Eight ASEP youth (17%) fall into the *reformed truants* category. They participated in the conference after already increasing their school engagement. Three participants: Lachlan, Laura and Ella, changed schools between recruitment and the ASEP conference. For Lauren, Isabella, Mikayla, Gabrielle and Isabelle, improvement in school attendance is attributed to forming closer friendships with prosocial peers at their existing schools. The cases of reformed truants suggest that school disengagement is not rigid and can be shifted to school re-engagement in a relatively short time (approximately 3–6 months; the time between recruitment and the ASEP conference).

However, the prosocial change is new, and it remains to be seen whether it is sustainable long term.

For reformed truants, the ASEP conference is a platform for articulating the mechanisms for school re-engagement that were activated outside the current intervention. In the case of Ella, the facilitator acknowledges how Ella's parents have helped her strengthen her presenting capability:

This is a family that does know how to problem solve. It wasn't working well at that school – you were obviously close enough to your mum and dad that you could talk about what's going on – you know you're not telling them everything – who does at your age? I get that. But you're telling them enough that they – you guys are trying to work together to see if you can makes things work better.

Ella's facilitator indicated that family relations characterised by trust are a medium through which school re-engagement solutions are brainstormed and executed. The young person and the family as a unit recognise that there is a problem and together they identify solutions. In this case, Ella changed schools and complied with new parental restrictions on time spent with her boyfriend. While school re-engagement ultimately requires the youth to alter the maladaptive behaviour, restorative family processes are set in motion to facilitate that change.

Other cases of reformed truants who experienced changes in their existing school-based relations suggest that school re-engagement can involve multiple parallel social processes. Mikayla's mother reflects on her ten-year-old daughter's experience:

I have to thank (name of the school teacher). I think the year that she (Mikayla) was with you (the teacher) was such a good turning point for her. Um, I don't know whether it was kids she was hanging around or, but it was the first time ever in the whole time Mikayla's been at school that she's actually wanted to go to school in the mornings... (when) her attendance picked up a lot... that sort of made it a lot easier once she wanted to come, so. [*slight pause*] But yeah, now that I'm working it's, it's 'no you gotta go to school. Suck it up.

This extract suggests that parallel changes in Mikayla's peer and teacher relations were conducive to increased school engagement. These positive changes at school made it easier for Mikayla's mother to reinforce daily school attendance. In addition, the mother gained employment during that time, which also forces her to change her approach to Mikayla's school refusal.

The case of Mikayla also provides evidence that school re-engagement requires strengthening presenting capability. Mikayla's mother explains how a formal parenting program helped in that respect:

I did the parenting course which was just amazingly life changing. Um, it opened my eyes to so many wonderful things, ah, communication wise, just understanding why kids do the things... We've talked a lot about our home life and, you know... we're still working through a lot of that. um, but hopefully, you know, with the guys help, you know, just that confidence building and building Mikalya's self-esteem and coping mechanisms and stuff like that where she's not going to be so effected by the stuff going on in the school yard with her friends and the bitchiness. And I mean it's gonna go right through life. I mean, if we can help her build these skills now um, you know, it's gonna take her so much further so.

Mikayla's mother suggests that engagement in the program assisted with strengthening the presenting capability of both the parents and the child. Mikayla also comments on her contact with the program's counsellor: 'when I was with her, if I had troubles with my friends I'd go to her and she would sort of help me.' The example demonstrates that accessing support from a community agency located in the family's broader exosystem can impact on the functioning of the family's microsystem to foster school re-engagement (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The family accesses the

community program and the formal program contributes to strengthening of their presenting capability.

The main task of the reformed truants is to maintain their school engagement (McConnaughy, Prochaska, & Velicer, 1983). However, the risk of 'relapse' (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986) into the old ways is exemplified in the following extract from Lachlan's conference:

Lachlan: It gets hard, because I'm not used to going to school everyday...
School rep: What parts are you struggling with?
Lachlan: Just the laziness I guess.
School rep: So it's the same, like it becomes a habit – if it's a habit that you get into of not going to school, it's difficult to break a habit but once you get back into the habit of going to school – it's part of a routine, it's easier.

Here, the teacher reframes laziness as a short-term problem that will diminish with time once Lachlan's school routines are well established.

The conference dialogue also further explores how Lachlan can maintain his motivation. This shift in focus leads to identification of Lachlan's aspirations which are then linked to his school engagement:

Facilitator: What do you think, like might be able to keep Lachlan motivated, what else can happen?
Mother: [unclear] a policeman because that's what he wants to be.
Facilitator: Really?
Mother: That's his dream, yes. [unclear] it's what he really wants to do.
Facilitator: So before we go I'll give you that paperwork and hopefully that's everything you need to join the Queensland Police Service and if not the services the Army, and if...
Lachlan: Sounds great.

Identification of Lachlan's dream of becoming a policeman is powerful. The facilitator provides him with information on steps required for him to realise his job aspirations. Simultaneously, in the context of the conference, Lachlan is advised that the process of realising his dream requires that he maintains his motivation towards school engagement.

For reformed truants, the ASEP conference may assist in maintaining prosocial changes, rather than merely 'preaching to the converted' the virtues of daily school attendance. The earlier mentioned Ella identifies inconsistencies getting up in the morning: 'my alarm goes off, I turn it off and go back to sleep'. She consequently is late for school. In response, the ASEP adults explore with Ella the meaning attached to her morning behaviours:

Facilitator: I do really think – tell me I'm wrong, I'm just putting that out there. I just think it's motivation. I think you're going, first class is boring, I couldn't be bothered, but I've got – I think you probably are excited enough about next year that you're doing what you need to do until the end of the year.
Ella: I just don't care enough about first class
Facilitator: You just – exactly. That's what I think's happening here.
Ella: Roll marking's boring. You just sit there.

Facilitator: But if these guys are saying...
Police rep: You've got to do things, you've got to tick boxes. That's it. I think that's the key. At some point when you go through life you've got to do some things you don't like, just to get the things you do like at the end.

Through the dialogue, Ella identifies that her challenge relates to her not being motivated to attend the roll marking and the first class because she finds them boring rather than because she has difficulties getting up. The ASEP adults also remind Ella that she requires to complete the more mundane parts of the educational experience in order to participate in the aspects of schooling that she enjoys.

The ASEP adults highlight the non-negotiable aspect of attending the whole day of school. This is demonstrated in the following extract:

Police rep: There's no lates, there's getting to school every single day.
Facilitator: So we're talking 8.40 at the latest.
Police rep: Whatever the school time is.
School rep: Yeah 8.40. You need to be here at 8.40 at the latest.
Police rep: Then I will get you something with Benji Marshall's signature on it.
Facilitator: Have we got a deal?
Ella: Yep.
Facilitator: Lock it in?
Ella: Yep.

This extract also exemplifies how the ASEP conference uses incentives to reinforce school attendance. In this instance, the police representative agrees to obtain an autograph from Ella's favourite rugby league football player as part of developing an agreement with Ella about her ongoing school engagement. Ella positively responds to this agreement and commits to getting to school on time. Research indicates that incentives are a 'soft' reinforcement mechanism in maintaining behavioural change (Sutphen et al., 2010).

ASEP also applies a 'hard' reinforcement mechanism through communication of the escalation of the legal levers if truancy persists (Mazerolle, 2014). Ella's school staff remark is a typical example of the articulation of the legal lever at each ASEP conference:

Yeah well there's a process obviously under the Education Act is that if you know, a student's away for an extended period of time the principal sends a letter home sort of indicating the absences and requesting an interview with the parents, and if there's no improvement they'll send another letter which leads to prosecution and I think it's up to about \$600 fine for Mum, so that's kind of the end point of you know, sort of I guess the whole legal process.

The statement is designed to serve as a warning. According to social learning theory, delinquency is less likely among those who perceive a high certainty of official sanctions (Akers & Jennings, 2009a; Bandura, 1977).

Mikayla's extract demonstrates how the communication of the legal levers can encourage the young person to maintain their school engagement:

Facilitator: Did you know there was a legal consequence about going to school?
Mikayla: Well mum has said that sometimes. I didn't realise that it was this bad.
Facilitator: What do you think about that now that you know that?
Mikayla: That I'll, well like, when I'm, when mum says 'you're not that sick, you can go to school,' I'll go to school so that I don't get in bigger trouble.

This extract suggests that hearing authority figures' messages about the importance of daily school attendance has a more powerful affect on the young person than being told by the parent, who often is not fully aware of the legal process.

In sum, the cases of reformed truants suggest that school re-engagement can be facilitated through supportive relations in a relatively short period. School re-engagement can be generated through informal processes (e.g. in the family) or formal intervention support. In the ASEP context, the focus is on maintaining the prosocial changes so that they form enduring behavioural patterns.

5.3.2 Ready Truants

Eleven ASEP youth (23%) are *ready truants*. They express willingness to re-engage with school and appear to have the presenting capacity to do so. However, their truancy is a problem. A 15-year-old male Thomas agonises: 'It's getting towards the end of school and I don't even know what I'm going to do.' However, Thomas believes that daily school attendance can give him direction. Another ready truant is Chloe, a 14-year-old female who wants to be the first person in her family to graduate from high school. Her comments convey much enthusiasm for school re-engagement: 'I'm really, really, really motivated. Yesterday I was looking at an assignment that was due today, and I was like, yes I've got to get this done... What I'm really looking forward to is work now that's crazy... My subjects and getting my assignments completed'. Chloe's motivation and academic potential are formally acknowledged. Yet, her regular co-truancy with her close friend and visits to her brother in prison during school days jeopardise her school engagement efforts.

In the data, I note a discrepancy between the school attendance patterns of ready truants, and their willingness and capability to be at school every day. Another ready truant, Hannah remarks: 'some days I'll wake up, my six alarms go off so I make sure I wake up and I'll wake up and I'll be like I'll get up in a minute, I'll close my eyes and I'll go back to sleep ... it's just my-my attendance since, oh-oh I never really fixed it'. This mismatch is a key characteristic of this group and provides some insight into how Prochaska and DiClemente's (1984) stages might play out in truant youth, whose developmental stage has been commonly characterised by 'confusion' (Erikson,

1968). Prochaska and DiClemente (1984) suggest that once individuals begin to contemplate change, they are faced with the tasks of preparation, action, maintenance and (if successful) termination of the change process. But it appears that truants in this (presumably) 'late' stage of progress towards a solution, are still engaging in contemplation of the positives and negatives of integration with the school system.

My analysis reveals that the ASEP conference processes can illuminate the young person's willingness for school re-engagement. Consistent with restorative literature, the conference can assist the youth with reframing their present situation from problem-oriented to solution-focused (Drewery, 2004; Rossner, 2011; Ungar & Teram, 2000). The case of Thomas exemplifies how expressing and hearing concern are part of a reparation process. Thomas's mother expresses her disappointment that amidst her attempts at instilling the right values, Thomas continues to truant: 'My job is to set them (her children) in a direction but it's up to them at the end of the day, and I hope that they make the right decision every day that I leave them (for work).' Thomas's adult cousin, who resides in the family household, also expresses her concerns about Thomas not attending school: 'I worry that if I go to work what'll happen to him. Is he going to get in trouble with the police.' In response, Thomas remarks: 'It makes me not want to do it anymore like if I know it's affecting more people than myself then it just makes you feel like crap, you know, like yeah I don't feel like doing it anymore and like blaming anyone.'

Thomas's comment conveys feelings of shame and a desire for self-redemption: the highly desired outcomes that the theory suggests will follow when procedural and restorative processes are applied (Braithwaite, 2001; Rossner, 2011). The conference processes have seemed to elicit what Rossner (2011) calls an 'emotional turning point' where 'feeling like crap' illuminates willingness for school re-engagement. Mazerolle and colleagues (2012, p. 9) observed that 'when people become more connected to their feelings of responsibility to others in the community, they become more motivated to either follow their moral principles or obey social authorities or institutions'. I infer Thomas' emotions based on his comments. However, it could also be argued that Thomas' responses convey social desirability bias in a context where he is under social pressure to repent (see Nederhof, 1985).

The ready truants maintained vocal participation throughout the conference proceedings. They actively participated in exploring how they could re-engage at school. Hayes and Snow (2013, p. 6) posit that 'conferences represent a reversal of the axiom that "actions speak louder than words", because words are the means by which such conferences are transacted and are the key vehicle by

which remorse, regret and accountability can be conveyed'. Although the social desirability bias may play out in some cases, the proceedings also generates some emotional turning points which create a pathway to envisioning change. Thomas identifies a misalignment between his abilities and his two subjects, which leads to identification of actions around curriculum adjustment:

School rep: Are you happy in your classes?
Thomas: Yeah. The only subject that I avoid is Maths because it's OP, it's like the only one I'm doing...I don't want school to be easy like I want to move out of comm. Like I got good marks in comm. But it's too easy.
School rep: I can – I can talk to Mrs Smith about moving him into for a trial
Thomas: Yeah she said I'd do better in the harder class it's too easy for me here.
School rep: What about Maths A?
Thomas: I just don't want to stay there.
Facilitator: OK. So maybe just you'll look at some rejigging of his timetable?

The ASEP process focuses on enhancing the match between Thomas' presenting capability and his educational setting. Youth's participation during conferences enhances what they get out of the intervention processes (Drewery, 2004). So, young people who may feel social pressure to engage more in the proceedings still gain more benefit from the conference than those who engage less. This is because of the conversational nature of the conference process which requires that the young person listens and responds to complex accounts from different parties about the truancy problem (Hayes and Snow, 2013).

The ASEP's focus for ready truants is on immediate action to foster school engagement. During Chloe's conference, the school representative identifies how the school can support her:

We can actually set up a time for an hour maybe every week for her (Chloe) to come in and sit with me and I'll get in contact with all Chloe's teachers just have a look at your assessment that's coming up, make sure you're on track, and we can just work through any problems that you're having together and talk about how things are going, just if you wanted to. ..That'll help with your time management as well because that's a big thing... Traineeships, we've got – I think we've got the most trainees in the school we've ever had at the moment so you know there's a lot of opportunities out there.

The school representative listed some immediate tasks to assist Chloe with applying both her motivation and presenting capability for school re-engagement into action. The conference proceedings seemed to create a 'momentum' for school re-engagement.

There seems to be a good fit between the readiness for school re-engagement of the 'ready truants' and the timing of the intervention. Research suggests that good timing can enhance an intervention's effectiveness (Reid, 2013). Chloe appreciates how the ASEP process generates solutions: 'I like that everyone's helping me and support that I need if I'm having trouble,' In turn, the facilitator explains how the ASEP members are part of what Drewery (2004, p.341) refers to as 'community of care':

That's why we wanted to get everybody around the table and go these are all the people that can really support you to go to school each day, and you know both for you and for Mum to go well this is the faces of the people and everybody gets to have a see who else's face is around as well so it's important if we can come around the table and do what we can do to help support you to get you to come to school, which you've been doing but we just want to keep that going.

The facilitator implies that the ASEP process establishes a community of care which will become the infrastructure of support post-intervention. According to Rossner (2008), successful conferences lead to a feeling of solidarity or a sense of unity and closeness towards working on a common goal.

Towards the end of the conference, Chloe expresses much readiness to set the identified actions into motion. This is evident in the following extract:

Facilitator: What are you going to do each day to try and get yourself to school on a regular basis?
Chloe: Get myself up this time.
Facilitator: Yes.
Chloe: Be motivated.
Facilitator: Yes. So are you talking about – so what are you going to do in the mornings that's going to you know, get you – get you up in the morning, what's the plan for that?
Chloe: Well, maybe get an alarm?
Facilitator: Yes.

Chloe articulates her willingness to be at school everyday and follow appropriate daily routines. There is a sense that the conference have energised Chloe towards a focus on school engagement through the examination of how maladaptive behaviours can be easily rectified towards greater school participation.

In summary, the ASEP conference can be particularly beneficial for ready truants who are willing and able to address the challenges that obstruct their school engagement. The restorative process of ASEP can elicit emotional turning points motivating the youth further to take immediate action. By immersing themselves in the ASEP conference proceedings, the ready truants engage in problem-solving their challenges. Frost and colleagues (2014a) noted that for the conference to be as effective as possible, the participants need to feel that they have an ability to come up with a plan and that they have some decision-making power. Consequently, ASEP conference participation gives ready truants directions related to working through their issues.

5.3.3 Reluctant Truants

There are seven (15%) *reluctant truants* among the ASEP youth. Overall, the group appears to lack motivation to maintain daily school routines but has the capability to do so. A common theme running through the narratives of reluctant truants is their poor sleep/wake up routine. Some of the identified issues compounding the problem include staying up late and playing Xbox (Ryan; Benjamin);

hanging out with friends in the evening (Kyle); starting assignments too late (Adam) and simply disliking getting up early (Peter). All of the youth in the group also report that they find school boring. Their reasons for school absence include feeling suddenly unwell in the morning (Adam), feeling 'too itchy' when wearing a school uniform (Peter), not liking to go to school on days when friends are doing traineeships (Emma). Consequently, reluctant truants tend to report that their truancy leads to falling behind academically and having difficulties catching up. Their behavioural patterns form a self-perpetuating cycle where negative attitudes, amotivation and a lack of perseverance in addressing educational gaps generates more truancy.

The ASEP conference focuses on activation of reluctant truants' motivation that could otherwise be dormant. As the extract for Ryan suggests, this is not an easy task:

Facilitator: Like how's it feeling having all these people here who want you to go to school?
Ryan: Nothing.
Facilitator: Nothing?
Ryan: I don't care.

There is a discrepancy between Ryan's poor school commitment and where the rest of the ASEP conference group wants him to be at. Ryan and Deci (2000) explain that amotivation arises for different reasons which include not valuing an activity, not feeling competent in it, or a lack of conviction that participation will yield desirable outcomes (p. 61).

At the conference, ASEP youth, if old enough, are also encouraged to seek casual employment. Employment is a means through which young people can exercise responsibility and develop a work ethic. However, reluctant truants such as Adam who is almost 15, is adamant that he is not ready for work:

Adam: Do they really get paid that much?
Facilitator: Its about \$10 an hour.
Mother: That's heaps.
Adam: [laughs] I can get more from you [others laugh]
Mother: [unclear]
Facilitator: I think mum will have to stop then [laughs] would you like some, would you like any help to you know write a resumè or anything like that?
Adam: No, I'm far too young.
Police Rep: You're close man, you're close [others laugh].

Adam's disinterest in gaining casual work can be seen to parallel with his lack of motivation to fully engage with his education. Adam hints that his disinterest in paid work also relates to him getting sufficient pocket money from his parents. The subtle

suggestions from the ASEP adults to change that around does not generate sufficient interest from Adam. Adam appears content with his status quo.

As the ASEP's main focus is mandatory school attendance, a range of processes are activated to minimise the discrepancy between what the young person thinks and the obligation to be at school. Communication of legal levers is the most utilised mechanism for this group of truants to elicit motivation. Upon establishing reasons for truancy, the school representative communicates to the participants their legal obligations of daily school attendance and then encourages the parents and young people to willingly comply with the law and not risk prosecution (Mazerolle, Bennett, et al., 2017). The communication legitimises the seriousness of the presenting truancy problem (Mazerolle, Bennett, et al., 2017). The communication is strategically embedded into the design of the ASEP conference and articulated at a point to elicit emotions related to truancy as a wrongdoing, from where restoratively oriented discussions could be generated. The following extract captures Adam's reaction to the communication:

Adam: It's like that know if I can apply myself to it I'll be able to succeed, almost. And like, then I'll know they won't have to worry about me
Facilitator: And how are you feeling about maybe this term going to school?
Adam: Good.
Facilitator: Yeah? After hearing that stuff?
Adam: [*softly*] Yeah.

While Adam's reaction somewhat resembles Mikayla's (reformed truant) response, there are differences in how reluctant truants participate in the conference proceedings in comparison to the earlier considered group. As already discussed, ready and reformed truants actively participate in co-producing new meanings for their school engagement. However, Adam's participation, similarly to other reluctant truants, appears more passive, possibly because he is not motivated to use the ASEP conference to help him with rectifying truancy. Adam's limited engagement in the ASEP conference creates a sense of a top-down dynamic where his answers capture what is expected of him. Nonetheless, the discussions seem to introduce some dissonance as he reports a desire to rectify his behaviour so that his parents would worry less about him. In general, dissonance creates discomfort which may drive behavioural change motivated by a desire to reduce the experienced tension (Leenders & Brugman, 2005).

It is also possible that the ASEP conference instilled a genuine sense of responsibility for Adam to rectify his behaviour: through the dialogues he gets a thorough explanation why it is important for him to comply with the legal requirements of daily school attendance. Tyler (2006) observed that

people are more likely to obey rules when they perceive them as fair and legitimate. In the context of the ASEP conference, the communication of the legal levers, coupled with the application of the restorative process, is designed to strengthen the influence of social values on people's law abiding behaviours (Mazerolle et al., 2012). Mazerolle, Bennett et al (2017) also found that careful communication of the school legal lever to the ASEP participants through a police-led partnership had a motivational role for the participants to engage in willing compliance with the school attendance laws.

At other times, communication of the legal levers can be beneficial to increase parental knowledge of the consequences of truancy. As exemplified by the following extract, the communication targets both the young person and the parent:

Facilitator: Did you know it was the law for you to go to school?
Peter: Yeah
Facilitator: Yeah?
Father: My wife's trying to tell me every time that we get in trouble if he doesn't go to school
Facilitator: Do you ever get worried about, about getting into trouble for...
Mother: Yeah well I dunno because we haven't been into trouble before so we don't even know what's the consequences. I know you can get into trouble but...
Facilitator: Mmm.
Mother: Yeah so we've had a bit of a dispute on that too [*others chuckle*].

In this extract, family members agree that truancy is a wrongful behaviour but the parents express ambivalence about how truancy laws apply to their family circumstances. Consequently, it is the parents rather than Peter who become more responsive to the communication of legal sanctions. Here, communication of the legal levers dispels some misconceptions and ensures that both the parents and the children are well-informed about the consequences of truancy. In a recent study that used the ASEP data, Mazerolle, Antrobus et al. (2017) found that the ASEP conference increased parental awareness of prosecution likelihood, which moderated students' self-reported willingness to attend school. Mazerolle, Antrobus et al (2017) used data from both students and their parents to assess differences between the experimental and control group on parental perceptions of prosecution likelihood and students' willingness to attend school. So, if Peter remains indifferent to the legal implications of his ongoing truancy, the parents would remind him of the legal consequences, now that they understand how the process plays out.

In this section I identified that the most significant barrier for reluctant truants' school re-engagement is their low willingness to change. The ASEP process focuses on instilling motivation. The conference may introduce dissonance between how the truants regard their current truancy and their obligation for daily school attendance, which could drive their behaviour change. Through

communication of the legal levers, the ASEP conference can trigger extrinsic motivation of both the young person and the parents. Next, I turn to the fourth truant category.

5.3.4 Resistant Truants

Resistant truants form the biggest category. I identify 16 resistant truants (34%) in the ASEP sample, who articulate willingness for school re-engagement but experience significant barriers that impinge on their efforts. The use of the term ‘resistant’ acknowledges the dominance of weakened presenting capability rather than the absence of willingness. Samuel, an 11-year old male with suspected Autism reports: ‘This year I was tryin’ mo’ a lot more harder to stay at school.’ His efforts are jeopardised by his peers: ‘I’ve been bullied really bad late’ at school. I’ve been getting marks like here from ‘em’. It seems that Samuel indicates bruising. Samuel’s microsystem of peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) weakens his presenting capability.

The diminished presenting capability can overshadow resistant truants’ willingness for school re-engagement. Developmental concerns are a common challenge for this group, which as expected negatively impact the young person’s school experience. Joshua is a 13-year-old boy with a diagnosis falling on the autistic spectrum disorder who refuses to attend his mainstream school. He gets assistance from a teacher’s aid and has a modified curriculum that reflects his special education needs. However, his supports are also a source of his consternation. Joshua’s mother explains: ‘Joshua has always had a problem with y’know “they’re against me”, “they’re watching me”.’. Joshua’s mother also contextualises the onset of his school refusal: ‘Some other kid came along and judged him for it “oh you’re in the stupid people’s class” [*unclear*] from then on it just went downhill.’ So while Joshua received help targeting his needs, he felt uncomfortable due to the social stigma of being the ‘special needs’ student. Joshua’s mother captures her side of the experience: ‘90% of the time I’m just angry... it’s pretty much yeah angry about the same thing over and over essentially.’ The case demonstrates that the individual’s vulnerabilities (e.g. the intellectual delays) can place the youth at risk of negative interactions with their immediate social environments, which further perpetuate the diminished presenting capability.

The ASEP conference illuminates the willingness for school re-engagement by targeting the parent as the proximate target and the youth as the ultimate target (Mazerolle, Antrobus, et al., 2017). This is achieved through the standardised process of communication of legal levers to address ongoing truancy as developed for ASEP. A typical parent/guardian reaction to this communication is well-

captured by the following interaction between Joshua's mother and her partner directed at the young person:

Mother's partner: You know Joshua, your parents could get prosecuted for your non-attendance.
Mother : I get in trouble because you can't listen.

