

**SCHOOL LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE WORK OF  
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN A CHANGING  
SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT**

**Lesley Webster**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of East London for the degree of Doctor of Applied Educational and Child Psychology.

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## **STUDENT DECLARATION**

This work has not previously been accepted for any degree and it is not currently being submitted for any other degrees.

This research is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of East London for the degree of Applied Educational and Child Psychology.

The thesis is the result of my own work and investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references in the text. A full reference list is included in the thesis.

I hereby give permission for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for reading and for inter-library loans, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Lesley Webster

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## **Abstract**

There has been a recent increase in the direct commissioning of Educational Psychology Services by school leaders and other stakeholders due to rapid changes in the political and socio-economic landscape. Such changes have led to a need to strategically reposition the profession of Educational Psychology in the new market place. In order to hold a strategic, leading position, there is an obligation on Educational Psychology Services to gain insight into and take full account of their commissioners' needs and views of service delivery in a more in-depth, informative way than more traditional, positivist approaches have allowed. There exists an associated need to demonstrate that Educational Psychologists, as extensively trained, applied psychologists, are best placed to meet these needs.

This study is situated within a particular local authority and is based on a small sample of secondary school leaders who are currently purchasing Educational Psychology Services directly. Semi-structured interviews have been carried out and a Constructivist, Grounded Theory approach to data analysis taken. Theoretical sampling has led to the views of Educational Psychologists, as service providers and the views of a business consultant also being taken into account.

This study indicates commissioning school leaders consider Educational Psychologists to be knowledgeable experts who deliver a service that they value and would like more of and reveals that there is an array of barriers inhibiting the work of Educational Psychologists in secondary schools. These barriers and some potential ways of maximising service delivery are explored.

The implementation of Constructivist Grounded Theory within this study has allowed the construction of a Substantive Theory that positions Educational Psychologists as the missing link in improving the emotional well-being and attainment of young people in schools.

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## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

*‘As we find ourselves within this changing environment, there is a real opportunity to be the architects of our discipline, to shape our profession, to make it fit for the next hundred years’ (Allen & Hardy, 2013 p.149).*

This research was prompted by my belief that in the current socio-political and economic landscape, there remains a need to strategically reposition the profession of Educational Psychology. This is **crucial**, particularly in the light of the radical changes to the training of Educational Psychologists (EPs) leading to a three year Doctoral level qualification. These changes are explored in relation to the significant degree of public funds invested in the training of EPs and it is proposed that given the professional entry requirements and training, EPs are now too valuable a resource to be confined to the arena of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and its related statutory assessment functions.

**The particular changes occurring, nationally and within the profession are then explored, with particular reference to the Children and Families Act (HMSO, 2014), the implications of continuing Local Authority (LA) budget constraints and the impact of these on EP trading activity.** It is proposed that there is a related need for EPs to take full account of commissioners' views of their service delivery and to closely examine how well they, as service providers, support the professional goals of their clients. An example of a marketing niche, the School Improvement arena, is provided as one critical to the skills base of EPs and the current commercial context.

In conclusion, some of my personal reflections on what is seen to be an unhelpful, continued modesty within the profession are explored. In my view, this has detracted and continues to detract from the profession taking up, a justified and necessary, central position within internal and external market places. In relation to this, EPs need to begin to question this modesty, raise their professional confidence levels by proactively and strategically repositioning their profession in a way that allows it to thrive by capitalising on growing commercial opportunities.

## **1.2 Repositioning EPs as Highly Trained and Valued Applied Psychologists**

A cursory look at many EP Training institutions reveals a range of aims and mission statements to inform prospective entrants to the profession. One states that their three year Doctoral EP training programme will prepare EPs to be able to address the interlinked issues of educational and organisational effectiveness, research and evaluation, consultation, training and therapeutic interventions, whilst preparing them to work across a variety of levels including, the child/young person and the family; school, educational, community and settings. Another advertises that their mission is to equip EPs to be able to practice innovatively, accountably and reflectively in the recognition that their role and training is moving towards more accountable, evidence-based, inclusive approaches to meeting children's and families' needs. This institution also advertises an integrated practice-based/ theoretically innovative/ research-rich learning path, exemplified by a focus on evidence based practice. These statements highlight the ambitious aims of this professional training with all institutions purporting to prepare psychologists to apply their skills across a variety of levels, settings and tasks.

On graduation, these doctoral level, newly qualified EPs are eligible for registration with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC) and Chartered membership of the British Psychological Society (BPS) (BPS, 2015). The training involves a three year full-time programme of study and placement with an EP Service, with an additional commitment to work for a LA for two years after qualifying. Given this investment of time, the aims of training courses, the competitive entry requirements (which typically include a psychology degree and additional experience of working with children and young people (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2014)), it would be safe to assume the emergence of highly trained, skilled, applied psychologists. Each graduating EP has a significant amount of public funding invested in them. The time has come to expand and develop the role of the EP and put this investment to a wider, more economical and efficient use for the benefit of children and young people, their families and schools. Each year approximately one hundred newly trained EPs enter the profession and in addition to this, year on year many experienced EPs



gain Doctoral status through an extensive continuing professional development route. Given this extensive training, recent legislative changes and extensive national financial constraints, it is timely for EPs to begin a major re-positioning of the profession of Educational Psychology in the new commercial market place. This re-positioning should aim towards a more visible and central position in current political and financial related arenas.

Such a repositioning is long and well overdue. Historically, the role of the EP has been confined to the narrow and increasingly side-lined arena SEN with its related statutory assessment functions. Although some might argue that economic advantage and professional security have been gained, from the profession's long-standing involvement in SEN and inclusion arena, these advantages have come at a substantial professional cost. This cost relates to the profession's ability to evolve, adapt and make use of the opportunities afforded by on-going changes to governmental approaches, political agendas, policy shifts and financial changes. Educational Psychology's on-going confinement to the SEN and inclusion arena inhibits their ability as professionals to challenge, change and consequently re-invent themselves in relation to new opportunities. This has led to the profession being in a poor position to respond to the new economic context and its associated market economy. This position stems from the profession failing to proactively seize the challenges and opportunities currently being afforded by various, governmental policy shifts such as the Health and Social Care Act (DfH, 2012) and the Children and Families Act 2014 (HMSO, 2014) and its associated SEN and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE, 2015). The implications of these shifts and the impact of a changing financial context are explored within the next section.

### **1.3 The Potential Impact of Recent Legislative Shifts and Financial Changes on Traditional Roles and New Commissioning Opportunities of EPs**

The current market context of Educational Psychology, with reference to trading and future commissioning, has been shaped by the new legislative and financial context. The potential impact of the Children's and Families Act (HMSO, 2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (DfE, 2014c) and the previous governmental

austerity measures (HM Treasury, 2013) and associated budget cuts within local authorities have impacted on many EP Services within the country leading to a necessity to trade Services. The austerity plans put LA services under even greater pressure to demonstrate their value and subject all public services to increased public scrutiny (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010), austerity measures which are set to continue given the current Conservative government's financial announcements. These are addressed in the next section.

### **1.3.1 Educational Psychology Commissioning Implications of a Changing Legislative Context**

The Children and Families Act (HMSO, 2014) and the Code of Practice (DfE, 2014c) have applied to England since the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2014. This has led to a radical overhaul of existing SEND legislation. A range of organisations listed within the code are required to have regard to this guidance including local authorities, LA maintained schools, maintained nurseries, academies, free schools, further education colleges, independent schools, national health trusts, clinical commissioning groups and local health boards (DfE, 2014c).

This new legislation and guidance applies to a wider age range of children and young people than before, including children and young people up to the age of twenty five. This change, in itself, has implications for EPs, broadening the age range of the children and young people with whom they work. This may lead to increased statutory duties as more young people between the ages of 19 and 25 now have the right to request an assessment of their SEN at any time. In addition, or alternatively, this may lead to further commissioning potential for EPs from within further education colleges, academies and free schools. Other significant changes which are having an impact on the work of EPs include a major shift towards more person centred planning (in line with adult additional needs provision) which brings a greater focus on the views of children, young people and their families and their role in decision making processes. It also introduces personal budgets and parent forums charged with working closely with local authorities to ensure services provided meet need. These shifts will have implications for EP commissioning, as children and families now have more power to exercise choice of service providers. These changes have an impact on

the way EPs work and the commissioning of their services. At the time of writing, a report commissioned by the Department for Education, (Truong & Ellam, 2014), highlights that 80% of responding local authorities were being commissioned, by schools and 72% at least in part by Academy Trusts or Free Schools

The Children and families Act (HMSO, 2014) includes guidance on joint planning and commissioning of services to ensure greater cooperation between education, health and social care and a greater emphasis on collaboration in relation to the assessment and support of children and young people's SEN, health and social care needs. Local authorities now have a legislative directive to engage children and young people and their parents in local commissioning decisions, ensuring the views of communities are harnessed and subsequent commissioning shaped by user experience, ambitions and expectations. The emphasis on shaping services through user experience is important for EPSs as service providers and points to a need to build the profession's awareness of how their customers experience the role of the EP. Crucially, this legislation puts greater purchasing power in the hands of local service providers, such as schools.

The SEND code stipulates a new joint assessment process involving education, health and social care where additional special educational provision is considered necessary for a child or young person at or under the age of twenty five. Within this new process, as before, advice is gathered from relevant professionals, including EPs, about the child or young person's needs and the education, health and care provision that may be required to meet identified need. In the light of evidence gathered the LA makes the decision whether or not to issue an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), a plan which replaces previous Statements of SEN and Learning Difficulties Assessments. EPs have retained a statutory role in the process of producing EHCPs, with the Code stating that psychological advice and information must be sought from an EP, who should normally be employed or commissioned by the LA. This allows EPs nationally to retain their statutory role but it also theoretically points to local authorities being given a mandate to commission psychology services as required, rather than retain them on a full-time basis. This may stimulate greater competition between local authorities and between LA employed psychologists and private practitioners. The Code also advocates that these EHCPs are to be

reviewed and amended as individuals pass between key stages which may place additional statutory demands on EPSs nationally.

In addition to the above, there is an emphasis on high expectations, aspirational parent negotiated outcomes and the provision of high quality teaching and differentiation. It seems that EPs will continue to help schools to assess, plan and review the SEN of children and young people and they may become more involved in negotiating outcomes and supporting schools to improve their quality of provision through evidence based practice (Fox, 2003). This is particularly pertinent as the Code dictates that the progress of children with SEN should be a core part of the school's performance management plans and its approach to continuing professional development for all teaching and support staff. This creates pressure on schools to ensure that all pupils have full access to the curriculum and inclusive practice is maximised. Schools are likely to continue to need support from external agencies, including EPs, in relation to this but it is important from a commissioning perspective to note that the Code states that school leaders are responsible for deciding what external service to consult regarding their perceived professional development needs (DfE, 2014c).

In summary, at the time of writing it is difficult to determine what impact this new legislation and associated guidance will have on the role of EPs, which has been subject to much debate over recent years (Baxter & Frederickson, 2005; Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010; Gersch, 2009; Leadbetter, 2000; Love, 2009). How the legislative process affects the commissioned work of EPs and their established statutory role or indeed the balance between the two remains to be seen. It seems likely that, in the context of LA budget cuts and national EP recruitment difficulties, the capacity of EPSs will remain stretched and the pressure to trade will increase both as a method of funding services and a recruitment strategy, as service leaders develop more creative and challenging roles to entice EPs to join their services.

The implementation of the Act has highlighted this national shortage of EPs and has raised the profile of the profession. EPs are now being seen as playing a crucial part in helping schools to implement the new SEN requirements. At the time of writing, the 2015 Educational Psychology Funded Training scheme now

provides government funding, in partnership with employers, for 132 trainee EPs (AEP, 2015). Although a positive development, it will take time for the benefits to come to fruition given the duration of Doctoral training. The Department for Education, by retaining the statutory role of EPs, is demonstrating that it recognises the central role that EPs play in supporting children and young people with SEN. Such roles outlined within the Code of Practice include the provision of professional advice, delivering training to the wider workforce, providing specialist support within the early years, the provision of strategies and intervention regarding transition, and considering evidence based approaches and effective teaching approaches with schools through direct commissioning (DfE, 2014c).

Significant additional funding has been made available to councils to support the reforms, including a SEN Reform Grant (£70 million) (DfE, 2013) and a significant SEND implementation grant (£45 million) (HMSO, 2015). These investments will continue to support EPs in strengthening their capacity to deliver their statutory responsibilities and may create opportunities for greater internal commissioning.

### **1.3.2 Educational Psychology Commissioning Implications of a Changing Financial Context**

Alongside the continuing statutory responsibilities within the demands of current legislation, EPSs continue to battle with an ever-reducing budget share from local authorities. Such increasing financial strain alongside the continued devolvement of funds to schools and academies (DfE, 2012) is putting immediate pressure on services to generate further income through the direct selling of services (other than statutory services) to commissioning clients. These pressures have resulted in new and variable models of service delivery being implemented which allow services to take full account of new opportunities. Such models include: services setting themselves up as Social Enterprises, services being partially traded and partially retained; services being fully retained and some fully traded. Many EPs are considering or proactively creating portfolio careers in preference to taking traditional LA posts (Gersch & Cowell, 2014).

This need to sell services directly to commissioners to generate income has created a new context of increasing consumerism for EPs. This brings with it, a

pressing need for EPs to define their role and be clear about what they do, who they do it for and at what cost. Given the complexity of their role and the variety of clients they work with and the potentially conflicting demands of the role (Mackay, 2002), this is potentially a complex task. This task is further complicated by the historical tendency of EPs to down play their expert role in their attempts to empower others. This has contributed to making their application of psychology 'invisible' to service users (Stringer et al, 2011) and does not sit comfortably with the high cost of EPSs to commissioners, many of whom wish to see what they are getting for their money. Now, more than ever, EPs are in the position where their skills and services need to be clearly articulated and forcefully marketed to ensure they are recognised and fully appreciated by their paying clients. The time has come for the profession to claim and celebrate publicly what it can do (Gersch, 2009) and to demonstrate its value.

This becomes even more vital as the current market place encourages EPSs to compete not just with other professionals, but also to compete within their own profession (between services and between public sector and private EPs) (Gersch & Cowell, 2014). This competition leads to pressure on all providers to demonstrate that their service is best placed to deliver the services potential commissioners require. EPs need to instigate some radical changes within the profession which will allow them to respond to such pressure. Such changes could afford EPs a welcome opportunity to broaden their role and become more involved in creative, universally focussed, market driven opportunities, to utilise their professional skills and abilities more fully and make valuable contributions as highly qualified applied psychologists. Such changes are necessary to ensure the profession remains a market leader and does not become marginalised and less visible to potential service commissioners, as other both public and private services begin to market their services and compete to deliver services. The time has arrived for the profession to acknowledge the historic lack of market forces that has maintained its status quo to date (Stobie, 2002) and to become fully immersed in a challenging process of creative adaptation that has potential to free them from the confines of the narrow and constraining role of SEN.

The next section addresses how this creative adaptation process needs to recognise that schools are unaware of the potential contribution that EPs can make. It highlights that EPs need to be more aware of the demands that schools are under and need to identify and market the various and extensive roles that they could potentially play across LA Children's Services, schools and academies. An exploration of how psychologists could use their knowledge and skills more fully, as applied psychologists, making a more valued and economical contribution is addressed next.

#### **1.4 Marketing and Strategically Repositioning a Profession of Education- based, Applied Psychologists**

Leadership teams within Children's Services and schools, particularly secondary schools and academies, can be unaware or can forget what EPs can potentially offer to support them in meeting their professional goals and organisational aspirations. EPs' lack of involvement in the School Improvement arena is a glaring example of this. EPs are infrequently called upon by local authorities and schools to support them in solving non-SEN related systemic problems. This leads to a lack of involvement in the key systemic plans and developments which crucially are linked to budget priorities. Local authorities and schools continue to over-invest in other professional groups and fail to make full use of EPs (Evans & Cowell, 2013). This is illustrated by the fact that EPs are rarely consulted as key professionals who can help support the delivery of key strategies such as school development planning and are rarely linked into support organisations with the Ofsted evaluation agenda (Ofsted, 2015). To date, school improvement has been the responsibility of school improvement advisors (Evans & Cowell, 2013) with school development plans now often regarded as the intellectual property of other professionals such as advisory teachers (now seen as school improvement managers) and external consultants.

Schools and academies are under greater pressure than ever from inspection authorities such as Ofsted, under the demands of the Education Act (2005), to achieve the outcomes prescribed by the current government and its associated agencies, a pressure exacerbated by the new Children and Families Act (HMSO, 2014) and associated Code of Practice. Current legislation creates tremendous

pressure on school leaders to meet prescribed outcomes and raise pupil achievement, including the achievement of more vulnerable pupils specifically. Those who fail to meet these standards are named, shamed and at times, closed or taken over. Such threats can create a climate of pressure, fear, uncertainty and anxiety. Schools as consumers, rarely commission the services of outside agencies such as EPs to support them in meeting their organisational needs that are intrinsically linked to inspection demands. Such services may include: the facilitation of research; supervision of key staff; coaching of staff and consultation; assessment and staff training, to name a few.

As consumers, school leaders now have the freedom to commission services that best meet their needs. This brings an additional commercial pressure on the work of EPs. EPs now need to have a clear picture of their professional identity and a clear idea of what services and skills are offered, as various stakeholders want to know what they are getting for their investment (Mackay, 2002). In relation to this, EPs need to be more willing to strategically advertise themselves as education based, applied psychology professionals who have the local knowledge, professional experience and the psychological and research skills to be key players and potential market leaders in supporting local authorities and schools, in assisting the progress of all pupils, not just the vulnerable.

The next section addresses a related, additional commercial pressure on EPs of the need to develop an awareness of what their customers/commissioners want and to explore more deeply how commissioners rate the services they receive and how these should be developed and tailored to meet need.

#### **1.4.1 Acknowledging a Context of Increasing Consumerism and the Growing Need to consider Commissioners' Views**

On-going government policy is creating an inevitable shift to an increasingly competitive market (Allen & Hardy, 2012). Inevitably, in order to hold a leading position in the market place, there is an associated obligation for EPs to take full account of their commissioner's needs and views. Taking such obligations into account will help to ensure that EP practice is continually evolving and responding the needs of their client base, particularly those clients who now commission their services directly. This makes finding a way to gain insight into



school leader needs, in a more in depth way than previous service delivery models required, crucial for the advancement of the profession.

To enable EPs to become more aware of how their commissioners experience and perceive the service they receive, and how this relates to their professional wants and needs, EPs will need to become more involved in effective in-depth consumer research. Consumer research is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as being 'the action of gathering information about consumer needs and preferences, especially in relation to a particular product or service'. As applied research psychologists, many now with Doctoral level qualifications, EPs are well placed to extend and develop their involvement in this task and use their knowledge and skills to refine the tools and processes required (Turner, Randall & Mohammed, 2010). This coupled with the fact that consumer research takes its methodology, questions and analytical models from social sciences including psychology, makes psychologists well placed for this task. EPs are skilled researchers who can support organisations in recognising what needs to change to enhance effectiveness within their system (Evans & Cowell, 2013).

In summary, such a two-pronged, radical overhaul of the profession's marketing strategy, developed in the context of recent governmental policy shifts, could bring a welcome and overdue opportunity for the profession to develop more innovative options, taking far greater account of commercial, value-led business approaches. This is important as local authorities now have much greater freedom to develop local solutions to improve services, and a far greater resource is now in the hands of local providers, such as schools and other potential commissioners due to recent government policy, such as The Children Act 2004 (HMSO, 2004), the Health and Social Care Act (DfH, 2012) and the Children and Families Act (2014). These changes provide new, crucial opportunities for EPSs to develop a far broader service offer (Davis & Cahill, 2006; Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires and O'Connor, 2006). The profession now has a timely opportunity to re-market itself as a body of applied psychologists, who are relevant and capable of providing real solutions (Gersch 2009) for schools and other commissioners of their services.

The next section offers some personal reflections on what I perceive as an on-going professional modesty and lack of professional confidence. A challenge is raised to Educational Psychologists to question existing confidence levels and act to reposition the profession accordingly.

### **1.5 Some Personal Reflections on the Professional Modesty of Educational Psychologists**

The profession of Educational Psychology has almost constantly been evaluated by and potentially directed by people outside the profession and a lack of professional confidence and conviction seems to have existed over-time. The profession needs to act now and examine this lack of professional confidence, and to explore questions such as:

- Why are EPs typically so modest in their approach?
- Why, as a mature profession have EPs, historically, been unsuccessful in fully and effectively marketing their services?
- Why have EPs continued to struggle to make strategic stakeholders outside the profession fully aware of their actual and potential professional contribution and struggled in their attempt to have the profession recognised and valued at a strategic level?

EPs have been put under pressure to demonstrate their worth. Such attempts to justify the existence of Educational Psychology as a profession include a study commissioned by the Department for Education and Schools in 2005, entitled, *The Review of the Functions and Contribution of EPs in England and Wales* (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires & O'Connor, 2006). This study sought to identify what was distinctive about the EP role. Subsequent to this study, Stringer and colleagues, all practising EPs, began to contemplate and explore the role and position of Educational Psychology, publishing a timely article entitled, 'The curious practice of invisible psychology' (Stringer, Brewin, Duggan, Gessler & Low Ying, 2006). Stringer et al. maintained that the profession has historically been frequently and unfairly judged with top managers frequently lacking knowledge about the scope of EPs' work. Stringer et al. observed that governmental reviews can be premised on a narrow view and questionable

methodology and based on imagination not evidence (Stringer et al., 2006). Stringer et al. further asserted the timeliness for placing a greater value on articulating, celebrating and writing about the practice of Educational Psychology.

Despite this optimistic statement in 2006, advocating the celebration and advertising of Educational Psychology, the profession has remained modest in approach with an inability to strategically communicate what the profession does well and to advertise the profession's valued contributions. This is despite EPs being intellectually able, professionally skilled and exceptionally committed to children and young people's well-being.

My perspective of the profession's current status resonates with that of Cameron (2006) where he attempted to define what was so distinctive about EPs. Although written almost ten years ago, his words remain pertinent today.

*'Today, the practice of Educational Psychology is taking place in a complex, challenging and ever-changing context where professional confidence is difficult to maintain and where it is easy for EP practitioners to lose sight of the beliefs, hopes and aspirations with which they entered the profession'* (Cameron, 2006 p.290).

It comes as no surprise that today's socio-political landscape continues to be complex, increasingly challenging and will almost always be ever-changing but sadly, I would argue, EPs have not managed to raise their professional confidence levels and have not managed to hold onto or re-capture the beliefs, hopes and aspirations with which they set out. For example, when I entered the profession back in 1993, words could not describe the elation and excitement on securing a training place. I began my career, as no doubt most EPs do, with hopes and aspirations of making a real difference to the children and staff in the various communities I served. Twenty years on, although having fulfilled many early professional aspirations, I have unfortunately experienced a strong sense of being under-valued as a professional in the LA context. This personal feeling has been reflected in the profession's historically low pay levels at a national level, in comparison to senior teachers and the profession's continued marginalisation and related role restrictions.

This word, 'marginalisation', summarises the profession's current strategic positioning. It captures my experience of working within a variety of EPS contexts where I have often observed major work-streams that could in my view be delivered more effectively by EPs, being taken over by other professionals who are strategically better positioned to be considered by the local authorities and schools to be the first port of call, as psychologists plough on with their important, yet narrow, statutory assessment role. I question the extent to which this SEN role fully utilises the skills of a doctoral level applied psychologist and the extent to which the heavy demands of this role have caused the EP to miss opportunities to change and evolve and the extent to which predictions within the profession, such as those cited below have come to fruition.

*'In the case of Educational Psychology, the delivery of high impact educational and child psychology services in the future will encourage EPs to move away from an over-involvement with both schools and SEN and also to develop the confidence in their discipline to challenge mundane and often marginal administrative duties demanded by the local authorities (Cameron, 2006 p.301).*

Related to these duties, I speculate about what might have been, had the uncertainties, articulated by Imich (2012), then adviser to the Department for Education, at the 2012 BPS (Division Educational & Child Psychology) conference, come to fruition. Imich stated that the EPs' role in the new Education and Health and Care Plans was uncertain and they may not be written in as having a statutory responsibility to provide advice. Had this indeed been the case, and they had not been written into the single plan process, it is interesting to reflect on how the role of EPs might have evolved. Would this loss of a statutory role have inadvertently led to an opportunity for the profession to begin to utilise their skills more fully and creatively to support schools and other commissioners with wider priorities? Would such a change to professional demands have allowed psychologists space and time to apply effective business models allowing them to position themselves more strategically within the market place enabling them to meet school leader needs in a cost effective way whilst fully capitalising on funding streams? This, of course, will now be unknown as EPs have been given a continuing statutory role in contributing to, and at times coordinating, the implementation of the new Education, Health and Care Plans.

It is interesting to note, however, that some EPs have taken the decision to opt out of such a role and have taken the entrepreneurial step of trading with commissioners directly or working in partnership with others to create EP consortia. Given that the time has come for the profession to enter the market place in competition with other agencies and also in competition with itself, could it be the case that these confident, forward thinking professionals become involved in the real applied psychology that LA psychologists can't provide due to statutory assessment demands and associated time constraints?

