Researching Social Capital: Accessing Children's Voice

Geri Smyth, University of Strathclyde

George McBride, AERS Schools and Social Capital network

Grace Paton, University of West of Scotland

Nathalie Tasler, University of Strathclyde

This paper will report on the ethnographic methodology used to investigate if and how Social Capital is built in schools to enable effective learning for refugee pupils. It will focus particularly on the need for multiple approaches to data gathering and on ways of accessing pupil voice when the children do not have English as a First Language.

The project is one of a series of case studies undertaken by the Schools and Social Capital network of the Applied Educational Research Scheme (AERS) in Scotland. This particular investigation built on the findings of the CLASP (Creative Learning and Student Perspectives) project undertaken by Geri Smyth for the Scottish part of the European project.

The CLASP projects' aim was to identify teachers' and students' strategies for developing creative learning in educational contexts.   One of the main findings of the project overall was the importance of participative pedagogies and a review of the data gathered in the Scottish project showed the ways in which pupils and teachers built Social Capital to enable participative pedagogy.

Accruing Social Capital may be a crucial factor for inclusion processes for refugee pupils. The research aims to explore how the children make use of Social Capital and if and how schools and teachers can provide room to establish Social Capital.

The empirical research took place in one primary and one secondary school in Glasgow with refugee pupils.   The methods used included observations in the school environment over a period of time, field notes, documentary analysis and informal interviews with the children and school staff.   To empower the children in the research they were equipped with digital cameras and audio recorders to document their learning environment and activities and share these with the researchers.

The paper will consider the strengths and limitations of the various approaches to data collection and the complexities of synthesising the data.

Introduction

The study discussed in this paper involved an investigation of how the development of different forms of social capital may impact on the education of pupils from refugee families, in one primary and one secondary school in Glasgow with GASSP units (Glasgow Asylum Seekers Support Project).

Research Questions

In order to understand the context of the research it is important that the reader has an awareness of the issues being investigated although the focus of this paper is not a response to these questions:

- Does the school intentionally operate to develop social capital amongst its pupils from refugee families?
- What forms of social capital (bonding, bridging, linking) are important?
- How, and in what manner, are the effects observed for salient forms of social capital?
- Are there important interaction effects between forms of social capital? (e.g. bonded families and different norms or values between school and home)
- Do other capitals (economic, cultural, professional) operate and interact with social capital development and if so how?

Why refugee pupils?

Jill Rutter (Insert reference) writes of the refugee pupil identikit as opposed to other pupils as being unannounced, traumatised, transient and insecure with no choice, no support and little cash.

It is axiomatic that within a given refugee community there is a great deal of heterogeneity, but needs and problems that manifest themselves with significant numbers of refugee children include:

• having an interrupted education in the country of origin

• having traumatic experiences in their home countries and during their flight to the UK - for some of them this affects their ability to settle and rebuild their lives

• living with families who experience a drop in their standard of living and/or status in society

• changing care arrangements: losing parents or usual carers

• having parents who are emotionally absent

• living with families who do not know their legal and social rights in the UK, including their rights to basic services such as education and healthcare, and who encounter problems securing education, healthcare or benefits

• speaking little or no English on arrival.

 With some or all of these givens how does the child from a refugee family establish a relationship with their new external world?

Research Issues

Previous research by Geri Smyth (insert reference) into the perspectives of bilingual pupils in GASSP units unearthed a number of social capital building strategies used by both staff and pupils to enable integration of the pupils into the mainstream school. This had not however been the focus of that research. The aim of the research discussed in this paper was to investigate if and how teachers and the pupils understand social capital and if it impacts on their networks outwith the school and on their families.

Methodology

The research was directed by Geri Smyth with fieldwork conducted by three of the participants from the AERS Schools and Social Capital network. Particularly as this was a small scale ethnographic study where the main tools were the three researchers themselves, it is significant to note the backgrounds and experiences of the three researchers and to reflect, in addition to methodology, on the approaches and understandings of the individuals.

George is a retired secondary school teacher from Glasgow. He has worked in a school with a number of refugee pupils. Before and since his retirement he has been involved in academic educational research. Hehas been active in the largest teacher's trade union in Scotland, and was, in particular, convener of its Education Committee.