The adult family members reiterate that Joshua's school absenteeism is a significant problem for the adults in the family. Joshua responds with silence, which can potentially signify feeling ashamed, overwhelmed or indifferent. Throughout the conference Joshua's mother acts as a broker between Joshua and the other ASEP adults, checking that he remains engaged in the proceedings and that he understands the seriousness of the concerns. Joshua's input was characterised by verbal utterances that were a few words long. In contrast, the adults' dialogues dominated the conference proceedings where often one adult's verbal input was a few sentences long. Towards the end of the conference, he appears disengaged, but this is not the case:

AB001's mother: Is he still awake?
AB001: Hmm?
AB001's facilitator: He certainly is

However, there is evidence that Joshua can participate in the ASEP processes focused on strengthening presenting capability. At the start of the ASEP conference, Joshua expresses: 'I could be good in being this guy that everyone likes at my school but I don't, don't want to.' Joshua demonstrates resistance to attempts to alter his existing behaviour. Yet, at the latter part of the conference, Joshua concedes: 'I'm gonna have a really good fresh year I won't like, well be naughty.' Examination of Joshua's 72-page long transcripts shows that much of the ASEP dialogues are focused on reframing some negative school experiences as historical events no longer relevant to his present moment or future. Similarly to other truants with learning difficulties, the negative historical events continue to play on his mind and obstruct school re-engagement efforts. With prompting, Joshua identifies the need for assistance with his educational gaps so that he can work towards attaining his dream of joining the army:

Mother: Well what help do you want to get better at that so at the end of it you can go to the army?
Joshua: The usual help
Mother: You don't want any extra help?
Joshua: Yes I do.
Facilitator: Extra he-okay okay what extra help would you like?
Joshua: English, stuff that I need to get into the army.

The application of the ASEP restorative processes to foster school re-engagement may introduce some tensions for resistant truants. In the ASEP restorative process, truancy is a violation against

people and relationships (Strang & Braithwaite, 2001). However, resistant truants often express being the victims of school misconduct rather than its perpetrators. ASEP's design shares the assumption with the SDM and social control theory that school is a prosocial institution (Catalano et al., 2004; Hirschi, 1969). The implication is that school factors that may be related to truancy (Gentle-Genitty, 2008; Kearney, 2008a) are not critically examined during the conference. These youth may experience conflicting emotions when instructed to go to school each day; to them, school is a place where they feel uncomfortable being. I use the term 'may' because the narratives of resistant truants have much less depth in comparison to those of reformed and ready truants, and some say very little. Timothy is a classic example. He is 11-years-old and truant due to comprehension difficulties and problems with peers. Timothy's vocal participation is minimal at the ASEP conference, and he utters 'yeah' whenever asked by the facilitator to follow a proposed action. His mother casts doubt about his genuineness: 'If someone's going to go to all that effort to get them into a school, their head has got to be in the right place. Timothy's head just isn't'. Timothy's mother suggests that Timothy is not ready to benefit from the conference because other outstanding issues need to be addressed.

Hayes and Snow (2013) point out that the restorative process is reliant on the oral language competencies of young participants. The competencies are a two-way process of receiving and sending information through active listening and talking (Hayes and Snow, 2013). The active listening requires the ability to understand others' speech words which can convey meanings ranging from concrete and literal, through to abstract and sometimes subtly nuanced (Hayes and Snow, 2013). However, there is evidence that young people with developmental delays can hold on to negative historical events and can experience difficulties applying new information to reframe their perceptions. Hayes and Snow (2013) also identify that the conference participants are required to be competent language users drawing on their own vocabulary and social conventions to articulate a 'coherent narrative that is judged as adequate and authentic by the parties' (Hayes & Snow, 2013, p. 2). Yet, a number of the resistant truants experience difficulties in communicating their perspectives.

The focus for resistant truants is on strengthening their presenting capability. The action plans formulated in the last stage of the ASEP conference outlined the tasks that needed to be undertaken post-conference. Action plans specify 'when, where, and how to act in accordance with one's goal intention' (Sniehotta, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2006, p. 25); and if followed through, they speed up the process of behavioural change (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005). The actions for resistant truants tended to

be more complex than the tasks assigned to truants in the earlier categories. For example, referral for paediatric assessment is a common recommendation for resistant truants with developmental concerns. These referrals may be starting points for further actions focused on strengthening presenting capability. For Samuel, an 11-year-old boy with suspected developmental delays but no formal diagnosis, the school staff explicate the lengthy and uncertain process of getting a teacher's aide. The student requires a formal diagnosis so that the school can seek funding for educational support. In turn, the school needs to be successful in obtaining the funding to provide the support. Manoeuvring through the structural issues to implement the action plans can be a trialling process for the youth and the families (see Sloper, 2004; Whiteneck et al., 2004). Commenting on the limitations of the ASEP conference, Mazerolle, Antrobus and colleagues (2017) acknowledged that while the action plans broadly sought to address key issues contributing to truancy, the intervention could not address the complex underlying causes. They stated that to adequately alleviate the precipitating issues in some ASEP cases would require complementary interventions that went well beyond the program.

5.3.5 Recalcitrant Truants

Recalcitrant truants are the last and smallest category (n = 5; 10.6%) with the most challenging cases. Similarly to resistant truants, recalcitrant truants have weak presenting capability. Unlike the former group, there is no evidence that these youth are willing to address their truancy. The complex problems of recalcitrant truants seem well entrenched and erode the youths' willingness for school re-engagement.

For example, 14-year-old Sophie is one of the most complex cases among the ASEP sample. Sophie has a lengthy history of disrupted schooling that corresponds to periods when she leaves home either due to fractured family relations or to hang out with peers on the streets. Her mother, who is present at the conference, expresses her side of the experience: 'At the end of the day her not wanting to be at home. That she was so hurt, and so miserable, and so upset about being at home that she just couldn't do it. It broke my heart. Just like it's broken my heart again.'

I suggest that the focus of the intervention should be reforming both their willingness and presenting capability. However, achieving this focus is a challenge. Sophie's conference, running for 2 hours and 53 minutes, is unusually long and emotionally charged. Contrary to Rossner's (2008) findings that emotive conferences act as emotional epiphanies that foster change, there is no evidence that this is the case here. The main focus is on strengthening family relations as a pathway to school re-engagement. Sophie remains adamant: 'I find it very, very difficult to trust people.'

Her experience of accessing formal support is also bleak: ‘Nothing is helping. No one has ever helped ever. They never do anything. They are always suggesting the exact same things but it never helps.’ Sophie’s remark suggests that her conference is unsuccessful in holding her accountable for her wrongdoing and eliciting remorse (Hayes & Snow, 2013). Sophie is an articulate young person in expressing her views, making her a suitable conference participant (Hayes & Snow, 2013). Yet, adult ASEP participants unsuccessfully try to challenge Sophie’s views. The police representative offers to talk with Sophie about her negative perceptions of police after the conference. However, Sophie’s prior experience has left her with an aftertaste of cynicism and in the absence of trust, she does not reap the benefits of the ASEP conference. Repairing trust is a process that extends well beyond the single session of an intervention and would also require Sophie’s active engagement (DiBlasio, 1998). Yet, Sophie indicates that she is not willing to go there. Her case demonstrates that changing young person’s behaviour is more complex than eliciting their active engagement at the conference.

Nathan and Hayden are also school refusal cases. Their conference participation is limited to a few word utterances here and there. The facilitator uses many prompting questions, which tend to be answered by the parent rather than the young person. Nathan’s mother comments on her son’s interpersonal difficulties, suggestive of a disorder on the autism spectrum: ‘His social interaction is non-existent, he doesn’t understand emotion on your face.’

At the latter part of the ASEP conference, there is no indication that Nathan feels motivated to re-engage with school. The following extract exemplifies this claim:

School rep: Do you want to come to school?
Nathan: Yeah sometimes.
School rep: I know we’ve got the bullying and we’ve got other things but what’s so good about staying home?
Nathan: I don’t know, just staying home.
School rep: Staying home. Doesn’t it get boring at home?
Nathan: Not really.

The group setting of the conference is not an ideal environment to engender change for youth with comprehension and social difficulties. Wenzel and colleagues (2012) argue that the group setting of the conference is designed to give the participants both the voice and control over the process. Yet, the weak presence of young persons’ voices raises the question of the extent to which the young participants feel in control during the conference proceedings and the benefit that they get from the conference.

The cases highlight the limitations of the conferencing process to empower the participants and address the power imbalance (Frost et al., 2014a). In the presence of a limited vocal input from the young participants, the adult participants dominate the conference discussions. This unequal level of participation creates top-down dynamics between the adults and the youth. Similarly, responding to active resistance as in Sophie's case while engaging with the young person as an equal participant is another challenge. The cases raise the question as to what are the most effective means in responding to legal non-compliance (Murphy, 2005). The recalcitrant truants are vulnerable youth whose non-compliance is related to complex issues. For some, school refusal is anxiety-based. The literature on responding to school refusal focuses on the appropriateness of clinical treatment (Kearney, 2008b; Pina, Zerr, Gonzales, & Ortiz, 2009). This raises the question of how to best strike a balance between support and regulation for this truant group and raises questions about how non-clinical truancy reduction programs could best engage with these young people.

Strengthening diminished capability through action planning focuses on the provision of therapeutic support and family interventions. The families are linked with community agencies that are present at the conference to work on presenting issues that are not resolved during the proceedings. The professional relations that are established may act as sources of motivation for the families to work through difficulties. Time is required before it can be assessed whether or not the ASEP group work facilitated school re-engagement.

5.4 Discussion

My analysis shows that ASEP youth differ in their readiness for school re-engagement. I propose that readiness for reform can be conceptualised along two dimensions: *willingness* and *presenting capability*. Willingness refers to students' motivation to be at school each day. Willingness stems from Prochaska and DiClemente's (1984) proposition that the amount of change that youth make during the intervention depends on their motivation. Some researchers consider that willingness signals behaviour intention which in turn determines the actual behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2005; Fishbein, 2008; Pomery, Gibbons, Reis-Bergan, & Gerrard, 2009). While Prochaska and DiClemente (1984) posit that the intervention should work with existing levels of motivation towards change, I identify that presenting capability is equally important. The presenting capability refers to different levels of skills, resources and supports that the ASEP youth have to help them re-engage into the learning environment. Skills include factors related to mental health or cognitive ability, which can be inflexible (DeSocio & Hootman, 2004; Paskiewicz, 2009). Conversely, resources and support available at school, family, and community agencies tap into structural

factors of the broader social and political environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2009). The presenting capability dimension recognises the complex interactions of the social environments in shaping the young person's behaviour. I identified that social environments can either strengthen through support or diminish through hostility the young person's presenting capability.

I identified five types of truants based on examination of the differences in how participants responded to the ASEP processes. I developed a typology of readiness for school re-engagement from emerging patterns where each participant has willingness which is either positive or negative and presenting capability which is either strong or weak. There are five possibilities. ASEP youth are either: (1) **reformed** (positive willingness and strong presenting capability); (2) **ready** (positive willingness and strong presenting capability); (3) **reluctant** (negative willingness and strong presenting capability); (4) **resistant** (positive willingness and weak presenting capability); or (5) **recalcitrant** (negative willingness and weak presenting capability).

I also identified differences across transcripts in how ASEP's conference processes responded to the five truant types. To assist with theoretical interpretation of the transcript patterns, I reviewed the Stages of Change model (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992). In applying the framework, I was mindful that Prochaska and DiClemente's (1992) model arises from intervention research for a voluntary behavioural change. In contrast, ASEP aims to foster school re-engagement because daily school attendance is a legal requirement.

Applying the Stages of Change model to the emerging patterns of the ASEP transcripts, I noted both overlaps and limitations between the model's propositions and the ASEP processes. Starting with overlaps, the reformed truants seem to fall into Prochaska and DiClemente's (1986, 1992) *maintenance* stage of relapse prevention. I also noted that the ASEP process focuses on maintaining school engagement for that group. Secondly, ready truants appear to be in the *action* stage, characterised by engagement in making the behavioural modification (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992). The focus of ASEP is also on the immediate action for this truant category. However, for the remainder of the truants, Prochaska and DiClemente's (1986, 1992) stages of *preparation*, *contemplation* and *pre-contemplation* do not hold. Perhaps this is because Prochaska and DiClemente's (1992) model focuses on an individual's motivation per se and does not consider other factors that I captured under the umbrella of presenting capability. Critics of Prochaska and DiClemente's (1986, 1992) model argue that human behaviour is too complex to change in a stage-like manner (Adams & White, 2005; Brug et al., 2005). For the latter categories of truants, I

identified that ASEP seeks to motivate the reluctant truants, strengthen the presenting capability of resistant truants and reform the recalcitrants.

The 5R typology considers different needs of truants focused on school re-engagement. The typology can be used as a solution-oriented framework to conceptualise different levels of school commitment and how the focus of standardised intervention processes can alter in response. The proposed typology differs to the existing truant typologies that focus on truancy as a problem and use data independent of the intervention (James, 2012; Keppens & Spruyt, 2016; Reid, 2002).

The ASEP's restorative process and communication of legal levers, designed to illuminate willingness, plays out differently depending on the truant type. For reformed truants, the conference acknowledges that the restorative processes have already been applied either informally by the family or formally by accessing other interventions. Legal levers are communicated to seal the maintenance of the prosocial change. For ready truants, the restorative process is especially powerful in evoking a desire for self-redemption, which has a motivational role in increasing school engagement. For reluctant truants, their motivation is activated through communication of the legal levers, which seems to create dissonance between the youth or parent's acceptance of the status quo and the legal requirement of daily school attendance. For resistant truants, parental willingness is particularly activated through the use of legal lever communication, which then has a trickle-down effect on the youth. For recalcitrant truants, the ASEP processes appear to be a starting point in a long journey of school re-engagement.

The ASEP process also seeks to strengthen students' presenting capability. Youth with strong presenting capability already have the skills, resources and supports and school re-engagement is a relatively easy process. The youths' action plans articulate how the existing strengths can be utilised to facilitate school re-engagement. In contrast, youth with weak presenting capability have more complex needs. The ASEP conference is a starting point for devising actions to target these needs. Consequently, strengthening presenting capability can be a lengthy process that involves seeking access to specialist support. Whereas in theories of behavioural change, individuals' motivation regulates the process (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1986), I find that school re-engagement is a team effort involving the young person and the social control agents. The ASEP processes encourage the youth, the parent and the rest of the ASEP members to work together towards change. Assessing the level of a youth's presenting capability and developing action plans to strengthen it may play a motivational role for the whole group to assist with resolving the problems post-conference.

In summary, the ASEP process differentially activates participants' readiness for school re-engagement depending on the young person's willingness and presenting capability. The focus of the ASEP conference depends on the truant type and can be either to maintain, act, motivate, strengthen or reform. Activating the readiness for school re-engagement is a social process that is a more complex process for some than others. The typology was developed from thematic analysis of conference dialogues. The transcripts varied in the extent to which the youth and their families provided a detailed description of their circumstances. These variations may well reflect different levels of communication skills among the participants (Hayes & Snow, 2013). It is possible that some participants were guarded in communicating sensitive topics impacting on the truancy in the presence of uniformed police and a community agency representative (see Taylor & Adelman, 1989). Farber (2003) observes that the level of self-disclosure during an intervention impacts on what participants get out of it. Another factor is that the youth were placed under group pressure to reconsider their truancy. Perhaps some of the positive youth responses could be attributed to social desirability bias rather than a genuine desire for school re-engagement (Nederhof, 1985). I consider the possible alternative explanations in particular in Chapter 7 where I conduct case analysis of the different school re-engagement pathways in relation to three sources of ASEP data collected over a two-year period. However, in the next chapter, I maintain my focus on the conference proceedings as I turn my attention to how peers can relate to truancy and school engagement

Chapter Six

Attachment to School Peers and ASEP

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I explore ASEP youth's attachment to their peers and how it relates to activating (or not) their truancy and school engagement. Much youth delinquency research has focused on the negative outcomes of peer associations (Akers, 1985; Haynie, 2002; Sutherland, 1947; Warr, 1993a). Peers have been blamed for adolescent antisocial behaviours including offending and school dropout (Hirschi, 1969; Moffitt, 1993). However, there is limited research on how peers can act as a prosocial influence to aid school re-engagement efforts (Barry & Wentzel, 2006).

Prevention research has, however, started to focus on how interventions targeting the individual can also affect the peer group (Chung et al., 2015; Rulison et al., 2015). These studies, however, do not focus on truancy.

I explore how the ASEP conference responds to participants' peer relations and how it focuses on these peer relations to foster school re-engagement. The SDM posits that young people with strong school bonds (including attachment) have prosocial peer relations and engage in prosocial behaviours (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). To date no research has been reported on how interventions can strengthen school bonds through the focus on peer relations.

This chapter is organised as follows. I introduce the research question and reiterate the theoretical framework. Next, I describe common trends pertaining to peer-related truancy and school engagement that I identified in the ASEP transcripts. I then unpack peer-related truancy and discuss how the ASEP intervention responds to them. I begin this exploration with co-truancy, or hanging out with peers. I then turn to school-based peer conflict. In my discussion, I consider the role of the family and implications for fostering school re-engagement. While the family is secondary to the peer influence analysis, its inclusion is necessary because family functioning influences the quality of school-based peer relations that youth form. Similarly to the previous chapter, I consider the perspectives of young people and other ASEP actors on presenting problems and formulated solutions. In the final part, I integrate my key findings and discuss their implications.

6.2 Analytical Approach

I focus on the second component of the SDM's school bond: attachment. School attachment is typically defined as ties to significant others at school; either peers or teachers or the student's sense

of belonging at school (Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Catalano et al., 2004). There is no consensus as to what is the most salient aspect of the school bond (Appleton et al., 2008; Maddox & Prinz, 2003). Previous research shows mixed results on whether peers or teachers are more influential in school engagement (Attwood & Croll, 2006). For the purpose of the analysis, I focus on attachment to peers because the SDM explicates a relationship between school bond and peer associations (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Considering that much research focuses on unpacking the association between peer relations and youth delinquency (e.g. Haynie, 2002; Warr, 1993a), I am interested to find out how the ASEP intervention responds to cases where peers influence truancy. I also note that truancy is typically omitted from the ‘package’ of delinquent behaviours studied in youth delinquency research (e.g. Agnew, 1991; Monahan, Rhew, Hawkins, & Brown, 2014; Warr, 1993a; Weerman & Smeenk, 2005). I am also interested to find out if the relationship between peer and individual behaviour is as pervasive for truancy as for other antisocial behaviours documented in published research studies. My research question is:

How does the ASEP conference affect attachment to peers to foster school re-engagement?

Similarly to my exploration of school commitment, I analysed the transcripts using both a deductive and inductive approach. Firstly, I conduct deductive analysis, where I apply key concepts from peer influence and delinquency literature. This process allows me to identify ASEP cases where truancy is attributed to peer associations. In my analysis, I applied the theme of attachment to assess the strength and quality of peer relations. I also explored how the ASEP youth discuss the behaviours of their peers. In quantitative research, the ‘peer behaviours’ construct is used to determine whether the person interacts with prosocial or delinquent peers (McGloin & Stickle, 2011). ‘Time spent with peers’ is also an important theme as it can unveil the extent of exposure to social learning processes related to truancy that take place through peer interactions. (Haynie & Osgood, 2005; Ploeger, 1997; Warr, 1993a). Barry and Wentzel (2006) note that youth report greater frequency in observing their friends’ behaviour than their non-friends’ behaviour. I then conduct inductive analysis focusing on how ASEP proceedings target peer relations and school attachment.

6.3 Peer-related Truancy – General Trends

Assessment of peer-related truancy was not directly built into the ASEP intervention design. Instead, at the ASEP conference, youth were asked two routine questions related to their reasons for truancy and school engagement. In response, 27 ASEP youth (or 57% of the sample) identified peers as linked with truancy, whereas 19 youth (40% of the sample) alluded to peers promoting school engagement. In 12 out of the 27 peer-related truancy cases, ASEP youth also indicated going

to school for social reasons – to spend time with peers and/or participate in socially-oriented activities. In these cases, peers can exert both a push and pull around school engagement.

I have identified two types of peer-related truancy: co-truancy and truancy related to school-based peer conflict. *Co-truancy* refers to hanging out with peers during school hours. I have identified that co-truancy occurs with: (1) school friends, (2) peers who are disengaged from school, and (3) siblings. ASEP young people who co-truant regard their school absenteeism as a socially oriented activity. Isabella, a 15 year old female comments: ‘I just liked hanging out with friends and everything and just didn't bother to go to school’. She implies that co-truancy has normative aspects of youth socializing together. Similarly, Lachlan, a 17-year old reformed truant refers to his past co-truancy experiences as: ‘just chill(ing) out, smok(ing) cigarettes, do(ing) what any teenage kid does’.

My findings also indicate a significant cohort of students who are driven to truancy by school-based peer conflict. *School-based peer conflict* reported by truants includes bullying and victimisation, physical and verbal altercations, as well as peer rejection. Zachary expresses: ‘getting’ pushed around, punched around that’s pretty much it... it makes me not wanting to go to school’. Eleven year old Timothy has similar experience with his peers at school: ‘sometimes I get bullied... people call me names and push me around’. Mother of 15 year old Elizabeth reports: ‘they’ve [peers at school] locked her [Elizabeth] in closets’.

Table 4 shows the demographics of the ASEP youth who reported peer-related truancy. There are 14 ASEP youth who co-truanted and 20 who truanted due to school-based peer conflict. The youth who reported school-based peer conflict tend to be slightly younger (average age = 13) than youth who co-truant (average age = 14.1). The table also shows that in seven cases, truancy falls into both categories. Youth who report co-truancy, either in a mixed model or without peer-conflict, tend to be slightly older than those who report peer-conflict. No gender differences were apparent across the categories. There were 20 youth in the ASEP sample who did not report peer-related truancy.

Table 4: Demographics of young ASEP participants who report peer-related reasons for truancy

Peer-related truancy patterns	N	% of total of FGC cases	Gender split, M/F	Average age
Co-truancy	14	29.8	7/7	14.1
School-based peer conflict	20	42.5	10/10	13.0
Co-truancy & school-based peer conflict	7	14.9	4/3	14.1
Neither	20	42.6	11/9	13.3

Table 5 presents patterns that I identified in the two types of truancy. Co-truancy relates to socialising with peers, whereas solo truancy is a form of peer avoidance. Co-truants tend to report affective relationships with their peers, whereas truants experiencing conflict tend to report ‘cold and brittle’ peer relations. Co-truanting ASEP youth seek out peers to compensate for family disruptions, whereas truants experiencing peer conflict are resistant to leave home because they want to avoid the social school environment. I will discuss the patterns in greater detail in this chapter.

Table 5: General trends in co-truancy and truancy related to school-based peer conflict

	Co-truancy	Truancy due to school-based peer conflict
Purpose	Socialising with peers	Peer avoidance
Peer relations	Affective	Cold & brittle
Source of strain	Family	Peers

I was also interested to see if there were any overlaps between peer-related truancy and the 5R typology that emerged from my previous study. Table 6 shows the overlaps. The majority of co-truants (64% or nine out of 14 youth) were ‘reformed’ and ‘ready’ truants who either already had made some significant changes in their school engagement or were prepared to make them. The reformed and ready truants reported that they either had distanced themselves from their antisocial friends or recognised that their friends had a negative influence on their school engagement. In contrast, four co-truants were ‘resistant’ truants who experienced complex challenges around school engagement. These participants reported both co-truancy and school-based peer conflict as reasons for their school absenteeism. Peers affected their truancy in more complex ways to their ‘reformed’ and ‘ready’ counterparts.

Looking at the relationship between school-based conflict and the 5R typology, over half (11 out of 20) youth who reported school-based peer conflict were ‘resistant’ and ‘recalcitrant’ truants. These truants have diminished presenting capability, which presents as difficulties with coping with the social school environment and vulnerability to being targeted by other peers. For example, Timothy and Isaac run home to escape school-based peer violence. They do not have friends at school that could support them. Youth with diagnosed or suspected developmental delays are over-represented

in the resistant and recalcitrant truant categories. This finding is consistent with research showing that youth with disabilities typically have poor academic and social outcomes (Cumming et al., 2014). In contrast, six participants who identified school-based peer conflict were ‘ready’ truants. These truants reported both positive and negative peer relations. For example, Lauren gets support from her friends, and together they also see the school counsellor to deal with the ‘bitchy’ girls at school. So, the friendships at school counteract the negative experience of the peer conflict that takes place outside the friendship groups.

Table 6: How Truant Reform Readiness Typology interacts with co-truancy and school-based peer conflict categories

Truant Reform Readiness Typology category	Co- truancy	School- based peer conflict	Total N	Male	Female	Male Age \bar{x}	Female Age \bar{x}
Reformed	3	3*	5	1	4	17.0	11.7
Ready	6	6*	10	3	7	13.0	13.7
Resistant	4	8#	9	8	1	12.8	11.0
Recalcitrant	1	3*	3	2	1	13.5	14.0
TOTALS	14	20	27	14	13		

* One participant also exhibited co-truancy behaviours

Four participants also exhibit co-truancy behaviours

In the next section, I turn my attention to a more theoretical analysis of peer-related truancy. I start with an exploration of co-truancy with school friends, which is the most prevalent type of co-truancy that I identified. Then, I examine co-truanting with siblings followed by co-truancy with youth disengaged from school.

6.4 Co-truancy

6.4.1 Co-truanting with School Friends

Most ASEP youth who co-truant do so with their school friends. ASEP youth commonly reported that the same school peers encouraged both school engagement and truancy. Co-truancy presents a

peer paradox as the same friends can encourage prosocial and antisocial behaviours. Fifteen-year-old Jessica reflects:

Like, I and my friends were like – we didn't like the class that we had... Sometimes we just like to go to the city...or just stay in the school... Just like sit somewhere and – like till the class is over. And then go to the next class.