## **1.6 Justification for the Current Study**

This section provides a justification for this study by giving a brief outline of a previous attempt to ascertain the views of EP commissioners using a quantitative methodological approach. It suggests a need to move towards the use of more in-depth qualitative research models when trying to ascertain the views of commissioners regarding service delivery, and provides a rationale for focusing on secondary schools.

### **1.6.1 Context of Current Study**

Related to the idea of being entrepreneurial and applying small business models to the context of Educational Psychology, I took a three-year career break mid-career to become immersed in running a small psychology linked business. This experience fuelled passion and drive to integrate business theory and practice into the models of service delivery of EPSs. This experience led to a subsequent role in the development of the host EPS's marketing strategy. This post provided me with an opportunity to consider, on a local level, how the profile of Educational Psychology could be enhanced and to explore more generally the effectiveness of new trading arrangements. This model of service delivery, involved the establishment of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with service commissioners, schools and other service users including the LA as a whole. Once these agreements had been established, I observed a skew in the sales figures with a particular lag in commissioning from secondary schools and academies.

I gathered information regarding potential causes of the observed sales figures. In an attempt to shed some light, all school leaders (head-teachers) were invited to participate in a short on-line survey to further explore their commissioning intentions. Predictably, this short survey yielded a poor response rate (12%) and the findings were therefore limited, revealing little in-depth information with regard to participant view and opinion. This limited study led to a strong drive to gain a more in-depth understanding of service commissioners' views of the EP service they were receiving, their views of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) and to explore commissioners' views of how Educational Psychology could effectively support them in meeting their professional goals. This became the focus of the current study that was subsequently formally commissioned by the host EPS.

#### **1.6.2 A Need for a Qualitative Approach Focusing on the Secondary Sector**

Having previously attempted a quantitative study involving all schools it was decided that the current study should take a qualitative approach and focus specifically on secondary school commissioners. The use of semi-structured interviews to collect data and a Constructivist Grounded Theory Approach to data collection and analysis was selected. Such an approach would potentially facilitate more direct, personal contact with school leaders allowing for greater account of the narratives school leaders construct to make sense of the work of EPs; allow more in-depth exploration and interpretation of the views, experiences, challenges, and aspirations of school leaders and take my position, as a practising psychologist, fully into account. Such a study, focussing on the exploration of commissioner views, was apt given that the current national and local political landscape and related policy changes were providing opportunities for services to develop innovative options, taking account of commercial, value-led business approaches. The study was timely given the context of more services trading (Truong & Ellam, 2014), delegated budgets (DfE, 2012) and increasing consumerism by schools (Gersch, 2004). It was also particularly pertinent with on-going government policy creating an inevitable shift to an increasingly competitive market (Allen & Hardy, 2012) with an associated obligation for service providers to take full account of their commissioners' needs and views.

Historically, EP service attempts to ascertain views of commissioners have adopted a quantitative paradigm (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Boyle & MacKay, 2007), with a dearth of in-depth qualitative studies. This study makes a welcome contribution to qualitative research in this area and helps to address the paucity of studies that are based specifically in the secondary sector. This study is particularly pertinent given that today's socio-political context determines that it is the role of service commissioners, including schools, to determine who, is best placed to deliver specific services. It follows that the more knowledge EPs can construct about school leaders' (i.e. those involved in strategic planning and spending decisions) experiences and world views, the more the profession can tailor their contribution and response to evolving needs in a rapidly changing context.

## **1.7 Conclusion**

The current legislative and financial context of the work of EPs is changing and there is a growing trend for EP services to be commissioned directly, at least in part, by schools, academies, trust and free schools (Truong & Ellam, 2014). As a result, there is a strong and related need to reposition the profession of Educational Psychology within current market contexts. On- going governmental policy has led to an inevitable shift to an increasing market context (Allan & Hardy, 2012), and in order to hold a leading position within this, there is a need for EPs to take full account of their commissioners' views, wants and needs. Given that school leaders are the currently the predominant commissioners of EP services, finding a way to gain insight into their wants and needs is crucial for the development of the profession. Past attempts by EPs to carry out such consumer research have been dominated by traditional, positivist, quantitative paradigms, at the expense of more appropriate qualitative approaches. The next chapter, addresses how these positivist paradigms and their associated methodologies are no longer appropriate and why qualitative paradigms are more suited to the task of ascertaining the views of EP commissioners.

The next chapter provides an over-view of the literature in this area and the rationale for the chosen methodology, Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006).





## **CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The main aim of this review is to highlight the over-dominance of positivist paradigms and associated quantitative approaches within this area and to provide a rationale for using post-positivist paradigms and associated qualitative methods. In order to fulfil this aim studies that used qualitative approaches to ascertain the views of EP clients were critically reviewed. The critique focused on content and findings, and methodological considerations of design and method of data analysis across the chosen studies. A collective summary of the findings, and strengths and limitations of the studies included in the review is provided. This review highlights gaps in the research and how these have informed the current research study.

At the outset, the context of the literature review is given. An over-view of how the literature search fits with the chosen methodology, Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) is given. This is followed by an account of the search procedure and the inclusion and exclusion criteria and the search terms. In conclusion, an outline of the research questions and justification for their usefulness in supporting the profession in responding to current professional challenges, is provided.

### **2.2 Context of the Literature Review**

This literature review was undertaken in the context of the legislative and financial context of the changing EP work, resulting in EPs increasingly being commissioned by schools and school-based clients as direct commissioners and consumers of EP services. These shifts have resulted in the profession facing pressure to become more customer-focussed in a new commercial market place and to take into account customer views more fully. When considering this shift, it is important to consider that, to date, EPs' attempts to carry out consumer research have been dominated by traditional, positivist, quantitative paradigms and this, the author argues is at the expense of more appropriate qualitative approaches. Within this review, the author argues, that these positivist paradigms and their associated methodologies are no longer appropriate and outlines why qualitative paradigms are more suited to the task of

ascertaining the views of EP commissioners. This is the justification for focusing on recent studies utilising a qualitative paradigm to explore values, assumptions and relational aspects of the role of the EP within this review. The use of such paradigms in ascertaining what clients think, feel about and assume about the services they receive is not common within the EP profession and for this reason the number of studies reviewed is small. This has the advantage of permitting more in-depth critique and allows a demonstration of the ways in which this current study augments published findings.

The next section provides an outline of the search procedure that led to the selection of studies for review.

### **2.3 Literature Search**

This section begins by outlining how the timing of this literature search fits with Grounded Theory methodology. It then details the search strategy used to identify relevant studies. This includes information relating to: the search terms, the different searches and the inclusion and exclusion criteria adopted. This section goes on to explain how the studies selected for review were critiqued using specific qualitative research guidelines (NICE, 2012) or other relevant guidelines specific to the respective methodologies of the chosen studies and evaluates the extent to which each study meets standards of high quality research. The collective findings are then summarised within the context of the combined strengths and limitations of the chosen studies.

#### **2.3.1 How is the Literature Reviewed When Using a Grounded Theory Method?**

Historically, there has been some debate regarding the timing of the literature review within a Grounded Theory study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 & Stern, 2007). Some Grounded Theorists advocate delaying any review of the literature until the data analysis is complete (Glaser, 1978) and some suggesting that a brief review before data analysis could at times be useful (Charmaz, 2006). Familiarity with elements of this debate, led to the decision to delay a full review of the literature until the data analysis phase of this study was in progress (Charmaz, 2006) and to carry out a brief literature review prior to data collection.

At the outset of the study, theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), that is, the ability to discern the meaning and subtleties within the data, was potentially enhanced by this brief review but the course of the research was not determined by it (Stern, 2007). Continually, throughout the research process theoretical sensitivity continued to grow and develop with on-going reading during the research process; the influences of my past and current experience as an EP, my related theoretical knowledge base and knowledge of the context of the profession. This growth in theoretical sensitivity peaked with significant findings from the full literature review that ultimately refined the process of theorising.

The advantage of completing the literature search in this way was to save time and effort by allowing a more focused and directed search of the literature for studies that were more relevant to the current study and the theories being constructed. Pertinent research contributions could then be reviewed and acknowledged and findings compared and contrasted. This allowed for a discussion of the ways in which this study augmented the findings of current research, and how it created new theory with implications for novel, pragmatic action oriented suggestions that would help to enrich the profession's ability to thrive in a new commercial context.

### **2.3.2 Search Procedure**

A preliminary search was undertaken at the outset of the study and more rigorous searches carried out when data analysis procedure was underway. The more rigorous search for potential, relevant articles for review took place via Athens using the EBSCO host which involved the following databases: Academic Search Complete; Education Research Complete; PsyArticles and PsylInfo. The searches were undertaken at different times during the course of the research (approximately 3 years). A number of key word searches were undertaken during the review and articles which were relevant to the stated research questions were systematically searched and included or excluded according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria contained in table 2.1. Only research studies undertaken within the last ten years 2005-2015 were specifically selected as they

took into account the huge shift in the socio-political landscape and the EP profession particularly in relation to trading.

**Table 2.1 – Inclusion and exclusion criteria and rationale**

<b>Criteria</b>	
<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>Exclusion</b>
Articles published within the last ten years were considered for recency and specificity	Articles published prior to the last ten years considered less relevant to context of current study
Articles which involved mixed or qualitative methodology were considered for relevancy	Studies which did not invoke qualitative methods considered less relevant and discursive articles with no research methodology applied were also considered less relevant
Articles relating to the English or national context were considered for relevancy	Articles based on non- English contexts excluded as less relevant
Articles which included secondary school leaders or secondary school leaders and EPs as participants, were considered for relevancy, although not always targeted directly in sampling procedures	Articles which attempted to ascertain the views of EPs only, other stakeholders, parents or young people excluded as considered less relevant
Articles with a focus on understanding client experience, relationship and process were considered for relevancy	Articles with a focus on: outcomes; on the evaluation of specific intervention or a specific service delivery model e.g. consultation were considered less relevant
Articles with full text available	Full text not available

The search terms included: school leaders perceptions of EPs; customer perceptions of EPs; school leader views of EPs; head teacher views and head teacher perceptions of EPs; stakeholder views of EPs; school leader perspectives regarding the role of EPs; school principal views of EPs; commissioner views of EPs and Special Educational Needs Coordinators views of EPs. Where these search terms yielded a vast number of studies, at least the first one hundred were checked manually for relevance. This procedure yielded no studies meeting the inclusion criteria detailed in table 2.1 (n=0). The use of terms such as school psychologist; administrator; high school were avoided as they were considered more representative of American school terminology and less relevant to the context of the current study.

A decision was taken to widen the search terms to include the following: EP service evaluation; the role of the EP; the role of the EP in academies; the role of the EP in secondary schools; EP service delivery in secondary schools and psychology in secondary schools. This search resulted in one unpublished article (n=1) which was a mixed methods service evaluation by a Community Psychology Service in 2006. It is important to note that this article is no longer available on line and only available as hard copy.

To widen the search procedure the following search terms were added: marketing Educational Psychology; marketing psychology services; selling psychology services; secondary school SLAs with EPs; EP service users and EP service trading (traded). This search yielded no appropriate studies (n=0).

It was decided to widen the search even further to include these search terms: future of Educational Psychology; what is valued in EPs; what is considered unique about EPs. This search identified one article which met the inclusion criteria (n=1). This article included school leaders and EPs within its sampling procedure.

A new Athens search undertaken in June 2014 using the search terms: teacher perceptions of Educational Psychology; teacher views of working with EPs

resulted in one article meeting the inclusion criteria (n=1). This included school leaders as participants.

A further search using the following search terms: emotional well-being in secondary schools, led to one more article meeting the inclusion criteria (n=1). This study sought to explore the processes involved in the promotion of emotional well-being in a secondary school and involved school leaders and EPs in the sampling procedure.

Finally, Google Scholar; ISI web of knowledge (science); Science Direct and <http://www.copac.ac.uk/copac/> were searched further to search for other relevant articles and grey literature (Thomas & Harden, 2008) using the following search terms; school leader perceptions of the work of EPs and teacher views of the work of EPs were then sorted by relevance and where possible date limited to 2004-2015. One article was found to meet the inclusion criteria (n=1).

The literature was hand searched in response to general reading around the research topic and other findings to ensure optimum coverage of articles and grey literature (Thomas & Harden, 2006) related to this study, one article was found to meet the inclusion criteria (n=1).

Given that the research topic was fundamentally about ascertaining the consumer views of Educational Psychology clients, the inclusion criteria were stringently applied. Overall the searches resulted in small number of studies (n= 5) being selected for in-depth review. In the references, section studies reviewed are indicated by an asterisk.

The critique involved a detailed analysis of both the findings and the methods used within the five studies that were chosen for review. This allowed an exploration of what was already known and an analysis of how the existing research within this field could inform the methodological choice of the current study.

The next section explores how EPs have long been exposed to the pressures of public accountability and the need to demonstrate impact. It also highlights that over the last decade there has been an over-focus on output (Turner et al, 2010)

rather than impact and a dominance of positivist paradigms and associated quantitative measures.

## **2.4 Traditional Approaches to Consumer Research within Educational Psychology**

Although not historically familiar with the practice of consumer research per se, Educational Psychology as a profession has long felt the pressure of public accountability. Historically this has stemmed from legislation such as the Every Child Matters agenda (DfES, 2004), the Children Act (HMSO, 2004) and associated changes to Children's Services. More recently, austerity cuts and current governmental policies are driving the evidence based practice agenda, a topic which has been much debated amongst EPs (Fox, 2003, Frederickson, 2002 & Biesta, 2010). A current directive from the Department for Education states that we must invest in a way that enables professionals to provide the best possible support and base this support on evidence of what works (DfE 2010). In conjunction with internal pressures on the profession, this directive is driving the need for the profession to have clear aims and objectives and a method of evaluation (Kelly & Gray, 2000); to add value (Fallon et al, 2006); to develop ways of evaluating what is delivered (Fallon, Woods, Rooney, 2011); to achieve 'evidence based practice' (Fox, 2003) and has led to much internal and external scrutiny (Baxter & Frederickson, 2005; Cameron, 2006; Gersch, 2004; Leadbetter, 2000 and Kelly & Gray, 2006).

In line with the code of ethics for EPs (BPS, 2010) and the demands of their professional registration (HCPC, 2012) to be reflective in their practice, EPSs have endeavoured for some time to measure their impact. Traditionally this has led to a focus on output rather than impact (Turner et al, 2010) and a domination of positivist paradigms and associated quantitative measures which have continued to dominate the service evaluation arena over the last decade (Turner et al, 2010). This was confirmed in 2010, by a survey that was completed on behalf of the National Association of Principal Psychologists by Hampshire Research and Evaluation Unit. This study surveyed all local authorities in an attempt to ascertain how they were evaluating the services they were delivering. The response rate of this survey was poor with 24 authorities responding out of a

total number of 151 (a response rate of 15%). Although not necessarily representative, this study indicated that most authorities collected data relating to EPs' activities and related time commitments. It also revealed that some services collected quite complicated data that was often not analysed or used by senior managers at all, whilst others reported that their services were increasingly being held to account by managers. Importantly, this study indicated that most services undertook stakeholder surveys of some sort (approximately 83%) and had sought feedback from schools with many services carrying out end of year review meetings. Most services sent a postal survey and some held consultative meetings with schools and the principal psychologist. This national survey indicated that pupil outcomes were rarely used in service evaluation although considered valuable to the Office for Standards in Education Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). A Scottish service made individual child outcomes a focus gathering a range of stakeholder and EP views (Turner et al, 2010). Some services used scaling systems such as Target Monitoring and Evaluation (Dunsmuir, Brown, Lyadurai & Monsen, 2009) and other recognised models such as the Research and Development in Organisations (Knight and Timmins, 2005). Many services indicated they were struggling to measure the impact of their involvement and cited the complexity of the role; the role having less tangible aspects and it being common to work through others as potential barriers. One service used a Plan-Do-Review system involving a rating scale and qualitative feedback to determine impact on outcomes and this was built into delivery systems.

Interestingly, the survey indicated that overall the evaluation of project work, commissioned projects and training tended to be more robustly evaluated although these tended to involve the use of immediate feedback sheets rather than any evaluation of implementation and effect. This study noted that commissioned projects tended to be the most effectively negotiated, outcomes made more explicit and standardised measures used more which points to increased consumerism potentially leading to improvements in evaluation practice.

Most importantly, this survey confirms that in line with consumer research more generally (Goulding 2005), traditional approaches to consumer research within



EPSs, have typically adopted more positivist paradigms and the influence of these remains strong (Turner et al, 2010). It also indicates that evaluation studies have mainly focused on the evaluation of service impact in relation to justifying service costs to managerial audiences not on consumer research per se. Such sweeping evaluations have often been output focussed and have not yielded information that allows the profession to be more fully informed about clients' views, needs, wants and wishes and in a position to develop services accordingly (Sharp, Frederickson & Laws, 2000). The survey illustrates that easily definable measures such as number of referrals or time spent on activities do not meaningfully illuminate what is working and what is not and therefore finding out more about the process remains important (Mackay, 2003). What is clear is that individual services have, over-time, been routinely involved in trying to measure the impact of their involvement, often with a reliance on what is easily measurable through research methods such as surveys, although these do not necessarily illuminate what is effective and working for EPs and their clients (Turner et al, 2010). Evaluation remains central to the work of EPs but as yet a consistent approach across individual EPs (Lowther, 2013) and across services has yet to emerge.

Despite the strengths and limitations of more positivist methodologies, the studies that have taken place historically and employed survey methodology have contributed some influential conclusions. Some studies have indicated that school staff generally appreciate the quality of service provided by EPs (Farrell, 2005) ; value relationships with EPs (Turner, et al, 2010) and want more access to their service (Farrell et al., 2006)). Others studies have indicated that school staff value the support that EPs can offer them with their school improvement agenda (Evans & Cowell, 2013). Some have shown that school staff appreciate individual assessment (Ashton & Roberts, 2006) and have some awareness of the role of the EP (Nottingham EPS, 2006). Some have highlighted that EPs themselves appreciated having positive relationships with school staff (Turner et al, 2010) and that EPs valued their ability to shift the perspectives of those they were working with (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). Importantly, some studies have acknowledged that EPs need to clarify their role and bridge the gap between

what schools want and what is provided by EPs (Kelly & Gray, 2000) and consult closely with their stakeholders (Turner et al, 2010)

The next section provides an account of research within the field of Educational Psychology that has moved away from the dominant pattern of positivist paradigms and associated quantitative measures, to the adoption of phenomenological and interpretative research paradigms and their associated qualitative methodologies. The findings of the selected studies will be explored and the various designs and methods of analysis compared and contrasted and show how they have informed the design and method of this study.

## **2.5 Towards the Adoption of More Qualitative Paradigms to Ascertaining Service User's Views**

Only a very small minority of authors inside and outside the profession have used qualitative methodologies to take a more direct and in-depth approach to exploring EP processes by actually asking their service users directly what they think about the complex nature of the work of EPs. Turner et al (2010) asked about the degree to which an evaluation rests upon the quality and type of working relationship established with clients and stakeholders whilst recognising that it is not necessarily what is delivered that is important but who delivers it, when they deliver it and how they deliver it that is important (Turner et al 2010). In their view, to deny the importance of stakeholder views would be to deny the core of the EP role that is relationships (Turner et al, 2010). Taking a more in-depth qualitative approach to analysing stakeholder's experiences of the profession would also help to bridge any discrepancies between what EP commissioners want and what EPs want to offer (Kelly & Gray, 2000). With on-going reflective practice, this would help to ensure school leader satisfaction and the commissioning or re-commissioning of services. As stated by Anthony (1999), *'If clients are satisfied, we should stop searching for our role and just do the job'* (Anthony, 1999 p.234)

A study, which aimed to utilise a qualitative approach to explore the views of EP clients and EPs themselves, was carried out by Ashton & Roberts, (2006). Using survey methodology, this study examined the views of Special Educational

Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) and EPs in relation to the role of EPs. Content analysis was implemented to analyse the data.

In order to provide an in-depth critique of this study, the Methodology Checklist for qualitative studies developed by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2012) was used. This checklist advocates that a review process benefits from an examination of the theoretical approach and stance taken by the authors, the related study design and methods of data analysis, validity, data analysis techniques and issues relating to ethical practice. A comprehensive critique of this study was undertaken addressing each of these areas.

### *Theoretical approach*

The research questions sought to understand the subjective experiences, meanings and values of SENCOS and EPs. The questions focussed on what was valued about the EP team and whether there were aspects of the role that were unique to EPs. The research was explorative in approach, seeking to describe not predict phenomena.

The research approach was not framed within the adopted ontological and epistemological stance. The authors' underpinning values, philosophical assumptions and theories were not alluded to, nor how they fit with their chosen methods of data collection and analysis. It was unclear how the authors' philosophical world views related to their choice of content analysis, a qualitative approach which allows statements from text to become quantitative when aggregated, as an analytical framework,.

The authors may have been adopting, at least in part, an empiricist and/or hypothetico-deductivism (Popper, 1959) stance. Empiricism is closely related to positivism and is based on the assumption that our knowledge of the world is derived through empirical generalisations or causal connections through the observation of empirical association. Within this, theories are accepted or rejected on the basis of how they correspond to the objective world, a truth against which the research hypothesis can be tested (Duberley & Johnson, 2000). This stance would fit with the authors' choice of content analysis which

views text as a direct expression of the interviewee's mental processes. This is an example of a 'small q' methodology (Kidder and Fine, 1987) where authors use a hypothetico – deductive research design. This could include a design such as the one used within this study, open-ended survey questions and the use of a framework such as content analysis to 'score' the qualitative material. Starting with a hypothesis, which in this case could have been, 'There is something unique about EPs' and 'There are some aspects of the EP role which are valued', the data is gathered and checked against author-defined categories to reject or retain these hypotheses.

A lack of clarity with regard to the theoretical stance, led to difficulties in determining how the authors viewed the data. Did the data represent fact, consistent with more realist ontology where it would be considered to be more independent? Did it represent a particular construction of reality specific to these particular authors and the involved participants, consistent with a more relativist viewpoint, where the author would be seen as more integral to the research process influencing the results from beginning to end? This is difficult to conclude due to the lack of detail about the adopted theoretical stance.

The purpose of the research was clearly articulated, with aims, objectives and key research questions addressed and a review of the related literature summarised. The authors highlighted that focus groups and closed questionnaires were used in previous studies but failed to highlight the limitations of these previous approaches and how they assisted in informing their chosen methods.

### *Study design*

The adopted qualitative approach was appropriate to the research questions asked. Questionably, a survey design was implemented in relation to data collection. It is debateable whether a survey design actually fits with a qualitative, explorative approach (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The research questions within this study had a specific focus on school leaders' and EPs' views of the EP role, and sought to explore personal knowledge relating to values, interactions and relationships. It could be argued that the use of a survey diminishes any understanding of one individual (Creswell & Clark, 2007) and therefore constrains

the potential findings of the study. The questions within the survey could have been more clearly related to the original research questions outlined in the article and key questions phrased in a manner that related more directly to the original key questions of the study. The open question approach, such as, 'What do you value about the EP team?', assumes that participants had reflected upon what they are being asked, such as, 'If you had no EP visits through the year, what would you miss them doing?', recognise what they would miss and were able, motivated and willing to articulate this in text.

In summary, this study attempted to 'obtain views in a time efficient way but without pre-empting what participants say (Ashton and Roberts, 2006). The survey design enabled the collection of appropriate data but significant limitations remain. The authors articulated a clear plan to analyse the data collected using a content analysis framework. However, there was no clear and reasonable justification for this chosen method. This relates to the lack of epistemological justification outlined above and contributes to the lack of clarity with regard to what the final analysis represents to the authors e.g. discoverable fact or a specific construction of reality.

Some justification for the sampling strategy was given within this article (e.g. a focus on primary schools where the majority of EPs' time is spent) and there was an implied recognition that the use of a homogenous sample helped to control other potentially contaminating factors. Appropriately, within the limits of the small sample used, no attempts were made by the authors to generalise these results. This approach implies recognition that qualitative research which does not purport to be generalisable, does not require large samples (Creswell & Clark, 2007) and most importantly involves participants that have the key information required for the purposes of the study, that is, they are a homogenous group of SENCOs with working knowledge of the work of EPs.

#### *Data Collection*

Data collection methods were described to a degree although it is unclear whether the responses were named or anonymous. This is an important dimension relating to validity e.g. participant honesty. The study failed to state how the research was shared with participants and context bias was insufficiently

explored. For example, the author's relationship to the participants was not adequately explored such as potential perceived power imbalances between the authors and participants, participant's potential concerns about maintenance of future relationships with the service and the potential effects of these on the honesty of their responses. Possible professional pressure amongst the EPs to describe their role in a particular way e.g. how senior management wish them perceived, was not considered. Information about the anonymity of the survey questionnaires may have clarified some of these issues relating to validity.

Issues of sample bias were not taken into account, such as responder bias and the data could have been enriched by arranging follow up interviews of non-responders to explore their views and reasons for non-participation.