Grace has been a teacher educator for several years and prior to this was a primary teacher in bboth rural and urban areas of Scotland. Her specialism is early childhood education. She has recently become more involved in empirical educational research and has this year begun working towards a PhD.

Nathalie is a PhD student whose supervisor was also the research director. She gained her Master's degree in Scotland but her previous education was elsewhere in Europe. English is not her first language although she is fluent in English in addition to her first language. Unlike the other two researchers and the research director, she is not a trained teacher. She is significantly younger than the other members of the research team.

The whole first year of the existence of the Schools and Social Capital Network was spent exploring what we mean by Social Capital. It is indeed a 'murky concept' (Horvard, Insert reference) but this has conceptual possibilities as well as problems.

However it might lead to some difficulties in investigating its existence among and benefits for young people. The initial literature review conducted in the first year of the project led us to the conclusion that respondent's voice had not had a huge place in Social Capital research to date and that children's voice had been almost ignored. The Network were keen to address this gap in the methodology and our approaches have all been geared to finding out what the respondents have to say about Social Capital. This has not led to one way of tackling the research but has rather produced a body of creative responses to addressing the issues, each informed by the restrictions of the site, the interests of the researchers and the possibilities offered by the respondents.

Within this particular case study, an ethnographic approach was taken to the data collection with several day long visits to both schools undertaken by the researchers over a period of two terms. Qualitative methodology was employed including analysis of policy documents; interviews and conversations with teachers, pupils and other school staff; fieldwork in school observing teaching and learning situations and social situations in school.

Access

All ethnographic research raises issues of access and indeed Nathalie wrote that 'access became the word of the year in this research'. Access for Ethnographic research in schools is granted partly because the gatekeepers have expectations of what might be in it for them. (see Troman, 2007 for an extreme example of this). Within both the schools involved in this research there was a concern to justify the methods being employed following negative HMiE reports.

Fieldnotes

Although the intention of the research was to use observations and fieldnotes as much as possible this ws partly restricted by some of the access issues and also because the three researchers had different experiences of fieldnotes and varied ways of recording. From her first day in the secondary school, the researcher used her field notes as reflective pieces of writing, intended to support the subsequent data collection:

> The main line is that we don't want to be exclusive but with all the enthusiasm of the teachers I am at the moment a bit scared of the mass of data that might derive out of it and that we will go over the top with all the exciting activities.

S (*teacher*) said later that if she asks who wants to take part all students will say 'aye' though at the end not show up … so maybe the enthusiasm is just appropriate to keep the momentum.

In the primary school neither of the researchers had used field notes for research previously although both were used to making notes in schools for a range of purposes.   Field notes from the primary school were more factual than those in the secondary school and were used as an *aide memoire* to check what had and had not been done on each day of the research.

1. Met with PT who carried out all arrangements for the day
2. Met with school dinner staff to explain our presence
3. Met with children who will be involved in research: all willing to take part; all articulate and keen; all had completed consent forms through the agency of the school.
   a. introduced selves
   b. they introduced themselves
   c. introduced aims of project
   d. practised use of cameras
   e. set guidelines for use of cameras
4. Interval in staff room
5. Met with class teachers whose classes will be participating in observation: all agreeable to participate; two had looked up information on social capital. Only two concerns expressed: that we might think classes were noisy and therefore perhaps not fully on task (P2, P7); that we might find class badly behaved (P5). Discussed both of these drawing on our personal experience and views about pupil autonomy and the demands on the teacher.
6. Observation in dinner hall
   a. PT concern that atmosphere might appear noisy but the school P6 monitors (timetabled each 1 day per week); one allocated to each recognised this as pupils' social space and time, interacting with younger children
   b. Children sitting in mixed (background) groups
   c. Children not sitting by and large in mixed gender groups
   d. Packed meal pupils sitting where they choose (ie with friends) not as previously allocated to one table section
   e. Meat is routinely halal (or if hot dogs are on the menu halal version is provided)

Pupil voice played a major part in the data collected in both schools, including photographic evidence collected by pupils themselves.   A particular feature of the pupil population under investigation was that the children do not have English as a First Language and a number of them were not literate in their first language.   The

researchers therefore had to give careful consideration to the ways of accessing the voice of these pupils which would accurately reflect their meanings.