Jessica and her friends share a dislike of a certain subject and their truancy is an antisocial way of dealing with aspects of school curriculum that they dislike. In contrast, 15-year-old Hannah is ambivalent about her co-truanting boyfriend encouraging her school engagement: 'He makes me do my schoolwork though, he tells me to go to school, he's actually quite bossy...it's very annoying I don't listen to him but still.' For co-truants, peer relations appear supportive and affective. However, the problem is that the peer group sends mixed messages about school engagement. Whereas in youth delinquency theories, there is the assumption that prosocial and antisocial peers are two distinct groups (Simons et al., 1991), co-truants' peer relations contain both prosocial and antisocial characteristics.

The ASEP youth often lack assertiveness in their peer relations. Matthew's mother describes her 16-year old son: 'He's like a sheep, like he's like a follower.' Similarly, Lachlan describes a leader/follower dynamics in his former peer group: 'When I go out with my mates I guess they just lead me on.' These remarks are consistent with youth delinquency research, which shows that peer influence has a trickle-down effect emanating from the peer group to the individual (Haynie & Osgood, 2005). Yet, Lachlan reports that he is able to resist antisocial peer influence: 'I just tell 'em [friends] to shut up. I wanna finish high school, and year 12.' Lachlan is a reformed truant who has changed schools and distanced himself from his negative peers. Lachlan's example is in line with the SDM's proposition that commitment to school can buffer against delinquent peer influence (Hawkins and Weis, 1985). However, Lachlan's school representative observes that certain school environments are more prosocially oriented than others:

It's easier if there's a lot of kids doing the wrong thing, it's easy to go along with that. If there's a lot of kids doing the right thing, it's just as easy to go in with that and I think at our school generally, most of the kids are doing the right thing so it's easier for Lachlan to toe the line and sort of keep going and so it's a big improvement.

The school representative suggests that informal peer cultures at school exert influence on the individual's behaviours. Ideally, as in Lachlan's case, there is an alignment between prosocial behaviours of the school peers and the individual's behaviours.

The ASEP conference can be a forum for co-truants to reorient their peer relations towards school re-engagement. This is the case for a 'ready truant', Chloe, who co-truants with her close friend

Charlotte who lives next door (and who is also a participant in the ASEP's experimental group). At Chloe's conference, a dialogue emerges that is documented across two pages of her transcripts on how the friendship can be shifted towards school re-engagement:

- Facilitator: So it's a good kind of friendship in terms of you know that you are there for one another and you are supporting one another and those types of things.
- Chloe: Yeah like with our assignments we'll skip our lunch breaks and go to the library and get them done... Sometimes I like – to get (friend's name) to go to school I buy her lunch. And she's like OK.
- Agency rep: And maybe you can peer pressure them into going to school.
- Chloe: [*Unclear*].
- Agency rep: Yeah that's it, yeah. Probably convince them to come to school with you.
- Chloe: Sometimes I like – to get Charlotte to go to school I buy her lunch. And she's like OK.
- Facilitator: So what are the things that you're going to tell your friends? So if Charlotte's singing over the fence or you know – or they're talking to you on Facebook what are the things that you're going to say to them if they're trying to encourage you not to go to school?
- Chloe: That it's wrong they should come to school.

The facilitator helps Chloe recognize that she can be a prosocial influence for Charlotte. Prompted by the facilitator, Chloe names the school engagement behaviours that she and Charlotte already participate in (i.e. doing their homework, going to the library). Significantly, Chloe also identifies that she is able to influence Charlotte to go to school by buying her lunch (Charlotte's family experiences financial hardship and Chloe offers instrumental support by purchasing lunch for her friend). The facilitator then engages Chloe in articulating how she can use her positive influence in the event that Charlotte wants her to co-truant. Consistent with her previous responses, Chloe indicates that she is able to resist peer influence to truant. Through this dialogue, Chloe articulates what she is doing right and how she can maintain it. The gist of the dialogue is then cemented as a task in Chloe's action plan which states that Chloe is 'to be saying "no" when her friend asks her to not go to school.' As one of the outcomes, the school is to set a buddy system for Chloe and Charlotte, which is a peer support structure to provide positive reinforcement for school engagement activities.

Charlotte's example shows how the ASEP process commonly responds to the peer paradox related to co-truancy with school friends. The young person is encouraged to cultivate existing friendships with co-truants on the school grounds with a focus on school re-engagement. The ASEP conference disapproves of co-truancy but not of the friendship itself. In other words, the ASEP conference recognises that the antisocial aspects of school-based peer relations can be shifted towards school attachment.

During ASEP conferences, co-truancy is acknowledged as a real risk for all participants. After all, there is a strong research base that delinquency peaks in adolescence due to youth socialising together in unstructured settings (Moffitt, 1993; Weerman, 2014). At each ASEP conference, the police representative warns about the risks associated with co-truancy regardless of whether or not it is a presenting issue for the particular youth. The standardised message delivered across ASEP conferences is well captured in the following extract directed at Hayden, for whom truancy is due to school-based peer conflict:

When kids hang out together when they're not at school, they can get into trouble... So they can be going out not meaning to get into trouble at all. They can just be going out just to have some fun. And things can happen. Um you can get into trouble for doing silly things. You might write your name on a post or something like that, or your friend might say, 'oh look, just wait outside this house for a minute. I just need to go inside there for a minute just to have a look at something', and they go and do something silly inside the house. And the Police turn up and everyone gets in trouble and all of that sort of stuff... when you get into a habit of not going to school, um there are lots of bad things that happen. And one of them is you might hang out with other kids who aren't at school, and you can get into trouble with the Police for doing silly things that you might not even have meant to do ah to do in the first place.

The police representative articulates a link between truancy, co-offending and police contact. The ASEP participants hear the main premise of SDM that school attendance prevents delinquency. By communicating truancy risks, ASEP places the responsibility on the young participants and their families to make informed decisions about school, peer associations and appropriate settings for socialising.

6.4.2 Co-truanting with Siblings

There are three cases involving co-truancy with siblings among the ASEP sample. As I discussed in chapter 4, one of the selection criteria for ASEP participation was that the young person had no siblings already participating in the project. In common with the peer influence paradox, siblings exert influence in both prosocial and antisocial directions. Typically, siblings are excluded from research on delinquent peer influence due to the shared social and genetic environment (Vitaro, Brendgen, & Lacourse, 2014). However, I acknowledge them in this section due to the similarities with the earlier considered co-truanting group. For example, 11-year-old Cooper occasionally co-truants at home when his older brother persuades him to do so, but at other times, he successfully motivates his brother to attend school. Siblings can generate a group contagion effect to resist going to school in a similar way that peers exert a negative influence when placed together in a social setting (see Gifford-Smith et al., 2005; Patterson, Dishion, & Yoerger, 2000). For example, Zoe's stepfather laments: 'Even if I manage to get 'em out of bed it's still—they decide that they're not

going, that they're not going to go to school, they're going to dawdle and drag and dig their feet in.' Unlike peer co-truancy that takes place away from the parental gaze, parents are confronted with their children's resistance to follow direction. Sibling co-truancy appears to challenge both the parental and school authority.

ASEP dialogues attempt to challenge the decision making processes through which the ASEP youth succumb to antisocial sibling influence. For example, when Cooper expresses that 'you get dumb if you don't go to school', his teacher urges him:

Don't allow, if Steve [older brother] doesn't want to come to school, his actions to determine your future.... You know, if he's gonna jump of a bridge are you gonna jump off the bridge? [*slight pause*]
No. So if he doesn't wanna come to school, you still come to school. Okay?

In this extract, the teacher's message is designed to expose the discrepancy between Cooper's proschool attitude with his truancy behaviours. This strategy is designed so that Cooper could consistently align his school engagement with his prosocial stance. The facilitator reiterates the school representative's message: 'It sounds like you're a very smart cookie from what your teacher's just said. And you can do really really well... if you come to school every day.' Cooper, who is a 'ready truant', is reminded that he is highly capable of not letting sibling influence obstruct his school engagement efforts.

In responding to sibling co-truancy, the ASEP conference focuses on the post-conference engagement with the sibling group rather than the individual. In doing so, the intervention seeks to strengthen the siblings' attachment to formal institutions to reduce the antisocial sibling contagion effect. So, Cooper's action plan includes a referral to a youth community centre for a weekly activity for him and his brother. The activity is to be used as a reward for school attendance and is put on hold if the brothers co-truant. The inclusion of a fun activity into an action plan acts as an incentive, which increases compliance with school routines and strengthens engagement with other institutions (Maynard et al., 2011). Targeting problematic behaviours *per se* can result in formulating action plans that are unappealing to participants, increasing the probability of non-compliance (France et al., 2010). The community referral for siblings is designed to encourage them to spend more time together in structured and supervised settings (Osgood, Wilson, O'Malley, Bachman, & Johnston, 1996).

In the cases that I have examined so far, co-truancy is problematic as the young people miss out on learning opportunities. It is not the quality of the peer relations that are problematic but the co-truancy behaviours. I have identified that ASEP encourages strengthening these relations in schools

and other structured and supervised settings. In the next section, I turn my attention to problematic peer associations and how ASEP responds to these cases.

6.4.3 Co-truancy with the Peers Disengaged From School

Research shows that truancy can be a gateway to delinquency and offending (Huizinga et al., 2000; Maynard et al., 2013). There are ASEP youth who well acknowledge the risk of falling in with the ‘wrong crowd’. Lachlan reflects on the risks associated with making the initial step to skip school: ‘You meet a lot of bad people, and you just get influenced, that’s how it is... and you can’t stop it (truancy).’ Similarly, Thomas makes a connection between his truancy and a time when ‘everything started to fall apart’.

Escalations in truancy among ASEP co-truants is associated with increasing time spent with peers who are also disengaged from school. In two separate cases, Thomas (16-year-old male) and Sophie (14-year-old female), their truancy peaks when they remove themselves from their family’s care and temporarily live with peers who have dropped out of school and who have contact with criminal justice. Thomas associates with gang members and Sophie hangs out with peers, some of whom live on the streets. The peers of Thomas and Sophie have the classic ‘delinquent peer association’ features portrayed in the youth delinquency literature. The peers offend (Haynie & Kreager, 2013; Sutherland, 1973), come into contact with law enforcement agencies (Carbonaro & Workman, 2013), and offer an alternative source of influence to that of conventional society (Carbonaro & Workman, 2013; Moffitt, 1993). Agnew (1991) found that increasing attachment and time spent with delinquent peers increases the impact of their influence.

The ASEP conference flags out the risks that these delinquent peer associations can introduce. The police representative warns Thomas based on her knowledge of his peers:

The worst thing you can do is keep going down the path that you were going, because that leads to gangs and I know you know what I’m talking about. Yeah?... It’s also bad because the police get to know you for bad reasons, rather than for a good reason, and as soon as police get to know you for a bad reason, they will just continue to speak to you and think that you’re bad when you’re actually a really nice young guy which is not good and the worst of it is, the more you get associated with gangs, the more you will get into trouble and the more the gangs will do because they’ll just encourage each other to do more and more which I know you don’t want to do.

While Thomas is a ready truant who is back living in the family’s home and has made some prosocial changes, the police highlights a real risk emanating from his peers if he continues to associate with them. The police woman’s personal knowledge of peers adds more significance to the warning.

Thomas's conference discussions focus on deselection of his antisocial peers. Thomas's older brother, who is part of the proceedings, is highly instrumental as a prosocial model. Thomas and his brother started truanting and associating with 'the wrong crowd' at approximately the same time. Unlike Thomas, his brother was able to re-engage with education and reorient his peer relations. Drawing on his experience, the brother gives Thomas advice:

Like all he [Thomas] needs to do is just find something that that he really enjoys and then just just do it, practise, to get better, I practise volleyball a few times with my friends but the hardest thing is pushing away your friends like – Thomas's school rep's right when you walk – when you walk out on one of your friends you basically walk out on all of them.

Thomas's brother acknowledges that distancing from peers is a difficult but achievable task. Thomas becomes motivated hearing the comments and the facilitator encourages him to use it as a momentum for envisioning the 'next step':

Thomas: I didn't know how everyone felt about it, so it was really good that I finally know how... my brothers – well my siblings feel.
Facilitator: What do you reckon like could be your next step to getting to school regularly, being efficient again?
Thomas: I guess just stop hanging around with the wrong people and just focus on school.
Facilitator: Mmmm hmmm.
Thomas: Just get my mind set on what I want to do in the future instead of thinking about what I want to do today. I guess like I've got to start focusing on my long-term goals.

Consistent with his brother's advice, Thomas expresses that as part of school re-engagement, he will 'stop hanging out with the wrong people' and focus on 'long-term goals'. His action plan captures his verbal undertaking.

In principal, Thomas agrees with moving towards school-engagement, but expresses concern about the implications: 'If I turn my back on these boys... the hardest bit is that I'm just going to be by myself.' Thomas also appears reluctant to let go of his friendships because in his words: 'I just I reckon I have more fun with my mates than at school.' Thomas's comments suggest that the delinquent peers generate a strong pull, bringing to mind Warr's (1993a) notion of 'sticky friends'. Warr (1993a) proposes that sticky friends are hard to lose because through interpersonal contact, they continue to reinforce the individual's delinquency. The ASEP conference seeks to disrupt the sticky friend effect via peer deselection. Associating with the right people at school may require readjustment of Thomas's values and behaviours. To Thomas's advantage, he has family support at home which provides prosocial messages that contradict those of his antisocial peers. As discussed

in Chapter 5, people tend to find conflicting messages uncomfortable and, consequently, actively seek to minimise the conflict.

The case of 15-year-old Kyle however, shows how the allure of delinquent peers can remain sticky and enduring even when the youth has moved away from these associations. Prior to the ASEP conference, Kyle has had contact with youth justice due to co-offending. While he has made some prosocial changes, the police representative expresses concern that he may be drawn back into delinquent peer associations:

- Police rep: If you go back on the things you now changed in your life and you start hanging around the wrong people again and you start not going to school and going to other people's places and drinking, smoking, smoking pot, going out create havoc at shopping centres or whatev' whatever it is that you had been doing. Um it's just headed in one direction and that's not a direction that's good for your future.... Do you have any ideas of what you want to do with your future?
- Kyle: No, not yet.

Kyle has distanced himself from his delinquent peers but the police representative is concerned that in the absence of future goals, delinquent peer associations continue to present an appeal. The exchange between the police representative and Kyle suggests that enduring prosocial change involves both peer deselection coupled with a deeper level shift in which the youth replaces antisocial values with prosocial ones. To emphasise that message, police representative assesses how Kyle differentiates antisocial and prosocial peer associations. Kyle expresses a limited ability to differentiate between the two influences:

- Police rep: What do you think's the difference between good people and bad people to hang around?
- Kyle: Um, less trouble with good people
- Police rep: Mm hmm
- Kyle: And yeah, bad people, they go to jail and yeah...
- Police rep: But what about good groups you hang around...?
- Kyle: I'm not sure.

Kyle sees peer influence as falling into two distinct categories – bad people go to jail, good ones get into less trouble. However, he is unable to paint a more complex picture of the primary and secondary characteristics of prosocial and antisocial friends.

While the ASEP discussions may be able to draw on a larger pool of information in constructing a picture of what 'good' and 'bad' influence looks like, the individual participants are drawing on a much more limited and personal set of experiences. Kyle's past exposure to sticky friends, youth with offending histories, informs how he distinguishes between the prosocial and antisocial. The ASEP discussions attempt to build a more complex picture. For example, the police representative

urges Kyle to select peers ‘who are thinking of their future rather than people who just thinking of right now.’ The police explains that the future outlook constrains antisocial impulses. The police representative also reiterates to Kyle that his father is ‘a good dad’, different to fathers of many youth that he has dealt with, and urges Kyle to spend more time with his family. Kyle’s action plan includes activities such as going fishing with his father and joining a basketball team. These tasks offer the opportunity for Kyle to experience social connection removed from antisocial influences.

6.4.4 Co-truancy and Family Relations

Significant disruptions in the family are a common theme in the narratives of truancy development. The disruptions include the death of a parent (Lachlan), parental separation (Thomas, Sophie, and Joshua), entry into foster care (Isabella) and sibling incarceration (Chloe). Co-truancy can be interpreted as ASEP youths’ reaction to changing family circumstances. For instance, Lachlan reflects:

In Grade 9 it [truancy] wasn’t that often, but at the point when my dad passed away... it [truancy] just got constant. I just didn’t want to go to school anymore; I just couldn’t take it – the pressure... When I was wagging, I was with my mates.

Lachlan’s co-truancy presents as a coping mechanism. Similar to other ASEP truants experiencing family disruptions, he responds to family stress as predicted by General Strain Theory, which posits a relationship between stressful life events, negative emotions and antisocial behaviours (Agnew, 1985, 2008). The family disruptions act as stressors, increasing the likelihood of negative emotions such as anger and frustration (Agnew, 2001). Truancy can be a method for reducing experienced strain. The ASEP youth can become vulnerable to the antisocial peer influence as they drift away from the institutional bonds of family and school which, as the SDM explicates, promote conventional behaviour (Hawkins & Weis, 1985).

Families have a key role in assisting youth to cope with disruptions. There is evidence that families instinctively endeavour to correct problem behaviours. Prior to the ASEP conference, Lachlan’s mother re-enrolled Lachlan into a new school where other children of family friends were attending. This school change provided Lachlan with a fresh start, which facilitated what his mother describes as Lachlan ‘snapping out’ of truancy. A different example of how guardians assist in school re-engagement and strengthening prosocial peers is the case of Isabella. Isabella is a young person in Child Safety’s out-of-home care system. Prior to her ASEP conference, she experienced placement breakdown in her previous foster care home. Co-truancy was a contributing factor to that breakdown. Since then, Isabella went on to live with new foster care parents. Her placement condition was that she would go to school every day. Initially, she tested the condition and

consequently had higher than usual contact with the Child Safety Department, who monitored the placement. With time, Isabella developed a relationship with her carers and stopped truanting. Her example suggests that creating a stable home environment in which clear expectations and boundaries about school attendance and peer associations are reinforced can foster school re-engagement. However, as a teenager in care, research suggests that she is at risk of further placement changes, which potentially introduce further educational disruptions (McDowall, 2013). In Isabella's case, her placement disruptions had been rectified prior to her ASEP conference and no further placement issues emerged in the course of the conference. Her case demonstrates that some youth experience more family instability than others, which impacts on whether the family is a consistent source of support for them. It is unrealistic to expect that entrenched family problems could be repaired through a single family conference focused on truancy.

During the ASEP conference, the family has a critical role in fostering school engagement and the intervention emphasizes this family role. Typically, parents express concerns about their children's truancy as part of ASEP's process of reparation. However, this can be tricky if the child does not have a good relationship with the parent. For example, Sophie's social world is compartmentalised into her exciting world of peers that she hangs out with when she runs away from what appears to her as a dull family and school life. Sophie's mother strongly expresses that her daughter's choices have a spillover impact on her family relations: 'My life lives in limbo until you [Sophie] decide that you do want to come home. Sophie's ASEP conference is focused on rebuilding mother–daughter relationship.' The application of restorative processes triggers robust discussions related to existing family problems, which are documented at great length across the 96 pages of Sophie's conference transcripts. In her case, the process does not lead to the reparation of harm that the restorative literature suggests follows after the stakeholders express their perspectives (Braithwaite, 2001). Sophie argues that 'nothing is helping', while her mother unsuccessfully tries to tell her that the patterns persist because Sophie does not allow enough time to work through presenting issues. Sophie's action plan includes family counselling and for Sophie to develop a prosocial relationship with her brother. Improving Sophie's family relations remains a work in progress post-ASEP as repairing entrenched family issues can be a long-term process (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2012).

In my discussion so far, I have focused on how ASEP responds to co-truancy. I identified that the ASEP conference encourages maintenance of peer relations of youth who co-truant with school peers and siblings. The focus, however, is on selective peer socialisation related to increasing time spent together at school and in structured activity programs. In contrast, youth who co-truant with other disengaged young people are instructed by the police representative to deselect their

delinquent peers and replace them with new prosocial peers. The focus is also on strengthening the family bond. Creating balance in one social domain may have a trickle-down effect on peer relations and school engagement. In the next section, I explore perspectives of another group of youth, those that truant due to problematic peer relations at school.

6.5 Truancy due to School-Based Peer Conflict

6.5.1 Contesting School-Based Peer Conflict

Unlike the co-truants whom I discussed in previous sections, the ASEP youth who report school-based peer conflict truant alone to avoid peer interactions. Twenty ASEP youth (74% of ASEP youth who report peer-related truancy) reported that peer conflict drives their truancy. The severity of the reported conflict differed. At the lower end of the spectrum, ASEP youth reported being picked on for being 'different', which could include simply having a lower socioeconomic status than their peers. For instance, 15-year-old Hannah, who is a 'ready' truant expresses: 'The people there [at school] are not very nice, it's about what you have, like what you can afford and all that sorta stuff.' At the other end of the spectrum, there are indications of physical violence perpetrated by school peers. The mother of a 16-year old Nathan who is a 'recalcitrant truant' describes her son's social school experience:

He comes home with half a tooth missing ... cause he got pushed into a pole so that they could see him cry, and then he's come home, his uniform has been ripped, and he had his books thrown all over the oval.

Unlike the ASEP co-truants who can have sticky friends, the ASEP truants who experience the more severe and ongoing peer conflict at school tend to have what Hirschi (1969) has termed 'cold and brittle' peer relations (Giordano et al., 2010, p. 919). In contrast to sticky friends, who signify the presence of affective relations, 'cold and brittle' implies their absence or weakness. Most of the ASEP youth experiencing peer conflict at school (in particular resistant and recalcitrant truants) also report a lack of close prosocial peer relations. This trend is consistent with research showing that bullied students tend to have fewer friends and are rejected by classmates more than non-bullied peers, leaving them vulnerable to aggressive peers (Haynie et al., 2001; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). However, Hirschi's (1969) notion of 'cold and brittle' peer relations does not account for the delinquent behaviours of the seemingly 'prosocial peers' at school. Yet, my analysis shows that it is the covert delinquency of the 'prosocial peers' at school that drives the less institutionally integrated youth towards truancy.

ASEP youth report the prevalence of delinquent or at least non-positive school-based peer cultures that shape their school experience and drive students towards truancy. For the earlier mentioned Thomas, one of his triggers for truancy was avoiding getting involved in school-based fights. Thomas explains that the fights were a common means to establish the pecking order among his school peers. Similarly, 17-year old Matthew describes the high prevalence of physical fights on school grounds:

The whole group can be going so well and then it can just come from like so good to so crap just so quick... Then everyone just starts doing the wrong thing and I can see that in everyone down there. Like as soon as one person will do the wrong thing and it gets enough attention, there's plenty more people lining up to do the same thing.

There are also more subtle negative drivers of absenteeism. Sixteen year old Phoebe chooses to be 'a lone wolf' and distance herself from the dominant peer groups that she describes as 'bitchy'. For ten year old Mikayla, truancy is a technique to avoid participation in peer group conversations about 'dry sex' experiences at lunch time which she finds uncomfortable and distressing.

During the ASEP conference for Isaac, the facilitator describes two types of bullying that ASEP youth report:

The first type is a type that, it's like what dad said, so water off a duck's back, kinda I don't really need to worry about it. Um someone might call you a little name or someone might give you a funny look or stuff like that. That's not really something that you need- that you need a teacher to help you with you can just go just ignore it, you can just walk away, you can just say "leave me alone" ... And I guess there's another type of bullying and that's stuff that you probably can't handle on your own, that's when you need help from a teacher. It's when you need help from mum and dad, and that's when um you've tried to walk away, and maybe someone's followed you or um you've been hurt very badly um, or there's um you're feeling very very sad all the time about it, um there's stuff that you will need help with.

Based on her experience facilitating ASEP conferences, the facilitator differentiates between a benign and severe peer conflict. She notes that benign conflict is a normative phenomenon that should not impact on the young person's school engagement. She suggests that the young person can manage the dispute without external help, as part of learning how to handle interpersonal differences. In contrast, severe peer conflict is more complex to manage. The facilitator encourages the young person to seek help from parents and teachers as the conflict can have a detrimental affect on the student's well-being.

In contrast, ASEP youth and their families commonly express that the two types of peer-conflict are less polarised than the facilitator presents them to be, and that they both should be taken seriously,

because benign conflict can escalate. For example, the mother of the earlier mentioned 16-year-old Nathan expresses that her son is ‘super sensitive and over emotional and he doesn’t do well in a group situation’ due to his Aspergers Syndrome. She also points out that Nathan’s sensitivity makes him susceptible to being singled out by his peers. She observes an entrenched interactional pattern: ‘Since primary school the kids pick on him to get him to cry, but it’s the same repeat offenders that get him to cry and then it annoys everybody else in the class, and then they pick on him for crying.’ Through her narrative, Nathan’s mother elaborates on how the school has downplayed violent incidents of bullying. Mother recalls lodging a complain to school when Nathan returned with his tooth half missing and his uniform torn. She reports that the school’s response was that ‘it’s not bullying because he’s had friends with them’.