Given the sampling and resource limitations of this study, the original research questions were addressed to some degree.

#### *Validity*

Although the research context and participants were described clearly and a clear rationale given for the study, there were no sections within this article about the reflexive position of the authors and their status in the research. For example, the status of the author was unacknowledged leading to possible potential bias.

#### *Data Analysis*

The data analysis procedures were reported and approached systemically. A consistent method for coding and developing categories was described with selected quotes to illustrate how the categories were constructed. This study would have benefited from the use of 'member checking' to check coding for consistency. This would have enhanced reliability and validity of categories used. The potential disadvantages of content analysis were not mentioned by the authors.

#### *Ethics*

There was no reference to ethical considerations. This may be due to the word constraints of a peer reviewed journal article. It was also unclear whether this qualitative research had been approved by a research ethics committee.

## *Findings*

The study indicated that advice giving, statutory work, individual assessment and having a 'link EP' were mostly valued by SENCOs whilst EPs mostly valued their relationship with client, knowledge of schools, their ability to instigate change in perspectives, to obtain pupil views and work with individuals. It illustrates that SENCOs commonly considered statutory assessment, closed tests and the expert role to be unique about EPs whilst EPs most commonly considered individual assessment and intervention, knowledge of psychology and changing perspectives to be unique. These findings highlighted a gap between the two groups in terms of what they valued and considered as unique about the EP contribution. This may have important implications in relation to the commissioning of services, as those commissioning want to receive services that EPs are less inclined to provide.

## *Conclusion*

The data gathered during this research is relatively in-depth, quite convincing, and just detailed enough to provide some level of insight into what it is that SENCOs and EPs within a specific authority valued and considered unique about the EPs role. The authors made clear links between the data, its interpretation and the conclusions drawn but failed to acknowledge any methodological limitations relating to conclusions. The authors outlined some implications of their findings for service development, particularly relating to marketing and suggested potential directions for future research within their context. This study makes a small contribution to obtaining school leader views of EPSs by offering a description of views sought from a specific population within a named authority. As the importance of consumer voice and customer choice within the profession becomes more apparent, such obvious leaning towards reliance on survey methods may no longer be appropriate. Greater adoption of post-positivist, authentically qualitative paradigms is considered to be timely. Such paradigms will allow the profession to understand more about EP consumers and commissioners experience of the work of EPs, what they think about, feel about and assume about the services they receive. This will allow EPs to examine what it is that consumers and commissioners want from EPSs now and in the

future. By mapping this information onto the competitive arena of the market place, the EP profession can ensure it remains current and competitive and can adopt a more insightfully informed and therefore more confident market position.

The next section outlines two studies which attempt to overcome limitations of survey methodology by using a Mixed Methods approach. The first outlines an approach by an EPS to ascertain the views of school leaders, and their attempts as a service to overcome the limitations of a survey as a data gathering tool. It is interesting to note that this study was originally conceived in the context of this service trying to overcome the limitations of survey-based research that had been commissioned by an external governmental agency, namely the Audit Commission. The next study is a more extensive study commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills in 2006 (Farrell et al., 2006) which again attempts to use both quantitative and qualitative data. These studies continue to provide examples of the dominant use of potentially economical survey methodology in the public sector service evaluation arena.

## **2.6 Use of a Mixed Methods Approach to Ascertaining Service Users' Views**

The first study was carried out by a County Community Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in 2006 (Nottingham Community EPS, 2006). This study sought to overcome the limitations of a quantitative paradigm by gathering both qualitative and quantitative measures. A mixed methods approach to ascertaining the views of school leaders (Head-teachers) was adopted. This study attempted to build in a substantial qualitative element into the study design and it targeted head-teachers directly in its sampling procedure. This is relevant as head-teachers are now the direct commissioners of EP services under the current SLA process.

### *Research Context*

This study was carried out in response to an Audit Commission survey of service delivery which highlighted that although the effectiveness of the service had improved over recent years, the service was attaining a below satisfactory and



below average score in comparison to statistical neighbours. Following this finding, the Community EPS undertook a more in-depth consultation with head-teachers to find out more about their views of the service and how the service could be improved. This study is an internal study that has not been formally published and has therefore not been subject to the quality criteria routinely used by those who review articles for publication or funding (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

### *Methodological Rigour*

A combination of survey data and data from semi-structured interviews was gathered. However, the reason why these were both needed is not articulated by the authors (Creswell & Clark, 2007). When undertaking research, the ontological, epistemological and methodological stances adopted should be clearly stated (Creswell & Clark, 2007) and the author's worldview was not clarified. Paradigm issues are a major concern in mixed methods research; however, a realist approach is suggested as an appropriate paradigm (Hall, 2012).

Detracting from the rigour of this Mixed Methods approach was the lack of detail about the choice of mixed methods design and the rare use of Mixed Methods terminology (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The visual diagram of procedures that would normally be offered within such an approach was not provided. Due to these omissions, it was unclear whether: the quantitative and qualitative phases were concurrent or sequential; unclear which strand was given more weight or if both had been treated equally and it was unclear at which point and in which way the data were integrated. For this reason, it was difficult to raise challenges regarding the appropriateness of procedures design. The study reported that 25% of the total number of schools within the authority were represented through a purposeful sampling procedure with secondary and special schools being under-represented within the sample. Although schools supported by each EP within the service were represented within the sample, and schools were selected by each EP randomly, this was not explained.

### *Data Gathering Procedures and Analysis*

The actual interview schedule was made available and the main themes within the interview covered areas such as why clients involve an EP; school leader knowledge of service aims and purpose; nature and frequency of involvement; views on impact; other service links; future perspectives and comments on how the original Audit Commission rating could have been improved.

The survey format was provided and this covered questions relating to impact; quality of service and what would need to change to increase the Audit Commission rating. A combination of five point Likert scales (with an 'unable to comment' option) and text boxes were provided. The survey yielded a 37% response rate (48 schools responded) with the vast majority being completed by head-teachers (n=41) as planned and some (n=7) being completed by SENCOs. The proportion of primary, secondary or special schools responding was not provided so the presence of any inbuilt bias was unclear.

The survey information was analysed and reported independently and at other times, it was combined. This made it difficult to compare percentages directly. It was also unclear how the interview data was analysed. It is possible that a simple thematic analysis had been carried out; however, this information was not provided.

The survey data revealed that most head teachers considered themselves to have an awareness of the EP role, although this was difficult to confirm as it was based on self-report. Both sources of information indicated that most schools involved an EP to access knowledge and expertise and an objective and broad perspective and systemic input.

The majority of questionnaire respondents rated the impact of the service to teachers and their school as being satisfactory and impact to families and children good or very good. Overall, the majority of questionnaire responses rated the effectiveness and quality of the service as being very good, good or satisfactory. These scores were reported to be higher than the effectiveness and quality scores obtained by the Audit Commission. It appeared that when asked

by EPs schools appeared more positive and perhaps more loyal and possibly less candid in their responses.

Analysis of the interview data highlighted the importance of issues such as: the importance of staff consistency, access and availability, having follow-up possibilities, approachability and flexibility. It also highlighted hindrances such as: time to respond to involvement requests; time available; the difficulty of releasing staff to consult; staff changes; EPs over-promising; EPs being distant and difficult to access, too many agendas; repetition, changing populations, increasing complexity of cases and transition difficulties. The interview data raised issues of schools involving EPs when other services had already been accessed and were unable to make a difference, and uncertainties about partnership working.

The majority of schools wanted more EP time, some wanted more easy access to the service and some wanted more involvement with school improvement agendas and some special schools wanted a link EP.

Recommendations to enhance future service delivery included; producing clear documentation, collating examples of good practice, having greater school presence and delivering more of what was currently provided. The study concluded with a list of positive aspects of service delivery. These included; acknowledgement of the breadth and depth of EP knowledge and skills, broad perspective in supporting vulnerable pupils and a list of issues for consideration such as the need to maintain consistency of EP and areas for development such as increasing head-teacher awareness of EP work in schools and the value of releasing teaching staff to consult with EP.

The questions within the survey appeared open, concise and focused. The use of Likert scales although versatile and inexpensive do not necessarily fully reflect true attitudes. It is common for people to avoid selecting extremes even if they are more representative of opinion and it is common for responses to be influenced by previous responses. The presence of an 'unable to comment' option may have led some people to opt out of reflection and giving their true response. It may have been more useful to include an 'other' category with a space to gather qualitative comments. There was no reference to the

questionnaire or interview format having been piloted to test, whether, for example, the reliability and/or ease questions could be answered by participants or whether the questions were suitable for all types of school involved. This may have led to more specialised surveys for each type of school that may have yielded more useful information specific to different contexts. It was unclear whether the survey was administered on-line or posted.

Although more expensive to administer and more time consuming, the use of semi-structured interviews within this study could have supported some of the limitations of the survey method, and led towards an embedded mixed methods design where one data set provides a supporting role to another (Creswell & Clark, 2007). It was also unclear how the interview data was recorded and analysed.

In conclusion, given the strengths and limitations of this study, it appears to have yielded some useful information for a particular EPS and context at a particular time. Importantly this study represents a rare attempt to bolster the limitations of quantitative data by also using qualitative approaches to ascertain the views of school leaders and what they value about the services offered by EPs.

The next study reviewed used a Mixed Methods methodology and was entitled, 'A Review of the Functions and Contributions of EPs in England and Wales in light of the Every Child Matters: Change for Children'. It was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (Farrell et al., 2006)

This study aimed to make a judgement about the extent to which EPs had a distinctive contribution to make within the Every Child Matters (ECM) legislative framework (ECM, 2004) by considering the views of a range of stakeholders on how EPs work with local authorities in the context of the ECM agendas. This study had a particular focus on SEN assessment, multi-agency working and strategic work and capacity building with schools to promote school improvement and pupil achievement and facilitators and barriers to the EP role.

A mixed methods approach to ascertaining a wide variety of stakeholder views including school leaders was adopted. This study was similar to the previous

study in that it attempted to build in a qualitative element into the study design and targeted head-teachers directly in its sampling procedure.

### *Research Context*

This study was carried out in response to a recommendation of a previous research report on the role and practice of EP Services in 2000 (Kelly & Gray, 2000). This recommendation stated that:

'A further exercise should take place to map linkages between Educational Psychology Services which are developing around local and national strategies in this report (Kelly & Gray, 2000, p. 9).

This was an extensive study involving a wide range of stakeholders including schools, EPs, Local Authority (LA) officers, a wide range of other professionals, parents, professional associations representing EPs and young people.

### *Methodological Rigour*

Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected using a combination of survey data, data from telephone and face to face interviews and site visits. This was to maximise the opportunities for collecting different types of data and to increase the validity of the review. When undertaking research, the ontological, epistemological and methodological stances adopted should be clearly stated (Creswell & Clark, 2007). In this study, the authors' world view was not clear and a realist approach can therefore only be assumed as an appropriate paradigm (Hall, 2012).

This was a substantial study which sought to ascertain the views of EPs and a wide range of stakeholders. Given the scale and complexity of this study, it may have benefitted from the chosen Mixed Methods design being identified through the use of a visual representation of procedures (which is usual within Mixed Methods Methodology (Creswell & Clark, 2007). The inclusion of such a visual representation of procedures would have made it easier to clarify whether the quantitative and qualitative phases were concurrent or sequential; which strand was being given more weighting or whether or not all strands had been treated equally. It would also have helped to clarify the manner and the point at which the

data were integrated. This information would have added to the methodological rigor of the reporting of the selected design and the procedures the authors employed.

#### *Data Gathering Procedures and Analysis*

Questionnaires were sent to a wide range of EPs and stakeholders but no details of the actual sampling procedure were given. Three versions of the questionnaire were created, one for EPs, one for school staff and one for other professionals. Substantial supplementary qualitative data was collected from Principal EPs, Local Education Authority officers and directors of EP training courses. The study would have benefitted from the rationale for this decision being explained. Questionnaire response numbers were given which was informative but response rates were not detailed.

Parents and young people were selected, by Principal EPs, but the rationale for this was not explained. It was unclear how statutory and voluntary organisations were recruited for interview and how the local authorities chosen for site visits were selected.

The actual interview schedule was made available. The main themes within the interview covered areas such as assessment, intervention, consultation, research and training and invited respondents to highlight which activities they considered to be distinctive to the role of the EP and to provide an potential alternative provider and to rate the impact of these broad work categories on the ECM outcomes. There was no reference to the questionnaire or interview format having been piloted. Piloting may have led to more specialised surveys for each type of stakeholder that may have yielded more useful information specific to different contexts. It is also unknown whether the survey was posted. It was unclear who carried out the interviews. This is important in relation to potential bias. It was also difficult to judge whether the respondents other than the EPs themselves had sufficient knowledge and experience of the EP role to provide the information requested. The report stated that 'there were three versions of the main questionnaire and they differed only in the identifying information required and in the introductory text. Only the EP version of the questionnaire was included in the report and it is questionable how applicable the wording would be

to school staff and other professionals. This questionnaire was complex and listed activities such as assessment, intervention, consultation, research and training (terms a respondent may not understand in depth and subtlety). It also asked respondents to identify which of those an EP could do, to describe how distinctive the EP role was in relation to each one, to suggest potential alternative providers of these activities and to describe the impact of EP activities on ECM outcomes. Respondents were also asked to provide an illustration of the distinctive contribution of the EP role.

The authors stated that the quantitative data was entered into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)<sup>l</sup>, yet no details of the SPSS analysis were given, although percentages and modes were frequently quoted. The authors explained that the qualitative data was entered on to an 'Excel' spread-sheet but no details of the procedure for analysis were given. A considerable amount of quantitative and qualitative data was generated from a range of different sources. This was lengthy, dense and confusing to the reader. This was partly due to the quality and weighting of each data strand being difficult to ascertain due to the lack of information pertaining to the data analysis process and the actual volume of data.

The authors of this study drew numerous conclusions. They began by stating that EPs were contributing to the five ECM outcomes with an increasing number of services planning their service delivery model around these outcomes. They also stated that there was a universal view that EPs were too heavily involved in statutory assessments which limited their ability to make an effective contribution to the ECM outcomes.

They highlighted that there was a universal view that EPs held an important role in working with children with severe, complex and challenging needs. They also highlighted that there was evidence that EPs were making a significant contribution within multi-disciplinary contexts and effectively managing multi-professional teams. They concluded that EPs were making an increasing contribution to strategic work and capacity building, both in schools and in other contexts.

The authors concluded that EP specialisms facilitated effective practice. They stated that evidence was gathered illustrating that EPs were making an

increasing contribution to strategic and capacity building work which was being facilitated by good working relationships while recognising a need for change. They stated that respondents referred to EPs' academic background and training as enabling them to make a distinctive contribution and identified one or more distinctive psychological functions outlined by the BPS.

The authors reported that the majority of school based respondents and about half of EPs indicated that alternative providers might have been able to carry out the work described in discrete examples. This could be another psychologist or school based personnel such as specialist support teacher or a SENCO.

The conclusions drawn with regard to facilitators and barriers to the EP role highlighted that EP communication skills and working relationships and having clear aims were facilitative. In contrast, time limits were a barrier with staff in schools particularly valuing contact time highly and wanting more, particularly for therapy and intervention. At that time, other concerns surrounded the age demographic of the profession and funding threats.

The report made recommendations that were ECM and government policy specific. These alluded to the need for EPs to bring greater clarity to what they could do, the importance of joint planning, the importance of services reviewing their performance, the need for EPs to communicate their professional contribution, and the need for them to ensure their contribution was distinctive. They recommended that this should be done by clarifying the purpose of EPs activities, what they could offer and clarifying when someone else could do what was required. Commissioners needed to be clear about the nature of the work required and the psychological contribution they expected from an EP. Continued involvement of EPs in the statutory assessment process was also recommended with the authors adding that when there was less demand for statutory input, EPs should expand and develop their activities in different areas where their skills and knowledge were more fully utilised.

In conclusion, given the strengths and limitations of this study, it is difficult to judge the usefulness of the aims the data, the conclusions and recommendations made. The conclusions and recommendations are also context and time specific and some are less relevant to EPs today given the introduction of the Children's



Bill (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (2014). Nevertheless, this study provoked emotions, questions and reflection within the profession which was useful, but most importantly this study with its Mixed Methods design provided an example of addressing the respective limitations of quantitative and qualitative approaches to ascertain the views of stakeholders about their experience of the Educational Psychology role.

The next section highlights the growing trend within consumer research generally to use more qualitative paradigms. Two studies that adopted such paradigms and moved away from positivist and empiricist epistemological stances and associated survey tools, towards more relativist positions and their associated phenomenological and interpretivist methodological approaches are reviewed. One of the studies was undertaken by professionals outside the profession and the other completed by an EP working within a particular LA context. The implications of this are discussed with reference to possible professional rivalry and the pressing need for EPs to promote and widely market their own high quality research skills.

## **2.7 The Adoption of Phenomenological and Interpretivist Approaches to Ascertaining Service Users' Views**

It is reassuring to note that within consumer research arenas more generally, there has been a recent shift from positivist, quantitative approaches to the adoption of more qualitative paradigms (Goulding, 2005). If the aim of consumer research is to explore client attitudes, preferences and reasons for behaviour, it seems appropriate that qualitative approaches such as Phenomenological and Interpretative paradigms should be invoked. The use of qualitative paradigms incorporating methodologies such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and Grounded Theory approaches, are suited to ascertaining the views of commissioning clients and the views of EPs about what they, as purchased providers, are offering. However, these approaches have not been commonly used by EPs or others, to explore the EP role and those few studies which do exist tend not to specifically target service commissioners or EPs themselves in their sampling. Existing studies tend to include school senior management team members (i.e. potential direct commissioners) by chance rather than by

design. Two such studies are reviewed. The study carried out by authors outside the profession of Educational Psychology uses Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis as an approach. The other, carried out by an EP in relation to Doctoral training uses Grounded Theory as an approach to data analysis. The findings of these studies will be explored in relation to their potential impact and influence on marketing and consumer research developments within the Educational Psychology profession and the concept of professional rivalry.

### **2.7.1 Use of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis to Ascertain Service Users' Views of the Work of Educational Psychology Providers**

Rothi, Leavey & Best (2008) aimed to explore client experiences of working with EPs in the context of schools. The study aimed to examine teacher perspectives regarding their professional involvement with EPs, particularly in relation to young people with mental health needs in schools. This research project was part of a larger unpublished study, commissioned by the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT).

Smith, Flowers & Larkin (2009) provide guidance on what constitutes a quality Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) study. Based on this guidance, this research has many weaknesses and limited strengths. At the outset, the authors failed to outline their shared epistemological and ontological stances and therefore did not determine how this influenced their choice of methodology. They also failed to detail their research questions, opting to give a broad overview of the areas covered by the semi-structured interview format which was not included. The article indicated that local authorities across England were approached but no further information regarding sampling procedures was provided.

The study presented a number of contradictions, particularly in relation to the role of EPs working with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties and associated mental health needs. Regarding the status of the knowledge of the EP role, the authors initially stated that 'Locating the specific roles and functions of EPs is difficult', yet later stated that the roles and functions are 'well documented'.

The authors attributed a 'role vagueness', to the profession whilst acknowledging that, 'a review of the literature on EP role definitions and functions revealed a highly diverse set of responsibilities and duties, as well as numerous individual professionals and agencies with which EPs are expected to collaborate, liaise and consult'. The study generated a comprehensive list of clients EPs typically work with, what they do and the main areas of difficulty they encounter. Secondly, the research levied heavy criticism at the contribution of EPs working with children with mental health needs whilst relying heavily on one particular source of data i.e. governmental reviews of the profession and asserted a view of what EPs should be doing, based on selected references, some of which were dated (over ten years). The authors made some strong statements that were not evidenced by research examples such as 'it is important to stress that EPs are not mental health professionals', again without making reference to an evidence base of research. It appeared that theoretical conclusions may have been drawn prematurely before full analysis of the data.

The description given of the methodology of this study revealed that 30 teachers, each from different schools, covering a range a primary, secondary and special schools, were interviewed using a semi structured interview format which included open questions and prompts. Within the article, the broad themes of the interview were described but as noted, the interview schedule was not included.

It is unclear whether the participants had actually had direct experience of working with an EP. It is also unclear how much knowledge the interviewer had of the context surrounding the role of the EP. This is likely to have affected interpretation of responses. The study stated that it focused on teacher perspectives of EPs. It is therefore surprising to note that EPs were not specifically mentioned in the three broad themes outlined which centred around: 1) teachers' understandings of mental health 2) the role and the form of school-based initiatives, policies and services available 3) teachers perceptions of external resources available. It was unclear if the focus of the study was determined at the outset or emerged during analysis (Smith et al., 2010) as the authors failed to state whether it was their intention from the onset of the study to explore the EP role or whether this theme was developed from the data obtained.

It is interesting to note that within the article the authors claimed that the interviewers had no connections with the participants or the funders of the project and in making such a claim may have been alluding to a position of unbiased observers. This is not a position commonly taken by phenomenologists who would openly recognise their role in the research process and be continually and openly reflective with regard to personal experiences and potential biases.

It is useful to acknowledge at this point that the analysis was carried out using a software package (Hyper Research) to assist with coding and the development of themes. This has the advantage of convenience and time economy and the disadvantage of distancing the author from the data and the interpretative process involving a double hermeneutic where the person researching is trying to make sense of the participant attempting to make sense of what is happening to them (Smith, 2011).

Within IPA, it could be questioned whether the participants' experiences of working with EPs are a 'lived enough' experience to warrant the use of IPA in preference to another interpretative data analysis framework such as Grounded Theory. IPA typically involves relatively small sample sizes which allow intensive analysis of detailed personal accounts and as Smith states, 'While it would be possible to conduct IPA on any type of experience, in practice it is most commonly used to examine experience which is of existential import to the participant' (Smith, 2011 p. 9)

Given that the broad outline of the questionnaire themes did not directly mention EPs but external agencies generally, it is surprising to note that the four main themes emerging from the data all relate to the EP role.

The themes and the number of supporting extracts are outlined in table 2.2 below:

Table 2.2: Themes and the number of supporting extracts

Theme	Sub-themes	Number of extracts
EP service related issues	EP service resources	2
	Consistency	1
	Reaction not pro-action	1
Relationships with EPs	Positive regard	2
	Relationship building	1
Issues related to the impact on pupils of the involvement of EP	Stigma	1
	Exclusion	3
Role and function of EPs as perceived by teachers	Duties/responsibilities	3
	Hands off approach	1
	Impact on teachers	1
	Non-mental health specialists	2

Whilst the themes raised above were potentially interesting, what predominantly lets this research down is lack of academic rigor. There were insufficient extracts from participants to support the themes being illustrated and no explanation of the prevalence of themes determined. Given such an unusually large sample size for an IPA study, the illustration of themes was limited. Smith recommends that with larger samples such as this it is good practice to provide quotes from at least three or four participants per theme and provide an indication of how prevalence is determined (Smith, 2011). It is also important to note that disparity existed

between what was claimed and what was given as evidence for the claim. As a result, the analysis frequently 'appeared crude and lacked nuance' (Smith, 2011), was not plausible and often lacked persuasion in terms of the evidence presented to support the claims made. In summary, the findings of this study concur with Smith (2011) when he discusses poor research in IPA that fails to demonstrate academic rigor.

There was little semantic connection between claims made and the quotes evidenced. Taking account of probable word count constraints, it would be expected that the quotes which most strongly support the themes detailed would have been selected rendering them the most illustrative of the authors' claims. This analysis did not give any indication of how extracts had been selected e.g. most representative of a claim or an example of the most prevalent response. A sufficient number of extracts from participants was not given to illustrate the variation in response (Smith, 2011). It was claimed that there was little divergence of opinions and experiences expressed, a surprising finding given the sample size. However, it is possible that closed or leading interview questions may have contributed to this but this can not be verified. In a sample size of thirty, providing illustrations from at least three or four participants per theme to provide evidence, illustrating variance and giving an indication of prevalence would have been possible. Extracts had not been selected to give an indication of convergence and divergence, representativeness and variability (Smith, 2011). As stated firmly by Smith, there should be a skilful demonstration of both patterns of similarity amongst participants, as well as the uniqueness experience and the unfolding narrative for a theme should provide a sensitive interpretation of how participants manifest the same theme in particular and different ways (Smith, 2011). The ability to capture this is a hallmark of good IPA (Smith, 2011). At times, the authors made claims which did not appear substantiated by the extracts given, for example, 'that EPs are seen as inflexible', 'EPs unsure what could be accomplished on each visit' and lastly 'the attempts to involve parents and other school staff could be a serious impediment'. This is shown in the relation to this last claim which was inaccurately evidenced by the following quote:

‘Two mornings or afternoons per term...in that time....he needs to work with the particular pupil, it’s usually only one pupil they can see at that time, and that pupil’s parents with the SENCO’.

This quote does not seem to relate to ‘attempts to involve parents and other school staff being a serious impediment’ to EP practice.

Again under the theme ‘impact on teachers’ the authors’ claim is that ‘because observation and assessment can only be done by EPs, time spent on these other duties is often limited’ and the actual extract reads:

‘When the EP comes into school...and does a battery of assessments and an interview with a pupil, and then will give you the report on how they’ve done an assessment but also some very practical stuff about what you need to be doing’.