We are now at the stage of being able to reflect on and assess the various methods adopted.

The Refugee pupils case study team was aware of the limited English of many of the young respondents and chose to use audio and visual recording as a means of the young people expressing their interests and concerns. However the limitations of the equipment proved frustrating for some of the respondents which added to their frustrations in expressing themselves in English. Time was an additional factor here as access to the pupils was mediated through the schools who could only offer limited opportunities for the children to use the equipment. The discussion started here highlights some of the reasons for choosing certain approaches and some of the problems associated. All of the methods have produced rich sources of data for analysis and the methods of analysis themselves have been as varied as the data collection approaches. Tied in with this are ethical issues of access and recording and reporting back to the participants. A further issue worthy of discussion is how the fact of being involved in research may add to the social capital of those researched and how this can be investigated.

As we reflected on the methods we had used and their relative success in gaining valuable ethnographic data and accessing pupil voice, we were aware of a number of important issues arising and this paper will discuss each of these issues with reference to our data and try to draw conclusions about the methods to be used to work with young refugee pupils whose first language, and life experiences, the researchers do not share.

1. Power and structures within organisations and the work needed to get children and young people to talk about social capital.

Our research was conducted within two local authority schools, one primary and one secondary. In the primary school, the access to children and staff was very tightly controlled by the head teacher. While he was very sympathetic to the research it was clear from the outset that the researchers were unlikely to see or hear anything that the head teacher did not want us to.

The Head Teacher was a powerful gatekeeper. He selected the particular children. However the school were very helpful is allowing us access to the children… an introductory session, good accommodation for interviews and focus groups.

The data collected from observation of the pupils was perhaps limited in value as the Head Teacher arranged for the researchers to observe "showcase" lesson taught by "approved" members of staff. We were unable to observe all the case study children. I feel it would have been more valuable to shadow the targeted children for longer periods of time.

(Extract from research diary)

This extract and team conversations about the research site raise some of the difficulties of conducting truly ethnographic research in such a tightly controlled situation. The desire of the Head Teacher to showcase the school meant it was difficult for the researchers to gain a picture that would enable response to the research questions, although it did shed light on managerial systems, professional capital of teachers and the impact of performativity on pupils' and teachers' lives.

In the secondary school the contact teachers worked in the English as an Additional Language (EAL) Unit and the researcher found power differentials between the Unit and the mainstream resulted in different perceptions and access. In addition there were tensions in the school as the Head Teacher had recently retired and the staff awaited the arrival of a new and unknown Head;

there was a gap between the EAL members of staff who wanted involvement and mainstream staff. There appeared to be issues of communication, despite different proactive projects initiated by EAL staff. A big insecurity as to what the new Head Teacher would say to the researcher and if it would be good to take part was found in EAL as well as mainstream class. (Extract from research Diary)

Having earlier stated that social capital was a difficult concept it is apparent that we might have difficulties talking about it with young people, perhaps particularly those whose first language was not English and who by nature of their reasons for being in Scotland (having fled from their country of origin, seeking refuge) may have very limited social capital.

I was anxious about getting to know the children and striking up relationships with them and to an extent my fears were confirmed. The less extroverted children were hard to reach and their interviews very stilted. The more extroverted children made me feel humble by the trust they placed in me and the ease with which they revealed details of their lives. It seemed to me that these pupils trusted their teachers, and transferred that trust to me, as a person approved of by the teachers and Head Teacher. I felt the focus group situation allowed most children to speak with less inhibition. Eg some criticised the class work as too easy. (Extract from research diary)

In the secondary school the researcher was not a teacher and did not have the professional capital to negotiate many of the school structures. This led to frustration:

… at the moment I am a quite frustrated with the things going on and I can't really see how the research can proceed ... at the moment I am really stuck in all the structural struggles and struggle with staff and organising that I am not getting down to the actual research topic … and that is really frustrating … (29th January 2008, Research Diary)

Researchers in the primary school became aware through their observations that the pending transition to secondary school was an important one for the children in the final primary class and decided to interview the pupils about their thoughts on this change. However in the light of the changes that had already happened in these young refugee's lives was this really going to be a big issue for them? Were we right to question losing friends and worries about the future rather than looking at the resilience the young people had shown in their major life transitions to date and how this could help them to make future transitions?. In this extract from a pupil interview the researcher wants the respondent to discuss the transition to secondary school but perhaps the researcher's perspective is so different from the respondent that the issues raised are invalid.