Reconciling school-based peer conflict during an ASEP conference presents some limitations. First, no peers are present. The intervention focuses on strategies for the young person, parents and school around school re-engagement. As noted earlier, the ASEP conference considers the school social environment as a prosocial setting. This position parallels with the SDM’s assumption that school is conducive to prosocial peer associations due to institutional structure and supervision (Catalano et al., 2004; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Therefore, the focus is on changing the youth’s behaviour with the support of the ASEP team rather than changing the social climate of the school. This focus delivered during a once-off conference essentially means that the entrenched structural issues that perpetuate school-based conflict cannot be addressed during the intervention.

Second, there is no consistent framework for how Queensland schools respond to peer conflict. Hannah’s mother comments on the differences she has observed across the schools in which her daughter has been enrolled:

I think (name of school) handled the bullying very well, um and the way they mediate the kids, what I’ve heard from the kids who did this at the house, umm, they’re taught bullying is unacceptable, and if they wanna make a go the school supports them so much, um I’m really quite taken back by that compared to the two schools, considering um (name of another school) is held up here in higher steam with a lot of parents.

Here, Hannah’s mother indicates that some schools respond to bullying better than others in the region. She makes this comment when Hannah’s school representative, who is the school principal, explains that his commitment to responding to bullying is based on his past horrendous experience as a parent of a bullied teenager. The differences in approaching school-based conflict across schools can affect how the issue is responded to during the ASEP conference.

At some conferences, tensions arise due to the differences in perspectives between families and schools about the school’s responding to reports of peer conflict. Hancock and colleagues (2015)

note that youth tend to attribute their truancy to school factors whereas the teachers tend to attribute truancy to individual and family factors. Some ASEP youths' accounts of being bullied are disputed or challenged by staff (e.g. Samuel, Sophie, Isaac, Lauren). The following extract exemplifies this occurrence:

School rep: Um, this isn't about bullying... He can't even name a child. He can never tell me a name of anyone.

Samuel's father: Ah um you're wrong.

School rep: And my concern for Samuel is... he's isolated. Not bullied... not, not being harassed so much, he's isolated because of lack of friendships.

The ASEP conference aims to promote transparent dialogue between the family and the school to develop a group consensus about the presenting issues. Samuel's school representative urges Samuel's parents, who are separated: 'We've gotta be consistent, all of us together... otherwise it's not gonna make any difference.' The teacher makes a logical point about the interpersonal dynamics that can perpetuate the problem. However, the intervention's focus is on changing the young person's behaviour and the structural factors that can aggravate truancy are not acknowledged. The ASEP conference focuses on Samuel's increasing his school attendance rather than on enhancing the school climate or the quality of his parents' interactions around Samuel's care, factors that could potentially increase his desire to go to school each day.

6.5.2 Active and Passive Victims

In youth delinquency theories, the line between the victim and the delinquent is blurred because delinquency-prone youth put themselves at risk of victimisation by engaging in risk-taking activities (Cuevas, Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2007). Put differently, youth who report problematic school-based peer relations are thought to contribute to peer conflict. However, the narratives of ASEP youth reveal that they can be either 'active' or 'passive' recipients of peer conflict. This trend is consistent with Olweus's (2014) findings that youth experiencing peer victimisation either externalise or internalise their responses. In hindsight, Hannah can reflect on her own 'active' contribution to the peer conflict:

I would never just go up and start bullying a kid, there always had to be a reason behind it. Usually it was because if someone did something towards me, or someone that I cared about, like a good friend, then I would say something or do something back. Sometimes, I didn't look at it as bullying, sometimes I'd just up and I'd say something to them, but I didn't see it as bullying until I took a step back and I was like 'whoops' and then I realised what I was doing.

From Hannah's comment, it is evident that young people may struggle to identify their input to peer conflict. In the case of Hayden, it is apparent that the bullied young person is a 'passive' victim. Hayden's mother expresses:

He was talking about the bullying that was going on with three particular girls. It was for most of the whole year, but you didn't tell mum until towards the end of the year. They'd stole his school books. They stole his calculator, pencils, rubbers, rulers. I had to replace everything. They stole his socks when he went to HPE. (Hayden) wouldn't tell the school but he'd actually come to the office and told them that he was sick so that way they would ring me to come pick him up and I come picked him up. And he broke down in the car about it.

Hayden's mother's description of Hayden being a 'passive' victim also highlights the challenge of responding to the peer conflict underpinning his truancy. Hayden does not seek support from the teachers nor does he alert them about the seemingly benign incidents that keep on repeating. Instead, he pretends to be sick and goes home.

In responding to peer conflict, the ASEP conference places the onus of responsibility on the individual youth to move away from the conflict. ASEP acknowledges the challenge that peer conflict generates with school engagement. Nonetheless, Hayden, similarly to other more 'passive' victims of peer conflict, is urged that he needs to be at school:

Police rep: It's not nice to go to school if you think you're gonna be bullied. Is that right?
Hayden: Yep.
Police rep: That'd make you a little bit worried wouldn't it?
Hayden: Yep.
Police rep: And one of the things I like to say to kids who worry a little bit about things is the word that I try to get them to put in their brain all the time is I need to be brave.
Hayden: Yep.
Police rep: Cause problems can't work themselves out unless you be brave and try to work your problems out.
Hayden: Yep.
Police rep: So that's, do you think that's something you can say to yourself as you're getting up in the morning and you think, 'Awe I gotta go to school. I don't really wanna go to school. I need to be brave and go to school.' Do you think that might be something that you could?
Hayden: Yep.
Police rep: I often say I say kids to be brave, but say two other things as well. Be brave, be calm and be sensible.
Hayden: Yep.
Police rep: And you have to think about all three of those. You gotta be brave in terms of coming to school when you don't necessarily want to or telling the teachers when you've been bullied. You've got to be calms when people do bully you... And then you've got to be sensible with the decisions you make like with not swearing and all those sorts of things. So, be brave, be calm and be sensible.

Bullying is a very delicate issue in this case. Yet, Hayden hears simple advice from the police representative to 'be brave, calm and sensible', which is not that simple to implement. School staff also reassures Hayden: 'We try and make differences for you, okay? And I mean one of the differences is how I how I organise the class so that this year for you it will be easier than perhaps last year was.' Here, the teacher indicates that the school reviewed Hayden's classes to maximise the fit between Hayden's learning and positive relations. Hayden will also get 'in-class' support from the teacher. In addition, Hayden's action plan contains tasks related to how Hayden and his

parents will work with the school around positive relationships, learning about emotions and behaviour and talking to school staff when experiencing problems.

The ASEP conference can at times position the young person as contributing to the school-based peer conflict. Timothy, is a resistant truant with comprehension difficulties and complex history of bullying. Through the dialogue, the ASEP facilitator suggests to Timothy that he can reduce the peer conflict by ignoring it:

Facilitator: So what happens when you get bullied and teased?
Timothy: People push me around.
Facilitator: Mm hmm. And what do you do when that happens?
Timothy: Sometimes I don't do the right thing.
Facilitator: Okay.
Timothy: And sometimes I do ignore them.
Facilitator: Okay. Umm, so when, when you don't do the right thing, what do you mean by that?
Timothy: I'll, I'll get in trouble also.
Facilitator: Okay. Alright. And so, what do you think happens when you, when you ignore them? Do yo', what makes you - -
Timothy: I won't get in trouble

It appears that in this dialogue, the facilitator attempts to position Timothy as an active rather than a passive victim. Her questioning style elicits answers from Timothy where he indicates that he responds to the experienced conflict in antisocial manner which leads him to 'getting into trouble'. This dialogue also highlights the potential risk of a well-meaning intervention to contribute to blaming the victim (Allen, 2003; Frost, 2005; Graycar & Jamrozik, 1991). While the victimised youth may reiterate in distressing social situations, empowering the young person to respond in prosocial way could benefit with greater level of exploration and provision of strategies which is missing in this transcript.

The ASEP conference's main focus is on the youth being proactive in strengthening prosocial peer relations at schools. This positive intervention approach mirrors strategies used in prior research to integrate bullied students to school (Fung, 2012). James, an Indigenous boy, is told by the school staff: 'You've got to think of the big picture perhaps – if I go to school I'll have a good time there with my friends... you've got all the kids who miss you when you're away.' ASEP youth with minimal social connections (e.g. Lauren and Angela) are encouraged to 'go to school every day to develop good and positive friendships'. So, the ASEP conference urges the young person to put in the effort to enhance social connections.

While existing peer relations of truants experiencing conflict are not ideal, the ASEP conference highlights that the structured school environment is safer than other forms of social contact the youth could potentially encounter outside the institutional setting. This message is well conveyed by the police representative to Joshua:

School, apart from you have of the boys threatening you, is generally a safe place... it's not just the police who look at, y'know students as [*unclear word*] truancy... there are people out there, predators who see those flags as well.

The key point of the police's message is that Joshua is at increased risk of being a victim of crime when not at school. To promote his school re-engagement, the school representative recommends that Joshua looks up to his prosocial peers in class who model expected classroom behaviours, as well as be linked with a peer mentor. These recommendations encourage Joshua to shift his focus away from the peer conflict to more neutral socialising. The implication is with Joshua focusing on prosocial peer socialising, the peer conflict that he experiences will also reduce. Joshua does not comment on the recommendations, so we do not find out what he makes out of them.

In other cases, ASEP conferences focus on enhancing the young person's focus on the existing positive peer relations to aid in the young person's self-regulation to increase school engagement. For example, Angela experiences difficulties with her German class and the teacher. At the conference, school staff recommends that Angela uses peer relations in her class as a means for connecting with the class on a more significant level: The school staff suggests that Angela's school experience can be improved if she shifts her attention on focusing on the positive rather than the negative aspects of her German class.

If you have a friend that you sit with in class, instead of focusing on what sort of mood the teacher's going to be in, you know, if you're going to get in trouble, think more the fact, oh cool, I'm going to be in class with Kath today. I'm going to be in class with, yeah. I know that you're learning there in class, but you've got someone you can focus on. I'm going to sit with her today.

During the ASEP conferences, youth are prompted to contribute to developing strategies for responding to peer conflict. Through the process, 12-year-old Angela concedes: 'Well maybe I have to stay away from the people that distract me, change my schedule a little bit to try to fit it in and not annoy the students and teachers.' Knowledge of response strategies, however, does not necessarily mean that the ASEP youth regularly agree to apply them in practice. This is the case for Isaac:

Isaac: My anger taking control uh strategies for home: deep breathing, count to ten, read a book, go into my room, to calm down, say the angry words in my mind, and not to who I am angry with.
Strategies for school, walk away from bullies, talk to the, talk to a teacher, go to the office, sit outside the classroom for... ask whoever is making me angry to please stop because I don't like it.

School rep: Have you tried any of these strategies? [*short pause*] think about it, in class.

Isaac: I've tried that one.

School rep: You've tried to walk away? Well done! How often do you do this one?

Isaac: Sometimes.

School rep: Probably not as often as you should. Talk to the teacher cos I see disappearing Isaac but I don't hear the one who needs some help.

Here, Isaac describes his existing ‘emotion management plan’, which he seldom implements. Isaac’s response resembles the behavioural patterns of other truants who report that when faced with peer conflict, they do not seek help from school staff. Isaac’s action plan reiterates the content of his emotion management plan as well as explicates that his parents and school staff are to help Isaac with using the plan.

I have identified that the ASEP conference is designed to encourage the young participants to prosocially respond to peer conflict without addressing its causes. This approach is one way of responding to peer conflict, which involves teaching assertiveness skills to the victimised youth (Craig, Pepler, & Blais, 2007; Fung, 2012). Yet, the amount of learning of social assertiveness skills that can take place during the family group conference is limited. The conference places the responsibility on the youth to avoid peer conflict with the help of parents and teachers and engage in prosocial forms of peer interactions. This is a significant responsibility that the vulnerable youth may potentially continue to find challenging. In evaluating the change, caution must be taken that no change is interpreted as the participant’s fault (Oliver, Hoover, & Hazler, 1994). Scholars caution that the interventions can potentially blame the individuals for no improvement rather than critically examine the failings of the professional partnerships in generating prosocial change (Allen, 2003; Frost, 2005; Graycar & Jamrozik, 1991).

6.5.3 Family Relations and School-Based Peer Conflict

A common theme in the narratives of truants experiencing peer conflict is school refusal. Hayden’s mother describes Hayden’s entrenched morning pattern:

He [Hayden] cried for an hour before we left the house – and he cried the whole way here because he just didn’t wanna come. ‘I don’t wanna be there mum, I don’t wanna be there.’ I said, ‘Mate, you’ve gotta go to school.’

Hayden’s mother also acknowledges her own reluctance to send her son to school knowing that he may experience bullying: ‘I don’t wanna send him to school when I know he’s being picked on’.

The theme repeats in the case of Samuel. Samuel’s mother describes her experience:

I think it was a lot because I was going through a depression and um, Samuel would cry and then it was hard for me to let him go. So that was part of the reason too, not, you know, not wanting to send him to school where he’s gonna get bullied and I was just really I guess insecure about a lot of things so.

In both instances, the child and the parent co-regulate in a counterproductive manner that reinforces truancy. The comments suggest that parents can be conflicted between encouraging school attendance and protecting their children from the potential emotional harm emanating from their school peers.

I have observed differences in the parental attendance at ASEP conference for youth experiencing school-based peer conflict and co-truancy. In cases of co-truancy, only one parent (predominantly the mother) attended the conference, while both parents were present in half of the ASEP conferences where truancy was due to peer conflict. This pattern for truants experiencing school-based peer conflict tacitly suggests that the parents at least acknowledge that the child is being isolated and needs support. While family represents a safe haven for some ASEP youth and the family may compensate for the youth's absence of prosocial peer relations, the family's presence can be interpreted as their signalling that they need support to deal with the complex problem.

At the ASEP conferences, the parents typically express the negative impact of truancy on the family. The facilitator uses parental comments to generate momentum so that the young person reflects on the harm that their truancy causes in the family. This is illustrated in the following extract from Joshua's conference:

- Facilitator: How d'ya think um that your mum's affected?
Joshua: I dunno, she's angry.
Mother: When it first started happening I was worried, because Joshua had a way of not finding his way home, he's always know how to get somewhere but not get back... He'll get grounded or he'll get something taken off of him, sometimes I phone his dad and his dad will talk to him about it or just always tryin' something different.
Facilitator: Yeah sure, and how's um, how's Joshua going? Like respond to that?
Mother: Umm, Joshua doesn't like authority so he'll crack up, y'know, stomp out, whatever... Joshua doesn't want to but um if it comes to the time where he's just not listening at all, then he'll go live with his dad, because he listens to his dad.
Facilitator: Okay then, um what would make this better for you?
Mother: Go to school would be a good start.
Facilitator: What do you think would need to, to happen y'know like to?
Joshua: To go to school, yeah.

Joshua articulates that his truancy is stressful for his mother and that the problem could be resolved if he would go to school. However, Joshua is a resistant truant with a diagnosis on the autism spectrum disorder whose truancy is related to his diminished capability, which also makes him vulnerable to being singled out and picked on by his peers at school. Joshua's action plan outlines referrals to specialist agencies including family support. Yet, there is minimal focus at ASEP on how peer relations that exacerbate his truancy can be improved.

ASEP is also a forum for activating family supports and reiterating the young person's responsibility for school engagement (Mazerolle, Bennett, et al., 2017). The school representative communicates this message to another resistant truant, 16-year-old Nathan, who has been diagnosed with Asperger's: 'You have a mum and dad who will support you, and help you a lot, ok? But, your responsibility is for them is to get an education and to be a role model for your brothers and sisters.' The father has more leverage than the mother in making Nathan go to school as he notes

that ‘there’s never any arguments with me, never, you know, get ready for school.’ Consequently the father explains that ‘I’m in negotiation to try and swap my whole work around so that I can maybe ensure be there to take him to school.’ However, changing the father’s work schedule is not a feasible long term solution. Nathan’s action plan includes linkages to family counselling but excludes actions to reduce his negative social experience at school. Again, the young person’s refusal behaviour is positioned as the problem and the responsibility is constructed as resting within the family rather than with the social structures of the school. In other words, the focus is on reframing the young person’s perceptions and their way of engaging at school. Because bullying is a serious issue in this case, Nathan is also told to report any peer problems to teachers, a task that he feels uncomfortable fulfilling.

The young person and the parents’ responsibility is emphasised through the communication of the legal levers related to non-attendance. This message forces Nathan to reconsider the impact of his truancy behaviours:

Facilitator:	Why does it make a difference, hearing it (importance of going to school) from me rather than hearing it from Mum and Dad?
Nathan:	I don’t know, it’s more...
Mother	Official.
Nathan:	Yeah.
Mother	I don’t think he really believed us.
Facilitator:	This really is serious, Nathan.
Nathan:	Yep.

Nathan concedes that his school attendance is non-negotiable. Ultimately, the ASEP conference makes the point that it is a young person’s responsibility to be at school regardless of the quality of his peer relations.

6.6 Discussion

The research question guiding my study is how does the ASEP conference affect school-based peer attachment of young participants. I uncovered a school-based peer paradox – peers at school are the main source of antisocial peer influence to truant. While the SDM posits that attachment to school peers is necessary for school engagement, I found that school peers are a mixed source of prosocial and antisocial influence. School peers can foster school engagement, but significantly, they can also influence truancy through either attachment or conflict. I identified two types of peer-related truancy: (1) co-truancy and (2) truancy due to school-based peer conflict.

Contrary to the scholarly debate about whether it is social learning theories or social control theory that better account for peer influence in understanding youth delinquency (Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; TenEyck & Barnes, 2015), I find that both of these theoretical frameworks are relevant.

These theoretical tensions are not examined in the SDM, which integrates these two perspectives (Borden, 2000; Matsueda, 1982). I find that co-truancy as a social activity can be explained with social learning theories (i.e. DAT and social learning). In contrast, truancy due to school-based peer conflict can be better explained by applying the social control theory.

Co-truancy relates to socializing with peers who are predominantly friends from school. In the presence of affective relationships, through social learning processes (e.g. modelling and reinforcement), co-truants and their peers enact similar behaviours (Akers, 1985; Boman, 2013; Sutherland, 1947). Young people's emotional bonds strengthen as they spend time together, be it at school or elsewhere. In the presence of attachment to peers, young people are more willing to modify their behaviours to fit with those of the peer group (Reynolds & Crea, 2015). Through spending time together, the ASEP youth and their peers at times spontaneously decided to engage in truancy, a behaviour that weakens their school bonds but appears as a more attractive alternative to school attendance. These co-truants are able to differentiate between wrong and right behaviours. They also are able to enact prosocial behaviours a lot of the time. However, when with friends they are inconsistent in reinforcing and enacting rule-obeying behaviours and get swayed into engaging in rule-breaking behaviours.

Only a small subsample of ASEP co-truants reported associating with youth who, because of their offending and school dropout, fit the 'delinquent' definition (Haynie & Kreager, 2013; Sutherland, 1973). In these cases, the peer associations illustrate what Warr (1993a) refers to as the 'sticky friends' effect – the peers model alternative antisocial lifestyles. In these cases, the delinquent peer associations are related to significant escalations in truancy and disengagement from school. A drift into the 'wrong crowd' greatly weakens the young person's school bonds, including relations with school-based peers.

Truancy due to school-based peer conflict can be explained by the 'cold and brittle' hypothesis of social control theory (Giordano et al., 2010; Hirschi, 1969). The weak attachment to school peers steers the youth towards truancy. The paradox here is that it is the school peers, are regarded as prosocial in delinquency theories, who actively push the ASEP youth towards truancy. Moon, Hwang, and McCluskey (2008) note that school bullying or 'the more mundane but pervasive school misconduct' (p. 23) is not well reconciled in criminological theories.

As a general finding, the ASEP conference processes were more aligned with targeting co-truancy than school-based peer conflict. The standardised police message linking truancy to co-offending, communicated at each ASEP conference, is based on the assumption prevalent in youth delinquency

theories that truancy is a social activity (Akers, 1985; Sutherland, 1947). ASEP's focus is on selective peer socialisation, or enhancing prosocial relations with school-based peers, and deselecting or distancing away from antisocial peer relations. Yet, this is an easier task for co-truants who already have good social relations at school, and who predominantly fall into the 'ready truant' category. The ASEP conference encourages the co-truants to practice assertiveness in their interpersonal relations at school. In contrast, youth who experience peer conflict at school are urged to be 'brave, calm and sensible' and to develop their social skills. As noted earlier, youth whose truancy is related to school-based peer conflict predominantly fall into the resistant and recalcitrant truant categories. These categories are characterised by the diminished capability for school engagement. The task of responding prosocially when faced with bullying can be a daunting call for these youth because the intervention's focus is on changing their behaviour per se and not that of their peers. However, Reynolds and Crea (2015) found that self-regulation is an effective strategy for negotiating peer influence and building resilience. Self-regulation provides the young person with skills to navigate through challenging social contexts (Reynolds & Crea, 2015). Also, considering the format of the intervention, there is limited scope for responding to peers of bullied youth in this context.

My analysis showed that while school peers are a significant factor related to truancy, there was no uniform approach to how they are responded to during the ASEP conferences. Exploration of peer relations emerged organically and was not part of the ASEP script. Consequently, inconsistencies emerged among the cases as to how peer issues were explored and targeted. Some action plans included peer-related tasks, others did not. These inconsistencies possibly arose because peer influence is regarded as secondary when dealing with truancy. The key message that ASEP youth hear is that school attendance is non-negotiable but peer relations can be changed. At the conference youth are supported to increase their selective peer socialisation at school and in other structured settings. By increasing structured socialisation, there is less opportunity for unstructured socialising that can lead to engagement in delinquent behaviours (Catalano et al., 1996; Osgood et al., 1996). By going to school more often, the youth would spend more time with their school peers, which means that the quality of the relations would change too and be more focused on school engagement. ASEP youth with sticky friends who are disengaged from school are also asked to deselect these peers because these friends are a significant antisocial influence. It is outside the scope of the ASEP intervention to enforce the recommended changes. However, the youth and their families are provided with information about the risks of continuing on the truancy trajectories and

advice on changing the social relations to enable them to make informed decisions and choices post the ASEP conference.

Findings from this analysis also highlight that so much more is yet to be learnt on how truancy interventions can more effectively target peer issues. I concur with Reynolds and Crea (2015) that truancy interventions should include exploration of peer influence in their design. Quantitative methods could also be used to assess the pre- and post-intervention effects on peer relations. Considering that school re-engagement is the primary focus of ASEP and peer relations are a secondary issue, in the next chapter I examine how they are related together. Next, I follow three ASEP truants and examine how the school re-engagement process can parallel with shifts in social relations. I focus on three cases to examine in-depth how school re-engagement unfolds over a 2-year period commencing at the ASEP conference. By doing this, I aim to explore how the ASEP processes offset change in the participants' lives and how the participants enact the change using the infrastructure of support and resources that have been drawn out during the ASEP conference.

Chapter Seven

School Belief and ASEP

7.1 Introduction

In restorative interventions, antisocial behaviour is viewed as a violation of shared values or beliefs (Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather, 2009). Okimoto and colleagues (2009) posit that moving away from antisocial behaviour requires establishing shared values, taking on responsibility and acting in accordance with the shared values. The shift happens through the application of a restorative process that engages the affected parties in a dialogue (Drewery, 2004). In this chapter, I consider how the ASEP intervention tried to reposition truants' beliefs about school engagement and how that impacted the young person's behaviours and social relations post-intervention. The analysis in this chapter differs to that employed in chapter 5 and 6 in respect to the data sources and the time frames explored.

This chapter is organized as follows. First, I describe my research question in relation to the case study method that I employ. Second, I focus on three cases to assess the reach and limitations of the ASEP processes. Finally, I conclude with integrating my findings and discussing their implications.

7.2 Analytical Approach

I explore how the ASEP processes target participants' school belief to activate school re-engagement. The belief sub-construct of an SDM's school bond examines the individual's degree of acceptance and obedience to rules and values (Erickson et al., 2000). The founders and scholars of the SDM (Catalano et al., 2004, p. 252) state that 'belief is a consequence of social bonding and a mediator between the effect of bonding and behavioural outcome.' This proposition implies that social interactions impact on the individual's beliefs, which conversely impact on the individual's behaviour. Researching activation of belief through the use of a family group conference such as ASEP is appropriate because it is theorised that the restorative processes within the intervention's design facilitate the restoration of belief (Okimoto et al., 2009). As discussed in chapter 4, the restorative process of the ASEP conference aims to foster willing compliance of the truant and the family to take ownership of the truancy problem and act towards solving it (Mazerolle et al., 2012).

I examine the social processes between the ASEP young people and the ASEP adults (the parent, facilitator, school, police and community agency representative). I explore how the ASEP group jointly construct shared beliefs to activate school re-engagement and how this in turn influences the young person's school re-engagement in the post-intervention period. My approach is consistent

with the social constructionism epistemology guiding my thesis, which stipulates that a phenomenon is a product of co-construction between the individual and other social agents (Drewery, 2004).

I apply a comparative case study method to the three ASEP cases to explore the relationship between ASEP process, school belief and school re-engagement. Yin (2009) points out that the case study method is the preferred analytical approach for exploring the 'how' and 'why' questions that are required to trace operational links over time. It is thus a suitable method to explore how ASEP's processes can have an enduring affect on the participants' school beliefs. The exploratory nature of the case study method enabled me to develop theoretical propositions about the intervention's change mechanisms as I compare and contrast the cases (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009). In Yin's (2009, p. 10) words, 'case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense the case study, like the experiment, does not represent a "sample", and the investigator's goal is to expand and generalize theories.'