The sweeping claims, ‘that EPs are no substitute for a mental health professional’, and ‘the role and skills of professionals such as EPs and the new primary mental health workers, need to be carefully considered for a number of reasons, not least because we need to ensure that we do not allocate responsibility beyond the remit, training and expertise of these professionals’, **are not substantiated.**

It is interesting to note that in the context of such a large sample size, the authors claim that no contradictory or opposing extracts were gained, yet claims such as: ‘clearly EPs are valued by teachers’ ; EPs offer ‘many good and potentially useful strategies’; ‘the recognised potential benefits of EP involvement in school mental health’ and EPs being ‘perceived by teachers to be an essential part of the support system for pupils with mental health needs’ are articulated. To be at all convincing, these claims would need to be substantiated by extracts and if they were, this would then be evidence of divergence of view.

As a study that attempted to ascertain the views of Educational Psychology commissioners using an in-depth qualitative methodology, this research appears to the current researcher to be unconvincing, lacking nuance, contradictory, and poorly substantiated.

From the point of view of marketing the profession, it is disappointing to note that within this Pastoral Care in Education Journal, the editorial purely reiterates the negative assertions regarding the work of EPs without seeking to ascertain the quality of the study. It is important to recognise that that this paper was not published in a notable psychology journal but a Pastoral Care Journal and that most high quality IPA articles produced so far have appeared in psychology journals (Smith, 2011). The author questions whether this article would have met the criteria for publishing in a psychology journal that had greater familiarity with quality IPA studies (Smith, 2011). It is also potentially significant that this study is part of a much larger study exploring recognition and management of mental health difficulties in English Schools, which remains published by the funders but currently unavailable via usual search procedures. It does not appear to have been included in a notable professional journal and therefore been subject to usual peer review procedures.

This study is an example of an attempt to evaluate the work of EPs undertaken by an applied psychologist and colleagues from health related professions including a researcher. Given their professional background, it is interesting to note that access and agreement procedures are not detailed and details of ethical approval are not given.

The quality of this research, the implications it has for misleading prospective Educational Psychology commissioners within pastoral care professionals and the potential negative impact on the market positioning of the Educational Psychology profession, invokes a sense of frustration. There is an urgent need for psychologists to initiate their own high quality research within their professional practice and to seek to present more credible findings to the market place. This action will act as an antithesis to research which could conceivably have been born out of potential professional rivalry. As a counterpoint at this juncture, it may be useful for all EPs to listen to the words of Dorie Clark who states the following:

*‘Professional rivalries can be a powerful vehicle for self-discovery — if you step back and think analytically about them. Learning where you’re weak, what values you cherish, and how to think big are important advantages. But even if you*



*struggle to rise to that level of self-reflection when it comes to your rival, the blood-boiling effects of a competitor can sometimes be salubrious...*' (Clark, 2012).

The next section reviews another example of consumer research which has been executed within a qualitative paradigm. This study also has a mental health focus but uses Grounded Theory as an approach to data analysis that the current researcher considers more appropriate to participant experiences.

### **2.7.2 Use of Grounded Theory to Ascertain Service Users' Views of the Work of Educational Psychology Providers**

This study sought to explore the processes involved in the promotion of emotional well-being in a secondary school (Salter, 2010). Although being a Grounded Theory study this was not an initial aim, theoretical sampling and the consequent analysis led to an exploration of the role of the EP in promoting emotional well-being in secondary school. In common with the previous study, this study had a mental health focus and involved the use of an interpretative, qualitative approach. In contrast to the study above this research was carried out by an EP, and subjected to peer review procedures. Constructivist Grounded Theory was the chosen method of data analysis. Although in keeping with Grounded Theory approaches, this study did not necessarily intend to explore the views of Educational Psychology clients as a primary aim, the role of the EP in supporting secondary school staff arose as a theme when the author was exploring the arena of promoting the emotional well-being of teaching staff in secondary schools. This research study has a number of strengths as a qualitative study and some limitations. The study provides a factual description of current and pertinent governmental publications relating to the importance of emotional well-being in children, the vital role of schools and highlighting that guidance is more prevalent in primary than in secondary schools. In line with Grounded Theory methodology, a full literature review was not considered necessary at the outset of this study. Again in line with Grounded Theory methodology, the research questions were not specified at the outset, although the author did detail the broad research aims of exploring the views of pupils and staff regarding the promotion of emotional well-being within secondary school

and to develop further understanding of the social processes surrounding the promotion of emotional well-being and associated implications for practice. The author clearly outlined her critical realist stance and its implications for the chosen Grounded Theory methodology. The chosen model of Grounded Theory was clearly articulated and comparisons and contrasts with earlier Grounded Theory frameworks were outlined. The author also openly acknowledged their position as an EP working in the focus school.

Access and consent procedures were well detailed and information relating to obtaining ethical approval given.

Within this study, a single case design was implemented focussing on a school that was considered to have a good reputation for its work in promoting emotional well-being. Focus groups and individuals were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format (present in the original thesis but not in the published article). In line with Grounded Theory methodology theoretical sampling was utilised, moving through cycles of data gathering which began with interviewing pupils, and moved to interviewing staff and older pupils through to interviewing school coordinator, behaviour consultant and a group of EPs. The process of data gathering and analysis were described as being inductive with each cycle of interviewing informing and shaping the context of the next. A process of constant comparison of codes was used to generate categories and a process of memoing used to enhance reflexivity. The author claimed to reach theoretical saturation which is often considered to be a theoretical rather than an actual aim within this methodology (Charmaz, 2006) and to have generated a Grounded Theory. The author fails to articulate what type of theory she considers this to be and how it might relate to existing theories within the literature.

In the final theoretical sampling turn, five EPs, a teaching staff member, Social Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) Coordinator and a Behaviour and Attendance Officer were interviewed and 'time spent reviewing the EP role and how we can support schools to promote the emotional well-being of teaching staff' (Salter-Jones, 2012, p.28). This aim contrasts with usual Grounded Theory aims which focus on explanation of phenomena not just description, reviewing exploring (Stern, 2007). Unfortunately, the data relating to this focus group is

sparse. The author includes one paragraph about this focus group and within this states that 'There was shared agreement that our role should involve supporting teaching staff to meet their pupils' needs', however, no verbatim quotes are offered at all to substantiate claims and the contribution the psychologists made to the Grounded Theory, if any, is unclear. It is important to note, at this point, that during previous focus groups with pupils and with teachers, no reference was made to the EP role generally or to any particular activities carried out by EPs working in the area of young people's mental health within this secondary school. The author goes on to give a substantial personal comment on the role of the EP in supporting secondary schools with the promotion of emotional well-being. Although well articulated this opinion does not appear to be constructed directly from the data. This could be seen as a failed opportunity to bring new and credible theory regarding the role of EPs in supporting secondary schools. A list of interesting and potentially useful recommendations are made for EP practice and secondary schools. It is difficult to ascertain if these are the author's personal recommendations or if they actually relate to the data gathered, the coding procedures, the constant comparison process; category generation and the eventual theory generation.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The review of the five studies selected within the profession of Educational Psychology demonstrates that a range of qualitative approaches have previously been used to ascertain the views of Educational Psychology commissioners and service providers. However, it is clear that the primary school context has mainly been represented within these studies and the involvement of school leaders from the secondary school phase is unclear or clearly under-represented, in all but one of the previous studies. Two of the studies purposely included head teachers and SENCO's within their sampling procedures, the others may have included some by chance but relative numbers are unclear, with one not focussing solely on direct commissioners per se but mainly teachers and the data relating to the focus group where a school leader was present being sparse. Almost all the studies demonstrated some degree of methodological strength such as some having a clear purpose and implementing a clear coding strategy; some having transparent questions and some outlining clearly the

theoretical stance taken and its implications for the methodology of choice. Despite these strengths, these studies also share a range of methodological flaws such as the theoretical stance being unclear; having interview questions that are not closely correlated to the research questions or not given at all; having potential inherent biases that are not explored; utilising unclear sampling procedures and lacking nuance and validity.

Overall, these studies point towards the differences in the values held between school staff members and EPs themselves. The research highlights that school staff have some awareness of the role of EPs, appreciate their expert advice, value consistent relationships with them over time and appreciate their specialist role within the statutory assessment process whilst EPs appreciated their relationships with their commissioners but also valued their ability to influence the perspectives of their commissioners. Whilst appreciating these factors the research to date also points towards some professional critique such as time and access restrictions and a wish for more follow up and support with school improvement. The two studies that examine the role of EPs within the realm of child mental health both struggle to substantiate their claims regarding whether or not EPs are sufficiently qualified and experienced to have role in this area.

## **2.9 Implications for the Current Study**

This review points to the usefulness of more in-depth qualitative approaches in the field of consumer research within service industries that have a more psycho-social rather than outcome focus. It highlights the paucity of in-depth, qualitative research which has a direct focus on school-based commissioners of EPSs. It illustrates that there is limited research that takes account of the new commissioning context within the profession and identifies a dearth of studies that focus on secondary school leaders exclusively. This is an important gap in the current research context as secondary school contexts can be large, complex environments for EPs to work in and research is needed to explore school leaders' views related to experience, processes, degree and quality of the professional artistry (Schon, 1897) invoked by EPs. EPs habitually work in complex and uncertain situations that are often unique and often involve some

kind of conflict. This gap is pertinent given the current apparent reluctance for secondary schools within the host authority to commission LA EPSs.

This research seeks to add to the dearth of studies which examine the meanings attributed the work of EPs by their commissioners, how their commissioners view their own professional needs and how they view the professional help and support they require to meet these. It seeks to present a quality consumer research study into the role of the EP. It is predicted that the findings will support the profession in developing more customer centred practice and offer findings that potentially could be presented and advertised within the commercial market place to support the profession in ensuring that it continues to hold a strong, relevant market position.

Given the findings of this review, it is apparent that the research questions related to the current study are useful and topical. The research questions are, as follows:

1. What meanings do school leaders attribute to the contribution of EP's?
2. How do these attributed meanings of school leaders' impact on engagement and purchasing behaviour, in the context of trading?
3. As commissioners of Educational Psychology services, how do school leaders' view their wants and needs?
4. What benefits do school leaders seek from the Educational Psychology profession?

In summary, the literature review illustrates that this study will contribute to qualitative consumer research in the EP profession and assist with showing where the research fits into existing literature (Fink, 2005). This research will further help to address the dearth of studies that sample school leaders directly and those that focus on school based leaders within the secondary school context. This review, illustrates a pertinent gap in the previous research and this needs to be addressed given that today's socio-political context determines that it is the role of service commissioners, including schools, to determine who, in their view is best placed to deliver specific services (Fallon, Woods & Rooney,

2010). It follows that the more knowledge we can construct about school leaders' (i.e. those involved in strategic planning and budget decisions) experiences and world views, the more able we will be as a profession to tailor our contribution and respond to their ever changing needs in a rapidly changing context. This study will support the profession in ensuring that it remains relevant and capable of providing real solutions for people, taking greater advantage of developing opportunities, ensuring they are fully involved and exerting influence at appropriate times (Gersch, 2009).

The manner in which the findings from the literature review have helped to inform the methods adopted within the current study will be outlined in the next chapter. The potential contribution that a qualitative approach such as Constructivist Grounded Theory can make, to in-depth consumer research that has a direct focus on school-based commissioners of EPSs will be addressed.

## **CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided a critique of the literature and drew attention to the dearth of in-depth qualitative research in the area of consumer research generally and in particular in relation to EPs ascertaining the views of their commissioning school leaders. It also highlighted the potential contribution that approaches such as Grounded Theory can make in enabling EPs to explore their school leaders experience of their professional role.

The research paradigm, the chosen methods of data collection and analysis, and the role of the researcher are outlined, within this chapter. The sampling framework is also outlined followed by a more in-depth account of data collection and analysis. The importance of reflexivity is raised and issues relating to methodological rigour addressed and, in conclusion, ethical considerations relating to this study are detailed.

### **3.2 An Outline of the Research Paradigm and Design**

As a researcher, I subscribe mainly to a constructivist paradigm whilst appreciating some elements of a more recent transformative paradigm, and associated critical theory (Mertens, 2010). The assumptions guiding a constructivist paradigm are that knowledge is socially constructed by people active in the research process, and researchers should try to gain some understanding of the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who are experiencing it (Schwandt, 2000). Both social constructivism and social constructionism refer to how social phenomena occur. However, social constructionism takes greater account of social context and is therefore more sociological while constructivism refers to the process by which individuals construct their own meanings in particular social contexts and is more psychological (Young & Colin, 2004). They are both complementary aspects of the process by which human beings create their worlds for themselves.

A transformative paradigm takes this further, recognising that various versions of reality stem from social positioning with social constructions being influenced, for example, by power relations (Duberley & Johnson, 2000). Within this paradigm, knowledge is seen as socially and historically positioned (Mertens, 2010). Critical theory highlights the importance of understanding any social or organisational phenomena with respect to its multiple interconnections and position within historical contexts (Johnson & and Duberley, 2000).

The author's basic beliefs are positioned closer to social constructivism and related social constructionism, whilst appreciating elements of critical realism. Both these worldviews share some important ontological and epistemological similarities and contrasts. Critical realism ontology assumes that a social and natural reality does exist independent of cognitive structures (i.e. an extra mental reality), the noumenal world (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). This ontological stance is more objective and realist. In contrast to this social constructivism is more subjective and relativist. It assumes that there is no absolute reality and that only multiple socially constructed realities exist which people create and make sense of in the context of their established social practices and shared language. Within this view, what one takes to be external social and natural reality is considered to be merely a creation of one's consciousness and cognitive processes, with no independent status, that is the phenomenal world (Johnson & Duberley, 2010). These socially constructed phenomena are seen as being born out of individual experience and interpretation.

Although these two positions appear contrasting, critical realism has elements of both positivism and constructionism, and postulates that an independent reality does exist but accepts that multiple, socially constructed realities exist around this, which are real to those who experience them. This position also takes into account that multiple socially constructed realities can be in conflict with each other and that perceptions of reality can change during the process of a study (Mertens, 2010). The next section provides a detailed description of Constructivist Grounded Theory as a method of data collection and analysis and the rationale for this choice.



### **3.3 Constructivist Grounded Theory**

The chosen method of data collection and analysis is Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) and this is aptly situated between the realist and constructivist positions (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) outlined above. It is realist in its recognition that although serious attempts have been made to represent the various realities, experiences and views of participants as faithfully as is possible, the theory that is developed is considered to be a constructed representation of the observed phenomenon.

Constructivist Grounded Theory is a particular version of Grounded Theory. Grounded Theory is a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis that allows the researcher to learn about individuals' everyday experiences of particular phenomena. It supports the exploration of how people describe their feelings, opinions and perceptions regarding particular experiences. It can also be used to analyse written materials. Grounded Theory aims to develop new theory which is firmly grounded in the researchers' observations and analysis of the data. It does not advocate the testing of predetermined hypotheses. Grounded Theory was initially conceived, in the 1960s, by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) with the publication of their book, 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory'. This seminal work raised the profile of qualitative studies in a political arena that was biased towards viewing quantitative methods as more scientific and objective in approach.

Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006) contrasts with earlier grounded theorists (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) in that it does not assume a more abstract understanding of a knowable world (an external reality that can be discovered) by a researcher who is separate and as unbiased, as is humanly possible. Within earlier models, the generated theory is considered objective, the product as conceptual and providing an abstract distance from the data and the conceptualizations viewed as distant, objectifications (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). In contrast to this, within the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, the data and analysis are recognised as being created from shared experience and relationships between the researcher and participants and other data sources (Charmaz, 2006). The resulting theory is seen as depending on the

researcher's view and cannot be seen to stand outside it. This model explicitly assumes that any theory that is constructed is an interpretative portrayal of the studied world, not an exact picture (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist Grounded Theory studies are seen as being constructed from beginning to end with the researcher, for example, determining who is interviewed, what questions are asked, what aspects of participant responses are followed up and how the data is recorded. In addition, the researcher also determines how the data is analysed, that is, how transcripts are coded and how codes are raised to increasingly abductive categories and theory. This results in a process that is interpretivist and interactive from beginning to end, with the data being continually shaped towards a mutual construction which reflects the respective positions of all involved (Charmaz, 2006). Within this approach, it is appreciated that although 'everything is data, data is not everything' (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007 p.14) as everyone is seen as processing information and representing information in a truly unique way. From the outset of this constructivist study, I, as the researcher, was acutely aware that different researchers attempting this study would have developed very different codes and categories, highlighted different themes and ultimately constructed different theories to mine, reflecting their unique positions, experiences, studies and theoretical sensitivities.

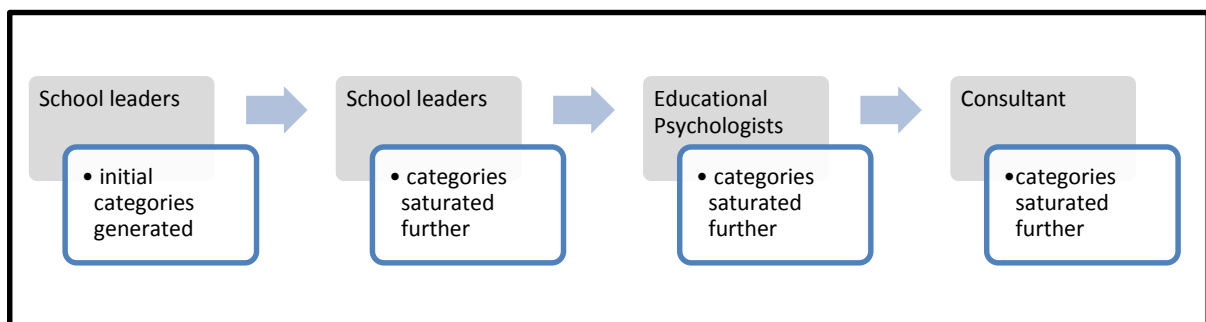
Constructivist Grounded Theory was considered the most effective method for the collection and analysis of information about what was occurring when EPs were commissioned to work in the secondary school setting. It allowed the exploration of what life was like for school leaders and EPs working together in that particular context. Other methods such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2011) were considered and rejected because the lived experience being explored in this study was not considered to be of sufficient personal significance to participants to warrant the use of this approach. Furthermore, the aim of this research was to generate findings with more explanatory than descriptive power. Although consistent with my worldview, Ethnography was rejected due to the extended observation, researcher immersion and the potential fieldwork demands of this approach. Thematic analysis was considered as a possible approach but rejected on the grounds of not generating theory grounded in data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Although this

approach would have allowed the identification of themes within the data, it would not have allowed for technicalities such as taking a theoretical approach to sampling.

Constructivist Grounded Theory, as the preferred approach enabled the systematic elicitation and interpretation of the multiple meanings ascribed by participants. It allowed for questioning implicit assumptions held by participants and the exploration of their personal values, beliefs and perceptions. As expected within this approach, theoretical sampling procedures led to sampling areas that could not have been anticipated originally. The research began with a focus on the experiences of school leaders and moved on via the theoretical sampling procedure to explore the views of EPs to allow the expansion and enrichment of codes and categories. Towards the end, the research journey took another unanticipated twist as a decision was made to consult with a professional consultant who had no direct role in education to explore further theoretical ideas and intuitions that had developed. This decision was due to consultancy parallels being detected within the data. This description highlights the power of grounded theory to lead in directions that are completely unanticipated at the start of the explanatory journey. This consultant was a personal acquaintance and this may have resulted in some reporting bias.

A qualitative semi-structured, interview method was adopted as the most appropriate tool to generate the data required. Initially, one by one three school leaders were asked to consider, through a series of open questions, their experiences of working with EPs and to reflect on these experiences in relation to their own professional wants, needs and aspirations and their commissioning intentions. **These interviews were recorded, transcribed personally, or anonymised and transcribed by a professional transcription company who could provide a confidentiality agreement.** The data was subsequently analysed using the Constructivist Grounded Theory model as proposed by Charmaz (2006) to generate the initial categories. Later, a similar process was followed where another three school leaders were interviewed one by one to allow further saturation of these categories and the generation of new ones. Three EPs were then interviewed individually and asked to consider their experiences of providing services within the secondary sector, in an attempt to enrich the data further.

Lastly, a professional consultant was invited to comment on the visual models that had been constructed from the Constructivist Grounded Theory analysis of all the transcripts (from both the commissioners and providers), to that particular stage of the analysis. These comments were taped, transcribed, coded and integrated in a manner that was consistent with the data collection and analysis to that point in the process. This resulted in three data sets being generated, one from school leaders, one from EPs and one from the consultant as the different theoretical sampling steps were taken. Please see Figure 3.1 below. These data sets were treated consistently and as one from the onset.



**Figure 3.1 – A visual model of theoretical sampling steps**

Constructivist Grounded Theory was chosen as a method of analysis because it actively recognises that an interview reflects what the interviewer and the participants bring to the interview and the impressions and relationships constructed within it (Charmaz, 2006). Within this approach, I, as the researcher, acknowledged a lack of complete objectivity, and as bringing my own unique contribution to the research, influencing the data and findings from beginning to end. Thus, my position as a practising EP, my passion for the profession, and my status as currently working within the host authority in which this research was undertaken could be openly acknowledged.

A Constructivist Grounded Theory approach has been successful in allowing an in-depth exploration of how the participants explain their statements and actions during interviews, and to make analytic sense of these explanations through a strategic process of comparative analysis. It has enabled the construction of a theory that is grounded in the interpretation of the voices, actions and experiences of commissioners and providers. This has supported the incorporation of the findings from this study, into a theoretical framework, that can be considered to have potential explanatory, as well as descriptive power. This approach has allowed the completion of an exploratory journey of discovery whilst providing a distinctive opportunity to build new theory in this research area. More importantly, it has enabled the generation of some pragmatic suggestions about what the profession of Educational Psychology can do to hold a stronger market position in the new commercial context.

### **3.4 Role of Myself as the Researcher**

Interviews were used to collect the data. Interviews are recognised, within the Constructivist Grounded Theory approach, as being a social construction or a reconstruction of reality, reflecting the totality of what I and the participants bring to the interview and the impressions and relationships constructed within it (Charmaz, 2006). It is openly acknowledged within this approach, that I, and the participants, come to the research context with their own assumptions, prior knowledge, relative social positions and unique influence. My position as an EP working within the authority where the research originates is openly recognised, in addition to my long-standing, passionate interest in the topic being explored. Constructivist Grounded Theory takes into account the fact that I have been unable to be completely objective, and have brought my unique contribution to this research, influencing the data and findings from beginning to end. During the interview process, I was aware of each participant in the role of an informer and I strived to conceal my own opinions and views to prevent unnecessarily influencing their contributions.

In recognition of the above, a reflective log was kept throughout the research process to support me in continuing to be aware of how my personal interests,

relationship with participants, positions, assumptions, emotions and prior hypotheses might influence the research process.

During this study, I was continually aware of the danger that the Grounded Theory process could be reduced to a technique for systematic categorisation, producing a systematic map of concepts and categories, which was merely descriptive rather than explanatory (Willig, 2008) in power. I worked to ensure that strategic comparisons and the efficient generation of associated conceptual categories ensured explanatory power. I also realised that a high degree of reflexivity was essential to guard against the risk of adopting the beliefs of participants which could bias the interpretation (Goulding, 2002).

As an EP, working within the southern county where this research originated, I was conscious that this may influence the extent to which participants felt able to be open and honest in their views. They were aware that I was a member of the service and profession under-discussion and they were aware that they had been referred by psychologists they know personally. I attempted to overcome this by working to establish rapport and trust and giving reassurance regarding confidentiality and anonymity. It was necessary to make my position as a researcher transparent to all the involved participants and to make clear the rationale and aims of the study and to remain acutely aware of the impact of my own professional experiences of working as a psychologist in the secondary sector. The chosen analytical approach, Constructivist Grounded Theory, helpfully acknowledges that the process relies on multiple factors including what we know, who we are, our interactions with our participants, our interactions with the data, and the impact of our unique developing ideas (Charmaz, 2006).

In summary, the chosen approach to analysis offered an open acknowledgement of my position; allowed the construction of theory that is grounded in my interpretation of the voices, actions and experiences of school leaders. It incorporated findings into a theoretical framework that potentially had explanatory, as well as descriptive power allowing an exploratory journey of discovery and the opportunity to build new theory.

### **3.5 Sampling Framework**

A criterion sampling method was used to select participants, incorporating the following inclusion criteria. Each participant was selected as being able to offer meaningful insight into experience of working with EPs and each held a strategic management role with related commissioning power. These criteria helped to ensure the participants were experiential experts. Initially, participants were homogeneously (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) selected in relation to the extent to which they fulfilled the inclusion criteria and therefore met the conceptual/informational demands of the study. This sampling procedure helped to: eliminate the danger of time being wasted collecting and analysing poor data and reduced 'noise within the data', (Morse, 2007).