R: --- what I would like you to think about for a wee minute is what kind of things do you think you're going to miss about primary school? Things you've liked, things that have interested you, things you've enjoyed.

A: I think I'll miss the easy work

R: The easy work?

A: Yeah, and the trips

R: What kind of trips are we talking about?

A: In primary five we went to the cinema

R: And did you like that?

A: And we went to Loudon Castle with primary four

R: Did you enjoy that? What things in class do you think you'll miss? Think of the things you do just now.

A: Language work, easy ones

R: Is that easy do you think?

A: And art

R: Do you enjoy art? And what about the teachers?

A: Good. I'll miss them as well

R: Why?

A: Because they go easy on you. In secondary school they go hard

R: Do you think so? How do you know that?

A: Just guessed

2. Consent/dissent: the challenges posed by children and young people's literacy and communication difficulties and ensuring that they understand that to which they consent.

One of the researchers in the primary school felt that there were a few challenges communicating with the children, but did not believe this was due to language difficulties as it appeared that the Head Teacher had chosen the children who were most fluent in English.

I observed other refugee children who were less fluent. I think the communication difficulties with the more reticent children were due to shyness and the newness of the relationship with the researchers e.g. W. started off her interview and focus group saying very little. In fact, on reflection , I wonder if she was "encouraged" to participate by teachers. Her twin brother was not selected, as he was a very disturbed child. Towards the end of her interview she recalled an incident where she sang to the class and became more animated. When I observed her in class, she was much more animated and extroverted (than in research conversations).   (Extract from research diary).

In the secondary school the researcher was concerned that in many of the classes she observed in the pupils did not seem very engaged with their learning.   She decided to devise a short questionnaire to ask the pupils what they liked and disliked about school and to use this as the basis for a focus group discussion.   A difficulty in this method was that all the children (indigenous and refugee) were involved in both the questionnaire and the focus group and it was not possible for the transcriber to differentiate between the respondents other than by gender.   However a further issue raised by the discussion is how much the pupils understood what the researcher was concerned with

When I checked the questionnaires you filled in, I remember, a lot of you guys said that PE is your most favourite subject. Why?

F: Because you're not sitting in a classroom

M: It's pure practical, you're doing stuff all the time

R: Anything else why PE is good? You're not sitting in a class.

M: Something is happening

F: You're active

M: Cos we're not sitting in a classroom all the time

M: You hardly get shouted at

M: You do get shouted at just not as much

M: No you don't

M: Aye you do

M: No you don't

M: Well I do

M: You don't do what you're told

M: Aye cos youse never bring kit

One female pupil who had initially refused to consent to participate in the research later became willing to participate by the end of the fieldwork.   By that time, as is the nature of ethnographic research, the researcher had met and talked with this pupil on several occasions and developed a relationship with the girl.   This does raise questions as to the requirement to possibly treat data from this respondent more sensitively than that given from pupils who immediately agree..

3. What you are offering the participants and the organisations and what you give back (eg feedback, response to needs raised; dealing with effects on participants of raising previously unexplored questions)

Responses to the schools are mediated by the Local Authority who gave permission for the research but in each site the researchers built up relationships with school staff and felt a need to give feedback direct to the schools in addition to the formal report for the authority.   However this feedback itself needs to take different forms: what will be read and understood by teachers may well be different from what will be of interest to the young people.

In both schools recent negative HMiE reports meant the management were keen for the 'good side' of the school to become apparent.   They both believed that they were in fact using Social Capital practices explicitly to unable integration of the refugee pupils.   This led to some tensions for the researchers, particularly those who were more known in the small world of Scottish education to ensure they 'told a good story'.