I capitalize on the case study analysis' unique strength of being able to interrogate multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009). My results emerge from three events or sources of data: (1) ASEP conferences, (2) ASEP exit meetings, and (3) ASEP parent interviews. I conducted thematic analysis of my case study data. (I use Braun and Clarke's (2006) six step approach that I have described in detail in Chapter 4). I applied themes from the SDM (Catalano et al., 2004; Hawkins & Weis, 1980) related to school bonds, individual behaviour and social relations. I also conducted inductive analysis in search for the themes around how the participants responded to the ASEP intervention's processes.

In the following section, I focus on three cases to illustrate how they differently engage with the ASEP processes. Yin (1994) posits that the 'logic' of using multiple case studies that produce contrasting results for predictable reasons is a means of theoretical replication, as the cases are designed to cover different theoretical conditions. First, there is Elizabeth, who best demonstrates how school re-engagement can be a relatively linear process. Elizabeth makes the most out of the intervention processes and over time, we see a significant turnaround in her school engagement. Second, Rachel's school re-engagement is a more chaotic process. Her case shows how the intervention re-orientates the family's focus on school engagement as the family goes through significant transitions. Third, Isaac's school re-engagement is a work in progress and his case exemplifies how the notion of shared responsibility is obstructed by developmental challenges that arise along the way. Schwartz and colleagues (2007) have highlighted the need to examine the

heterogeneity of developmental trajectories to better understand the different ‘profiles’ and how they respond to interventions. In my discussion, I introduce each case by presenting a case synopsis, and then consider how the ASEP offsets changes across the three domains: the young person’s school re-engagement, parental support and other social relations.

7.4 Elizabeth: School Re-Engagement as a Linear Process

The first ASEP case involves a 17-year-old female, Elizabeth, who demonstrates how school re-engagement can be a relatively linear process. In that sense, Elizabeth represents a relatively ‘ideal’ case. At the ASEP conference, Elizabeth presents with complex issues that appear to be associated with her truancy. Elizabeth has a record of getting into fights with peers, swearing at teachers, and anger management problems. The school representative in the conference also expresses concerns about Elizabeth’s co-truancy with peers. Elizabeth also underperforms academically, and her grade averages are Ds and Es. Elizabeth’s mother suggests that home schooling is not a viable solution because it would be just an escape and Elizabeth needs to deal with the school environment. In the conference, Elizabeth worries aloud about her mother staying home alone: ‘Cause sometimes she’s like feelin’ sick, and then I just want to stay home and look after her.’

The ASEP conference assists Elizabeth and her mother to recognise their contribution to the truancy problem and how they can work with school staff towards school re-engagement. Elizabeth hears from her grandmother (also present) that it is up to her ‘to want to help (herself)’ and ‘change (her) life’ and is reassured that ‘everybody being there to help her’. The school and police representatives provide Elizabeth with strategies to enhance her self-regulation and how she can utilise her social supports to foster school re-engagement. At the exit meeting, Elizabeth’s school attendance is reported to have significantly improved as she implements her action plan, which includes resisting antisocial peer influence, with support from her mother and school staff.

At the two year interview, her mother reports that Elizabeth has ‘really pulled her socks up...she’s got direction, she knows what she wants to be and where she wants to go in life.’ Maturation may mean that some of these changes would have occurred regardless of the intervention. However, Elizabeth is completing her final year of secondary college and wants to pursue further education at her local college. Her mother reports that Elizabeth completes homework ‘when it needs to be done’ and consequently her ‘grades have dramatically improved’. Elizabeth has also developed competence in managing her emotions and no longer allows her peer relations to obstruct her school engagement. Elizabeth makes changes with support from her mother and school staff. Her mother reports that ‘we have become closer’, signalling a shift in the mother–daughter bond focused on

school engagement. Her mother also notes substantial improvements in Elizabeth's relationship with school staff.

Elizabeth's School Engagement

At the early stage of the ASEP conference, the participants agree that Elizabeth's truancy is related to school-based interactions and Elizabeth's difficulties in managing them in prosocial ways. Her mother remarks that Elizabeth is labelled by teachers as the 'naughty child' because she gets 'very, very angry' and 'reacts in the wrong way'. The conference dialogue reveals that Elizabeth has a history of getting into fights with school peers, which in turn brings her into trouble with the school authorities. Elizabeth acknowledges that 'I get aggravated in class' but also expresses that she is positioned as the problematic other: 'Teachers get angry at me', 'the teachers don't see them (other students) doin' it but they see me', 'kids tease me again, and the teachers are like, are just standin' there'.

However, the focus of the conference is on addressing the problematic behaviours of the young person rather than the imperfect school system that perpetuates the misconduct. The school representative juxtaposes the family's views with the school's perspective on Elizabeth's resistance to support offered by the school:

I know it's frustrating and I know I do [*inaudible*] we do a lot of stuff that I make recommendations. And, and it doesn't come off. And you keep doing it and it doesn't come off and then people say, why doesn't this happen and you go you may get a recommendation and you haven't taken it up.

The school representative first acknowledges that Elizabeth's school misconduct is frustrating to the different parties, including Elizabeth. Expressing this recognition acts as a hook to keep Elizabeth engaged in the conference dialogue. Second, the school representative reiterates that Elizabeth needs to be actively involved in rectifying her own behaviours to break down the perpetuating cycle. So, in his statement, the school representative places parameters around how Elizabeth's truancy is responded to during the conference proceedings, where the focus is on targeting the young person's antisocial behaviours.

The information sharing leads to what Baumeister (1994, p. 281) calls 'crystallisation of discontent', or drawing associative links between different presenting concerns, which in this case involves making connections between truancy and other concerns. Ten minutes into the conference, Elizabeth's mother expresses disapproval as she learns about a recent truancy incident that Elizabeth concealed from her:

Mother: Elizabeth! You lied to me.
Elizabeth: Huh?

Mother: You said you didn't leave the school grounds. It is dangerous!
 Facilitator: With Elizabeth not going to school, what are your thoughts on that?
 Mother: Oh, well, get a reputation for one. Me getting into trouble for second [*laughs*]. But with my condition⁴, I can't, I can't put her on the bus. It's, you know, not possible—I can't take her to school, so once she leaves this house, I can only assume she's going to go to school and stay there. So when I find out this sort of stuff, it just...it really upsets me. Elizabeth.

The value of the exchange is less about Elizabeth's mother gaining new insight and more about her realising and communicating that truancy jeopardises 'the high stakes in conformity' (Toby, 1957). In this exchange, the facilitator identifies that Elizabeth's mother's expressed frustration signifies her belief that Elizabeth's truancy is law violating. With prompting, Elizabeth's mother expresses that it is 'dangerous' for her daughter to 'get a reputation' and for the family to 'get into trouble'. Elizabeth's mother also implies that she is in a powerless position to act on the problem herself and signals that it is Elizabeth's responsibility to rectify the problem behaviours. In response, Elizabeth presents her perspective that she feels that no one cares about her at school and her absence goes unnoticed.

The group dialogue shifts onto creating a shared understanding about the importance of going to school. At this point, in a segue that is not smooth, the school representative drives the process of repositioning the dialogue on school attendance, which also signals to Elizabeth that the teachers make note of her absence. The teacher cites the legislation to emphasise that school attendance is non-negotiable: 'You still have to be at school till you finish year ten. That's what the law says.'

Creating a shared school belief, however, gains momentum as the adults apply positive group pressure to emphasise to Elizabeth that school engagement needs to be her priority. In response, Elizabeth attempts to negotiate a home-schooling alternative as a means to maintaining her commitment to education and escaping the social school environment. Her mother and the school staff explain why the request is not practicable. The unity in message between the three levels of authority (school, police and the parent) is expressed by the police representative:

You need to put your education in a framework... You've got to go through that tough stuff and do some things that you don't like because you want to get to the end and have a goal of being a chef or whatever you want to be, but you've got to go through some tough hard parts in the middle and I think this is where you're at now... Let's get you oriented towards some goals that you want to achieve cause you're obviously talented.

The link between school belief and responsibility is communicated through the TPP partnership (Mazerolle, 2014). The police representative acknowledges that Elizabeth is 'go(ing) through that tough stuff' but also indicates that she needs to get through it to succeed by engaging in goal-focused behaviours. The value of the partnership in Elizabeth's case is that it reinforces the value of

⁴ The mother has agoraphobia. Detailed discussion of this is included in the parental support section.

institutional bonds for her future and the seriousness of her situation. The school staff takes over the dialogue and provides the directives in how to create a new pathway:

We've got to look at is that, that, change in the way you approach it, whether I like it or I don't like it, change it to that model of 'ok this is that other package, my question is now how do I get it done?' Right? And the how is, always action words. Y'know. If I asked teachers for 'what' questions, a teacher would tell you 'work harder'. Doesn't actually tell me how to achieve anything. So I need to move out of that 'what' stuff to the 'how' stuff. And you can do that.

The key message is that Elizabeth needs to change her focus from 'what' is wrong with school to 'how' she can improve her school experience. The school and the police representatives highlight that the message is non-negotiable.

So far, in the ASEP conference extracts, the ASEP adult members apply pressure on Elizabeth to change how she engages with school. From a critical perspective, it can be argued that school and police representatives' narratives seek to 'remoralize' Elizabeth, who is a youth at-risk and whose truancy can be regarded an act of willfull irresponsibility (see Muncie, 2006). They use strategies to appeal to Elizabeth's sense of 'rational self' (Muncie, 2006) as they emphasise the need for improving her self-regulation and engaging in responsible behaviours. Yet, while the ASEP intervention exemplifies new ways of governing youth, Elizabeth's engagement in the process can be equally interpreted as an example of a successful restorative process unfolding. Through the restorative process, the focus is not so much centred on the individual taking responsibility but more so on how the ASEP members can help the individual to rectify wrongful behaviours.

The conference proceedings transition to discussions around establishing a new social contract based on shared responsibility. The extract below exemplifies how the conference proceedings engage Elizabeth in the process:

Elizabeth: I get angry at school then I just...
Facilitator: Anyone you can walk to, to talk to?
Elizabeth: I just don't.
Facilitator: Maybe you could make some other choices there?
Elizabeth: Yeah. [*Very softly*]
Facilitator: Like what?
Elizabeth: Talk to Mr Smith (ASEP's school staff).
School rep: Yeah you can always come and yell at me. If, if you get build up, the best way to describe it is if, if I keep pumping air into a balloon, what happens?
Elizabeth: It'll blow up

The extract exemplifies how the conference dialogue can facilitate the creation of shared responsibility between the young person and the school. Elizabeth articulates that a way forward involves her actively seeking help from the staff. Research shows that a young person's involvement during the intervention signals the young person's willingness to execute the change post intervention (Fitzpatrick & Irannejad, 2008). In turn, the school representative expresses his

commitment to being available to help Elizabeth out. To seal the mutual commitment, one of the action plan items is, as noted in the extract above, that Elizabeth will seek help from the school staff around coping with feelings if required. In effect, the action requires commitment from both Elizabeth and the school staff to work on ensuring that the negative emotions do not obstruct her school engagement.

Six months later, at the exit meeting, there is indication that the shared responsibility is well set in motion. Elizabeth's mother advises that: 'It's not a hassle to get her (Elizabeth) up to go to school, she just does it. I don't think that she's as aggressive towards the teachers as what she was (laughs) She does try and listen.' Her mother further notes that when there is 'a bit of an issue', Elizabeth 'tries to sit in Mr Smith's office'. As Elizabeth's school engagement improves, so does the quality of her interaction with school staff. At the exit meeting, there is a sense that the school staff and Elizabeth work together:

- School rep: Yeah, like how can I say it in a nice little way... One of the things that you need to look at is if you are not the part, look the part.... So if the work is boring in class, at least try to look like you are doing something'
- Elizabeth: That's why when I draw and the teacher is writing something on the board, I look at the board when I draw.
- School rep: Yeah.... when they (teachers) are scanning, on their radar there are some people who unintentionally are on the radar but if they scan see something different, like the other things that we have talked about, they go hang on...

This extract suggests the emergence of trust and transparency between Elizabeth and the school staff as they deconstruct the intricacies of Elizabeth's difficulties at school and reconstruct them with a focus on enhancing school engagement. This extract indicates that Elizabeth is engaging in a partnership with school staff to overcome hurdles, something that has not, historically been the case.

At the exit interview, the school staff indicates that the ASEP intervention has acted as a catalyst for school engagement:

Elizabeth was basically travelling on the railway line and then she just sat on the line... and she needed something beyond what we (the school) could do, and someone external to get a push start again. Because she could have sat on the side and unfortunately when you sit on the side, nothing probably would have happened, and that's where we would start sending letters home and we would have had to go through that process and it may have not changed anything. Whereas this gave her the opportunity to make that change and get a direction, ok, I'll get rowing again, and I'm back on track.

The school staff indicates that ASEP gave Elizabeth a 'push' that a business-as-usual approach to dealing with truancy could not achieve. The school staff does not extrapolate why and how the 'push' processes play out. This is not surprising, as Giordano, Cerkevich and Rudolph (2002) argue that people tend to construct narratives around 'hooks for change' (p. 992), or shorthand accounts

describing what seem most essential from the narrator's perspective. In other words, people tend to articulate the salient features of change, rather than the process itself.

Post-intervention, Elizabeth remains committed to her school engagement. It appears that the social contract developed at the ASEP conference assisted with breaking down the 'circular causality' (Granic & Patterson, 2006, p. 104) of truancy and the negative feedback processes that normally reinforce that behaviour. The social contract based on shared belief and responsibility facilitated development and positive reinforcement of a new behavioural repertoire and interactions centred on school engagement. Elizabeth's future-oriented focus coupled with her advancement into the final year of secondary college not only reflects her ongoing commitment to the shared values but also is a means of reinforcement the shared belief. In the next section, I examine how the ASEP intervention facilitated shared belief and responsibility in the family and how it played out in the family processes.

Parental Support

At the two year post-intervention interview, the narrative of Elizabeth's mother includes evidence of fulfilling her part of the shared responsibility. Elizabeth's mother expresses that the most significant adjustment she has made is 'taking back (her) mother role' and 'getting out more'. The mother has agoraphobia, a condition that historically prevented her from completing some daily tasks. With her making adjustments, Elizabeth's mother also notes that 'Elizabeth is sort of not knowing what to do'. It appears that the mother's focus on her responsibility to foster Elizabeth's school re-engagement has broken down an element of co-dependency in the mother-daughter bond, repositioning it to a more appropriate role of the mother as carer.

As mentioned earlier, Elizabeth's mother expressed disapproval of Elizabeth's truancy at the conference. The mother also actively engaged in the ASEP process to break down interaction patterns that covertly sent mixed messages about truancy. At the start of the intervention, co-dependence between mother and daughter was openly noted. Elizabeth's mother articulated that Elizabeth 'would do all the things that I couldn't do'. As the conference proceedings unfold, a dialogue organically arises between Elizabeth and her mother, illustrating the mixed messages about school attendance that the mother, with her illness, may be delivering.

Mother:	I think you need to stay at school!
Elizabeth:	Yeah, like...
Mother:	I'd rather know that, I'd rather that you stay, stay at home and not actually leave school than wag school. It's horrible to say that I know, but at least I know that you're safe.
Elizabeth:	But you always say go to school—
Mother:	Well, yeah!

Elizabeth: Then it really annoys me that you tell me to stay home.
Mother: She argues with me some mornings and says, just completely says “no” and just refuses to go, so what am I meant to do? What can I do? I mean, Peter (police representative), what can I do seriously? Is there anything that I can do?

The communication exchange is hard to decipher at first. Both Elizabeth and her mother acknowledge the expectation that Elizabeth needs to be at school each day. However, both also acknowledge that there is a shared understanding that Elizabeth’s at-home truancy is regarded as a safer alternative to her out-of-home truancy. Consequently, Elizabeth exploits the loophole in this shared school belief.

In the ASEP extract considered in the last paragraph, three significant events unfold in quick succession. The family plays out the mixed messages underlying problematic mother–daughter interactions, the mother recognizes the interaction as a problem, and the mother turns to the police for help. Exposing the mixed messages in family dynamics responsible for precipitating a problem is considered a significant intervention event because it can be used as a hook for prosocial change (Engle & Arkowitz, 2006). In this instance, the mother rather than the other ASEP representatives, picks up on the ambivalence of the family interactions contributing to truancy, which is preferable to an ‘outsider’ diagnosing the case. In intervention settings, people can be guarded in expressing their own contribution to the problem (Farber, Berano, & Capobianco, 2004), but Elizabeth’s mother shows insight. In this case, the mother suggests that she experiences difficulties with shifting the particular family dynamics by herself and she asks for help (‘what can I do seriously?’). Her call for help is timely, considering that help is literally at hand, and here the group intervention shows its greatest strength. In interventions, clients can present as ‘stuck’, yet signal a conviction that the interventionist will provide an insight or a strategy to solve the difficulty (Hayes, Strosahl, et al., 2011).

In turn, the police reassures the family that solving the ambivalence is ‘simple’:

That’s why we’re here for today to get her engaged, to get her in a position where she has some desirability to go to school, to get her to make some decisions that are, urm, oriented towards her future, and paths that she set... we’re here for Elizabeth to make some decisions, and for you guys to make some decisions about what’s good as a family.

The alignment of messages can be achieved *using* the power relationships towards conformity in a group setting. The conference in fact is reframed as an event of empowerment for the mother and daughter to fulfil their shared responsibility focused on school engagement. The shared responsibility is sealed as an action plan that outlines tasks for the family to complete together. At the exit interview, the mother indicates that she fulfils her responsibility in supporting Elizabeth:

Facilitator: So have you been using any of the strategies?
Elizabeth: No.

School rep: Yes, you have, you haven't just been disappearing.
Mother: Yes, I wrote you some self-help talking cards for her to take to school...I also thought that the star chart was a very good idea. I tried them years ago and it didn't work...
And we will be doing it again next term.

Elizabeth's mother gives examples of how she helps out Elizabeth with implementing strategies that Elizabeth would be reluctant to follow outside of the intervention context. In fulfilling responsibilities stipulated in the social contract, the mother's interactions with Elizabeth are focused on school engagement.

Enhancing an alignment between mother and daughter's shared school belief and shared responsibility also fosters school engagement focused communication between the parent and the school. At the exit meeting, Elizabeth's mother reports: 'I got a phone call from Mr Smith last week about Elizabeth being respectful and doing the right thing.' The school staff elaborates on the significance of what would otherwise appear as a mundane event:

When the schools make contact with parents, it's generally about the negative and quite often when the parents have contact with the school, it is normally because something hasn't happened or something isn't quite right. So quite often the transfer of information is about something negative. It's not often where it is transferred to great work.

It appears that the school staff actively promotes ongoing school engagement with the family by instigating contact simply to acknowledge Elizabeth's progress. The quote illustrates again that the intervention, while captured in this research as a singular 'moment', is in fact extended out, and has far-reaching impacts at home and at school. Rossner (2011) argues that successful conferences generate emotional group energy that is later used to maintain the envisioned changes as everyday life unfolds. Rossner's claim appears to be supported in Elizabeth's case study as it re-energizes the ASEP members to approach the old problem through a fresh lens. The phone call acknowledges the successful breaking down of what appeared as an entrenched problem at the start of ASEP.

School Engagement Oriented Social Connections

With Elizabeth taking on responsibility for her school engagement, the influence of her peers, who had historically contributed to her truancy, declined. As discussed earlier, Elizabeth sought help from school staff around self-regulation and implemented recommended strategies, which in turn decreased the probability of being drawn into school-based conflict (Gardner, Dishion, & Connell, 2008). At the interview, Elizabeth's mother indicates some reciprocity from peers, stating that the students 'grew out of' picking on Elizabeth as she distances herself away from peer conflict.'

It should be noted that preventing co-truancy was explicitly targeted through conference discussions. The following extract attests to that:

School rep: What are you going to do when other people put pressure on you to miss class to go with them somewhere?
Elizabeth: Urm, I dunno.
School rep: Cause I'd guess that that happened yesterday.
Mother: You're going to be the responsible one aren't you and go 'no that's not right, I'm not doing that', aren't you?
Elizabeth: I already put twenty dollars.
Mother: Everybody been asked a question. You're gonna say no!
School rep: Cause that's going to happen.
Elizabeth: Yeah...Elizabeth and Rebecca were like 'I want to wag today, d'you want to come?' and I'm like 'nah I've got class 'n that', and they're all like 'c'mon just wag and stuff', and I'm like 'fine'.

At the ASEP conference, Elizabeth's expressed attempts at resisting peer pressure are not convincing in light of her recent co-truancy incidents. Elizabeth's action plan contains goals to 'make good choices' and 'stay at school' that Elizabeth needs to implement in daily life, which may sound naïve and unrealistic when set against a complex background to the truancy. However, at the exit interview, a dialogue emerges that highlights that Elizabeth is making positive progress post-ASEP conference:

Elizabeth: I don't go along with the group. They go: I'm going to wag, do you wanna wag? And I say nah, I'm going to class.
Mother: She was actually very excited to come home and tell me that.
School rep: And you have to keep reinforcing that. And what happens then is that they will stop ask you... And to me, that's a huge turnaround because you are thinking about the consequences of one thing, but you are also thinking about the future, for my future I need to be here, and then you start doing this not because we say, but because I know that at the end of the day, it's going to be beneficial for me.

The school staff explicates that Elizabeth has made a 'huge turnaround' in resisting peer influence to truant as she can discern that co-truancy has negative consequences both short and long term. By focusing on school engagement, Elizabeth has successfully resisted antisocial peer influence – a matter of pride, as it emerges. There is also a sense of a shift in communication about co-truancy between mother and daughter at the ASEP proceedings. At the conference, Elizabeth's mother tells Elizabeth what she should not be doing. At the exit meeting, the mother reports that Elizabeth relays to her when she resists the antisocial peer influence.

At the two year mark, Elizabeth's mother reports that Elizabeth has stopped co-truancy. With Elizabeth strengthening her school engagement, social distance widens between her and her friends. Elizabeth's mother indicates that Elizabeth compensates for the gap by using her school engagement: now 'this is why the kids hang out with her because she is a smart kid'. Elizabeth takes the lead in completing group projects and lets her two friends copy her homework. However, there is no evidence that there is a diffusion (Rulison et al., 2015) of the ASEP intervention effects, where Elizabeth influences her peers to increase their school engagement. Her mother notes that her friends consider her 'a pushover' and 'they get Elizabeth to pretty much do everything and she will

do it'. It appears that the intervention does not have a trickle-down effect when the peer relations are weak and when the intervention participant retains a recessive position in the group (Osgood et al., 2013).

Elizabeth continues to experience friction between the messages generated from the peer interactions and the ASEP messages about school belief and responsibility. Her mother notes: 'She would message me and say: oh, they (school friends) are doing this, or they are doing that, and I'll be: 'what can you do'... She (Elizabeth) goes: 'you are lucky that you have a teenager like me.' Elizabeth seeks support from her mother when she is presented with peer issues that contravene her school beliefs. Her mother appears to have responded appropriately by acknowledging the issue and reinforcing the ASEP messages where the school friendships occupy a less significant background to the foreground of scholarship-related school engagement.

When Elizabeth is saying 'your are lucky', she is really implicitly acknowledging that she has internalised the aim of the intervention. Elizabeth's case is a somewhat ideal case that exemplifies how the ASEP conference can activate the young person's school belief and responsibility around school engagement through its purpose-built processes. The case usefully exposes how the intervention *can* achieve this change, by targeting the social relations that perpetuate truancy and sensitively analysing and setting the conditions for change. Development, or at least highlighting, of the social contract appears to seal the commitment of Elizabeth to focus on school engagement. It is clear in this case that the mother, Elizabeth's primary carer, plays a crucial role in ensuring that the aims of the ASEP conference are brought 'in' to Elizabeth's particular language, context, and emotional world.

7.5 Rachel: School Re-Engagement as a Chaotic Process

The second case study is that of a 16-year-old Rachel. Shortly before joining ASEP, Rachel, her mother and three younger siblings relocated to Brisbane because Rachel's father went to jail. The timing of the conference coalesces with Rachel experiencing adjustment difficulties as the family moves through transitions. In retrospect, Rachel's mother reflects that Rachel entered the new school in Brisbane 'with a bad attitude and this is what she got out of it'. Rachel experiences low moods which play out as indifference towards school and difficulties getting out of bed. Rachel's school work also suffers; her mother notes that 'her report was very much D, E, F and N grades'. Rachel's school engagement is further problematised by her peers. In her mother's words: 'The brown kids would pick on them (Rachel and her siblings) for being half white, and the white kids were being horrible because they are half brown,' At the interview her mother points out that

Rachel has been accustomed to getting noticed for her exceptional good looks, rather than triggering racially prejudiced comments.

Post-conference, the family applied the ASEP messages in unanticipated ways to promote Rachel's school engagement. Unexpectedly, Rachel temporarily goes back to the family home town to live with her grandmother, a retired high school teacher. Her mother instigates the move as Rachel 'burns all the bridges in her school'. Six months after the conference, two exit interviews are conducted separately with mother and daughter, deviating from the standard format of the meeting design. At that stage, Rachel increases her school attendance out of obligation to, and with the support from her grandmother, and she continues to consolidate her complex family relations. Rachel anticipates further transitions as she plans on moving back with her mother, who has since re-partnered, and starting a new school.