From the outset, it was recognised that the chosen sampling framework was aiming for theory construction, not demographic representativeness (Charmaz, 2006) and it was subsequently acknowledged that this qualitative enquiry would be inherently influenced by me with theoretical sampling procedures being increasingly adopted to allow greater saturation of specific categories. Theoretical sampling involved simultaneously collecting, coding and analysing the data and allowing the data to decide the direction of further data collection to support the saturation of categories and theory construction.

It was fully acknowledged that 'all data are not equal' (Morse 2007), cited in Bryant & Charmaz, 2007 p.243), some data would be favoured over others and some would be considered useful and others less so. As the construction of the analysis progressed, I purposely sampled from the data, selecting and sorting, prioritizing or back-staging the available evidence (Morse, 2007).

The process of data collection and analysis were concurrent within this study. Sampling procedures were altered as the study progressed incorporating a combination of criterion, purposeful and theoretical sampling procedures. This resulted in six school leaders being interviewed, three EPs, and one professional consultant. The EPs who participated did not provide services directly to the school leaders who were included in this study. The school leaders were not known to me; the EPs were known in a professional capacity and the professional consultant was known on a personal basis. This contained sample

size allowed me to vividly recall information and images about the interviews and the people they were conducted with, in detail. It also prevented excessive data being an impediment to the analysis (Morse, 2007).

A routine, pre-planned approach to sampling was not invoked as it is recognised within Grounded Theory that pre-planned, routine sampling may force the research into irrelevant directions and potential problems (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and inhibit the concurrent collection and analysis of data associated with the construction of theory and the continued tailoring of sampling to fit the data. A purposeful sampling framework was implemented that allowed similarities and differences between participants to be minimised. This enabled initial categories and properties to become established and a basic theoretical framework to develop. The developing analysis of this data eventually led to the pursuit of greater similarities and differences between participants. This allowed comparison of a range of diversities and similarities, establishing how different data compared with the developing conceptual framework and supported the widening of the scope of developing theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As concepts were developed and theory began to be constructed, individuals were selected as they were needed to saturate categories and strengthen findings, that is, through a more theoretical approach. This allowed developing theory to guide the next data collection steps as gaps were perceived and questions suggested by the data obtained to that point. The criteria for theoretical sampling, theoretical purpose and relevance, as outlined by Glaser & Strauss (1968) were applied. In summary, the process of data collection was continually adjusted to ensure the data's relevance to developing theory and maximised or minimised differences among participants to control the theoretical relevance of the data collection.

The data was collected from the school leaders and EPs during the time period September 2012-2013 and from the consultant in February 2014. Participation was completely voluntary and participants were free to withdraw at any time during the study. The characteristics of the SENCOs, Assistant Head-teachers and EPs involved in the study are provided in Table 3.1.



Table 3.1: Details of Participants

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Position Held	Terms of contract
1	male	white British	Assistant head-teacher	Full-time
2	female	white British	Assistant head-teacher	Full-time
3	female	white British	SENCO	Full-time
4	female	white British	SENCO	Part-time
5	female	white British	SENCO	Part-time
6	female	white British	SENCO	Full-time
7	female	white other	EP	Full-time
8	male	white British	EP	Full-time
9	female	white British	EP	Full-time

The majority of participants were female and of white British ethnic origin reflecting the demographics of the Children's Service where this study took place and involved a range of part-time and full-time professionals.

In summary, as the study progressed, the generality of the research was gradually increased and the scope of developing theory broadened. The process

of data sampling and data analysis continued until the goal of theoretical saturation was in sight. That is, no new categories could be identified and until new instances of variation for existing categories could be found (Glaser & Strauss, 1998). Saturation was seen to occur when a category or finding was felt to be certain and sampling subsequently ceased in a particular domain because it was considered that what was being seen was understood (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). However, it was acknowledged that theoretical saturation could never be totally achieved as each new respondent almost always had something unique to contribute to the study (Charmaz, 2006). It was recognised towards the end of the sampling process that the published word is not the final one, but only a punctuation in the never ending process of generating theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

### **3.6 Method of Data Collection and Analysis**

LA psychologists were approached in person to refer participants to the study. Potential participants who met the inclusion criteria were contacted personally and the nature of the study was outlined, time expectations clarified and invitations to participate in a semi-structured interview were given. As stated, the school leaders involved were not known to me personally. The psychologists who were interviewed were known to me, but they were not known to the particular school leader participants involved in this study. It was recognised that being known or not known had advantages and disadvantages with being unknown potentially enhancing the honesty of responses and being known potentially generating richer data (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). When participants expressed their willingness to be involved in the study, information letters (Appendix 1) and consent forms were issued (Appendix 2). Assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were also given verbally. The participants were interviewed within their places of work, with a private room being requested to minimise disturbances and distractions.

The interview schedules for the school leaders (Appendix 3) and the EPs (Appendix 4) were designed to generate discussion around the research questions and allow each participant to reflect upon their experience of working together as commissioners or providers of Educational Psychology in the

secondary school setting. One pilot interview was carried out to test questions, elicit themes for future interviews and to become more experienced with this particular semi-structured interview process. This participant was made aware that their interview was a pilot and the data generated was not included within the findings in this study.

As an experienced psychologist, I considered myself to be an experienced and confident interviewer with training in the required processes and skills such as appropriate questioning and active listening. During these interviews, participants were asked a series of flexible, open questions that allowed them to describe their experiences of working together and to reflect on this in relation to their own professional wants, needs and aspirations. Open questions were used to allow participants greater freedom to elaborate and probe questions were utilized to encourage the participants to reflect further in relation to particular experiences and views. The actual questions showed some variation between interviews, to allow, for example, theoretical hunches and leads to be followed up and theoretical gaps to be filled. Some biographical questions were asked at the beginning of each interview to establish rapport and trust.

In constructing the interview schedule sources such as, Kvale & Brinkman (2009) were consulted for guidance in how to conduct qualitative research interviews. Initially some questions were generated which were related to the research questions and consultations were undertaken with a small group of psychologists with regard to the suitability of the questions. Amendments were made accordingly and the interview schedule piloted, as stated, to check how effectively the research questions were addressed. The questionnaire was considered to be fundamentally appropriate although this process highlighted some areas for improvement in interview technique and suggested future probes. At the outset, it was recognised that each interview was a construction or reconstruction of reality and not a reproduction of prior reality (Silverman, 2000) with the content being generated in a specific context for the specific purpose of fulfilling the expectations of the interview process.

The interviews lasted for approximately an hour and were recorded using a digital dicta-phone. At the beginning of the interviews, participants were asked if they

were comfortable being taped and their consent was sought again for the contents of the interview to be used in this study. The participants were informed that the interview data would be transcribed verbatim, anonymised and the tapes and transcripts stored in secure facilities within the LA office. They were also informed that should the research be published the anonymised data would be kept securely for a maximum of five years from the date of publication.

The interviews were transcribed and each interview listened to at least once and each transcription read and re-read. The transcriptions were subjected to a process of open (Glaser & Strauss, 1968), line by line coding soon after they had taken place. During this process of line by line coding active labels (summaries which described segments of data and indicated what each segment is about in action terms) were generated. Active tenses reflecting action were used where possible to avoid any premature abduction and development of categories. During the line by line coding process sentence structure was taken into account to ensure the sense and meaning of a passage was preserved. This resulted in more than one line being included at times. The data were also checked using a 'seize and grab' read through (Stern, 2007) to ensure the main points of the text had been captured in the coding process. This checking enabled the focus on theory development as absolute descriptive accuracy was not the goal. Each interview was transcribed and analysed before proceeding to the next and each informed the next. The process of analysis involved the codes from each interview being transferred from the transcripts to small index cards that were then physically sorted to establish commonalities, differences and relationships between codes and categories as they arose. Memos were written about these codes, the comparisons made and ideas that were generated throughout. The physical process of sorting and categorising the data helped the creative refinement and organisation of the data. It allowed initial inductive comparisons of segments and, in time, the construction of more abstract analytic categories which became more analytical and theoretical as successive levels of analysis were engaged in. Beginning with detailed descriptive accounts of the experiences of participants, considering potential theoretical hypotheses that might account for the data and following the most probable hypothesis, allowed

for the construction of more abstract, theoretical, representative explanations of what is going on for participants in their particular setting.

Through this sorting process of comparing similarities or differences between codes, categories and themes, outlined above, generality and explanatory power were increased. Categorisation allowed for the conceptualisation and communication of key features of the phenomenon to be observed (Dey, 2007). During this process of comparison it was recognised that the cognitive process of categorisation is not a simple one, with categories always being, as Harnad (1987) points out, approximate, provisional, prototypical, permeable and constantly subject to revision through further observations of possible alternatives. **An illustration of the coding process is provided below in relation to parts of a particular theme.**

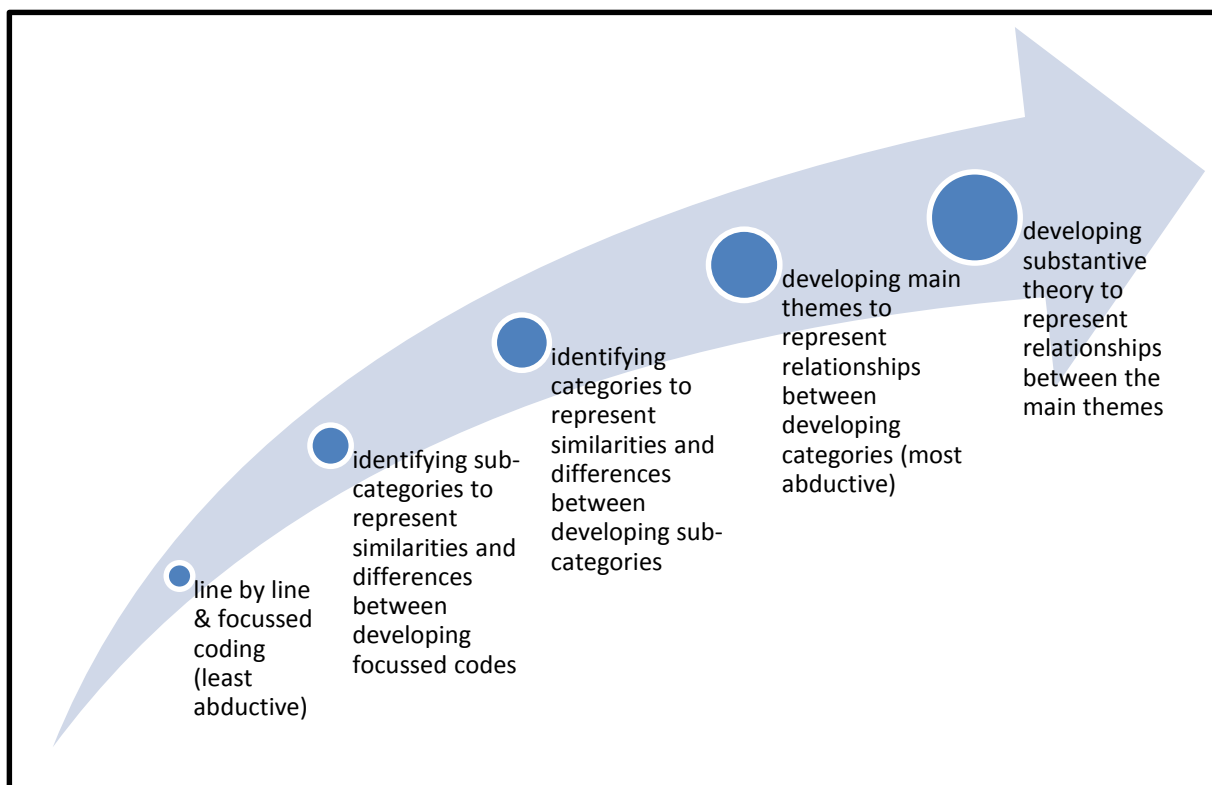
Interview data	Open code	Focussed code	Subcategory
'..she (the EP) was quite prescriptive with me to start with and that was really useful because I almost had a tick list'.	wanting EP to be more prescriptive when particular need first encountered	Ability to enhance knowledge and understanding in others	Psychological Knowledge and skills (Contributing to the category- <b>Less visible aspects of commissioned practice</b> (practice that is more subtle and less obvious in nature))
'She (the EP) offers some really good advice when it comes to training materials...she has given some really good training materials and some of those we've used'.	EP contributing resources and information for senco to cascade	Ability to enhance knowledge and understanding in others	Psychological Knowledge and skills (Contributing to the category- <b>Less visible aspects of commissioned practice</b> )

'I suppose a fresh pair of eyes on it. ...it's just a kind of fresh mind on it'.	EP bringing a new view	Having a unique perspective	Psychological knowledge and skills (Contributing to the category- <b>Less visible aspects of commissioned practice</b> )
'I want to see an alternative view. I want to get (pause) children with special educational needs are always a puzzle..'	EP bringing alternative view	Having a unique perspective	Psychological knowledge and skills (Contributing to the category- <b>Less visible aspects of commissioned practice</b> )
'.. we had back up from people whom you respect and now they know what they are talking about and can come in and give practical help '.	EPs offering valued pragmatic support	Being resolution focussed	Professional approach experienced by clients (Contributing to the category- <b>Less visible aspects of commissioned practice</b> )
'Different animals aren't they (EPs), they bring different expertise. Like saying what's the difference between going to the butchers or going to the milkman'.	EPs being distinct	Being qualitatively different	Professional approach experienced by clients (Contributing to the category- <b>Less visible aspects of commissioned practice</b> )

'they (EPs) look to see what strategies can be put in place to improve the situation..where we get as many external agencies involved as we possibly can'.	EP problem solving with a range of professionals	Collaborative problem solving	Less direct aspects of visible practice (practice that is more consultative in nature) (Contributing to category- <b>More visible aspects of commissioned EP practice</b> (this relates to the more observable aspects of practice))
'So I got the EP in and said, 'What are we going to do about this child? How are we going to manage this child? She (the EP) took me through some really simple steps...'.	senco requesting and receiving advice	Giving advice	Less direct aspects of visible practice (Contributing to category- <b>More visible aspects of commissioned EP practice</b> ).

**Figure 3.2 An illustration of elements of the coding process relating to theme one: The skills and activities involved in the commissioned work of educational psychologists in the secondary school context**

Through this on-going iterative process, categories arising from the codes were eventually refined and re-specified as five main themes and eventually a Substantive Theory. Such substantive theories are theoretical explanations for particular findings and formal theory even more far reaching and generalisable. It should be noted that formal theory was aspired to but not attained within the scope of this study. Substantial theories and formal theories represent a large amount of information, extend and raise significant categories to the higher level of abstract theory, conceptually extend the core categories and represent relationships between core categories (Glaser, 2007), as illustrated below (Figure 3.3). Substantive theories focus on and attempt to explain particular problematic issues in specific substantive areas (Charmaz, 2006).



**Figure 3.3: A visual representation of the ascending steps taken in developing substantive theories**

It was recognised that within Grounded Theory applications, there are many different and inter-changeable labels used to represent different levels of abstraction. The labels within Figure 3.3 are the labels that were chosen for use within this study and they were used consistently throughout.

This process of theory generation was rooted in the firm belief that the Grounded Theorist is modest, grounded and not a generator of immaculate conjecture (Glaser, 2007) and the realisation that the complexity of a situation can never be captured in its entirety by a theory (Kearney, 2007). Theories constructed from my concrete observations were verified as much as possible, with as accurate evidence as possible (i.e. linked to and supported by the original codes and analytic categories), whilst acknowledging that they were data based but also theoretically motivated. The ultimate goal was faithful representation, not an absolute accurate description of the observations. Constructed theory considered to be of practical value and grounded through systemic confrontation



with the evidence (Dey, 2007). As the research continued the coding process highlighted potential areas for exploration and focus during subsequent interviews and the need to gather additional data to check and refine developing analytical categories and themes. Data collection continued until the study culminated in a 'grounded theory' or a more in-depth understanding of the experiences and perceptions of school leaders and EPs working together in a new socio-political context.

Technical methods of analysis and coding methods such as axial coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) were rejected in favour of the less formalised sorting approach outlined above. Formal systems such as axial coding were considered to be too prescriptive, to rely on analytical preconceptions, and to apply preconceived category labels which had the potential of interfering with the intimacy being experienced between myself and the data, my ability to engage imaginatively with the data and to allow the data to determine what codes and categories were developed. However, as the study progressed and the amount of data involved increased, the physical sorting procedure described above was supported by the use of a coding framework within Microsoft Excel. This allowed more efficient organisation of data and therefore supported the iterative process of going back and forth between codes, categories and theories to check fidelity as the data became increasingly more focused and successively more abstract.

In summary, through a process of reaching up to construct abstractions and down to ensure these abstractions were firmly grounded in the data, the coding framework allowed the data to be usefully viewed as a bottom up hierarchy which is considered the most helpful way to view data within a Constructivist Grounded Theory study (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007)

### **3.7 Methodological Rigour**

It was the aim to maximise methodological rigour. In doing so, a reflexive stance was adopted. Within this, I recognised that my interactions with the participants, our respective professional and personal contexts would have influenced the research process throughout, with us being, as French ethno-psychoanalyst, Georges Devereux (1967) describes, a unique stimulus for each other,

determining what was mentioned and what was omitted with each interview situation being uniquely biased in this respect.

Throughout this process, I have not claimed any level of objectivity. In contrast, I have aspired to implement the reflexivity sub-category of radical reflexivity (Lynch 2000) which fits with my constructivist approach to analysis. This aims to:

*'deconstruct established modes of objectivity in order to set up alternative, more democratic and perhaps even stronger, modes of objectivity and makes no concession to any form of objective, or privileged, analysis.'* (Lynch, 2000 p.36)

It follows that the goal of this research was never to preserve and re-represent a 'truth' or series of truths as expressed by narratives or quotes but to critically analyse the transcription data to produce 'a truth', a distinctive analytic understanding, interpretation and representation of what was occurring (Clark (2005). In the words of Stern:

*'I act as an interpreter of the scene I observe, and as such I make it come to life. I grew it.'* (Stern, 2007 p.115):

The aim was to obtain rich data relating to participants' experiences, meanings, feelings, intentions, actions and views. A 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) was sought by transcribing the interviews verbatim to ensure fidelity and structure. A reflexive journal was kept to capture how personal experience and assumptions affected the interview situation and a process of free style memoing (Glaser, 2014) was implemented throughout the research process. This style of memoing considers memos to be ideas that occur to a researcher at any time and in any place to capture the ideas that came when coding and constantly comparing the data. These were recorded throughout the Grounded Theory process, in a 'stop-jot' manner (Glaser, 2014). These memos were written to aid my memory as a researcher and to guide the development of ideas with conceptual freedom and privacy. They allowed me to change the names of patterns, to specify concepts and allowed me the freedom of trial and error when trying to find the best label for a perceived pattern in the data. These memos were not written up formally and were never intended to become public but to be integrated eventually into this body of work. These memos were supportive to

moving the Grounded theory process away from description into conceptualisation and facilitated theory construction.

Given the constructivist underpinnings of this study, it is not envisaged that this research will meet the more positivist, traditional evaluative criteria of reliability, validity and generalizability. In fact, the application of these would be inappropriate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In contrast, I propose that this study offers advantages that link to the alternative characteristics of good qualitative research proposed by Henwood and Pidgeon in 1992. These include:

- 1) Importance of fit: In trying to ensure this characteristic is met, I have ensured that the themes or analytical categories offered fit closely to the original data and that this fit has been demonstrated through clear, explicit justification of how categories were developed;
- 2) Integration of theory: In trying to ensure this I have strived to articulate how the relationships have been constructed between codes, categories themes and theory and how codes, categories and themes have been integrated or generalised to the construction of theory;
- 3) Reflexivity: I have strived to meet this characteristic by openly acknowledging and accounting for my role as researcher in the write up of this study and by using analytical memos to increase the awareness of my impact on the findings;
- 4) Documentation: I have attempted to provide a clear audit trail and have detailed the justification of steps taken and decisions made;
- 5) Theoretical sampling and negative case analysis: I have continuously developed and modified any developing theory, integrating and exploring cases that don't fit as well as those which do fit developing theory;
- 6) Sensitivity to negotiated realities: I have shown awareness of the research context, appreciation of individual realities and have openly acknowledged the differences between the participants' interpretations and my own;
- 7) Transferability: Although never having expected my findings to be fully generalizable I suggest that findings may have applicability to the wider context of Educational Psychology but leave it to those applying them to make their own

judgment regarding the appropriateness of transferring these research outcomes to their own particular contexts (Robson, 2002).

In aspiring to these attributes, I have also kept in mind the evaluative criteria of credibility, originality, usefulness and originality, suggested by Charmaz (2006). Credibility within the research was ensured by establishing categories that were constructed from a wide enough range of empirical observations and strong links built between the data, arguments made and the analysis process. Originality was addressed through generating new theory and providing novel insights in this area of research. The usefulness of this study lies in its contribution to addressing the dearth of in-depth qualitative studies within this area. The research was considered to have resonance, in that its findings are linked to established literature and new contributions have been generated which make sense to participants and practitioners within the field. In addition to these criteria suggested by Charmaz, care was taken to ensure that theoretical explanations offered might have sufficient abstraction, in terms of their applicability, at least in some degree, to the larger world (Stern, 2007).

### **3.8. Ethical considerations**

This research was conducted within the ethical principles outlined in the BPS's Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2010) particularly respect; responsibility and integrity. It also took full account of the professional standards stated by the Health and Care Professions Council's Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (Health and Care Professions Council, 2012) particularly those relating to: best interests of service users; respecting confidentiality; obtaining informed consent and the duty to communicate effectively with service users.

In relation to acting with responsibility and integrity and taking the best interests of service users into account, I strived to give participants respect as individuals in their particular circumstances and roles, and valued their respective knowledge bases, insights, experiences and expertise. I considered the research plans from the standpoint of the participants to ensure the elimination of potential risks to their psychological well-being, physical health, personal values or dignity by informing research participants of any action they should take to minimise such

risks, such as agreeing to decline to answer questions, as they wished. Throughout this study, I aspired to valuing honesty, adequate clarity, and fairness in all my interactions and to promoting integrity in all facets of the research endeavour. I aspired to be honest and to develop faithful representation in conveying my research findings, whilst acknowledging the potential limitations and being sensitive to the needs and reputation of the hosting authority.

In relation to obtaining informed consent, I obtained informed written consent (Appendix 2) from all participants and verbal consent to audiotape the interviews and consent to use the data once recorded. Participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from participation in the research at any time.

In relation to respecting confidentiality, appropriate record keeping procedures were followed, with information being stored and anonymised to avoid inadvertent disclosure. Recordings and transcripts were stored in secure facilities within the LA office and should the research be published the anonymised data will be kept securely for a maximum of five years from the date of publication. I ensured confidentiality issues were explained to school leaders at the time of interview and where interviews were professionally transcribed, a professional company offering confidentiality agreements was used and interviews were anonymised.

In relation to the professional duty to communicate effectively with service users, participants were given a letter providing information about the study (Appendix 1) and the aims of the study were explained to them in person.

In addition to the above, ethical approval for this study was obtained from the University of East London's Research Ethics committee prior to the collection of any data.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

Constructivist Grounded Theory as an approach to data analysis has allowed the representation of the various realities, experiences and views of participants and the theory developed is recognised as being a constructed version of the phenomenon observed. It has supported the exploration of how commissioners and providers of EP services describe their feelings, opinions and perceptions of the work of EPs. As an approach, it recognises that the data and analysis are

created from shared experience and relationships between me and the participants (Charmaz, 2006) and have resulted in a theory which is dependent on my view and is my constructed, interpretative portrayal of how the work of an EP is experienced by commissioners and providers. Within this study, this approach has provided an efficient methodology for obtaining and analysing information about what is occurring when EPs are commissioned to work in secondary schools. It has allowed for the questioning of the implicit assumptions held by participants and an exploration of their personal values, beliefs and perceptions. The theoretical sampling steps have led to areas of enquiry that were unanticipated, at the start of this Grounded Theory journey. The process as a whole has led to the generation of a Substantive Theory that is topical, emotive and once again was unanticipated at the outset. The next chapter will explore this Substantial Theory and the five main themes that contributed to its construction. These will be evidenced by extracts from the original data.

## **Chapter 4 – Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The findings from the data are outlined within this chapter. The main themes and the Substantive Grounded Theory that was constructed from the data will be highlighted and explained. Initially, a broad outline of the constructed Substantive Theory is provided including the five main categories that contributed to this. This is represented through a visual model (Figure 4.2).