The children in the primary school appeared to enjoy the attention afforded by engagement with the researchers and the use of technology – camera, voice recorder, tape recorder and lap top. The Principal Teacher intended to display their photographs

and they were encouraged by the school to see themselves as school ambassadors by taking part in the project.

4. The transient, fragile and ephemeral nature of social capital and networks: capturing movement and flow.

The major questions being investigated through this research were outlined earlier in the paper. The researchers used a range of methods with the children to establish the nature of their social capital, including discussion of photographs, individual interviews, focus groups and discussions after observations. The discussions were largely based around friendship patterns and trust. However this raises the question of whether while networks may be transient or fragile a person's stock of social capital may remain fairly stable: eg as one friend drops away another comes to take that place and whether or not this particular issue may have different import for children as they grow up in contrast to adults?

In the secondary school, Nathalie understood the relationships to be more stable and longer lasting then in the primary school. This in turn possibly increases the impact of change happening, such as children arriving and leaving due to the asylum process. Unless in a very long scale ethnographic research project, the impact of movement and flow is difficult to capture except for isolated exceptional cases with high impact such as the girl removed to a detention centre during the period of the research or the girl who was deported two years ago and now seems to be returning to Scotland. There was also a case in the secondary school of one indigenous girl who spoke about the difference in relationships and her own personality (a personality she felt she had to take on) between primary and secondary school.

The research evidence, particularly the photographs taken by the young people in the secondary school, did suggest a stable component in networks and thus social capital was the family. However the limitations of time and the fact that families had not originally been involved as respondents hindered further investigation of this issue for this particular project.

5. The vulnerability of subjects: if we want to drill down into people's lives, how do we rethink the whole issue of ethics. There is a line between ethics in relation to legal responsibilities, and the ethics which is concerned with regard for persons. Where is that line?

While we can plan to 'protect' the subjects of our enquiry (in this case, the young people), it may be more difficult to 'protect' witnesses: eg the teachers in a given school.   In the primary school, the selection of teachers to be involved in the research was completely in the hands of the head teacher who chose colleagues for reasons that he and probably they themselves would consider positive, i.e that they would demonstrate 'good practice' in terms of social capital building to the researchers.. However this placed a twofold burden on the staff involved: the commitment to participation and exposure of their classroom practice to outsiders. It conceivably could make their relationship with colleagues who were not selected difficult: a response of jealousy perhaps from others? To uncover any of this medium term impact would require further ethnographic investigation which was not so harnessed by the head teacher as gatekeeper.   These problems were not apparent in the secondary school since only teachers who really wanted to be involved in the research were involved and the start of the research period coincided with a time when the school did not have a head teacher, as gatekeeper or otherwise.

However in both settings it is possible that, similar to national security measures and legislation, ethical protection is never perfect and that even the rules established by university ethics committees might be found culturally inappropriate by participants. Perhaps in ethnographic research more so than any other form of research, a particular vulnerability can be apparent, that is that some of the students without the realisation of the researcher will become attached if not to the researcher him or herself then at least to his or her presence in the class room. Nathalie was asked several times accusatively when she would come again and why she had been away for such a long time (following a period of enforced absence from the field). One of the participants who would hardly answer any of her questions with more then a couple of words started opening up during her penultimate day in the field, when she accompanied the pupils and teachers on a theatre trip. Within this conversation she said that she was sad not to have been in school during Nathalie's last visit because the others had told her how much fun it was. So even if, as researchers, we avoid the dangers of 'going native' (insert reference) and even if we don't intend to, it is probably inevitable that we will leave some form of impression or footprint in the field. This might as such not be unethical, but we do have to give serious consideration as to how we leave the field and end the relationships and trust we have developed while visiting.   Is it

appropriate for new researchers to be left to deal with these issues themselves or should there be more in the way of advance preparation for the exit strategy?

The issue of the young people revealing information that their parts may not want known by outsiders can also create dilemmas for the researcher.