Rachel's case exemplifies how the ASEP processes foster subtle shifts that assist with transitions. On her return to Brisbane, Rachel enters a new school as well as improves her attendance, grades and peer relations. Rachel also engages with a mental health service to which she was linked through ASEP to help her manage low moods. Over time, the mother–daughter relationship improves and the mother is proactive in helping Rachel through difficulties. At the two year interview, the mother describes Rachel as having 'very strong personality, lots of common sense, lots of common knowledge' and being the social butterfly among her peers. Rachel's mother remarks: 'We have done a lot of work in the last two years.'

Rachel's School Engagement

At the start of the conference, Rachel's school belief misaligns with that of the ASEP adult participants. Rachel is adamant that: 'School's, any school, doesn't matter what school it is, it's boring.' Rachel puts much emphasis on her desire to 'just marry rich' in attempts to invalidate the need for her to take on responsibility around enhancing her school engagement.

Rachel's belief about the value of school contrasts with the views held by the ASEP adults. Similarly to the strategy applied in Elizabeth's case, the female police representative takes the lead role to encourage an alignment between Rachel's beliefs and those of the remainder of the group :

Police rep: That may be your plan A right now, marrying a rich person... You've just got to put in that effort just in case you don't find that rich person. ok, but like I can guarantee that, you know, I'm not saying that it won't happen but I'm saying that you need to set yourself goals and you need to set yourself up for life. Ok?

Rachel: Ah huh.

Police rep: (You have to have) plan B... or you can change your plan B to plan A.

The police representative puts Rachel's desire to marry rich into a broader perspective. Rachel hears that the more realistic plan B requires 'trying hard' at school to 'get to grade 12' and choosing between university or TAFE as a pathway to a chosen career. The police ties the school belief to exercising responsibility in the here and now, which needs to be carried into the future.

There is no evidence of Rachel becoming particularly enthusiastic about school engagement. Unlike Elizabeth, who at ASEP participated as part of the group in brainstorming solutions to her problem, Rachel is less engaged in the co-production process. However, communication of the legal levers relating to ongoing truancy forces Rachel to both rethink her truancy and act responsibly:

- Police rep: And it's not, you know, a \$50 fine, it's a...
- Mother: No, it's like thousands, it's up there in the thousands.
- Facilitator: Did you know that?
- Rachel: No. Oh, I knew she'd get in trouble.
- Facilitator: Do you think mum's got a spare thousand bucks?
- Rachel: No, she does not.
- Mother: \$8 till payday.
- Police rep: Did you know that sometimes the police can get notified as well?
- Rachel: Yeah, sort of.
- Police rep: Yeah? And did you consider that when, you know, you're waking up in the morning and not wanting to come to school?
- Rachel: No.
- Police rep: Did you know that it could effect, and I know that, well it shouldn't be your problem, but did you that it could effect your other siblings as well with actions, with your actions?
- Rachel: No.

Here, the police and the facilitator pose consecutive questions which Rachel has not previously considered about the legal and financial repercussions of her truancy. Rachel's short 'no' answers befit the questioning style and the power imbalances. Yet, the responsibility becomes well ingrained on Rachel's mind because during the exit interview, Rachel reports that she has been 'going to school each day... just because I have to'. Similarly, her mother indicates that Rachel has been 'doing the motions and not particularly enjoying it', implying that responsibility and fulfillment do not necessarily go hand-in-hand.

Rachel's school re-engagement post intervention, however, is a chaotic process. Resnicow and Vaughan (2006) assert that the prevailing assumption of behaviour change as a linear process is not universal. Behaviour change can be a disordered process reflecting the complex and dynamic environments in which it takes place (Resnicow & Vaughan, 2006). Rachel's mother acknowledges that during the ASEP intervention, Rachel 'was definitely given the information and opportunity to fix it (truancy problems)' but is quick to add that 'we had to do some drastic action, I don't think that we had any other choice'. She further explains that soon after the conference, Rachel's school engagement deteriorates, reaching a point where Rachel 'has burnt bridges with her school teachers'. On face value, ASEP has failed to foster school re-engagement at that point. Based on her

mother's comments, Rachel has not engaged with the ASEP's recommendations. However, based on the retrospective interview data, there is a poor alignment between the school environment and the student. This poor fit is not explored at the conference.

Rather than being a prescriptive recipe for school re-engagement, the ASEP conference conveys more symbolic meaning about the importance of school belief and shared responsibility to the family. With Rachel's school engagement deteriorating, her mother comes up with an alternative strategy, sending Rachel to temporarily live with her grandmother. Rachel's mother explains that 'getting her out of there has given her a cooling off period, and it sort of worked... Her demeanor, the effort that she has put into life in general is a lot better'. Granic and Patterson (2006) observe that when the family is going through transitions, it is highly receptive to shifts, and seemingly small changes have the potential to radically alter the trajectory of relationships and individuals. In this case, Rachel's mother re-evaluates the parameters of the social support infrastructure that was not fully discussed at the conference.

Rachel's desire to enter a particular school on returning to Brisbane becomes a catalyst for school re-engagement. Rather than simply agreeing on school change, her mother uses it as a hook, as described in the interview: 'We did a sort of a deal with her.... that if she attended and put her mind to it for the last bit of the year, she could go to that school.' Simply put, Rachel is required to demonstrate her taking on responsibility for school engagement for a sufficient period. So, mother and daughter exercise a bargaining power in this negotiation process that was not evident at the conference. The new school becomes a reward once Rachel fulfils her obligation to go to school. Two years on, Rachel continues to attend school and seeks support from school staff when required around her school work. The case suggests that school change can be a good strategy for school re-engagement. This possibility was not considered at the conference, where change is facilitated by working within the existing institutions and the structural factors contributing to the problem are not targeted.

Rachel's mother also acknowledges the ongoing support that her daughter accesses through a mental health service that was instigated through ASEP. During the interview, the mother indicates that: 'The facilitator has talked about Headspace ... I took her to Headspace and she has been talking to them for a while now. Over twelve months, maybe 18 months.' Rachel's mother indicates that the service complements parental support: 'I know that she needs help. But because I was her mum, they don't listen to mums.' The mental health service that Rachel was linked to as a result of the ASEP action plan acts as a catalyst for school re-engagement. The mother further comments:

‘When she goes there, she levels really quickly. She comes out and she’ll be much more rational and realistic, so it is a really good thing for her... She knows that she is supported here and knows that she really needs to be going to school.’ From her mother’s narrative, it is not clear if the mental health service directly reinforces Rachel’s attendance or whether its function is more indirect and focused on managing Rachel’s well-being.

Rachel’s case demonstrates how school re-engagement can be a chaotic process. The ASEP conference activates the young person’s understanding around expected school belief and responsibility. It does so in a superficial way, because following the conference, Rachel’s school engagement deteriorates further. Yet, over time Rachel starts to engage with the concepts of shared responsibility through a process driven by her mother.

Parental Support

ASEP brings Rachel’s truancy from periphery to the front of outstanding family problems. At the conference, Rachel’s mother construes Rachel’s truancy as a product of: ‘Your standard issue of family falling apart sort of situation, and his (father’s) association with illegal activities at the time.’ So, Rachel’s truancy is embedded in complex family problems. During the conference, Rachel’s mother expresses her own contribution to the problem: ‘I might have made a little bit too much allowance for her, with her dad and I sort of, ah, overcompensated... it was the path of least resistance.’ Rachel’s mother elaborates that ‘the path of least resistance’ is riddled with inconsistencies in responding to truancy: ‘You can have today off and tomorrow we’ll start again. It was always we’ll start tomorrow.’

Yet, close interrogation of the data reveals a consensus between mother and daughter that Rachel is not ready to form a working alliance towards school engagement with her mother. This dynamic is unacknowledged in the formal group setting. Towards the end of the exit meeting, conducted as a phone conference with Rachel, she expresses: ‘It sucked being in the same room as my mum (during the ASEP conference)... what you could do differently is to get rid of mum.’ The weak attachment between mother and daughter is problematic as it may limit the extent to which family engage in exploration of issues precipitating the truancy through the ASEP intervention. Hawkins and Weis (1985) note that bonding to conventional society begins in the family. As bonding to school is conditioned by the extent to which social bonds to the family have developed, weak family bonding can also play out as weak school bonding (Hawkins and Weis, 1985).

Post conference, Rachel's mother is proactive with implementing strategies designed to disrupt Rachel's ongoing maladaptive patterns. However, her approach deviates from the action plans that were formulated at the conference. Yet, mother identifies that ASEP offered her a guide on how she responded to Rachel's problematic behaviours:

We were given all the tools and all the information. And you guys were contactable. I guess that the information is not that something you can find on google... like how do you control an uncontrollable child? And also having contact with people if you needed it which I guess is empowering a little bit if you are a parent. Because it is not something that is written in a book, kids aren't textbooks. Parenthood isn't in a textbook.

Rachel's being sent to live with her grandmother marks a transition phase for the family in creating new interactional patterns. At the exit meeting, her mother notes that Rachel is 'very respectful and engaged' when she visits the family on the weekends. The weekend visits act as the gradual immersion into the new family dynamics, which require Rachel to make some adjustments. With Rachel returning home, over time, a stronger partnership between mother and daughter, focused on problem solving, develops. At the two year interview, Rachel's mother elaborates:

When she's in trouble, if she's struggling, if she's down, she comes straight to me. She might be angry about it, not seeing it as a negative interaction, but it may be her asking for help. She will get not aggressive, but quite loud voiced, but it's an anxiety thing about something that is going wrong. So I call myself her 'venting post' where she comes to me and goes rah! [raised voice] and everything is out of control.... That's her saying 'help!'

Rachel's mother interprets the seemingly negative interactions instigated by her daughter as help-seeking behaviours displayed by a child with good attachment to the parent. She regards her role of being a 'venting post' as part of providing parental support. She indicates that participation in the ASEP intervention 'made me not so much proactive, maybe interactive as in when she (Rachel) was struggling, I knew she was struggling.' Being 'interactive' relates to a two-way communication, whereas being 'proactive' is more of an action noun referring to preparing to intervene in response to an unexpected and negative event. The mother implies that by being 'interactive' rather than 'proactive', she shifts her focus to actively problem solving family problems by applying a child-centred approach and collaborating with Rachel.

School Engagement Oriented Social Connections

At the ASEP conference, Rachel is encouraged to develop social networks because her isolation at school precipitates her school dis-engagement. This recommendation comes about in the context of Rachel experiencing grief and loss around the family's separation and her father going into jail. At Rachel's conference, there is an absence of discussions around existing peer networks, which possibly is indicative of Rachel having no positive peer relations at school at that time. Following the advice from the ASEP's facilitator, Rachel joins a netball team. This structured extracurricular

activity becomes a platform for developing prosocial peer relations. Rachel's mother notes that unexpectedly, the extracurricular activity 'gave her a positive social experience outside of school and she transferred it to school.'

The new peer group becomes a catalyst complementing the ASEP intervention in offsetting processes conducive to Rachel's school re-engagement. On an immediate level, the netball group provides Rachel with a sense of belonging in a structured setting and ignites her desire to transfer the experience into a school setting. In addition, the sports training provides opportunities for involvement where Rachel applies skills that she both enjoys and is good at. Subsequently, Rachel's desire to change schools is a driver for the family 'making a deal' with her around school attendance for the school change to take place. Rachel enters a new school once she demonstrates that she can maintain good attendance levels. The new peer group accelerates her integration to the new social environment. The mother reflects that Rachel 'went to school with half a dozen existing social relationships that were positive relationships, they took her in, and before she started school, they were like: oh, it's so exciting that you are coming to school. They showed her the school. She now has a big social network, whereas in the other school, she had no social network.'

In the presence of so much social incentive to be at school (her mother reports: 'she wants to go there for that'), Rachel's school absenteeism significantly reduces. Rachel's school-based peers exert a prosocial influence and reinforce school beliefs. Her mother describes the content of the phone calls that Rachel receives from peers when she truant: 'they are like: 'where are you? we missed you today' and this will often get her off to go to school'. The mother also notes that Rachel's friends are prosocial models because they truant significantly less than Rachel.

In Rachel's case, there are transparent borders between the world of peers and the family. Her mother has a good knowledge of Rachel's school peers: 'Most days we talk about friends and that sort of thing. Cause I know that this is important to her because of the school she feels very well because she now has friends.' Her mother also notes that their household at times is a safe haven for some of Rachel's friends: 'If one of her friends is in trouble, she says: "oh mum, can so and so come over?"' The mother also maintains contact with the parents of Rachel's friends: 'We definitely discuss what they are doing.' Parent-to-parent communication is a wider form of monitoring of the children's peer groups and behaviours as 'the kids are talking about what they are allowed to do but it is actually not what the parents say that they can do.' Parent-to-parent communication is a useful tool for dispelling misconceptions about what the young people are allowed and not allowed to do in the friendship group.

Bushway and colleagues (2001) argue that desistance from antisocial behaviour is a gradual transition involving real changes within the individual and the individual's social interactions, rather than a straightforward discontinuation of misconduct. Rachel's case exemplifies the complexities of the process. The ASEP intervention brings the truancy problem to the forefront of family issues and the mother drives the change. Over time, mother and daughter are able to work together towards school re-engagement in the presence of formal and informal social supports. ASEP indirectly fosters shifts in family dynamics and consequently, the mother and daughter create conditions conducive to Rachel's school engagement through collaboration and negotiation.

7.6 Isaac: School Re-Engagement as a Non-Linear Discontinuous Process

The third case is that of a 14-year-old male. Isaac's case demonstrates the non-linearity of the school re-engagement process even when significant improvements are initially made through interventions. Isaac's case represents a 'polar type' case study (Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007) as it enables observation of contrasting patterns in data to the ones that I have discussed so far and makes for points of comparison. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) note that polar cases assist with recognizing clear patterns of central constructs, relationships and logic of the focal phenomenon. Isaac's case assists in examining the prevalent patterns in truancy reduction interventions where the participants increase their school attendance in the short term, but not necessarily the long term (Fantuzzo et al., 2005).

Isaac was selected to the ASEP intervention because he tended to leave school without permission when difficulties with peers arose, as well as refusing to go to school in the mornings. Isaac has 'A grade potential' but his grades are a 'C average'. Isaac's school engagement difficulties co-occur with ongoing conduct problems, mainly aggression. During the conference, Isaac's mother indicates that historically, the school had a role in triggering these problems: '(In) grade three and that was when um uh... his teacher at the time had rung welfare because he had a mark just here... and that's when all these problems really started, big time.' Here, his mother refers to a child protection notification that the school made because Isaac had a physical mark that was suspected to be a sign of abuse. Child Safety's investigation found the concern to be unsubstantiated. However, Isaac's mother identifies that this event instigated ongoing tensions between herself and the school, perpetuating Isaac's school disengagement.

At the time of the exit interview, Isaac had significantly increased his school attendance and had actively engaged with the action plan. However, with ASEP finishing, Isaac relapses into his antisocial behaviours. At the interview, Isaac's mother indicates that with the onset of puberty after

the ASEP intervention, Isaac's conduct problems have become more complex: 'He turned into a totally different child ... and the hormones now have changed him too.' In my case analysis, I consider how Isaac's parents utilise the ASEP intervention to discourage antisocial behaviour and how other factors not targeted through the intervention exacerbate the problem.

Isaac's School Engagement

During the ASEP conference, creating shared school belief and responsibility is a straight-forward process. The police representative emphasises that Isaac's truancy is a child-protection matter and in response, Isaac expresses that he needs to go to school each day:

- Police: Child Safety will look at the situation and go well you know what, he's at home by himself, he's not goin' to school, he's gettin' into blues all the time, mum and dad can't take care of him, so we're gonna put 'im in another environment, where he can be taken care of...
- Facilitator: Yep. So, so how how are you feeling about not going to school now?
- Isaac: Worried.
- Facilitator: Do you think it's something that, d'you think that the way things have been going so far, d'you think that they're gonna stay the same, or do you think they're gonna change?
- Isaac: They're gonna change.
- Facilitator: And what do you think needs to change?
- Isaac: I need to go to school everyday ... stop walkin' out of the school grounds when I get angry... if anyone goes to annoy me or anything I ignore them and go and tell the teacher and not walk home.

In this context, Isaac is fearful that his truancy will bring further child protection involvement for the family. So, Isaac's responses could be signalling his 'passive' rather than a 'willing' compliance in the presence of power differentials. Ryan and Deci (2000) found that passive compliance generated through external regulation, activates extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivation. Subsequently, the person tends to perform the required actions with resentment, resistance and disinterest rather than willingly, of his own accord (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Immediately after the communication of the legal consequences, a dialogue emerges that taps into Isaac's intrinsic motivation. Here, the ASEP adult participants make a link between Isaac's future career aspirations and school belief:

- Father: What do you wanna do when you leave school?
- Isaac: Be a mechanic.
- Mother: You need a bloody good education for one of them, mate.
- Police: A mechanic? Yeah cos you need a degree to work on cars these days.
- Mother: So lucky you like maths.
- Police: Yeah
- School: Cos you're gonna need it.

The parental lead in this dialogue is particularly effective. The take home message for Isaac is that going to school is important not only for the sake of being a law abiding citizen but to foster positive future outcomes.

Six months later at the exit meeting, Isaac demonstrates willing compliance as he takes responsibility for his school engagement. The school representative observes: 'Isaac is improving in his resilience and persistence in things, definitely, definitely noticeable, maturing as well, which has been like exponential (accent) since the start of the year which is really encouraging.' Isaac also names the changes that he has made: 'I stopped walking home all the time...I finish my work on time... doing what the teacher says that I have to do.' Isaac's mother observes: 'He's got a confidence boost there. He knows that if he puts his mind into something, he can do what he's put his mind to. He's never been like that.' The comments suggest that ASEP's restorative process elicited Isaac's desire for self-redemption. Consequently, Isaac aligns his behaviour with the shared belief about school.

Post conference, Isaac maintains focus on school engagement as he implements tasks outlined in his action plan. In particular, Isaac follows his emotion management plan to manage his anger. Isaac's mother observes: 'He'd stop and think about what he was doing, that was the thing that he was doing badly at before.' Feedback from a teacher also indicates that as a result of the emotional plan being used in the class setting: 'He had come a long way ... and settled down a fair bit and she was able to have a normal conversation with him, whereas before he would be more verbal.'

Isaac's mother recognises that her son's behavioural improvements are a joint ASEP team's effort. She praises Isaac: 'You came a loong way. Do you think that you could have come that far without facilitator's help?' This rhetorical question implies that a working alliance has developed between the project officer and the family. Isaac indicates: 'It's the best thing to do (ASEP) because they help you if you have anger problems.'

At the exit meeting, Isaac's school engagement remains a work in progress. The facilitator reiterates: 'What I hear is that you need to continue what you are doing and use words rather than actions.' Isaac's mother agrees: 'I think if he keeps on using the strategies that he's been using, it will get better and better.' The school staff reinforces the seriousness of the feedback: 'The communication needs to keep on happening. He made an awesome improvement but to continue improving, he needs to learn how to communicate his feelings and even having those adult peer relationships as well.' Isaac is required to work on his interpersonal skills to aid with his prosocial behavioural trajectory.

Two years after participating in ASEP, Isaac's school engagement oscillates between progress and relapse. His father (who was also an active participant in ASEP) comments: 'First it used to be extremely hard and we got involved in project ASEP and then he has just changed, and then with

the change from primary school to high school and after the project ASEP stopped, he went backwards.’ His father implies that the ASEP project was a catalyst for Isaac’s school engagement, while the project’s end, coupled with school transitions, destabilised the prosocial changes. Hawkins and Weis (1985) note that social bonds can be disrupted by a range of factors including inconsistent responses. Isaac’s father, however, does not extrapolate how school change and the ASEP’s ending interrupted the process.

Isaac’s school engagement problems co-occur with home-based misconduct and complex mental health difficulties. His mother indicates that with the onset of puberty, Isaac’s conduct problems increase in severity. She recalls an incident where: ‘He flooded the laundry, put a hose in the laundry. Then he make mud piles outside and started throwing mud balls at the window. I had to lock myself in the house.’ Loeber (1996) shows that antisocial behaviours can become ‘stacked’ or accumulated over time and have transactional effects that generate further misconduct. In other words, the young person can actively disrupt the social bonds. For example, research shows that aggressive children can jeopardise their prosocial relations through aggressive behaviours (Adams, Bukowski, & Bagwell, 2005; Dodge, Coie, & Lynam, 2006; Risi et al., 2003). In Isaac’s case, his relapse into antisocial behaviour changes how his parents respond to him. His mother reports locking herself in the house to protect herself from his aggression.

Isaac’s new range of antisocial behaviours overshadows his drive for fulfilling his responsibilities articulated in ASEP’s action plan. At the interview, his parents report that while Isaac goes to school, he gets in trouble and gets suspended, which suggests that he does not implement his emotion management plan. Post-ASEP, Isaac is linked to a mental health service for an assessment. His mother notes that Isaac is being diagnosed for oppositional defiance disorder and a mild case of post-traumatic stress disorder. Dealing with these new concerns takes priority and pushes the truancy problem to the background. However, there is no indication that this clinical support promotes continuity of the ASEP intervention’s focus on school engagement or that his new school is involved in that process.

Parental Support

The ASEP conference instigates a shift in parental engagement with school from problem oriented to solution focused. The shift comes about as the conference gives opportunity for the parents to raise their concerns about the school’s historic contribution to Isaac’s school engagement problems. Okimoto and colleagues (2009) observe that ‘injustice elicits affective as well as cognitive appraisals about the fairness of the situation, and these emotions are intertwined with how people

subsequently evaluate a transgression' (p. 160). Isaac's mother holds on to a historical event where the school made a child protection notification: 'His teacher at the time had rung welfare because he had a mark just here. Um what happened the weekend before he put the front brakes instead of the back brakes on his bike [*slapping noise*] over the handlebars, as you do!' She is particularly upset about the school's lack of consultation with parents in escalating the concern to child protection: 'She (the teacher) automatically assumed instead of coming to see me, automatically assumed that I'd been, or one of us had been gettin' stuck into him.' The parents suggest that the event violated their trust in the procedural fairness of how school handles concerns about Isaac. His mother reports: 'They were gonna suspend him for it (another matter involving school misconduct), even though he'd done nothing wrong.' His father adds: 'There's been other instances too where Isaac's been in fights where he's been named as the bully.'

Isaac's parents expressing concerns about the school's handling of past matters forms part of a restorative process that helps rebuild their own engagement with the school staff. First, the school staff acknowledges their concern: 'I'm not saying I'm not believing you ...but I honestly do not see any of that occurring in the class.' The teacher then clarifies how the school typically responds to concerns and peer conflict:

We would have followed that up I can assure you of that, and your outcome might be that you want those other children suspended but how our system works is that ...it doesn't necessarily warrant a suspension or an expulsion immediately [*mother: mmm*]. It could have been that child's first incident so that child would have had a phone call home to their parents. There would have been a meeting and a discussion about it...there would have been a repercussion not necessarily a suspension.

The school staff clarifies that the fairness of the process has different repercussions for students.

This explanation offers to the parents the school's perspective, presenting a different way of viewing the problem and contextualising the presence of what appears to be double standards in the school's processes. With the 'air cleared', the parents are ready to pursue a different engagement with school staff, focused on shared responsibility.

The two-way communication between home and school is evident two years later, signalling that the parents have fulfilled their part of the responsibility around supporting Isaac with school engagement. At the interview, his mother provides an example: 'She (the teacher) gives him (Isaac) an extension and then would ring us to let us know that he has an extension... he doesn't let us know that he has homework.' Parents act as 'the middle man' in assisting Isaac to resolve school difficulties when required: 'He won't go to the teachers, because he doesn't think that the teachers will believe him. He normally tells at home and this is when we (parents) will ring school to get

things sorted out.’ With their actions, his parents demonstrate to Isaac how to go about resolving school based difficulties.

Isaac’s parents indicate that in the follow-up contact, the ASEP staff supported the family to respond to Isaac’s challenging behaviours. During the interview, his mother notes that ‘there were times when I had to ring the ASEP facilitator and police rep to come and speak to Isaac because he refused to go to school, we just couldn’t get him motivated no matter what we said or did.’ The follow-up contact reactivated restorative and procedural justice processes (Tyler, 2006) to foster Isaac’s compliance. In these instances, Isaac was successfully redirected by the ASEP staff to listen to his parents and go to school.

At the two year interview, Isaac’s parents indicate that their relationship with Isaac is volatile, making provision of parental support difficult. His mother expresses: ‘Him and I used to be very close... lately, he just doesn’t want to be anywhere near me.’ Research indicates that the family’s ability to provide emotional support is hindered in the presence of problematic interactions (Madden-Derdich, Leonard, & Gunnell, 2002). His mother attributes the weakening of the bond to Isaac’s verbal aggression: ‘I just end up in tears half the time cause some of the things he says are just so hurtful.’ From the data, it is not clear how the strained relationship with Isaac affects his parents’ ability to consistently support his school engagement. According to the SDM, it is through attachment that the messages communicated by the social control agents are internalised by the young person (Shaw & Bell, 1993). Without strong attachment, parents do not have the leverage to reinforce school belief and responsibility.

In contrast to Rachel’s case, where her mother used emerging life events as hooks to enhance prosocial interactional patterns in the parent–child relationship (see Giordano et al., 2002; Granic & Patterson, 2006), the narrative of Isaac’s father indicates that new events can inhibit this process. During the interview, his father suggest that life events occurring in quick succession can destabilise parental capability to provide support appropriate to the circumstances:

Going from primary to secondary school was a big change even if he had his brother there, and then certain other people were around, peer pressure, then going through grief and loss, his grandad passed away three years ago and had to deal with that. And then two years ago I lost my mum. Then going through puberty.