Subsequently, each of the five main themes and their associated categories, sub-categories and focussed codes are outlined in turn and presented within a visual model. Each visual model is arranged in a hierarchical way to illustrate the increasing levels of abstraction that have been applied to the data. The more numerous focussed codes and subcategories towards the bottom of the models have been integrated to construct the more abstract, less numerous categories and eventually a main theme, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. It should be noted that focussed codes usually contribute to sub-categories which contribute to core categories and subsequently themes, occasionally focussed codes contribute to categories directly and subsequently the main theme with one less level of abstraction. This allows the data to be usefully viewed as a bottom up hierarchy which is considered the most helpful way to view data within a Constructivist Grounded Theory study (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

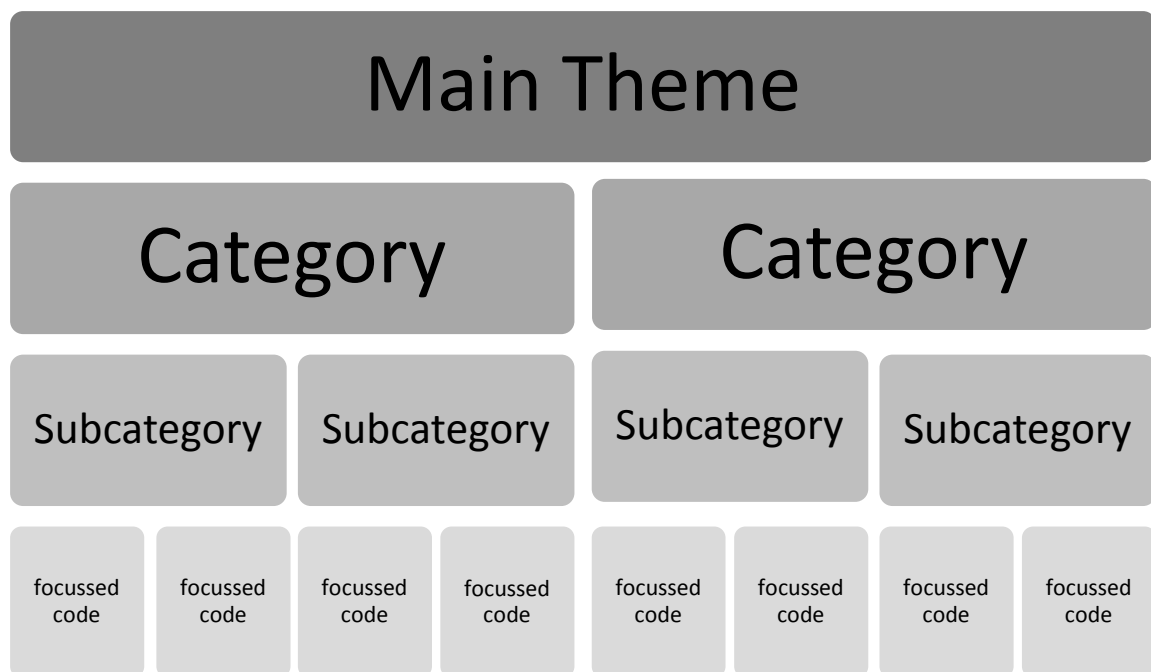


Figure 4.1 A visual illustration of the successive levels of abstraction applied

An explanation of each theme and its contributing categories, subcategories and focussed codes is provided with illustrative examples of occurrences within the original interview data. Examples of occurrences which most represent the focussed codes have been selected.

#### **4.2 An Overview of the Main Themes and the Constructed Substantive Theory**

During this constructivist grounded theory analysis five main themes were **identified. These** five themes related to various aspects of the EPs commissioned role in the secondary school context and are illustrated below in Figure 4.2.



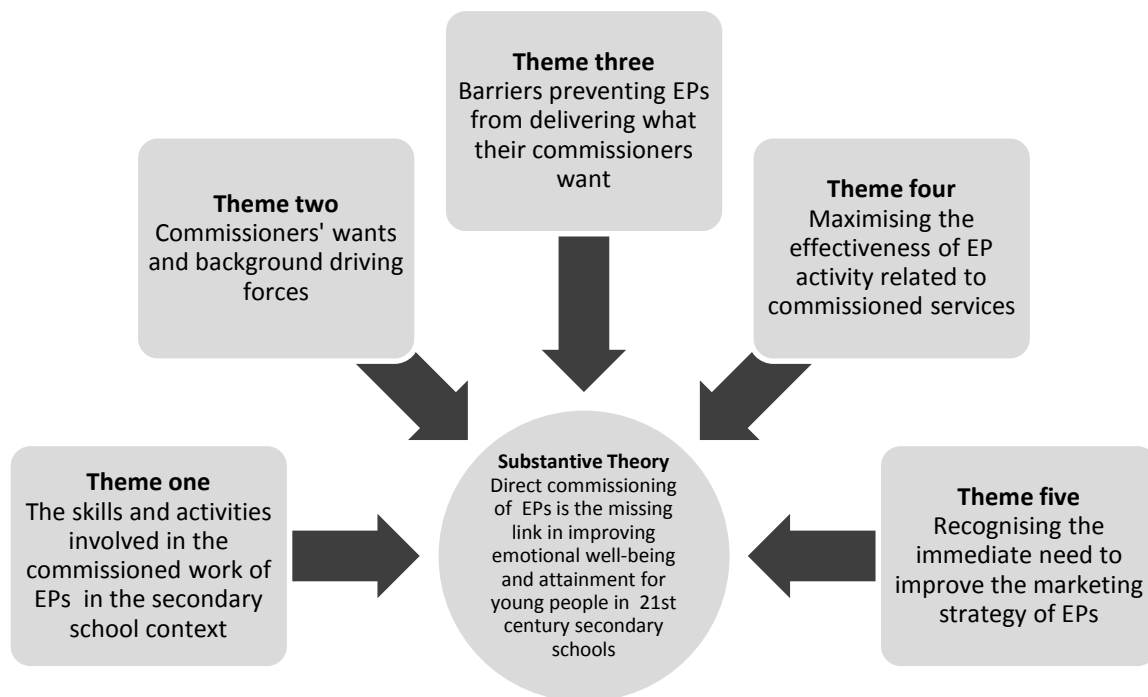


Figure 4. 2- A visual model of the substantive theory and main categories constructed

Five main themes were constructed from the data. The first theme related to the skills EPs brought to their commissioned role in secondary schools and the activities they were involved in. The next theme highlighted what it was that commissioning school leaders wanted from EPs and the driving forces behind these wants. The third theme indicated the barriers that were preventing EPs from delivering what their commissioners wanted. The next theme highlighted how the effectiveness of commissioned services could potentially be maximised. The last theme pointed to the need for EPs to recognise the importance of making improvements to how they market their services to current and potential commissioners within the secondary sector. Together, these five main themes contributed to the construction of a substantive theory which related to the commissioned role of EPs in secondary schools. This theory was, 'The direct commissioning of EPs is the missing link in improving emotional well-being and attainment for young people in 21st century secondary schools'. This theory offers a deeper understanding of the role of EPs working with secondary school leaders to improve the emotional well being and attainment of young people within their schools. It highlights that EPs are a resource which secondary school

leaders recognise and appreciate as having the knowledge and skills needed to support them in making improvements in this area. The theory also illustrates that although highly valued and appreciated by their school leaders, secondary schools are currently failing to target sufficient resources to securing adequate EP support to maximise benefits to young people. The theory suggests that EPs are well placed as professionals to work with secondary schools to improve the emotional well being and attainment of children and young people and they could and should be involved in this work to a much greater extent than their current involvement.

The five themes that have contributed to this theory will be outlined below.

#### 4.3 Theme One: The Skills and Activities Involved in the Commissioned Work of EPs in the Secondary School Context

This main theme; ‘The skills and activities involved in the commissioned work of EPs in the secondary school context’, provided an understanding of how the psychological knowledge and skills base of EPs, their particular professional approach and the activities they were seen to be involved in, were perceived by participants. This theme is illustrated in Figure 4.3.

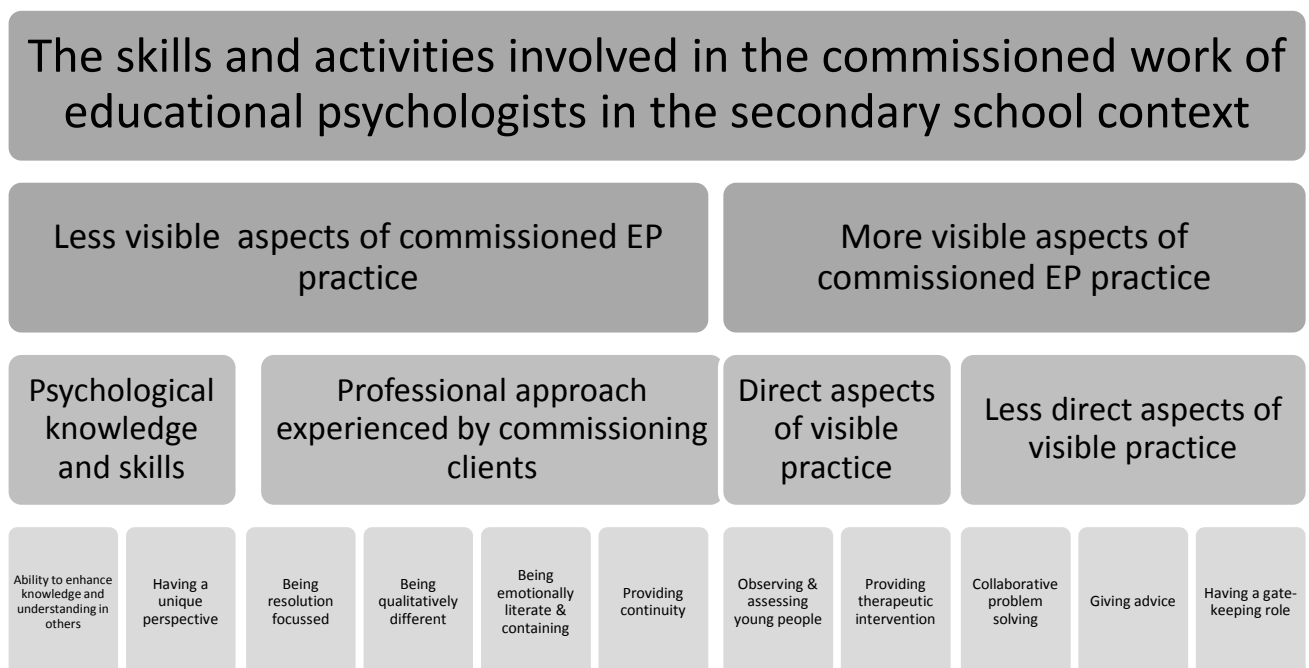


Figure 4.3- A visual model of theme one with contributing categories and focussed codes

Within this theme, there were two contributing core categories that related to aspects of the practice of commissioned EPs that were experienced as less visible and more subtle by the sampled school leaders and aspects that were experienced as being more visible and more obvious. These two contributing core categories and their subcategories and focussed codes are outlined below.

#### **4.3.1 Less Visible Aspects of Educational Psychology Practice**

This category 'less visible aspects of practice' of commissioned EP practice had two subcategories. These related to 'the psychological knowledge and skills' that commissioned EPs were perceived to have and the particular 'professional approach experienced by school leaders'. EPs implemented within their role. These two subcategories and their contributing focussed codes are outlined below.

##### **4.3.1.1 Psychological Knowledge and Skills**

The sub category, 'psychological knowledge and skills' is based on two focussed codes, one of these relates to EPs being seen to have the ability 'to enhance knowledge and understanding in others' and the other to EPs seen as possessing 'a unique perspective'.

###### **4.3.1.1.1 Enhancing Knowledge and Understanding in Others**

The first focussed code, 'enhancing knowledge and understanding in others', related to the ability of EPs to apply their knowledge and skills to developing knowledge and understanding in others. All the commissioning school leaders within the study considered EPs to be knowledgeable experts. One school leader, when asked what benefits she was seeking from an EP, responded:

*'Expert advice I would say, something that we don't know about as a school. So obviously, we've tried what we currently know about as professionals in our area and we're looking for more specific expert advice about where we can go with students. So it's their expertise that we're trying to draw on really'. (Int. 4. line 78).*

When asked about what particular skills EPs brought, another school leader explained:

*'Calmness and the ability to listen and specialist knowledge and expertise and a sense of being able to put into perspective because they have much more experience of this kind of work, type of problem is' (Int. 2. line 95).*

When asked to explain why she found working with an EP reassuring, one school leader talked about the EPs professional experience and knowledge:

*'I guess it's the kind of you feel like they must know what they're talking about because they're EPs. I mean I guess it's the kind of experience that you have in dealing with lots of children but also the kind of psychology side of things' (Int. 3. line 120).*

When asked how his school would be different if an EP wasn't involved, one school leader stated:

*'I think we would feel that we, for some of our most challenging youngsters, we had not given them the best shot of staying in stroke, succeeding in education. We would be aware that there was a level of wisdom we hadn't tapped into (Int. 1. line 214).*

Some school leaders experienced EPs as bringing a qualitatively higher level of thinking. When talking about what he particularly valued about his EP coming in one school leader explained:

*'I was I guess, I am a pastoral specialist but I am a teacher not an EP I haven't got that training to analyse behaviour and deep seated understanding of what makes kids tick.....I guess it's a different level of knowledge and someone who could engage pupils about their behaviour in a sort of, in a more specific way, that probably I didn't have the tools to do' (int.1. line 74).*

When asked what particular skills she considered EPs brought to project work one school leader stated:

*'A sense of intellectual curiosity and time. They can spare the time to do the research and ask the questions and raise the issues. Where as we just live this day to day' (Int. 2. line 200).*

When talking about the professional reassurance she perceived EPs to offer, one school leader said:

*'I wouldn't necessarily expect an EP to come in and know every intervention....what I would expect them to do is that higher cognitive stuff that maybe I just don't think about...'* (Int. 3. line 130).

Psychologists were often perceived to apply this expert knowledge and their higher order thinking to the enhancement of the skills of secondary school staff that was seen to result in them being in a stronger position to manage future difficulties. When asked how she bridged the psychological theory brought by the EP and practice in the classroom one school leader commented:

*'That's what I tend to use the SLA for is unpicking the absolute worst-case scenario ... and then identifying 10 -12 other children who've got those needs but in a lesser form. So whatever our EP suggests for that one really crystallised child, we could use it as a drop down feed for all the other children'* (Int. 6. line 57).

When asked about a specific time she had used an EP, she later added:

*'You have to say to staff think of this child and you've just got to model it (the approach the EP has suggested) for all other children in your class and that's really, really effective and staff have still got the resources that we put up them and those kinds of things. That was really useful'* (Int. 6. line 120).

In relation to enhancing understanding in school staff and parents, two EPs made a reference to themselves as being knowledge experts. When talking about the particular skills he brought as an EP one EP said:

*'I think the ability to actually see the child as the centre of the issue and actually understand the child within the context.....and the knowledge base that EPs have around child development and adolescent development and particular areas of need which stretch again across the curriculum'* (Int. 7. line 112).

When asked about the benefits she brought as an EP, another EP expressed the opinion:

*'I am not part of the system, so I'm outside the system I think and have that psychological body of knowledge. I suppose that's the perspective that you're coming from and it's a surprise I suppose when other people don't think that way'* (Int. 8. line 118).

One EP specifically mentioned bringing knowledge of evidence based approaches to her training work.

EPs more commonly talked about their skills base and the particular areas of need they had supported staff with. One EP mentioned that they were routinely involved in working with emotional needs, predominately at an individual level. Another spoke of working experience with self-harm and school refusal and another, with a young person with attachment needs who had experienced disengagement with learning. These EPs considered themselves to be able to apply techniques such as solution focussed thinking, to be child centred and context sensitive.

The consultant who commented on the findings of the study offered the opinion that in a consultancy role, being viewed by school leaders as an expert could be seen as advantageous.

*'So I think sometimes you go to a consultant and it is beneficial when you think, (inaudible 00:20:11), right, so I need to ask you this and your advice on this', and that's actually...I find that quite positive because you feel you're being valuable and valued, which is great. And actually I'm sure it's similar for a psychologist, you know, they will identify you're the expert, they're not an expert in that area, so they...Yeah, so they have confidence that you know the answer, and even if you don't have full confidence yourself at least you'll actually have more experience than they have in addressing it. So I think that's a positive thing...'* (Int. 10. para 71).

#### **4.3.1.1.2 Having a Unique Perspective**

This second focussed code related to the perception of participants that EPs brought a different outlook. Some school leaders considered this unique perspective to be particularly useful when they felt unable to make further progress with the resources and the knowledge they had. When asked what an EP had contributed to a meeting, one school leader had observed:

*'I suppose a fresh pair of eyes on it. ....it's a kind of fresh mind on it...the sorts of things she highlighted. Might be the kind of thing that I might miss'* (Int. 3. line 94).

When asked about the benefits she sought from an EP, another school leader said:

*'I want to see an alternative view....we haven't located the key that's when we get the EP involved'*. (Int. 6 line 126).

When asked about systemic possibilities for engaging an EP one school leader considered that the alternative view offered by an EP could be helpfully used more widely within his school:

*'I think they could look at a range of issues, it's that different viewpoint that is key for me'* (Int. line 159).

EPs saw themselves as objective but did not specifically describe themselves as having a unique perspective.

The consultant highlighted that consultancy firms often advertise their staff as having a unique external perspective.

#### **4.3.1.2 Professional Approach Experienced by School Leaders**

The subcategory, 'Professional Approach' related to the professional style and culture that EPs bring to their commissioned role. Four focussed codes contributed to this subcategory. These included; 'Being resolution focussed'; 'Being qualitatively different'; 'Being emotionally literate' and 'Providing Continuity'.

#### 4.3.1.2.1 Being Resolution Focussed

The first focussed code was, 'being resolution focussed'. This reflected how EPs were often seen to be motivated to find resolutions to problematic situations. Within the study, EPs were seen by school leaders as being able to; focus others, clarify, prioritise, illuminate situations, facilitate, mediate, influence and guide in a pragmatic way that led to learning being enhanced with barriers to learning being broken down. The following examples are illustrative of these perceived skills:

*'They are very focussed people and that's not just our EP that's what we've found with the consultations we've had and all kinds of things'* (Int. 6. line 152).

*'In a sense they could kind of pinpoint ....they could pinpoint specific areas which I don't think we always recognise as a school that when you're working with the students you can't necessarily see what the main issue is'* (Int. 4. line 120).

*'...to feel that we had back up from people whom you respect and you know what they're talking about and can come in and give practical help was invaluable'* (Int. 2. line 128).

One school leader considered that EPs had helped remove barriers to learning.

*'You know it's about finding a way in which a child best learns, so that may be about getting teachers to do things differently, produce different resources or how they say things...'* (Int. 3. line 284).

In relation to being perceived as resolution focussed, EPs saw themselves as being observant, able to question (sometimes about sensitive issues), able to reframe, being thoughtful, responsive and empowering. When asked about her particular skills, one EP offered the following opinion:

*'I suppose it's the questioning. Our ability to question and reframe and I suppose pick up on.. and observation but also noticing of things that people say or do that may just pass by other people...Ask a question that's gone into the nub of the matter and make people cry usually'* (Int. 2. line 124).

The consultant commented that consultants were often forcefully advertised as resolution focussed.



*'..so if you look at any business consultancy website for example they will say, you know, we (inaudible 0:02:59) of our resolution focussed, we bring high quality stuff, we can bring an external perspective, a unique external perspective and we have got the knowledge that can supplement knowledge shortages within your organisation'* (Int. 10. para 8).

#### **4.3.1.2.2 Being Qualitatively Different**

The second focussed code, 'being qualitatively different' conveyed how EPs were perceived, particularly by school leaders, in comparison with other external agencies. The code reflected that almost all school leaders drew a positive comparison, with some seeing EPs as being more experienced, more reliable and more knowledgeable than other external agencies. When asked how working with an EP was different from working with other external agencies, one school leader emphasised the uniqueness of the EPs:

*'Different animals aren't they bring different expertise..'* (Int.1. line 165).

When pressed about what was different about this expertise, he explained:

*'Skills base that psychological understanding of pupils'* (Int. 1. line 169).

This school leader also perceived EPs as being more satisfactory to work with:

*'You hear, um you hear staff, pastoral staff being quite critical of the work that is done by other agencies in terms of its validity. I can't remember hearing staff moan about the work of EPs'* (Int. 1. line 191).

Some school leaders drew similarities between EPs and Specialist Advisory Teachers in terms of collaboration levels, but differences in terms of consultative levels. One school leader offered the view:

*'It depends who you've got coming in really. Some specialist teacher advisors I'd say it's very similar-reports, advice and evidence which is very helpful. Some specialist advisors are much more hands on so will sit with us and write programmes of support for the students ..... I see that more as their role to do that with us whereas your role more to support us in understanding pupils more perhaps and take next steps'* (Int. 5. line 135).

One school leader considered EPs to be more proactive in telling schools what their needs were in terms of service delivery and some saw EPs as being more contactable due to the variety of different service access points available.

EPs were also often seen by school leaders as being more reliable, more realistic, more 'big picture focussed' and more understanding of the schools and education context. One school leader stated:

*'They always turn up for a start. They come from an educational bias so they understand where education comes from...they get school they get where you're coming from'* (Int. 6. line 156).

EPs were experienced by one school leader as being more able to relate to pupils who were having difficulties and as tending to work more in context than other agencies.

The EPs did not comment on qualitative differences between themselves and the professional approach of other agencies.

When comparing the professional approach of EPs the consultant commented that many of the skills that EPs were perceived by participants to bring were very similar to the skills that consultancy firms advertise to their school leaders.

#### **4.3.1.2.3 Being Emotionally Literate and Containing**

The next focussed code, 'being emotionally literate', highlighted the emotional literacy skills that commissioned EPs were seen to have by participants. They were frequently seen by the school leaders within the study to be prepared, motivating, focussed, thoughtful, resolute and resilient in approach. Some school leaders also saw EPs as being passionate, confidence giving, empathetic and warm, particularly when working with children. One school leader stated:

*'I think it's their training but I think you also have to be somebody who is quite passionate about education yourself and I think you have to have a certain amount of empathy within your makeup but also a significant amount of internal resilience really because our EP comes across as a very lovely caring woman but always gets the right answer. She's always very resolute'* (Int. 6. Line. 145).

EPs were seen by the school leaders as being able to contain them emotionally when working through more routine tasks or challenging situations. They were often seen by school leaders to be reassuring and to bring perspective and calm to situations. When asked about what EPs brought one school leader said:

*'Sometimes it's like reassurance that you're right. Because I have a real kind of imposter syndrome going on and despite having done this for years and years I quite often think, 'Oh I'm making this up as I go along' (Int. 3. line 105).*

When talking about the particular skills she experienced EPs as bringing, one school leader observed:

*'They bring calmness. They have this kind of aura of calmness and it kind of frees everyone's thinking around the table' (Int. 6. line 136).*

Another school leader talked about valuing particular incidences where EPs had provided useful support in relation to the experience of crisis and trauma. In relation to this, she found it reassuring that EPs were able to support where school leaders lacked skill and experience. She talked about appreciating delegating some responsibilities to an EP and feeling reassured to have their support. She gave the following examples:

*'I felt I was able to ask for help in a crisis from the EPs and they came over and helped us counsel the kids and did one to one therapy with them and gave us really, really useful advice...' (Int. 2. line 122).* She added:

*'We could kind of channel off...knowing that was all being dealt with meant that we could get on with all the rest of what was happening' (Int. 2. line 132).*

In relation to their emotional literacy, EPs saw themselves as being authentic, able to build rapport easily with children and to offer rare active listening skills. In relation to being able to contain others, the EPs talked about how they made themselves available to support school leaders and clearly saw every interaction with them as an intervention which in itself may have been perceived by school leaders as containing.

*'I suppose it would be a skill of bringing yourself to the meeting and not just being an agenda item or chairing a meeting. You know that actually it's a sort of*

*therapeutic environment ...I suppose that's from the training that every encounter is an intervention...and being available, being that kind of congruous person and that experience of listening as well as real proper active listening I think is not always available' (Int. 8. line 132).*

The consultant also recognised consultants as having a containment role, when talking about how they worked with clients.

*'So you are kind of hand holding throughout the process, and I think that's ...I think that's important to be able to do it' (Int. 10; para 25).*

#### **4.3.1.2.4 Providing Continuity**

The last focussed code contributing to this subcategory was, 'providing continuity'. This highlighted the ways in which school leaders valued being familiar with an EP and having a relationship over time. One school leader reflected:

*'...we have got a very close relationship with the EPs at x and we have known them for many years and we trust them...' (Int. 2. line 118).*

One school leader specifically appreciated having a named EP who she could contact when needed. She also valued other service access points such as the telephone contact line within the host service and knowing the area team as a whole including the administration team who support them. When asked about EP availability, she gave the following example:

*'Because you have the helpline it makes it more accessible and because we work with them regularly and we know their team so I mean our EP everything comes through her secretary so I know her secretary really well' (Int. 6. line 167).*

The EPs within the study spoke less about the importance of continuity with one EP making a minor reference to the importance of relationship.

#### **4.3.2 More Visible Aspects of Educational Psychology Practice**

This core category related to the more visible, more obvious aspects of EP practice. This category had two contributing sub-categories, which differentiate between the 'more direct' and 'less direct' aspects of EP practice. The term direct

referred to face to face work that EPs do more directly with children and young people and less direct referred to work they do in a more indirect manner often through others. These two sub-categories and their contributing focussed codes will be outlined below.

#### **4.3.2.1 Direct Aspects of Practice**

This sub-category 'Direct aspects of practice' of commissioned EP practice relates to the work that EP do more directly with young people. This category had two contributing focussed codes, 'observing and assessing young people' and 'providing therapeutic intervention'.