I was very conscious of the trust the children placed in me and some revealed quite intimate details of family life e.g. a "scam" that a brother devised to take advantage of the Glasgow healthy eating reward system. No child revealed any aspect of their life where I felt they were at risk and I wouldn't have hesitated to take action had they done so. I followed the teachers' lead in respecting the vulnerability of the children. The prevalent attitude was not to revisit the past unless the children raised the topic. The motto of the school was to leave the past behind, develop resilience and move on. I decided that I would not visit their past experience as I was unsure how to support children in distress, as I was a passing stranger in their lives. (Extract from research diary)

6. The use of technology and virtual engagement with children and young people.
The researchers used digital cameras to enable the young people to have control over the material they produced and shared with the team. However there was evidence from the primary school that young people are very familiar with such technology and have high expectations of accessing equipment that works. This could be problematic with a group who were not otherwise convinced of the value of participation

It may be that our use of cameras is based on an implicit assumption that social capital leaves evident visible traces: presumably a model which stresses direct face to face interaction as the case on which social capital is built. It could be argued that in 'traditional' society some of the most productive social capital is based on power networks whose members do not meet frequently. Our use of cameras and also audio recording equipment certainly ignores the roles played by new technologies: both such comparatively longer established media such as e-mail and newer social websites. However when researching in school settings where the use of such digital communication technology is certainly monitored carefully if not censored it may

have been difficult to answer the research questions using such media as a tool. Our use of digital photography did prove fruitful in both settings, perhaps particularly as a conversation starter although more time could have been devoted to follow on discussions. In the secondary school the researcher suggested that the children take pictures of mnemonic objects. The results of these gave some indication of the value particular relationships had for the children and the part these played for the individuals' identities. One participant for example said that she thinks she is interested in arts because her granddad had taken loads of pictures of his drawings and needlework. Friends knew about the objects that their friends had taken photos of; they knew the stories behind them and why these things were important to the people with whom they were connected. This peer knowledge itself could be an indicator of the existence of social capital.

One of the researchers in the primary school had some initial dounts about the value of the method due to difficulties with the equipment. However overall the evaluation was positive:
The approach motivated the children. It provided a focus for conversation … and common ground for conversation. I felt the photographs reflected areas of strength in the school's practice but did feel that the adults in the school may in some instances have influenced the children's choices.
In a similar situation in the future I would ensure the equipment allowed the children a larger degree of independence. They relied on school staff to release equipment to and it was restricted to use in school. (Extract from research diary)

7. The particular contexts of each case study and the nature of the formal and informal connections which children and young people are exposed to, through different legal frameworks or different opportunities.

Our case study was one of several within the network. Other case studies were investigating, among other fields, the existence of social capital in a youth club, in independent schools and among parents of children with disabilities.

One major influence on the research in our case study was the impact of the Asylum and Immigration legislation. Many of the children were in families whose asylum application had not yet been granted and this left them even more vulnerable than those whose families had refugee status. While Nathalie was in the secondary school, one of the pupils with whom she was working was removed, with her family, in a 'dawn raid' to a detention centre. This had an impact on the other young people

and the teachers in the school (though it was unfortunately not an uncommon occurrence) but it had a particular effect on the researcher also:

K is in detention centre with her sister and her family they got dawn raided and detained on Friday … this is why she was not in school on Friday! I had been wondering, because she does not seem to be a girl that is missing school voluntarily. But I thought she just might be sick.
I really had to fight not crying … such things are just … don't even have words to write. … (Research diary4[th] March 2008)

The very immediate implications of these legal structures were difficult for a novice researcher to deal with in the field.   However the realities of the children's lives impacted also on more experienced researchers:

The work impacted on me to a large extent. I heard some distressing stories e.g. a 6 year old reporting to the immigration office very week, children's lives shattered by a period of detention. I always had some nagging doubts that there was tendency for some children to paint a "rosy" picture of life outside school, and refrain from telling me their more harrowing tales. The reports of racist incidents in Glasgow are high. I was also uplifted by the optimism and success stories of most of the pupils. I was humbled by their bravery, resilience and optimism.
By reflecting on this experience I learned a great deal about " listening to children", treating them as active agents and allowing then ownership of the research. (Extract from research diary)

The legislation also impacted on the sustainability of friendships: several children mentioned friendships being disrupted because of movement due to re- housing , either as a result of obtaining "leave to remain" and requiring to find accommodation or a decision taken by the housing authorities, over which the refugee families had little control.