Isaac’s father suggests that life events, which present new challenges, may unfold faster than the family is able to adjust to. The assumption in interventions is that the participants align their behaviour and social worlds in accordance to the goals of the programs (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1992). However, Isaac’s case shows that unfolding events can push the youth in another direction,

and undo the work that came about through the intervention. The timing and the duration of the intervention does not align with the timing of other life events. There is a sense that the family could potentially benefit from a longer-term intervention focussed on school engagement concurrently with enhancing the quality of the parent–child relationship.

School Engagement Oriented Social Connections

As described in the conference, historically, Isaac’s truancy was related to school-based peer conflict. Isaac’s utilisation of his emotional management plan yields improvements on the interpersonal front. At the exit meeting, the school representative observes: ‘His relationships with peers have improved greatly.’ The school representative provides an example: ‘He’s saying he’s sitting next to Ahmed and they had fallings out in the first term and then to be sitting next to each other and helping each other with their learning is just amazing. You know, you really have to be proud of yourself. Yeah, it’s not often that people shake hands and move on anymore. It’s been phenomenal and it has happened.’

The momentum generated through the ASEP intervention does not offset enduring changes. At the two year interview, his parents suggest that Isaac’s misconduct aligns with that of his older brother’s both at home and at school. Isaac’s mother explains: ‘My other son is in year 11 at the same school and he is more of the leader of their group.’ She provides a recent example of both her sons getting ‘a three day suspension for fighting and arguing’ and ‘with them being home, I couldn’t get anything done because they thought that they could play games and whatever they wanted but that wasn’t on.’ Isaac’s brother presents a competing influence to that of his parents and the ASEP intervention, jeopardising school re-engagement efforts. The case highlights the difficulties of responding to antisocial peer influence if that influence originates from an older sibling.

Isaac’s case exposes a gap in responding to the delinquent peer influence. The SDM posits that the formation of social bonds with family and school decreases the likelihood that a young person develops attachments to delinquent peers in adolescence (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Hawkins and Weis (1985) argue that the behaviours rewarded in family and school and those likely to be rewarded by delinquent youths are not compatible. However, Isaac’s misconduct seems to be rewarded by his older brother, who perhaps is his role model. Perhaps, one way to overcome this would be for the ASEP intervention to extend its focus on promoting an alignment between responsible conduct at home and school and include the older brother in the proceedings and the social contract.

At the two year mark, Isaac's school-based peer relations are problematic. His mother notes that Isaac seldom talks to his parents about his peer relations except 'when he gets in trouble at school, he will talk to us then so that we can help him.' However, his mother indicates that Isaac does not adhere to parental advice:

If he had an argument with a child at school, we would tell him, well stay away that way you don't get the urge to start any trouble or the other child doesn't start it with you. Next day he is at school, we get a phone call from the school: 'Isaac is having an argument with that child again'. He told me that he had an argument with someone the other day, actually with the same child that he has been having arguments all year, the one that we told him to stay away from. But he doesn't.

Isaac's parents also note the presence of other antisocial peers on Isaac's social landscape that his parents do not approve of. His mother provides an example of preventing Isaac meeting with his drug-using female friend in a local park. Isaac's parents have knowledge of his antisocial peers, which is suggestive of their monitoring of Isaac; however, they note that there is a very limited number of peers that they have met and that Isaac's socialising is situated outside the realm of parental involvement. His mother, however, notes that 'there is only so much that you can do, unless you lock them up and don't let them socialise with anybody.' There is also an absence of evidence to suggest how they endeavour to create prosocial socialising opportunities.

At the time of the ASEP conference, Isaac was engaged with a karate group. Its function as a social reward was recognised, together with it being a structured opportunity for prosocial socialising and an aid in self-regulation. At the exit meeting, his mother reports that this positive reinforcement strategy has 'worked wonders'. However, Isaac's defiance becomes an inhibitor for the karate to be a tool for prosocial engagement. Isaac refuses to continue with karate because he is required to move into a higher ability ranking as his skills advance. Instead, he prefers to stay in his room.

Isaac's case raises the issue of whether the same types of interventions are appropriate for all truants. The two earlier cases are of teenage girls in high school who are nearing completion of school, and they are able to link the relevance of the ASEP messages to their future plans. In Isaac's case, there is no hook for reinforcing the intervention's messages. There is also a sense that he needs more intensive support to work through his adjustment problems. The duration and timing of the intervention does not target emerging challenges and transitions. The formal support that the family accesses targets the new challenges rather than promoting integration with the ASEP's messages.

7.7 Discussion

In this chapter, I explored the link between the restorative processes of the ASEP's conference and the SDM's school belief. I identified that the ASEP conference sought to enact classical restorative processes focused on activating shared beliefs, responsibilities and a new social contract among its members (Mazerolle, Antrobus, et al., 2017). In restorative interventions, antisocial behaviour is viewed as a violation of shared values or beliefs (Hayes et al., 2014; Okimoto et al., 2009). Through this lens, truancy or 'unexplained school absenteeism' (Kearney, 2008b) is an expression of a weak belief about the importance of going to school. Establishing a shared belief through the application of restorative process becomes the initial step for taking on the responsibility to address truancy (see Drewery, 2004; Okimoto et al., 2009; Wenzel et al., 2012). At the ASEP conference, the process begins with the ASEP participants sharing their perspectives on why there is a truancy problem. This collaborative process facilitates the formation of trust within the ASEP group and also creates a tipping point for raising concerns about the truancy problem.

Developing a shared understanding of the truancy 'problem' (which in itself places the focus of the conference as the child's 'problem' rather than the context) is intended to lead to an expression of a shared concern and action. The process is initiated by the school authority figure communicating the escalation of legal levers to respond to ongoing truancy in the police's presence. The police representative also articulates the law enforcement perspective about truancy. At that stage, the parent tends to express concern through an emotive parental view. The union of the three authority figures can have an instrumental role in shifting what Rossner (2008, p. 27) calls 'the emotional energy' of the conference group and projecting the social impact (Latane, 1981) of the importance of the message. Shared concern about the truancy problem is designed to lead to the establishment of a 'common ground' of school belief about daily school attendance and instill shared responsibility. At the end of the conference, a new social contract is formulated through action planning to formalise shared school belief and corresponding responsibilities. The action plan stipulates school engagement-oriented goals and projected outcomes. Post-intervention, the plan acts as a reinforcement tool requiring ASEP participants to jointly support the young person's school re-engagement.

I found that the young person's school re-engagement is a consequence of the social contract that the young person enters into, with significant others, in particular the parents. The adults support the youth to implement. The SDM posits that a young person's school belief is a consequence of social bonding and a mediator of behaviour. However, I suggest that school re-engagement requires

an ongoing social process that includes a consistent reinforcement of the young person's school belief and responsibility towards school. I also found that the ASEP conference triggers that process by activating change processes across three domains: the individual youth, the family, and other social relations.

First, the truant's beliefs around school engagement become aligned with beliefs shared among the social control agents of the intervention; the alignment in turn enables the taking on of responsibility and engaging in actions that are consistent with school belief. Second, the intervention activates parental support and empowers the parents to take responsibility in assisting their children in enhancing their school engagement. Third, the intervention activates school-engagement oriented social relations where the young person prioritises school work and social interactions take place in a structured school setting. With the exception of peers, the ASEP intervention brings the key actors, representing the key domains, into a single meeting. The role of peers is discussed by other parties at the intervention, but the young person is left to negotiate these relations, and the changes that the intervention will require, independently.

My case study analysis shows that the ASEP process can facilitate different school re-engagement pathways, which I term as linear, chaotic and non-linear discontinuous. In the linear pathway, Elizabeth, her mother and the school staff work collaboratively on implementing the social contract. Through their invested energy and shared responsibility, their connection, focused on school engagement deepens over time. Consequently, there is a significant turn around in Elizabeth's school engagement and how she engages with her social relations. For Rachel, school re-engagement is more chaotic and delayed, as the family is exposed to a broader range of social influences, some of which complement, others that counteract ASEP's focus. ASEP in this case has a more conceptual role in setting a basic school-engagement framework applicable in changing circumstances. Rachel's bond with her mother is initially strenuous but over time, they are able to effectively negotiate fulfilling their shared responsibilities around school engagement. This entails Rachel's peer choices also becoming aligned with school values. Lastly, Isaac makes substantial improvements short-term, which discontinue post ASEP. The relapse coincides with Isaac jeopardising the working alliance that he has formed with his parents and ceasing to fulfill his part of the responsibility stipulated in the social contract, aligning himself with his older brother's antisocial influence.

The cases highlight the significance of post-ASEP prosocial relations for reinforcing shared school belief and shared responsibility. In Elizabeth's case, post-intervention, the ASEP team members

continue to reinforce messages that were initially unpacked at the conference. Rachel's case, however, exemplifies that the reinforcement does not have to strictly emanate from the ASEP team; other social relations can be as effective as long as their values resonate with the ones focused on at the conference. In contrast, for Isaac, the influence of the ASEP group dissipates as the intervention comes to the end. The onset of new life challenges (change of school, onset of puberty and mental health difficulties) takes the focus away from shared values and responsibilities, and antisocial peers step in as a competing influence.

My exploration highlights that a young person's developmental stage may be relevant in understanding the impact of the ASEP process. Perhaps Elizabeth's school engagement follows a linear pathway because her age and her future choices are directly related to her current academic outcomes. In contrast, for Isaac, who has just transitioned from primary to secondary school, the re-emergence of misconduct problems may be related to his stage of development. My analysis raises questions around what constitutes the most beneficial timing of the conference to aid school re-engagement efforts in terms of the child's age and developmental transitions. Considering that some cases are more complex than others, there is also the question of whether the same program should expand the timing of the conference and exit meeting to provide more support during the transition phase. The study is a starting point linking variations of intervention processes to individual level factors related to development.

Considering the exploratory nature of my study, the findings cannot be generalised. Lambert and Barley (2001) also note that attributing client outcomes to the theoretical framework of an intervention must be regarded with great caution. Lambert and Barley (2001) identify a range of other factors that impact on outcomes in intervention settings. These factors include the quality of the working alliance between the client and the practitioner, as well as the level of support a person receives outside the intervention setting. While the design of the restorative process seeks to facilitate an alliance between the ASEP practitioners and the clients, and link the young person to support post-intervention, the process plays out differently in each case. In addition, as I identified in Chapter 5, depending on the truant type, the ASEP process naturally adjusts to fit the young person's willingness and presenting capability for school re-engagement. Yet, in a recent study comparing the ASEP experimental and control group on their willingness to attend school and their school attendance data, Mazerolle, Antrobus and colleagues (2017) reported significant differences between the two groups and found that the ASEP intervention showed promise for reducing truancy.

In sum, this chapter shows that school re-engagement is a process that requires time, and reinforcement of school values and responsibility, which are enacted through social relations. The process plays out differently for each individual. As earlier alluded, further research could focus more closely on individual-level factors, such as age, gender, and family composition that contribute to the success of school re-engagement. In addition, future research endeavours could consider how the local communities and resources that youth access could be used to reinforce the shared school values and shared responsibilities of school engagement.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

It is well established that truancy is a complex problem that can lead to a range of negative outcomes and conversely, school engagement can generate social and educational successes (Hancock et al., 2015; Rocque et al., 2016). Thus, truancy prevention and interventions have the potential to disrupt the aetiology of antisocial development and promote positive development. Interventions can elicit change because the presenting problems are given new solution-oriented meanings (Cantwell & Stagoll, 1996; Damasio, 2008; Gurman & Kniskern, 2014). However, the study of the mechanisms for school re-engagement of youth at risk has been overlooked in prevention research (Maynard et al., 2013). To close this gap, my research focused on a process evaluation of ASEP to understand how an intervention can elicit change.

I employed three complementary approaches to examine the relationship between the ASEP processes and the particular facets of the school bond construct: commitment, attachment and belief in fostering school engagement. I adopted a qualitative approach because the 'how' is difficult to investigate using quantitative procedures (Giordano et al., 2002; Yin, 2009). I explored the SDM's hypotheses that strong school bonds encourage prosocial behaviours and that development of strong school bonds is a social process (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996; Hawkins & Weis, 1985). First, I conducted a thematic analysis of ASEP conference transcripts to investigate how the ASEP conference processes activate school commitment. Second, I again interrogated the conference transcripts in which peer-related truancy were identified to examine how the ASEP conference activates attachment to school peers. Third, I applied a case study approach to look at how the ASEP activates school belief and how this in turn impacts on school re-engagement and social relations over a two-year period post-intervention.

In this chapter, I revisit the main findings of this dissertation. I start by discussing *how* the ASEP process relates to the SDM's school bond. In section 8.3, I bring the thesis components together. Then in section 8.4, I discuss the implications of my research for policy and practice. In section 8.5, I consider the limitations of the current research. This is followed by directions for future research (section 8.6) as well as concluding remarks (section 8.7).

8.2 Main findings

8.2.1 School commitment and ASEP

School commitment, also termed as an investment in school and taking school seriously, is an important construct in the study of delinquency and its prevention (Jimerson et al., 2003; Libbey, 2004). Previous studies have shown that delinquent youth report weak school commitment and prosocial youth report high school commitment (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). Scholars have recommended further research into how school commitment can be activated through interventions to enhance educational outcomes (Appleton et al., 2008; Maddox & Prinz, 2003).

In chapter 5, I found that school commitment can be activated from a problem-oriented to a solution-focused state during the ASEP conference. I proposed that in the intervention setting, school commitment can be thought of as a readiness for school re-engagement that has two dimensions: willingness and presenting capability. Willingness refers to the student's motivation for daily school attendance. The concept supports the key premise of Prochaska and DiClemente's (1986, 1992) Stages of Change Model that the amount of change that people make during interventions is proportionate to their motivation. Significantly, I introduced the concept of what I term the presenting capability to refer to skills, resources and supports that young participants have that impact on their school engagement. The concept is based on my inductive analysis of the transcripts and my theoretical interpretation of the emerging themes in reference to the literature about the role of structure in creating societal inequalities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Sen, 1993). Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified four layers of the social environment: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. I identified that the different social systems have a role in supporting or diminishing the presenting capability. Support from parents, peers and community agencies can enact the former. Same can be said about the different microsystems of the family and school working together. In contrast, inconsistent parenting, bullying at school, lengthy waiting lists to access formal support or the absence of specialist support can enact the latter. Examining the systemic issues of the macrosystem was outside the scope of the dissertation which I discuss more in section 8.4.

I developed 'the five Rs of the student readiness for school re-engagement' typology to categorise the truant groups along the willingness and presenting capability dimensions. I named the respective truant types as reformed, ready, reluctant, resistant and recalcitrant. I identified differences among the truant groups in how they engaged with the ASEP proceedings. I found that the reformed and ready truants offered much more verbal input on why they tranted and how their school

engagement could be enhanced. The reluctant truants well-articulated their reasons for truancy but appeared unmotivated to change the status quo. In contrast, resistant and recalcitrant truants tended to be quiet during the proceedings, and the voice of the adults was much more dominant. I found that young people with diagnosed and suspected learning difficulties were overrepresented in the latter two categories.

Etzion and Romi (2015) assert that typologies enhance understanding of how complex problems play out and how solutions can be targeted. I found that the ASEP process differentially activates participants' readiness for school re-engagement, and its focus, depending on the truant type, can either be to maintain, act, motivate, strengthen or reform. However, some youth have more complex needs than others, which means that school re-engagement may be a long process for them. A practice implication is that the willingness and presenting capability concepts could be operationalised into a pre-intervention screening tool. The tool could aid in the provision of targeted intervention responses that fit the willingness and presenting capability dimensions. Consistent with the recommendation made by Hayes and Snow (2013) to refine the preparatory work with young participants around their communication capacities to engage in the conference process, the screening tool could also be used to assess the young person's presenting capability to participate in a group intervention setting. In cases of oral language competence problems, the assessment could focus on better understanding how to enhance the young person's participation, and effective engagement strategies (Hayes & Snow, 2013).

8.2.2 Attachment to School Peers and ASEP

In chapter 6, I focused on ASEP youths' attachment to school peers and how the attachment is fostered during the ASEP conference proceedings. In my literature review, I identified that there is no consensus whether it is the attachment to peers or teachers that matters most in school engagement (Attwood & Croll, 2006; Obsuth et al., 2016). I also noted that one of the most supported findings in youth delinquency research is the relationship between the individual's delinquency and that of the peer group (Haynie, 2002; Weerman & Smeenk, 2005; Young, Rebellon, Barnes, & Weerman, 2014). However, the role of peer influence in school engagement and truancy has been understudied (Rocque et al., 2016).

My findings were surprising: I identified a school-based peer paradox whereby peers at school can encourage both school engagement and truancy. So, while attachment to school peers is part of the school bond, peers at school are a mixed source of prosocial and antisocial influence. Peer-related truancy was reported in 57.4% ($n = 27$) of a total of 47 ASEP cases. Almost a third of the ASEP

sample (29.8%, n = 14) reported co-truancy with peers, predominantly school friends. Only for a small subsample of co-truants, co-truancy is related to associating with peers who offend and have disengaged from school. However, a greater percentage (42.6%, n = 20) of the sample reported truancy due to school-based peer conflict.

Identification of co-truancy and truancy due to school-based conflict suggests that peers at school can influence truancy through both conflict and attachment. This finding suggests that the peer influence is more complex than what the SDM hypothesises. Following social control theory, the SDM proposes that school-based relations are prosocial because they make the individual internalise institutional values (Borden, 2000; Hawkins & Weis, 1985; Hirschi, 1969). The theory, however, does not explain why the seemingly prosocial school-based peers participate in a conflict that 'pushes' certain students towards truancy to escape the negative social school environment. In addition, the application of DAT that is also integrated into the SDM posits that prosocial and antisocial behaviours are socially learnt through parallel but different social processes (Catalano et al., 2004). In polarising the peers as either prosocial or antisocial, the theory does not accommodate the school-based peer paradox of why at times the peers encourage truancy and at other times school engagement. More research is required to understand how social control theory and DAT compliment each other in explaining the role of peer influence in truancy.

I also found an overlap between peer-related truancy and the readiness for school re-engagement. The co-truants were predominantly the 'reformed' and 'ready' truants who made significant steps towards school re-engagement post randomisation but before the ASEP conference, whereas youth who reported school-based conflict were overrepresented in the 'resistant' and 'recalcitrant' category. In other words, it appears that school re-engagement is an easier process for youth who have affective peer relations at school in comparison to the youth who truant to avoid the social school environment. Co-truants also tend to have less complex issues impacting on their school engagement and those that truant with school friends appear more socially integrated at school. In contrast, truants who experience school-based conflict tend to experience difficulties coping with the social school environment.

The ASEP conference focuses on enhancing selective peer socialisation at school and other extra-curricular programs. This approach shares the SDM's assumption of school being a site for prosocial peer relations and it echoes the main premise of routine activity theory that increasing time spent in structured and supervised settings promotes prosocial peer interactions as well as reducing opportunities for delinquency (Osgood et al., 1996). At the conference, co-truants were

encouraged to spend more time with their friends at school and in other structured environments and were offered incentives for their compliance. Co-truants were also given strategies to enhance their assertiveness in resisting peer influence to truant. ASEP youth with delinquent peer associations were asked to deselect these peers because of their sticky friends' characteristics (Warr 1993), in particular, their antisocial influence. In contrast, youth experiencing school-based peer conflict were asked to change how they interacted with their peers by applying self-regulation strategies, including anger management, to prevent peer conflict or its escalation. Unsurprisingly, I found that ASEP young people who co-truant with school friends better respond to the ASEP processes than the young people who get pulled into peer conflict or are targets of school bullying.

ASEP's focus on enhancing the social skills of the young participants who report peer conflict is consistent with some intervention research that shows that the way to target peer misconduct is to empower the victims (e.g. Craig et al., 2007). However, I identified that some ASEP youth are passive victims of bullying. For these cases, changing the way they interact with school peers could be a challenging task considering that no parallel intervention was delivered to work with the perpetrators of the conflict. Kearney and Grabczyk (2014) argue that truancy reduction efforts should integrate individual-level interventions with whole-of-school prevention concerned with promoting positive a school culture and students' sense of belonging. This ideal recommendation is outside the scope of the ASEP trial and does not resonate with the present funding priorities of the educational system in Australia (Gonsky et al., 2011).

While the exploration shows the different strategies that can be employed to target peer issues in a family group conference, it also highlights the limitations of responding to this matter in an intervention where the primary objective is targeting the truancy of the young person. The ASEP cases exemplify the different ways that peers can influence truancy, and the restricted scope of interventions in targeting these issues when the peers are not parties to the proceedings. Addressing school-based peer conflict is further complicated by the absence of a uniform approach, at the institutional level, in how schools respond to peer-related truancy through their business-as-usual approach. Consequently, I noted inconsistencies across cases in how peer relations of truants were targeted. In the presence of the limitations which were outside the scope of the intervention, the ASEP's focus was on the young person and the parent working with other ASEP members towards school re-engagement using available local supports and resources.

I found that parents are implicated in peer-related truancy. Some ASEP youth reported that their co-truancy emerged during family crises, where peers acted as a displacement for strained family

relations. In contrast, for ASEP truants experiencing school-based peer conflict, the family was a substitute for the weakness or absence of positive peer relations. The parents reported reluctance to send their child to school to protect them from potential bullying. In either case, I identified that parents can unintentionally contribute to truancy by inconsistently enforcing school attendance. So, ASEP endeavours to break down the problematic family patterns by encouraging parents to be actively involved in supporting the young person around actions related to school-based selective peer socialisation. In their study, Rulison and colleagues (2015) found that family strengthening interventions (where peers were not focused on) can lead to a decrease in unstructured socialising and youth delinquency because parents increase their monitoring of their children. Their study was not focused on truancy but their findings, similar to mine, suggest that behavioural change is a social process that takes place in the young person's social environment of home and school.

8.2.3 School belief and ASEP

In chapter 7, I explored the link between the SDM's school belief and ASEP's processes in fostering school engagement. SDM scholars posit that school belief is a consequence of social bonding and a mediator of behavioural outcomes (Catalano et al., 2004). Similarly, restorative interventions, with ASEP being an example, seek to bring back the offender's prosocial belief as a starting point in reintegration (Okimoto et al., 2009).

Consistent with the literature, I identified that the ASEP process activates school belief, which acts as a hook for prosocial change. Through the restorative process, ASEP activates shared school belief and shared responsibility among ASEP members, as well as creating a new social contract. I found that successful school re-engagement is a social process in which ASEP members reinforce the young person's school belief and responsibility towards school. The process is enacted during and after the ASEP conference. In other words, the ASEP conference triggers what Granic and Patterson (2006, p. 123) call 'a major reorganization' of interactional patterns, where old patterns are 'shaken loose or destabilized to allow for new configurations to emerge or to be discovered'. Consequently, new 'interactional patterns' (Granic & Patterson, 2006, p. 123) are created and if consistently enacted, evolve to new behavioural repertoires and social relations.

My case study analysis shows that the school engagement pathways differ across individuals. I termed them as (1) linear, (2) chaotic, and (3) non-linear discontinuous. In the linear pathway, the young person is highly responsive to the intervention and continues to engage well at school two years later with the support of the parent and the ASEP school representative. The chaotic pathway is characterised by challenges and truancy relapses before positive outcomes are attained. In the

non-linear discontinuous pathway, the young person initially makes prosocial changes in school re-engagement but relapses when the ASEP intervention ends.

I found that the young person's school re-engagement is related to parental support and school-oriented social relations. This finding is consistent with literature about factors related to prosocial behaviours that I considered in Chapter 2 (e.g. Brechwald & Prinstein, 2011; Huizinga et al., 1993; Kearney, 2008b). The relationships, however, change over time, with life events unfolding and normative transitions taking place. Ideally, there is an alignment between parental and peer school values that reinforces the young person's school engagement. External stakeholders, such as community agencies and school in particular, have a role in supporting the alignment. However, the continuity of reinforcing shared belief may be lost as the young person accesses community agencies in relation to new problems, which become more salient than school bond issues. To build on this exploratory study, further research could examine how individual, family, peer, school and community factors contribute to the youth embarking on the different school engagement trajectories at different points of the ASEP intervention and after its completion.

8.3 Bringing the Thesis Components Together and Implications

This dissertation advances prior truancy prevention research by focusing on intervention mechanisms for fostering school re-engagement among youth at-risk. The SDM presents a broad framework for conceptualising how strong school bonds foster prosocial behaviour (Hawkins et al., 1992; Hawkins et al., 2005). This dissertation demonstrates how the ASEP process could reorient school bonds of truanting youth from problem-oriented to solution-focused, as well as its limitations. Activating school belief acts as a hook, tapping into youth's intrinsic motivation. Rollnick and Miller (1995) posit that motivation to change should be elicited from the individual and not imposed from the outside. However, my analysis shows that through the ASEP conference's dialogues, the police, the school and the community agency representatives can influence the person in making behavioural change.

The assumption of the SDM is that the social control institutions of school and family restrain young people's natural tendencies towards antisocial behaviours by reinforcing prosocial behaviours (Hawkins & Weis, 1985). In theory, truancy is an outcome of weak school bonds and a display of the young person's hedonistic impulses (Hirschi, 1969). However, my analysis shows that truancy's aetiology is more complex: the ASEP youth, parents, peers and other school factors can precipitate the problem. In response, ASEP explores how the truancy problem arose and through the social contract, holds the respective ASEP members accountable for helping the young

person re-engage in school. In theory, the focus on shared responsibility endeavours to make school re-engagement a group process rather than a sole responsibility of the child and the parents, which is a dominant approach in the interventions (France, Freiberg, & Homel, 2010; Okimoto et al., 2009).