##### **4.3.2.1.1 Observing and Assessing Young People**

This focussed code was 'minor', that is, it was a code with only a small amount of supporting data, as references to it were not frequent. 'Observing and assessing young people', highlighted how the observation and assessment work delivered by commissioned EPs was perceived by school leaders within the study. It revealed that some school leaders particularly appreciated EPs seeing children in context. When asked how EPs compared to other professionals, one school leader observed:

*'They often start with an observation in a classroom, that's quite an important thing' (Int. 3. line 260).*

When asked about her more general experience of working with an EP, she commented:

*'She would observe pupils in class over sort of a series of lessons look at the way they interact with staff look at their behaviour... (Int.1. line 44).*

With regard to the assessments that EPs carry out, school leaders within this study had a focus on emotional literacy skills such as resiliency and sense of belonging, not traditional cognitive assessment or dynamic assessment. When describing meeting her EP for the first time, one school leader recalled:

*'She told me she was here to offer advice and support. She was here to do assessments on children. She talked me through each of the assessments ....I*

*didn't understand you could do resiliency scales and I really understand all that now' (Int. 6. line 68).*

In relation to the observation and assessment work carried out by commissioned EPs, school leaders particularly appreciated EPs seeing children in the context of their school or classroom rather than in a more clinical situation. It is interesting to note that the actual assessment work experienced by the school leaders within this study tended to have focus on emotional literacy skills such as resiliency and sense of belonging, not traditional cognitive or dynamic assessments.

#### **4.3.2.1.2 Therapeutic Intervention**

The second focussed code, 'Therapeutic intervention' related to the direct therapeutic interventions that EPs offer. School leaders experienced EPs as working directly with children using techniques such as Consultation and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy to explore their behaviour patterns, explore their views, shift perception and change behaviours. School leaders saw the EP as contributing directly to inclusion.

*'..we asked the EP service to help us with her so she's had one to one sessions of cognitive behavioural therapy with her ed psych and she's sitting exams' (Int. 2 line 63).*

*'(The EP) worked on really trying to change his view of the world I suppose and to improve his social skills so...He's now in year 9 ...and I don't hear much about him which is a good sign' (Int. 2. line 34).*

The EPs did not refer to more direct therapeutic elements of their work but talked more about consultative problem solving.

#### **4.3.2.2 Less Direct Aspects of Practice**

This sub-category relates to aspects of the EP role that less directly related to their work with individual children which often involve EPs working with other stakeholders on behalf of young people. This subcategory had three contributing focussed codes; 'collaborative problem solving', 'giving advice' and 'having a gate keeper role'.

#### 4.3.2.2.1 Collaborative Problem Solving

The first focussed code contributing to this category was ‘collaborative problem solving’. This code highlighted the collaborative problem solving work that EPs become involved in, usually within a consultation framework where the EP works collaboratively with key-stakeholders to help resolve the difficulties. In relation to this, school leaders experienced EPs as being involved with a wide range of need, significant degrees of educational and family turbulence and working collaboratively towards the promotion of learning and emotional well-being. One school leader commented on the impact EP involvement with some individuals within her school highlighting the impact of this involvement of other children’s individual difficulties being managed:

*‘So I think that individuals have been enabled to be more successful in their school career with the help of an EP that they would have been without and that impacts on the classroom. So that the classrooms are more calm and more successful because the child isn’t creating a disturbance because they have problems being managed’* (Int. 2. line 145).

One EP in particular saw herself as an active problem solver working with SENCOs on an individual and group basis.

*‘It’s thinking about the problem with a bigger contextual picture that makes them feel really supported’* (Int. 9. line 212).

In relation to collaborative problem solving, references to the term ‘consultation’, the framework often used by EPs when problem solving were rare for school leaders. When asked what other benefits she would like, if funding were less of an issue one school leader said:

*‘In my ideal world it would be lovely if you had an EP that popped in once a month....and chatted through what you’d been doing and you said, ‘I’d thought I’d try that, what do you think? Almost a consultancy thing’* (Int. 3. line 244).

One school leader portrayed consultation in an informal, ad hoc way and referred to consultation as conversation. She explained that although she valued conversations with the EP, valued what she learned and could apply what she

learned to a range of children, she also offered the opinion that the leadership team within her school valued reports over consultation time with an EP.

*'I do think our leadership see it as ticking the box exercise. Like seeing an EP ok tick the box. Get a report written on this child and move on. I don't think they see the value of them coming in and having general conversations'* (Int. 6. line 56).

With reference to consultation, some EPs saw themselves as actively engaged in the approach and talked about enabling others to find their own solutions, working collaboratively, bringing people together and empowering others. When asked about the skills she brought, one psychologist conveyed:

*'It can be a real buzz when we are in consultation together with parents and I sort of wonder about a particular hypothesis which she will jump on and come up with really tangible ways forward and practical ways forward around that hypothesis'* (Int. 9. line 170).

Another EP wanted to avoid cognitive assessment and to use more consultation in her work. Some were striving to find opportunities to do more joint thinking and to encourage schools to value more empowering ways of working.

The consultant talked about EPs being similar to business consultants as he recognised the empowering nature of their approach.

*'They (consultancy firms) say what we are doing is we go in and we will change the organisation so that we are working with the client in coming up with their own solutions... and I think that could equally apply to psychologists'* (Int. 10. para 15).

#### **4.3.2.2.2 Giving Advice**

The second focussed code, 'Giving advice,' highlighted the advice giving role of EPs. EPs were seen as a highly valued source of advice to the school leaders in this study. When asked about his experience of working with an EP, one school leader recalled:



*'She would explain to me her views of why the pupils were behaving in the way they were....but sometimes a deeper understanding of what was making the kids tick than I had, em and then she would advise on strategies...'* (Int.1. line 35).

When talking about meeting an EP for the first time, another school leader reflected:

*'So I got (the EP) in and said, 'What are we going to do about this child? How are we going to manage this child?' She took me through some really simple steps that we implemented'* (Int. 6. line 110).

In contrast, EPs did not talk about their advice giving role and capacity and talked more frequently about their collaborative problem solving role.

When asked specifically about advice giving the consultant talked about the dilemma professionals face when asked for advice and being trained to empower.

*'...when I am on a client's site I am in a situation where they actually will just say, what do you think we should do, and that's fine. And actually personally, I think it's absolutely fine. I think it's fine when they have a specific thing like that so say, 'well in my experience of what I've learned from other organisation to do x, y, z. What some consultants do that grates with me is that they will never actually answer that question or give advice and they will always say, well what do you think you should do. And I know where they're coming from in saying that, because it's sort of empowering them to think about it and what have you but sometimes it feels like a bit of a cheap response, if you know what I mean'* (Int. 10. para 18).

#### **4.3.2.2.3 Having a Gate Keeping Role**

The third focussed code, 'Having a gate keeping role' relates to expectations and beliefs surrounding the commissioned EPs role in the statutory assessment process. This code illustrated that some school leaders considered their SLA to be useful in helping them to secure evidence for statutory assessment and exclusions. It also highlighted pressure on SENCOs to obtain reports from EPs to

ease the transition of pupils to specialist placements. These quotes are illustrative:

*'...we're trying to get evidence for applying for statutory assessment for that student and we've used one of those EPs as part of our SLA to provide support for that so that's been really valuable'* (Int. 4. line 25).

*'Because it's about writing reports that's what they see the SLA money for and it doesn't matter how many conversations you have....all they want for the good of the school is to get them out and do something else with them. We're not a school that believes in exclusion so we need an Educational Psychology report to access additional support from somewhere'* (Int.1. line 379).

#### **4.4 Theme two: Educational Psychology Commissioners' Wants and Background Driving Forces**

This main theme, 'Educational Psychology commissioners' wants and background driving forces', provides an understanding of what secondary school commissioners would like to receive from EPs when they are commissioned and the reasons behind their requests. This theme is illustrated in Figure 4.4.



Figure 4.4 - A visual model of theme two with contributing categories and focussed codes

Within this theme there were two contributing core categories, 'what school leaders want from the commissioning of EPs?' and commissioners' 'underlying motivations, driving forces and goals'. The first category highlights what it is that school leaders want from commissioned EP services. The second provides an understanding of why EP services are being commissioned, that is, what are the motivations, driving forces underlying commissioning and what goals are school leaders trying to satisfy by commissioning EPs. These two core categories, the contributing sub-categories and their focussed codes are explained and summarised below.

#### **4.4.1 What School Leaders Want from the Commissioning of EPs?**

The subcategories which contributed to the core category 'what secondary school leaders want from the commissioning of EPs' are 'activities commissioners currently value' and 'what commissioners want or want more of'. These two sub-categories and the focussed codes will be outlined below.

##### **4.4.1.1 What Secondary School Leaders Currently Value?**

This subcategory highlights the particular aspects of commissioned EP practice that were valued by the school leaders within the study. Two focussed codes contributed to this, 'being given guidance' and 'direct intervention' and these are addressed below.

###### **4.4.1.1.1 Being Given Guidance**

The first focussed code 'being given guidance' highlighted this aspect of EP service delivery. In relation to this, one school leader particularly valued having a role model in their EP whose skills and ways of working they could try to emulate.

*'... I just need to model her because she's actually very good at it (parental liaison)'* (Int. 6. line 291).

Many school leaders also valued being given direct guidance by an EP when they were unsure what further action to take on behalf of a young person. Some particularly valued having current interventions critiqued by an EP to see where changes and adaptations were necessary. When talking about the contribution of the involved EP, one school leader said:

*'She's been really good, she's guided me through lots and lots of different things'* (Int. 6. line 31).

Some valued the training regarding specific approaches that EPs had delivered. One school leader commented:

*'I mean it seems to be working with a lot of students that was really valuable actually that training'* (Int. 4. line 22).

#### **4.4.1.1.2 Direct intervention**

The second focussed code, 'direct intervention' related to direct work with young people at an individual level being valued by school leaders. In addition, some school leaders particularly valued an EP working directly with pupils specifically to improve their emotional well-being. One school leader spoke about what she would miss if she couldn't access an EP.

*'So Educational Psychology, that service is like the way of trying to maintain calm and security and happiness for a few students, and if you took that away as well we really would be without a very important support to us'* (Int. 2. line 183).

Some school leaders also valued the EP working with pupils to shift beliefs and their perceptions. Others perceived their head teacher valuing the EP working directly with young people in relation to obtaining reports that would support moving young people to more specialist placements.

#### **4.4.1.2 What Commissioners Want More of?**

This subcategory related to aspects of EP service delivery that commissioners particularly wanted to receive or wanted more frequently. This category had three contributing focussed codes outlined below.

##### **4.4.1.2.1 Staff Development**

The first focussed code, 'staff development' highlighted that some school leaders within the sample particularly wanted staff development opportunities to; promote teacher understanding, change teaching practice and to develop self-awareness in teachers with regard to how they manage pupils. Training and critical friendly support were highlighted by one school leader as potential methods of

developing staff skill with one school leader highlighting the importance of trust in EPs working in a critical friend role with staff. When asked about training one school leader suggested:

*'I think there could be quite a bit of work done with the understanding of, I mean of, look all aspects of pupil behaviour...Em maybe supporting staff in terms of supporting their own kind of how they would respond in certain situations and give them understanding of themselves... (Int.1. line 310)*

Supervision opportunities for SENCOs to overcome feelings of isolation, to allow action planning and to help manage role conflict were wanted by some school leaders. However, some held the view that supervision was not seen as an area of input that would be prioritised by leadership team members. Supervision for leadership team members themselves was highlighted by some school leaders as being a service that would be useful. When asked her opinion about receiving supervision from a psychologist one school leader responded:

*'I would really value that because there are times when you're sort of stuck in the middle of conflict between teachers, house progress teams, SLT and the parents..... and having supervision where you could just talk that through and talk about how to get everyone back on side...That would be bliss'. (Int. 6. line 365)*

When asked if she would potentially spend some SLA time on that she replied:

*'I wouldn't be allowed to...because it's about writing reports for children and that's what they see the SLA money for...' (Int. 6. line. 377).*

When asked if she could see a role for an EP working with the school leadership team she stated:

*'I think they could do with some supervision actually...because they are so focussed on strategic that I think they actually need somebody once every half term to come in and say, 'Right all these strategic things but what do they actually look like and what is the impact on the child?' Not on numbers, not on figures but what is the impact on the child?' I think that would be a really, really useful activity' (Int. 6. line 389)*

#### **4.4.1.2.2 Problem Solving Opportunities**

The second focussed code related to some school leaders wish for more opportunities to problem solve in a collaborative way with an EP. Joint problem solving opportunities in the areas of specific learning difficulty/dyslexia, attendance issues, SEN liaison, challenging behaviour, parenting and a wish for support with problem solving during multi-disciplinary meetings were particularly highlighted by the school leaders within the study. When asked what she would choose to involve an EP in, one school leader suggested:

*‘Probably more problem solving specific issues.....Even someone who could come into lessons with you and observe what is going on with a fresh eye...I’ve found that I’ve used EPs a lot when I’ve been able to bounce ideas off. Because actually as a SENCO you don’t have anyone else you can do that with’* (Int. 3. line 497).

#### **4.4.1.2.3 Time**

This third contributing focussed code, ‘Time’, highlighted that many school leaders wished they could have more time working with an EP. This wish for more time was frequently mentioned by school leaders with school budget constraints being mentioned as a barrier to obtaining more. Some school leaders voiced a wish for more ‘regular’ time and some for ‘earlier involvement’ in problematic situations. These quotes are illustrative:

*‘If I was a head with an unlimited budget I want a full-time EP in school...’* (Int.1. line 297).

*‘If I could have a wish list, which I think is what you’re asking I would have an EP in for a day a week’* (Int. 6. line 340).

#### **4.4.2 School Leaders Underlying Motivations, Driving Forces and Goals**

The subcategories which contributed to the core category ‘School leaders underlying motivations, driving forces and goals’, are ‘schools being unclear and unknowing’, ‘drive for inclusion’, and ‘needing to meet Ofsted related goals and standards’. These three sub-categories and the focussed codes that contributed to them will be outlined below.

#### **4.4.2.1 Schools Being Unclear and Unknowing**

This subcategory, 'schools being unclear and unknowing' highlights that the school leaders within the study often found themselves unsure of how to resolve the difficulties and challenges young people, parents and staff face. Two focussed codes contributed to this subcategory. These included, 'commissioners wanting to be less reactive' and 'staff needing evidence based psychology'.

##### **4.4.2.1.1 Commissioners Wanting to be Less Reactive**

The first of these focussed codes, 'commissioners wanting to be less reactive', highlighted how schools tend to be chaotic environments where staff don't always have the skills, the knowledge or the time to explore the difficulties young people are experiencing. This was seen by some school leaders to lead to children being more at risk of exclusion as staff struggled to cope. When asked how her school would be different if they did not involve EPs. One school leader responded:

*'We wouldn't be thinking in very much detail. I think well, I know the number of exclusions would go up because we're not thinking about the child in so much detail. We're not thinking about what's going on under the surface. There would be much more fire-fighting rather than planned intervention...You see people fighting fires because they're not actually taking the time to sit and think what's actually causing this problem with this child'* (Int. 6. 190).

School leaders perceived themselves, and school staff to need support from an EP to help them analyse behaviour, understand how to manage needs of young people and to prevent exclusion. EPs were seen to support schools with objectivity, building psychological knowledge, ensuring a deeper analysis of problematic situations and developing planned interventions.

##### **4.4.2.1.2 Staff Needing Evidence Based Psychology**

The next focussed code, 'staff needing evidence based psychology' related to the finding that school leaders within secondary schools were often struggling to meet the needs of children who were experiencing difficulties. They were also struggling to develop a shared view of SEN amongst staff. Some school leaders

talked about often applying knowledge and strategies born from experience and intuition rather than evidenced practice. When asked why she found EP's reassuring one school leader openly stated:

*'A lot of what I do is just common sense stuff rather than delve into this child's mind and wonder what they're thinking and all that kind of stuff. I'm like well let's try that and if that doesn't work we'll try that and if none of that's worked lets ask an EP for some ideas'* (Int. 3. line 135).

Many school leaders wanted EPs to bring psychological knowledge, knowledge of evidence based interventions and strategies which would allow the skills of class-based staff to be enhanced. School leaders also wanted direct advice and access to the higher order thinking skills of EPs to enhance the ability of teachers and other school staff and allow them to cope more successfully with young people who were experiencing difficulty.

It was interesting to note that one school leader, a SENCO, seemed unsure what the term 'evidence based' meant. When asked about the evidence base underlying chosen interventions she responded that she knew the interventions were evidence based because she tested them. She said earnestly:

*'We test all our interventions. We have tests we do at the start and tests we do at the end.'* (Int. 5. line 344).

The need for earlier implementation of evidence-based practice was highlighted by some school leaders reporting that they often tried what they knew to resolve difficulties but when school based strategies were not working and situations had escalated, they involved the EP. One school leader divulged:

*'We've kind of hit the end of the road with some of these students so I think we wouldn't use our SLA time as a first resort, it's kind of our last resort really so we leave it for extreme cases'* (Int. 4. line 74).

This also illustrates that EPs are often working at the challenging end of the SEN continuum where the evidence-based practice they bring is much needed.



#### **4.4.2.1.3 Ofsted Related Goals and Standards**

The third contributing code, 'Ofsted related goals and standards', related to the efforts school leaders were making to execute their managerial and leadership roles, whilst also maximising provision for young people in the context of pending Ofsted inspections and shifting agendas. The influence of the Ofsted framework and the impact on the emotional well-being of some school leaders is illustrated by the following quotes:

*'To continue to meet the standards we currently are meeting so we are a very successful school and that's always threatened in the outside world'* (Int. 2. line 159).

*'I try to keep the impact of Ofsted away from my team to be fair. I just think if you're doing your and you're doing exactly what we ask you to do then we haven't got any problems...it's about free school meals rather than about SEN children and I come out of meetings saying I'm the SENCO, I'm not the free school meals person'* (Int. 6. line 420).

#### **4.4.2.2 Drive for Inclusion**

This subcategory highlighted the passionate drive of commissioning school leaders to ensure that pupils who experience difficulty were included within their schools. Two focussed codes 'wanting to meet need' and 'wanting to prepare pupils for life' contributed to this subcategory.

##### **4.4.2.2.1 Wanting to Meet Need**

The first focussed **code**, 'wanting to meet need', highlighted that school leaders wanted to make sure that the needs of all young people within their secondary schools were met as far as possible, particularly lower ability students. Their efforts to do this involved trying to enhance the quality of support offered, trying to maximise sense of belonging in young people and striving to develop their coping and attendance patterns to allow them to survive within mainstream education. This was illustrated by the following quotes:

*'I want every member of staff to understand the children's needs and to meet them'* (Int. 6. line 245).

*'I'd like to make sure that we put the right support in place for the students so they can really succeed. So I see that the main goal for me as a SENCO...to make sure that the support is tailored for each student and that we're getting it right so that they can survive in mainstream'* (Int. 4. line 158).

*'....I want them to feel like there's a place where they belong...Literally this room if you like...I want them to come here and feel safe and feel they can succeed'* (Int. 3. line 365).

*'The ed psych is working with him to try to change his behaviour to make him more conformist, to fit in better into the classroom because he'll be a better learner and he'll be more successful if he's emotionally secure and happier'* (Int. 2. line 54).

#### **4.4.2.2.2 Wanting to Prepare Pupils for Life**

The last focussed code, 'wanting to prepare pupils for life', related to school leaders wanting to ensure that young people were prepared and empowered to meet the challenges they would face in later life. Some school leaders talked about wanting to ensure young people leave school literate, with socially appropriate behaviour patterns, having aspirations and valuing life-long learning. When asked about his professional aspirations and goals, one school leader shared the following:

*'I fundamentally believe in the education this school provides for the local community am absolutely passionate about what this represents and how the full range of ability of pupils and the full range of social groups ...leave here well prepared to take positions in twenty first century society.....the challenge for the school now is how given the changing nature of society how we prepare them for life beyond school'* (Int.1. line 245).

#### **4.5 Theme three: Barriers Preventing EPs from Fulfilling their Commissioners' Goal-related Needs**

This main theme, 'Barriers preventing EPs from fulfilling their commissioners' goal-related needs', provides an understanding of potential barriers that are

impinging on the role of the commissioned EP in the secondary school context. This is illustrated in Figure 4.5.



Figure 4.5- A visual model of theme three and the contributing categories and focussed codes

Within this theme, that there were three contributing core categories that related to the barriers preventing EPs from fulfilling their commissioners' goal related needs. These were, 'school based barriers', 'national barriers' and 'service based barriers'. These three contributing core categories and their contributory focussed codes will be addressed below.

#### **4.5.1 School Based Barriers**

This category, 'school based barriers', highlighted internal systemic challenges that were potentially having a negative impact on the commissioned EP's ability to meet school leader's goal driven needs (outlined above in theme two). This category had two contributing focussed codes contributing to it, 'systemic school challenges' and 'time challenges'.

#### 4.5.1.1 School-based Systemic Challenges

The first of these focussed codes, 'school based systemic challenges', highlighted a range of internal systemic challenges that were potentially having a negative impact on the commissioned EP's role.

The first of these specific challenges related to schools was that despite the level of knowledge and skill that EPs were perceived by school leaders to have in theme one and the extensiveness of the staff development and inclusion goals articulated in theme two, some school leaders had not considered involving an EP in systemic change processes. They were seen to be continuing to choose to work at a less economical individual case level, holding the view that systemic work was less valuable than direct work with children. When asked what the benefits of working at an individual level were compared to working more systemically, one school leader explained:

*'Just to provide more specific advice about that particular child so I suppose it's more personalised, it's more tailored to the needs of one particular person and one particular area of need rather than dealing with more general approach' (Int. 5. line 406).*

Although one school leader did recognise that working case by case was often less effective she found herself being pressurised by head teachers to obtain reports that could support exclusion and placement decisions. She also perceived a lack of understanding from curriculum driven leadership teams about the importance of enhancing both emotional well-being and learning in young people. When asked how she could get these people on board to understand how effective it would be to have the EP work at a more systemic level. She provided this telling account of school based systemic challenges:

*'No not really. The thing is she has some specialist knowledge in bullying; she has some specialist knowledge in self-esteem work and those kinds of things. The SLT of our school is very curriculum based. In fact there's no pastoral members of staff on there....So getting them to understand that if we meet the needs of the children pastorally then they would become better learners is actually, really, really alien to them' (Int. 6. line 95).*

The second challenge was teachers and head teachers having different priorities from EPs. One school leader talked about her experience of teachers challenging the practicality of EP interventions within the classroom whilst also getting pressure from her head teacher to obtain reports not systemic interventions. She conveyed the following:

*'I think it's difficult to get staff on board because they still go, 'Oh it's the EP' ..they come out with these really wonderful things but they're not in the classroom and it also comes out of our SLA money so the Head would rather we spent the money on getting individual reports written for children rather than having whole school interventions' (Int. 6. line. 79).*

When asked if she had thought about employing a psychologist in relation to systemic project work, another school leader responded:

*'I haven't personally considered it and I think that would obviously be a funding issue, in terms of whether the head would agree to pay for it.....currently the three days tends to take up what we need them to do with the assessments and behaviour consultations and obviously they are separate. That's taken up just writing the reports and the observations' (Int. 4. line 67).*

The third challenge was the perception that leadership team members could hold stereotypical beliefs about the role of EPs. One school leader saw this belief as leading to the commissioning of educational leadership consultants in preference to commissioning the EP to be involved in leadership development and organisational change. When talking about why she thought a leadership team would not buy into working with an EP on leadership, she offered this opinion:

*'Because of the psychology tag actually. They'd go, 'Oh no. I'm not having a psychologist come in' (Int. 6. line 403).*

The consultant specifically commented on this perception and the importance of finding a way to establish trust.

*'Yeah, Because I think it is possible that you go in as a psychologist that they're thinking...well one or two things, one is, 'Oh no they read my mind, these people', which I'm not sure we can do much about that, but the other is like, 'Are they*

*checking up on me as a clinician or are they going to report to someone else and think that I am not a good clinician?'. So yes I think that trust is important' (Int. 10. para 46).*

He went on to suggest that consultants by making their role transparent, clarifying their purpose and establishing clear ground rules can help to generate mutual trust and understanding.

The last challenge related to EPs considering that opportunities for them to work in systemic ways were limited. EPs spoke about systemic opportunities being limited and schools often not thinking at a systemic level at all. One EP commenting on why she had not engaged in systemic work said:

*'I don't think they would think of it. I don't think they have thought of ... Yeh not sure that's on their radar' (Int. 8. line 96).*

When asked about his skills base, one EP stated:

*'There's the potential for training should it be taken up. The potential for systemic work, for project work but my experience has been that that's quite limited for a lot of EPs in a lot of secondary schools' (Int. 7. line 124).*

One EP talked about experiencing the planning capacity of school leaders as being quite reactive and not well considered. When talking about a time when a school had enlisted her support, she recalled:

*'It's quite ad hoc so I'll come and it will be 'Ooh we've got another half hour can you meet this young woman quickly and just see how she is?' or 'Will you just mind doing some supervision of our ELSA (Emotional Literacy Support Assistant), she's been having a rough week' or whatever yeh a bit haphazard' (Int. 7. line 78).*

Another EP highlighted her view that school leaders can need support to plan the use of her time. When asked about the benefits she brought as an EP, she said:

*'I think I can be really helpful in terms of having to prioritise so they're making sensible decisions around the time and ensuring that it has the greater impact on*

*the school as opposed to reactive bits of work where it's giving into parental pressure.. and pressure from in house...' (Int. 9. line 150).*

EPs also raised the difficulty of trying to secure access to staff to be able to engage them in thinking about systemic opportunities. When asked about her attempt to do this one EP reported:

*'Thinking about the whole school and how I can be supportive in shifting some of the thinking. Helping issues that are through the school and seeing where I could be helpful by asking them what's going on but I imagine it will just be 'look we've got half an hour –what do you do? What can you do? You know that's really rushed...and we don't have space.'* (Int. 8. line 57).