In our school based study it was difficult to defines 'formal' and 'informal' connections as most of what we observed, particularly in the primary school, was directly mediated by the school.

For example, does the P7 (final primary class in Scotland) pupil who acts as a buddy to P1 pupils (first primary school class in Scotland) use his or her informal connections to support them or is this a formal position in the school?
Some of the primary school girls attended a local Women's Centre in the evening but the researchers, engaged in quite organised research, were unable to access this site

and determine its level of formality or informality. In the secondary school the teachers in the English as an Additional language unit were insistent that they teach more then just curriculum: they teach the children how to live in a strange culture. These teachers set up more informal ways of interaction and relationships with the children than existed in the secondary mainstream classes, but does this necessarily mean that these are informal connections as the relationship is still that of teacher and pupil? Some of this leads to questions about how possible it is to conduct real ethnographic research within the constraints of a school setting.

The primary school football club –took place after school and was voluntary for all participants including the teacher but was still in some way part of the school ,so could it be validly assessed as informal?

Although as a network we wished to clarify contexts it is difficult to assume even one generic context for a group of children. The children being researched share a context of attending a particular school but one thing the research showed is that this supposedly shared context can provide each child with quite different opportunities.

Our hopes to have the children using recording equipment outside school were not realised in the primary partly due to the limited number of cameras and voice recorders and the technical difficulties experienced by both the children and the researchers. In the primary their use was restricted to school. Had the children been able to use the cameras and recorders outwith school, perhaps we could have explored less formal networks.

8. Selves: What understandings of social capital do the researchers bring to the case study (Bourdieu, Putnam?) and what particular orientations do you have (layered capitals, interest in symbolic capital?).

The starting point of the majority of the team's understanding of social capital is close to Bourdieu (insert reference) which implies that social capital and indeed cultural capital are unequally distributed in a similar way to the inequality of the distribution of economic capital. This does raise a difficulty in that economic capital can be seen as 'outside' the individual and not part of her/his identity; this is more difficult to argue in the case of social and cultural capital: which can bring us a bit too close for comfort to the idea that some people's lives are not as worthwhile as those of others.

However all the researchers recognise the complexity of social capital.   One of the researchers in the primary school did find Coleman and Putnam's work of relevance in the context as in this research diary extract:

Throughout the time spent in school, I thought about Coleman's work in Catholic schools in deprived areas. The Head Teacher had a strong set of values which was reflected in the ethos of the school and it appeared that some families of the refugee pupils shared this ethos, resulting in good results for these children.

I found the work of Putnam relevant. It is mentioned in some Scottish Government policy and a strong impression of trust, reciprocity and bonded social capital emerged from the data. The fact that there was little evidence of bridging and linking Social Capital for the pupils emphasised how much of a bounded community this primary school was. I also find relevance in the capitals identified by Bourdieu: cultural, economic and social. Discussion of Social Capital needs to take account of inequalities in society. Cultural capital became a useful concept in this particular research. The school were keen to introduce the pupils to Scottish culture to allow them to settle into their new lives.   The school also acknowledge and value the cultural capital that the refugee pupils brought to Scotland.   (Extract from research diary)

9. Language: what work is done to engage participants in discussions about social capital on their terms?

Interestingly the class teachers in the primary school had pre-empted this by looking themselves for info on the web about social capital. Given our starting point was pupil voice in the research we need to consider other means of involving pupils in dialogue and discussion; the sorts of methods used in consultations with children and young people.

One of the researchers in the primary school felt particularly that the attempt to make a consent form 'user friendly' for young people for whom English was not a first language in fact acted to disempower the young people:

Insufficient work was done to discuss / explain Social Capital to the children. This stemmed from the consent form which "skirted" the concept and talked about friendships and things that happened in school. I feel this disempowered these intelligent and able children. We were deciding about their social capital for them,

and perhaps drawing false conclusions. We " did things to them" rather than engaging them in the research. In an ideal world we would have had more time to build up relationships with the participants and spend more time in discussion and observation. Perhaps this research would have worked better had a researcher worked with a sample group and a class teacher , and allowed the teacher and children more say in the data collection.   (Extract from research diary)