This dissertation demonstrates that school re-engagement requires formal and informal partnerships. Grey (2005) identifies a tendency for the restorative justice conference to be considered a cognitive developmental process focused on holding the offenders accountable for their wrongdoing and re-integration. In contrast, I find that restorative dialogue and TPP partnerships have a potential to facilitate a new social contract between the young people and their community. Hudson and colleagues (1996, p. 3) identify that this process has empowering implications:

Conferences help to illustrate the responsibility of citizens to participate in community affairs. The reciprocity evident in the family group conference helps emphasize the point that people can benefit from the challenge and opportunities of helping others. Receiving help can actually weaken one's self-esteem but giving help as well as receiving it empower people and strengthens their sense of self worth.

Hudsons and colleagues' (1996) argument about conferencing enacting civic responsibilities brings me to the next point. This thesis shows that school re-engagement involves not just the young person and the parent but requires an ongoing and consistent input from schools, police and community agencies. White (2001) argues that family group conferences should be based on communal objectives rather than individual incentives or punishments to elicit community empowerment. The ASEP is an example of an initiative that was developed due to the local community's concern that truanting youth were overrepresented in contact with the police (Mazerolle, Bennett, et al., 2017). Truancy as a community problem played out as an absence of a uniform approach in responding to it and a role confusion as to who should take the lead in responding (Mazerolle, Bennett, et al., 2017). The ASEP team is currently conducting research to examine how the initiative strengthened TPP partnerships in responding to truancy.

If truancy prevention is everyone's business, the restorative process for school engagement has wider implications, extending beyond the family group conference. Homel (2016) argues that the next wave of prevention science is to teach communities how to do prevention by translating research into practice. One of the ways to encourage the use of the restorative process and school re-engagement is through training. Training for schools, police and local agencies on implementing restorative process and how they can work together to reinforce school re-engagement could be delivered based on the ASEP findings. One of the practice gaps that emerged is that once the ASEP finished and the youth entered a different support service, the continuity of reinforcing school

engagement was lost. So, developing local interagency partnerships focused on prevention could potentially enhance the continuity of the school re-engagement focus.

8.4 Implications for Practice and Policy

My research shows that truants differ in their readiness for school re-engagement. Based on their willingness and presenting capability, the ASEP youth differently engaged in and responded to the standardised processes of the intervention. The finding has implications for how interventions can work with different types of truants to optimise their school re-engagement. I suggest that at the pre-intervention assessment, the young person's willingness and presenting capability are assessed. The assessment can potentially help inform the intervention's efforts in activating the young person's school readiness. If it is assessed that the young person's willingness for school re-engagement is weak, the intervention could then introduce different tools and strategies to strengthen the young person's motivation for school re-engagement. If the presenting capability is a concern, then the intervention could focus on provision of appropriate resources and supports to address the particular young person's needs. In other words, the assessment would enhance the intervention's efforts being tailored around the young person's readiness for school re-engagement.

I also find that the ASEP as an individual-level intervention was better attuned to responding to cases of co-truancy than peer conflict. Co-truants tend to present with more affective school-based peer relationships and less complex needs in comparison to young people who truant due to school-based peer conflict. At the intervention, the youth who truant due to being bullied are asked to rectify their truancy behaviours while the peer conflict issues are inconsistently dealt with. There is the risk that the restorative process of the intervention has limited effect in correcting the wrongdoing if the perpetrators are absent. Ideally, in these cases, complementary interventions such as peer mediation are utilized to support the young person and more thoroughly address the peer issues (Schiff, 2013). Yet, such provisions are scarce (Schiff, 2013). Enhancing positive and inclusive peer cultures at school to prevent truancy and promote stronger school attachment requires the effort of the whole of school community (Kearney and Grabczyk, 2014). This effort should complement the individual-level interventions (Kearney and Grabczyk, 2014). However, there are no uniform policy frameworks of how the schools could enhance their informal cultures to facilitate a sense of belonging (Queensland Government, 2013). Development of policy frameworks focusing both on the macro and micro strategies would be an important step towards enhancing positive school experiences for young people at risk.

My research also shows that some youth need more support than others around school re-engagement. Yet, there are limited services that specifically focus on supporting students around their school engagement needs (Queensland Government, 2013). My research identifies how schools and community agencies can work together to jointly address some complex issues related to truancy. Through sharing the responsibility, the agencies engage with the young people and the family to provide a continuity of support around school engagement and underpinning issues. However, the difficulty is that with the intervention coming to the end, the joint work can also diffuse. Subsequently, the help-seeking behaviours can lead to receiving fragmented support focused on particular issues, e.g. mental health, rather than a more integrated focus including school engagement (Yoshikawa et al., 2017).

My thesis shows that truancy should be everybody's business. One way to encourage this is by developing partnerships and networks that focus on joint community approaches in addressing problems such as truancy (Hawkins et al., 2009, 2014). Such initiatives require the support from the government to establish the community infrastructures and the necessary social and technical resources.

8.5 Caveats and Limitations

My findings present some mechanisms for activating the school bond and fostering school re-engagement. However, like all research, these findings must be considered in the context of the current study's limitations. In this section, I outline several caveats and limitations of this research.

One such caveat is the role of structure in school re-engagement. Critical scholars well recognise that schools as institutions can contribute to truancy. Schools' environment, culture, organisational structures, policies and procedures can precipitate truancy (Gentle-Genitty, 2008; Reid, 2002). In particular for students with learning disabilities, there is a complex interaction between individual factors and systemic factors related to social exclusion (Cumming et al., 2014). So when exploring the antecedents of truancy, we know that structural characteristics are influential. The assumption of the SDM is that school is a social control institution that restrains antisocial behaviours. As ASEP follows the SDM's assumption in this regard, I was unable to explore how the broader institutional factors interact with individual-level factors in school re-engagement using the ASEP data. Instead, I focused on how different stakeholders can work together within existing structures. Scholars recognize that the joined-up approach has the potential to both improve inter-organisational co-

ordination and overcome deficiencies related to the division and distribution of welfare knowledge (Allen, 2003; Frost, 2005).

The ASEP young participants are a diverse group. Their age range was 10 to 16 and included students in both primary and secondary schools. The participants also differed in terms of the cultural backgrounds, family circumstances, significant life events, gender and developmental transitions. Research shows that these factors impact on school re-engagement efforts (e.g. Reid, 2002). The influence of these factors and developmental transitions was secondary to my analysis.

My data comprise of transcripts from ASEP proceedings and interviews with parents. In my analysis, I assumed that the content of the dialogues accurately portrayed the circumstances of the young people and their families. In research studies, the participants may not accurately express their feelings and behaviours for a range of reasons. Social desirability bias or ‘a distortion of responses in a socially desirable direction’ is one of the most common sources of research bias (Nederhof, 1985, p. 264). Similarly, asking participants if their behaviour had changed after the intervention can encourage expectancy effects (Mazerolle, Antrobus, et al., 2017). At the other extreme, therapy research also shows that a significant proportion of clients in intervention settings conceal some important information (Farber, 2003). Intervention factors that foster disclosure include a strong working relationship between the client and the facilitator and the length of time spent in treatment (Farber, 2003).

It is possible that the biases also impacted on how young participants engaged with the ASEP processes. The group setting of the conference and a room full of authority figures introduce power imbalances for the young person (Walgrave, 1998). Some youth could feel under pressure to say what is expected of them and withhold undesirable information that they could perceive would get them into trouble. The group setting could also constrain participation of shy and quiet participants as well as those with developmental delays (Hayes & Snow, 2013). However, it can be argued that the participation of the frustrated parents and the concerned teachers reduced the respondent bias. The common pattern was that throughout the ASEP proceedings, one of the adults provided an in-depth elaboration on the different issues that were discussed. In cases when the young person would not disclose their peer associations due to their antisocial nature, one of the ASEP adults with some knowledge of peer issues would flag out the risks, and a dialogue would organically emerge on that topic. So, while the group setting of ASEP meetings introduced the potential for response bias, the input from the various participants reduced that bias. Given the one-on-one interviews with the parents, it was more likely that some respondent bias would come into play. Before the interview,

the participants were briefed not to disclose information that they felt uncomfortable sharing so as to prevent them becoming distressed.

In attributing intervention effects, Lambert and Barley (2001) identified four categories of factors that influence intervention outcomes: (1) specific intervention techniques, (2) expectancy effects (including the placebo effect), (3) common factors (empathy, warmth and the working relationship), and (4) extra-intervention factors (social support and life events). Working with intervention transcripts and interview data, I was able to separate intervention techniques from other factors. However, I acknowledge that the text analysis only permits an examination of the intricacies of the written language rather than an analysis of the interpersonal group dynamics that could be examined through a video-recording (see Rossner, 2011). Written text offered a limited scope for analysis of how common factors impacted on the course of the proceedings.

8.6 Directions for Future Research

In this dissertation, I applied the school bond concept of the SDM in exploring ASEP family group conference processes fostering school re-engagement. I reconceptualised how the school bond could be examined in an intervention setting. However, given the qualitative design of the study, the findings cannot be generalised to other populations. So, I recommend conducting further research using quantitative ASEP data to test some of my propositions.

First, further research could compare and contrast the five types of truants that emerged from the 5R typology in terms of their compliance with ASEP action plans, post-intervention school attendance and young participants' perceptions of school engagement. Second, further research could quantitatively investigate how ASEP affects peer relations. I identified that peer issues were not part of the ASEP script and, consequently, they were inconsistently discussed during the proceedings. If youth spent more time at school and other structured settings or more time under parental supervision after the intervention, it is likely that their relations with peers have also changed. A pre- and post-test of the experimental and control group would allow ascertainment of whether the changes could be attributed to ASEP. The study could investigate if young persons' perceptions about their peer behaviours, including truancy and bullying, attachment to peers and parents, and family support, change over time.

My research focused on how interventions can foster school re-engagement. This choice was based on the paucity of research on the topic, the unique data set of the unfolding ASEP intervention and a wealth of prior research showing that interventions' effects are modest and short-lived. Perhaps

future research can adopt a more pragmatic approach by comparing and contrasting experimental and control group participants' perceptions of school bonds, together with school attendance rates and how they change over time. This study could elucidate whether it is the impact of the intervention or perceptions about the school that are more important in predicting school behaviours.

Further research could also be more developmentally oriented in investigating which age and gender groups best respond to family group conference interventions and why. In my research, I noted differences in the level of participation among the ASEP youth. Research could examine whether interventions are more effective for older youth coming towards the end of school, where the intervention acts as a catalyst to enable them to take responsibility, or for the younger cohort where the parent steps up in dealing with the problem.

Foreseeing the future of intervention research, Yoshikawa, Whipps and Royas (2017) recently recommended adding on new intervention components to existing programs to understand how existing programs can broaden their impact. In the context of truancy, further research could examine how generic programs for youth and families (not focused on truancy) could incorporate promotion of school engagement to their business as usual approach in disadvantaged communities. Also, further research could examine best practice models of how community organisations, in their standard service delivery, could work together to promote school engagement and prevent truancy.

8.7 Concluding Remarks

Truancy and its prevention have been in the academic discourse since the early 20th century (Glueck & Glueck, 1950). A century later, the topic continues to be a thorny social problem and a research puzzle (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Rocque et al., 2016). This dissertation demonstrated that through partnerships targeting school re-engagement, the antisocial developmental trajectories could be disrupted and substituted with prosocial developmental trajectories. Yet, there is still much more to be learnt on this topic and the differences among youth as to what works best in school re-engagement.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Name of the child:

Age:

What is your child like? (shy, outgoing/sociable) What does he/she like to do?

Parental awareness of child's friendships

How close do you consider your relationship with your child on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is not very close and 5 is very close? Has your relationship changed with your child in the last two years? How so?

How close do you think that your child feels to his/her friends on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is not very close and 5 is very close?

How much time would you say does your child spend time with his/her friends when not at home or school?

How do you monitor what your child is doing when he/she is out?

How often do you talk to your child about his/her friends?

(E group only) Did you find that taking part in Project ABILITY changed your relationship with your child?

How often do you talk to the parents of your child's friends?

How well on a scale from 1 to 5 would you know your child's friends them (1=not at all; 5=very well)? How many would you know? Why do you know some friends more than others (e.g. do some friends come over to your place but not other young people)?

Your child's friends

How easily does your child make friends?

Where does your child normally make friends? (school, sports, family friends etc.)

What qualities does your child look out for in a friend? (i.e. what kind of kids does your child like to make friends with?) What are some of the qualities that your child and his/her friends have in common?

What are the qualities that your child has that attract other kids to him/her?

Does your child go along with his/her friends just to keep them happy or is he/she more likely to do as he/she wants at the potential expense of making his/her friends unhappy?

Is your child more of an individual who stands out or more of a member of a crowd that blends in?

Do you think that your child would break the rules and take risks when with his/her friends as this is something that the friends do?

What are some of the things that your child does that you don't approve of? How do you respond to that? What impact do your responses have on your child's behaviours?

Has your child changed his/her behaviours in the last two years? Give examples.

Your child's friends

How many friends does your child currently have? Name them (I would draw a sociogram, a network of friends to act as a guide for further questions).

How close are the other young people that your child is friends with to each other?

How long has he/she known them for? Where did she/he meet them?

How much time does your child spend with their friends? What are some of the things that they do together?

Which are the friends that your child spends most time with? What is it about them that makes your child spend more time with them?

Do you encourage your child to spend more time with particular friends but not others? How do you do that?

Who in your child's friendship group makes decisions about what the group does?

What are some things that your child gets up to when he/she hangs out with friends?

Do your child's friends do anything that you don't approve of? Give examples. Would your child be with his/her friends when this happens? What does your child think of these behaviours?

How does your child respond when his/her friend does something that your child doesn't like? Give an example.

If your child has disagreements with one of his/her friends, what does he/she normally do to deal with it?

Would he/she stand firm and insist on being right? How likely is it for your child to compromise?

What is the likely conflict outcome for your child? Is it likely that your child would have a fall out with his/her friends?

In the last two years, would your child try to be a positive role model for his/her friends? Give example. How did it come about that your child tried to be a positive role model? How successful was he/she with being a good role model?

Do you think that it is your child or his/her friends who have a stronger influence in the friendship?

In the last two years, would your child end a friendship because his/her friend/s are a negative influence? How did he/she find a replacement?

Thinking of two years ago when you were joining the ABILITY project, how many friends did your child have then? (I would make note of that too and compare the answer to the one provided for the present)

Your child's school bond

How is your child going at school? What are some of the things that his/her teachers say about your child behaviours?

What are your child's grades? What is he/she like with doing homework?

Has your child attendance changed in the last two years? Had this had impact on the time your child spends with friends?

How well does your child get along with kids at school?

Do you know how your child's friends are going at school?

For participants who are no longer at school

Why has your child stopped going to school? (This question will be asked when the young person is of an age that they could be in mainstream schooling).

Thinking about your child's friends, do they attend school? (Here, I would explore how similar or different the friends' situation is to the child's)

Facebook Friends – Does your child use social media?

If yes, ask the following:

Which type? (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)

Do you have access to your child's account? (e.g. password, Facebook friend). Would you say that you monitor your child's use of social media? How so?

How much time approximately would your child spend online on an average day?

Who are your child's online friends? How many online friends does your child have?

How important is it for your child to be liked online? What is it about being liked online that is important to your child?

What are some of the things that he/she does online when he/she is on social media sites?

What type of personal information would your child share on his/her social media page that would be available to all his/her online friends?

Do you know whether your child have participated in spreading online rumours? Explain.

Do you know whether your child has ever posted an embarrassing picture? Explain. Have they ever seen their friends online doing so?

Do you know whether your child's face-to-face friends use social media? What do they do online? How much time are they on it?

Has your child ever 'unfriended' or blocked anybody on social media? What was the reason for it?

Appendix 2 Parental Interview Schedule – Construct Table

Construct	Source & author's construct	Interview question
Social bond Parental attachment	Adapted from Vitaro et al 2000	How close do you consider your relationship with your child on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is not very close and 5 is very close? Has your relationship changed with your child in the last two years? How so?
Social bond Parental attachment	My question	Did you find that taking part in Project ABILITY changed your relationship with your child?
Parental monitoring	Adapted from Vitaro et al 2000	How do you monitor what your child is doing when he/she is out?
Parental monitoring	Adapted from Updegraff et al 20001	How often do you talk to the parents of your child's friends?
Parental monitoring	My questions	How well on a scale from 1 to 5 would you know your child's friends them (1=not at all; 5=very well)? How many would you know? Why do you know some friends more than others (e.g. do some friends come over to your place but not other young people)?
Peer attachment	Adapted from Platow (2008)	How close do you think that your child feels to his/her friends on a scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is not very close and 5 is very close?
Time spent with friends	Adapted from Ploeger (1997)	How much time would you say does your child spend time with his/her friends when not at home or school? What are some of the things that they do together?

selection	Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright (2003)	How easily does your child make friends?
selection	My questions	What qualities does your child look out for in a friend? (i.e. what kind of kids does your child likes to make friends with?) What are some of the qualities that your child and his/her friends have in common?
selection	My question	Do you encourage your child to spend more time with particular friends but not others? How do you do that?
Selection	My question	In the last two years, has your child end a friendship because his/her friend/s are a negative influence? What were the circumstances related to that friendship fall out? How did he/she find a replacement?
Socialization/selection	My question	Where does your child normally make friends? (school, sports, family friends etc.)
Socialization/selection	My question	What are the qualities that your child has that attract other kids to him/her?
Socialization/selection	Adapted from resistance to peer influence scale (Steinberg & Monahan, 2007)	Does your child go along with his/her friends just to keep them happy or is he/she more likely to do as he/she want at the potential expanse of making his/her friends unhappy? Is your child more of an individual who stands out or more of a member of a crowd that blends in? Do you think that your child would break the rules and take risks when with his/her friends as this is something that the friends do?

		What are some of the things that your child does that you don't approve of? How do you respond to that? What impact do your responses have on your child's behaviours?
Socialization/selection	My question	Which are the friends that your child spends most time with? What is it about them that make your child spend more time with them?
Socialization/selection	Adapted from Hartup et al 1988	<p>If your child has disagreements with one of his/her friends, what does he/she normally do to deal with it?</p> <p>Would he/she stand firm and insist on being right? How likely is it for your child to compromise?</p> <p>What is the likely conflict outcome for your child? Is it likely that your child would have a fall out with his/her friends?</p>
Socialization/selection	My question	<p>In the last two years, has your child tried to be a positive role model for his/her friends? Give example. How did it come about that your child tried to be a positive role model? How successful was he/she with being a good role model?</p> <p>Do you think that it is your child or his/her friends who have a stronger influence in the friendship?</p>
Socialization/selection	My questions	How long has he/she known them for? Where did she/he meet them?
Friendship group stability		
socialization	Questions adapted from social network analysis methodology that examines peer relations	<p>How many friends does your child currently have? Name them (I would draw a sociogram, a network of friends to act as a guide for further questions).</p> <p>How close are the other young people that your child is friends with to each other?</p>

	(e.g. Ennett and Bauman 1994; Kandel 1978)	
socialization	My question	Who in your child's friendship group makes decisions about what the group does?
Individual behaviours	My question	What does he/she like to do? What are some of the things that your child does that you don't approve of? How do you respond to that? What impact do your responses have on your child's behaviours? Has your child change his/her behaviours in the last two years? Give examples.
Friendship stability	group My question	Thinking of two years ago when you were joining the ABILITY project, how many friends did your child have then? (I would make note of that too and compare the answer to the one provided for the present)
School bond	Adapted from Catalano et al 1996	How is your child going at school? What are some of the things that his/her teachers say about your child behaviours? What are your child's grades? What is he/she like with doing homework? Has your child attendance changed in the last two years? Had this had impact on the time your child spends with friends? How well does your child get along with kids at school? Why has your child stopped going to school? (This question will be asked when the young person is of an age that they could be in mainstream schooling). How does your child and his/her friends support each other with school work? Give examples. Have you noticed any changes in the last two years?

Peer behaviours – peer school bond	My question	Thinking about your child’s friends, do they attend school? (Here, I would explore how similar or different the friends’ situation is to the child’s)
Peer behaviours - online behaviours	My question	Do you know whether your child’s face-to-face friends use social media? What do they do online? How much time are they on it?
Social media	Adapted from Pew Research Centre (2010)	<p>Does your child use social media?</p> <p>If yes, ask the following:</p> <p>Which type? (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)</p> <p>Do you have access to your child’s account? (e.g. password, Facebook friend). Would you say that you monitor your child’s use of social media? How so?</p> <p>How much time approximately would your child spend online on an average day?</p> <p>Who are your child’s online friends? How many online friends does your child have?</p> <p>How important is it for your child to be liked online? What is it about being liked online that is important to your child?</p> <p>What are some of the things that he/she does online when he/she is on social media sites?</p> <p>What type of personal information would your child share on his/her social media page that would be available to all his/her online friends?</p>
	Adapted from Zywicki et al (2008)	<p>Do you know whether your child have participated in spreading online rumours? Explain.</p> <p>Do you know whether your child has ever posted an embarrassing picture? Explain. Have they ever seen their friends online doing so?</p> <p>Has your child ever ‘unfriended’ or blocked anybody on social media? What was the reason for it?</p> <p>Do you use social media?</p> <p>What type of social media do you use?</p> <p>What are some of the things that you do online when you are on social media sites?</p> <p>What type of personal information do you share on social media pages that is available to all of your online friends?</p> <p>Have you ever read or witnessed behaviours and messages on your social media sites that you thought that were inappropriate?</p>

Has your child ever 'unfriended' or blocked anybody on social media? What was the reason for it?

Adopted from Sengupta
& Chaudhuri (2011)

My questions

**Parental social media
use**

Appendix 3: Participant Information Package



THE UNIVERSITY
OF QUEENSLAND
AUSTRALIA

Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR)

The University of Queensland

Brisbane Qld 4072 Australia

Telephone (07) 3346 7866

International +61 7 3346 7866

Facsimile (07) 3346 7646

Internet www.issr.uq.edu.au

‘Teens’ Friendships’ Project Information Sheet

Can you please help with research exploring your child’s friendships?

I’m doing a research project focusing on teenage friendships and how they influence behaviour. In particular, I am interested to talk to parents about their children’s friendships. If you agree to take part in this research, I would meet with you for about an hour and you will get a \$40 voucher for participation. I would ask you questions about your child and his/her behaviours, school engagement, and relationships with peers.

Why am I doing this research?

I am doing this research to find out the importance of friends in young adulthood and how friendships influence behaviour.

Who is being invited to take part?

Only parents of young people who are participating in the ABILITY project are being invited to participate in this research study.

What would be involved?

You would meet with a researcher for about 1 hour. The researcher would ask you questions about your child, school engagement, and relationships with peers. It would help if this conversation could be recorded so that I can remember everything you say.

What will I do with the information gathered?

The research will help with getting a better understanding of the importance of teenage friendships. The research may be presented in de-identified form ONLY (your personal details will never be used) in academic publications and presentations.

Will the things you say be kept private?

The University of Queensland must protect your privacy and keep all your information confidential. I will NOT use the data gathered for any purpose other than those outlined above. Your name and personal details will never be used in any publication or presentation. You will not be identified in any way. The information that you provide will be stored on a highly secure server that is accessible only by researchers working on this project.

Please be aware that if you disclose information about any serious illegal activity to me during our meeting, there is a very small and rare chance that police could demand access to the records of the meeting.

What if you change your mind about taking part?

- You are a voluntary participant in this research. This means you do not have to take part if you don't want to.
- You are free to **stop taking part** at any time without any penalty.
- If you don't want to answer a question during data collection you do not have to.

Consent

- A consent form must be signed by you before I can interview you.

Feedback

Findings from this research – in the form of an overall summary – can be made available upon request by contacting me via email or phone (details provided below).

Who am I?

My name is Agnieszka and I am doing research at The University of Queensland. I am interested in learning more about teenage friendship groups and how they influence behaviour.

If you want more information about the research or you would like to have a chat with me before deciding, please feel free to get in touch with me:

Call or text: 0435 800 451

Call: 1800 050 103 (toll free) or 334 69389

Email: a.sobolewska@uq.edu.au

Appendix 4: Consent Form



Institute for Social Science Research (ISSR)

The University of Queensland

Brisbane Qld 4072 Australia

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

Telephone (07) 3346 7866

International +61 7 3346 7866

Facsimile (07) 3346 7646

Internet www.issr.uq.edu.au

Consent must be provided by the young person who will participate in the project.

Please tick each block to indicate that you have read, understood and accept the point.

- I have read and understood the research project as described in the Information Sheet and have had a chance to ask any questions I may have.
- I am willing to help the research by answering some questions that the researcher from the University of Queensland will ask me during an interview and complete a questionnaire.
- I consent for the interview to be recorded.
- I take part in this research project out of my own free will.
- I am aware that I may withdraw from the project at any time without any penalty.
- I understand that the researcher from the University of Queensland will protect the confidentiality and privacy of the information that I give.
- I am aware that if I disclose information about any serious illegal activity to the researcher during the interview, there is a very small and rare chance that police could demand access to the records of the interview.

Name of Participant: _____

Signature of Participant: _____

Witnessed by (*name/signature*): _____

Date: _____