She highlighted it could be beneficial to target individuals at different levels of the organisation such as Heads of Year but recognised they could be resistant to taking on new ideas and that relationship building took time. This difficulty of EPs securing staff engagement in systemic projects may also be linked to the EPs experience of secondary schools. When asked what had got in the way of systemic plans, one EP said:

*'Access. The difficulty I experience within secondary schools is accessing the staff that are working with the children, and for them to be freed up by the systems within the school and have a clear understanding about what they might be doing and what they might get out of it'* (Int. 7. line 85).

When asked if time was an issue in relation to systemic work, he voiced:

*'Yes my experience is that many secondary school staff have their teacher directed time, they have their meeting time- most of which is already accounted for and directed in their sort of everyday meetings and mopped up by additional school time. Therefore anything that's seen to be additional doesn't appear to be entertained....'* (Int. 7. line 95).

Secondary schools were often perceived by EPs having disjointed systems and agendas. When asked about what she would like to offer schools, an EP proffered:

*'I would like to see more time invested in that aspect we talked about-systemic issues .....because I do see secondary schools in my experience as quite clunky in how they approach things, not all singing from the same hymn sheet so there's quite a bit of systemic work. A psychologist would be well placed to support members of staff (Int. 9. line 358).'*

#### **4.5.1.2 Time Challenges**

The next focussed code related to 'time challenges' and highlighted that lack of time, funding for more time, and time constraints to actually implement systemic projects. These were frequently considered to be barriers to commissioned EPs working more systemically and creatively within secondary schools.

One school leader talked about wanting to protect her allocated time should a crisis arise and being too afraid to spend it on systemic issues. She appeared to view systemic work as a sort of luxury that could take much needed time away from individual pupils. When asked about her experience of involving an EP in systemic research she stated:

*'If you've got three days and you use up two of those days in your first term you're kind of worried about what if I get to summer and there's a major issue and we really need them. I don't want to use it up on anything terribly trivial' (Int. 3 line 177).*

When talking about being offered support from an EP regarding a whole school project one school leader offered:

*'In days gone by I would have gone, 'Oh yeh great let's do that' but because now you have to pay for everything you kind have got to be really careful about what you decide to use the EP for and you kind of almost need to hang onto it and hang on to it, in case you need it ...I don't want to use it up on anything terribly trivial' (Int. 3. line 170).*

One school leader who had experienced EP involvement in systemic change projects reflected:



*'So research projects are really helpful as well. It's just that they take a massive amount of time and organisation and it's quite difficult to spare the time... and it's such a big school that you can't easily do that sort of thing' (Int. 2. line 77).*

One school leader who had not engaged an EP systemically within her school, expressed appreciation of off-site training opportunities offered by EPs. This may reflect the organisation and time demands of organising school based training with school leaders finding it more convenient to go off-site to be trained.

These school leaders' accounts of time constraints contrast quite sharply with the experiences reported by some EPs within the study. Despite being seen by school leaders as a highly limited resource, some had found themselves chasing school leaders to spend time in their schools.

*'... it's kind of chasing them and saying, don't forget you've got EP time, you've paid for this why have you not used the time' (Int. 8. line 31).*

One EP mentioned her frustration at how people often comment on how limited a resource she is but still fail to plan productively and creatively regarding its use.

*'It's like you're valued and a really scarce resource but when you're not there..I imagine they just forget you. The SENCO perhaps..well they're all, "hang on I've got my day I need to use this term who do I need to prioritise' (Int. 8. line 174).*

Another EP highlighted:

*'Both my secondaries have three days, One secondary that needs way more time than that and another that I think don't always use the time....they'll go through phases of using up significant amounts of SLA time in a short period and then will be difficult to get in touch with them for a while' (Int. 9. line 436).*

The consultant commented that there were times when consultants found it difficult to get their clients to commit time in their diaries for the work they were undertaking together. He suggested the following:

*'Some of that can be solved by sort of advanced planning but the other bit I think is there is a bit of they need to be able to see the benefit of what you're doing because otherwise their diary just won't...So I think part is helping them to*

*understand what the benefits are...So as I say...the case studies ..so you can actually see what the tangible benefits are....' X is now doing that in a better way, that issue has now been resolved, de, de, de so it could be qualitative rather than quantitative. Just showing the benefits can help so they understand that it's a valuable use of time' (Int. 10. para 69).*

#### **4.5.2 National Barriers**

The next category, 'national barriers' related to the nationwide challenges that school leaders perceived to be getting in the way of reaching their professional goals and maximising EP support in helping to attain these. This category had three focussed codes contributing to it, 'Ofsted pressures', 'government policy' and 'societal shifts'.

##### **4.5.2.1 Ofsted Pressures**

The first of these, 'Ofsted pressures' related to how school leaders within the study perceived the demands of the Ofsted inspection process and how this was impacting on their ability to meet the needs of children with SEN within their schools. This focussed code highlighted the conscious decision by some school leaders to base their practice on what was in the best interests of children not necessarily inspection demands. It also highlighted that school leaders want to find a balance between Ofsted demands and practice that they considered to be in the best interests of children, and the potential of them being distracted by the need to respond to Ofsted demands such as data recording. Dilemmas such as the perceived conflict between the attainment focus of Ofsted and the curriculum needs of each child were identified. Interestingly, feelings of threat and anxiety were expressed in relation to the perceived lack of fairness and the perceived inconsistency of current Ofsted judgements.

*'...we've got to focus on free school meals and it makes it very difficult for you to put SEN at the top of the agenda at the moment, and I have been known to go in and say, 'Look I need this for these children and by the way four of those are free school meals...because it's playing the game but it feels like it's game playing all the time to please Ofsted. It's not about making sure that children are getting the best education they can' (Int. 6. line 436).*

*'So Ofsted it seems to me has a record of setting schools up to be whatever and then coming in and cutting them down, like outstanding schools. There's a strong belief here that they we're just outstanding and now the goal posts have shifted....that's all a real threat and a real source of anxiety to schools and to leadership teams, trying to meet the challenges and meet all the targets but not really feeling that you're being fairly judged from year to year' (Int. 2. line 160).*

#### **4.5.2.2 Government Policy**

This focussed code, is related to aspects of government policy that could potentially detract from commissioned EPs being able to fulfil the wants and needs of their school leaders. Two school leaders in particular expressed immense frustration, and a sense of powerlessness relating to governmental policy shifts and the negative impact on budgets levels and the number of children they had on roll. These school leaders expressed that decreasing rolls and other budget cuts were affecting their ability to buy in the level of service they needed. One school leader voiced the opinion that services were easier to access in the past, particularly direct work with children and that direct purchasing of non-LA EP services (private EP services) had been contemplated within his school. One school leader voiced the opinion that valuable online resources had also been lost with successive government changes. The frustrations about budget cuts and the potential direct 'buy in' of Educational Psychology are mirrored in these quotes:

*'People don't forget, even in the landscape we have now, the advice of the EP is good. You don't hear people complain about ed psychs, it's the landscape we're in, it's the lack of resource' (Int.1. line 202).*

*'Models we've spoken of in a changing landscape is directly employing an EP between schools it's not a service we would just let run dry because we recognise the validity of it. It's incredibly frustrating, being in school at the moment, trying to tap into services, some of the services from the authority' (Int.1. line 215).*

*'It's something that I don't feel we should have to do we need Educational Psychology within school it's a nonsense we don't, not the authority's fault*

*funding's been stripped, it annoys me but that's the landscape we're working within it annoys me we need the provision ....you're limited by what's in the bank as it were, unfortunate necessity I guess' (Int.1. line 404).*

Education policy relating to the former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove's time in office as education secretary (2010 - 2015) was seen by some as not being inclusive and applying successfully to children experiencing difficulties with learning. The approach was seen as being too traditional and the lack of vocational options was a concern to some. One school leader's views on current governmental agenda, is illustrated below:

*'Where do you start? They're just not thinking about all the children. They're thinking about middle class children. They're thinking about kids that go to universities. I mean the latest thing. Gove's latest one about our children competing in the global economy and stuff, you know our kids need to be able to compete in the local community never mind globally' (Int. 3. line 438).*

*'They just view of children and what children need. The vocational things don't count in league tables anymore. You can only count two. So we've got kids now having to take GCSEs that shouldn't be taking GCSEs and then they're going to not feel a sense of success because they're not going to do very well. It's that real frustration of actually every time they make a decision it affects some child somewhere and they're the last thing that they actually think about' (Int. 3. line 464).*

#### **4.5.2.3 Societal Shift**

The last focussed code contributing to 'National Barriers' was 'societal shift'. This highlighted some of the challenges within society that are impacting on schools and the young people, many of which are causing great stress and unhappiness such as marital conflict and poverty, exacerbated by financial cuts. Specific behaviours such as aggression and self-harm were highlighted and specific pressures on young people such as the impact of media images on self-esteem and self-confidence and the negative impact on young people's sense of self with the rise in cyber-bullying. These quotes are illustrative:

*'I want them (EPs) to be there because we've experienced so many cuts and we've lost so much help, and it's a time when children are more and more under pressure and more and more unhappy in our experience..'* (Int. 2. line 172).

*'...boys hurt other people, girls hurt themselves...again it's about unhappiness and trying to help them deal with the problems of self-image and the culture that they live in which is all about being thin and beautiful.... and there's cyber-bullying which is a huge problem for school everywhere and it's all about children's self-esteem and self-confidence and it's not good'* (Int. 2. line 193).

### **4.5.3 Service Barriers**

The third category, 'service based barriers' related to issues within the service which could potentially be barriers for EPs to meet the goal related needs of their secondary school leaders. This category had three focussed codes: 'Commissioning dilemmas', 'Time allocation' and 'Systemic resistance'

#### **4.5.3.1 Commissioning Dilemmas**

The first of these focussed codes, 'commissioning dilemmas', recognised that although the SLA arrangement was seen as being generally successful by EPs, some quandaries existed in the commissioning process for them. For example, one EP talked about being concerned that the system has become too resource driven and some children who needed the services of an EP would not receive these in the absence of a centrally retained core service and/ or an SLA with the EP service.

There was some disparity of view across the EPs as to how directly they should be involved in commissioning conversations with one EP talking about feeling uncomfortable with having to directly sell services when schools requested input and finding this to be incongruous with being in a helping profession. She stated that perhaps the sales role should be left to senior managers not the EPs on the front-line. Elaborating on this, she offered:

*'I don't know. I suppose it's the role, being kind of the helping profession. I think maybe it's feeling that actually that's a managerial role rather than a foot soldier*

*kind of role...to really plug what we do and sell our services and get people on-line' (Int. 8. line 333).*

In contrast, another EP talked about wanting to be more involved in the process of the direct commissioning of his work. When discussing commissioning he stated:

*'I think that what is really difficult is the fact that the conversation that was had with her (the head teacher) when the SLA was commissioned did not involve me. So I have no sense of what it is that she was hoping for ....neither I nor the SENCO had any idea what the conversation was about or the content' (Int. 7. line 184).*

A fear of losing the opportunity for principled negotiation in the context of being bought directly by schools was voiced by one EP:

*'I suppose the concern is, do they then dictate what you do and I think the negotiation has been available in all schools. There's that kind of danger.' (Int. 8. line 315).*

Being unaware of competitors' contribution to systemic training work in schools was raised as problematic by one EP who said that:

*'....I'm not sure whether secondary school staff get much training in these sorts of areas at all. If they do they're not getting it from EP services. So I don't know where they're getting it from if they are at all' (Int. 7. line 255).*

Lastly, being less experienced as an EP was highlighted by one EP as inhibiting their ability to challenge secondary school leaders and guide them towards more effective ways of working. When talking about the benefit she brought to her role, one EP openly reflected:

*'Where I've been quite new in the role myself I think that's been maybe a longer process for me in terms of knowing what to do with secondary schools because they come with very specific ideas and as I have already touched on I probably ran with their very specific ideas around individual work. As I have grown in confidence and experience, I now feel quite skilled in being able to listen to what*

*their requests are. Sort of reflecting those back and wondering about that in a helpful way* (Int. 9. line 140).

This EP also highlighted that at times when SENCOs were the indirect commissioners of services and in direct receipt of EP input, EP efforts and the effects of the SLA could be diluted or lost if SENCOs were not well supported by the rest of the school staff.

#### **4.5.3.2 Time Allocation**

The next focussed code, 'time allocation' reflected the tight time constraints within which EPs were expected to deliver their role in creative cost effective way. Some EPs felt frustrated that some schools clearly did not have sufficient time in the three days to meet the needs of the young people they had there. Whereas, other schools were seen to be reluctant to use the time they had and were frequently needing to be reminded by EPs to have the time they had commissioned delivered.

One EP demonstrated recognition of the context of financial cuts and time restrictions she was working in and her desire to compensate for these by working more systemically. She explained:

*'I think what I was more attracted to was thinking about psychology as a way to help and also thinking about the environment that we're in with the cutbacks and restricted resources and time and that sort of thing. So I think the way I shifted is thinking about not doing too much direct work and thinking that my role is really to develop teacher and parents...so it's a bit more cost-effective'* (Int. 8. line 8).

However, she talked about her plans to work more systemically being hampered by the three-day allocation to schools being insufficient to accommodate them.

This EP also described how she had outlined systemic possibilities with a school but school leaders had difficulty recalling these and thinking about the EP as the first port of call when certain services were required from an external agency. When describing this she said;

*'...I suppose it's because maybe we only have a day a term so the EP can't be a go to because of time'* (Int. 8. line 299).

#### **4.5.3.3 Systemic Resistance**

The third focussed code, 'systemic resistance', related to schools being seen by EPs as being inflexible and often resistant to change. When asked how she could widen her influence in relation to exclusions, one EP suggested:

*'I suppose if I can widen my audience there may be a bit more ground swell...But then you have the resistance and there's so much involved in that really so the relationship I suppose will take time'* (Int. 8. line 273).

A perceived lack of flexibility in secondary schools was highlighted by this comment later in his interview. When asked about the impact of EP involvement this EP said:

*'I think they see a lot of the work around the individual children and you know the number of times secondary schools would say things like 'we can't do that because the systems don't allow them to do that' or 'it's not possible for us to do that'. Some are more flexible than others but's very much around 'this is what we provide and children can fit into it rather than us needing to change'* (Int. 7. line 170).

When this EP was asked how a secondary school would be different if they did not involve an EP, he answered with attitudinal resignation in his tone and body language:

*'But I'm not sure there would be a huge amount of impact in terms of systemic change... Sadly, I'm not sure they would be that different. I think the impact in a lot of secondary schools that I've worked in and I know that colleagues have worked in, they would probably describe their impact as being fairly limited..'* (Int. 7. line 165).

#### **4.6 Theme Four: Maximising the Benefits of EP Activity Related to Commissioned Services**

This main theme, 'Maximising the effectiveness of EP activity related to commissioned services', provides an understanding of what can be done to maximise the benefits of commissioned EP service delivery in the secondary school context, This theme is illustrated in Figure 4.6.



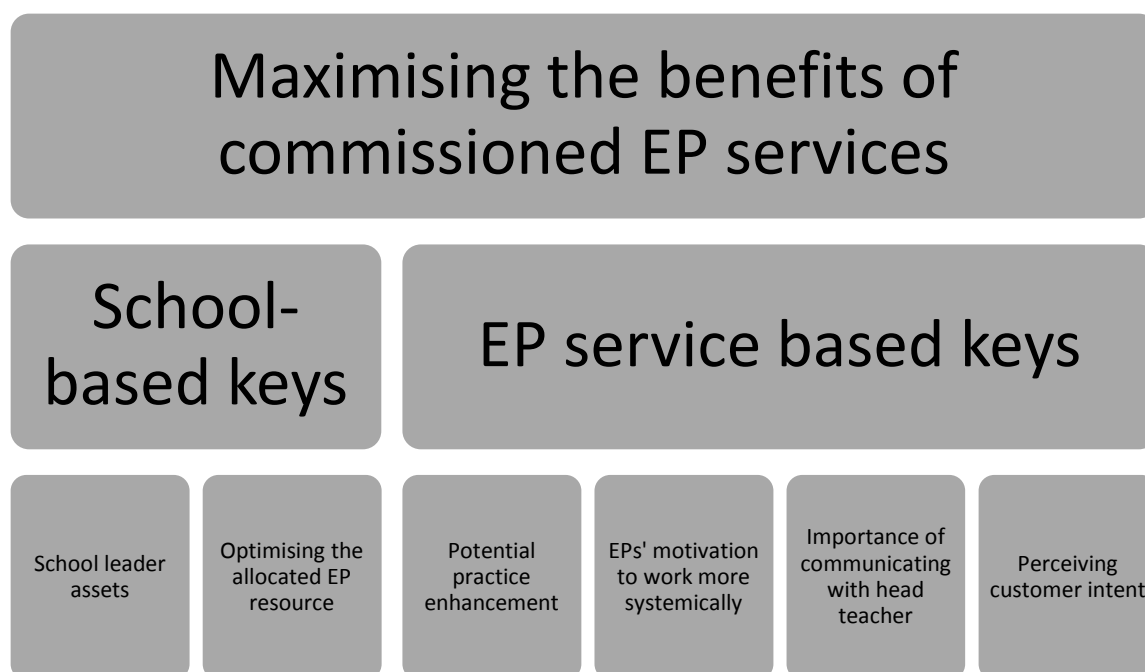


Figure 4.6 - A visual model of theme four with contributing categories and focussed codes

This theme, 'Maximising the benefits of commissioned EP services' highlighted the good practice within schools and EPs which could potentially contribute to EP services being better able to meet their school leaders' needs and being seen by them as being beneficial. Within this theme, there were two contributing core categories.

#### **4.6.1 School-based Keys**

This initial category, 'school-based keys', incorporated supportive practice and attitudes present within school leaders in schools that could help to optimise the ability of EPs to meet the needs of their commissioning school leaders. This category had two contributing focussed codes, 'school leader assets' and 'optimising EP resource'.

##### **4.6.1.1 School Leader Assets**

The first code, 'school leader assets' related to the skills and attitudes of the school leader who was commissioning the EP, either directly or indirectly, that could be supportive to EPs in their quest in meeting school leader needs. These

assets included qualities such as a school leader having the ability to be curious about what an EP could offer, being willing to work closely and collaboratively alongside them and truly valuing the EP's professional contribution. The ability to plan, organise and time manage well were also potentially beneficial assets. Working with school leaders who recognised the importance of meeting the needs of young people whilst also recognising the limits of their particular professional skills and experience were also potentially beneficial. In addition, school leaders who recognised the limitations of direct work compared to systemic input and who were already involving or willing to involve EPs in a wide range of activities at an individual and more systemic level were beneficial. School leaders who had thought about other creative ways to engage an EP and were willing to work with individuals at different levels within the organisation were seen as potentially supporting the work of EPs, allowing them to meet their school leaders' needs in a more time efficient and creative way. An example of such an approach is illustrated in the following quote. When asked what she would do if funding were less of an issue, this school leader indicated:

*'I would like them (the EP) to have a rolling programme of meetings with heads of department and house progress leaders....to almost pick her brains really about what they are doing... because I feel quite blessed that I am allowed to have that professional conversation'* (Int. 6. line 341).

The consultant introduced the term 'consultant savvy' and highlighted the benefit of having school leaders who know how to get the best out of the consultancy services they have purchased.

*'In the consulting world a phrase that is often used and people say, that they don't use their consultants very well, they are not consultant savvy or there are firms who know exactly how consultants work and can use them very effectively. But there are others who don't even scratch the surface of the skills that the consultant can offer'* (Int. 10. para 27).

The consultant suggested that working with a school leader who had the authority to ensure the appropriate staff member was given time to work with the EP would be particularly helpful.

*‘Often consultants talk about a joint team, so when they go into some work they work with...their people and from the client, which I suppose will be your school, who are seconded to work with them’* (Int. 10. para 10).

#### **4.6.1.2. Optimising the Allocated Time**

EPs working with school leaders who were creative in optimising the allocated EP resource by utilising every possible service access avenue e.g. the contact line and the learning and behaviour consultation opportunities, options which were free to schools at the point of delivery, was useful. This potentially freed up time for their SLA allocation to be used in a more creative way.

School leaders who explored other funding streams such as resources allocated to children in the care of the LA and Pupil Premium funding were beneficial as doing this could potentially enhance the EP resource they had access to. When asked about how she planned to increase the EP time she had, one school leader stated optimistically:

*‘I’m trying to get seven days to try and get x in to do some training and I am playing a game with free school meals, pupil premium stuff’* (Int. 6. line 458).

#### **4.6.2 EP Service-based Keys**

This initial core category, ‘EP service based keys’ reflected what EPs could do to improve their professional practice that could help to optimise their ability to meet the needs of their commissioning school leaders. This category had four contributing focussed codes, ‘potential practice enhancements’, ‘EP motivation to work more systemically’ and ‘the importance of communicating with head teachers’ and ‘perceiving customer intent’.

##### **4.6.2.1 Potential Practice Enhancements**

The first code, ‘potential practice enhancements’, related to practice that EPs should continue, do more of, less of or potentially change to help ensure that they were maximising their ability to meet school leader needs in a creative, time and cost efficient way. EPs recognising school leaders as true customers who were trying to do the best for the young people in their school was seen as potentially helpful. The interview data from the EPs in the study suggested that some EPs

clearly did see their school leaders as having positive intentions to do the best for the children within their school. As one EP stated:

*'I really think they have the best interests of the children at heart..'* (Int. 8. line 238).

Although well intentioned, some school leaders were seen by EPs to be struggling to meet needs of SEN population. EPs recognising the difficulties their school leaders face at times could also be helpful. When asked about the goals of her school leaders, one EP explained:

*'I think both of them (the school leaders) are struggling to meet the needs of their SEN population at the moment' ....the main aspirations for her are to help her colleagues in different departments'* (Int. 9. line 308).

EPs working to obtain a clear picture of what exactly their school leaders were struggling with was suggested by an EP as being helpful in shaping the offer or menu of potentially useful services. In relation to this, EPs working to detect patterns in the needs of school leaders was also seen by EPs to be useful. EPs understanding government policy and examining what secondary schools today are trying to attain in relation to this such as maximising learning, improving behaviour and enhancing social inclusion, could be beneficial, particularly if this information is used to further shape the offer EPs make to secondary schools. When asked how he perceived his school leader's aspirations and goals as a school, one EP stipulated:

*'Same as any other school in the sense that they're trying to actually make sure the teaching and learning is as good as it is, can be and to make sure that children actually achieve the highest level of attainments in their public exams ultimately'* (Int. 7. line 208).

This EP also highlighted the possibility of EPs investing time and resources to develop universal offer that were specifically suited to secondary schools systems.

*'Potentially there needs to be a more uniform offer in terms of these are the sorts of things we think potentially most secondary schools could manage to incorporate and then use this as a starting point.'* (Int. 7. line 308).

EPs tailoring their offer to meet their school leader's professional goals and working to deliver services in a way that works with the strengths of the school as an organisation was highlighted as potential way forward. An analysis of the data suggested that there was a perception amongst EPs that they were unsuccessfully pushing their existing ways of working onto secondary school systems. This was without carefully examining and reflecting upon secondary school systems to see what aspects of their current offer best fitted the existing system and what aspects need to be developed or changed to fit more effectively.

*'I think it's worth thinking about how we work and what sort of work secondary school systems are able to accept and how that's best achieved. I don't think we've got that right yet in terms of what we're doing and how we are doing it'* (Int. 7. line 304).

Given the three-day time period involved in a typical SLA with school leaders, the consultant highlighted the importance of being really clear with them about what is possible in the time available and the importance of suggesting what might be possible to deliver.

*'Because especially if it's three days. I would say the commissioner or the school....having absolute clarity of what you offer is essential because I mean and I think sort of case studies and examples of what you can do...'* (Int. 10. para 59).

He went onto say:

*'...it's also quite useful if it's that short a time to almost have a menu of things that they can choose and say, you know...you can still tailor it...'* (Int. 10. para 60).

He then added that it may help to present a portfolio of options.

*'This is the portfolio of things we can do', it's then thinking, 'Okay, actually I'm interested in those because we've got some needs in this area (inaudible*

00:16:59) *that' and then it's you responding and saying, 'Okay, we can address those and here's how we will tailor that to your school' (Int. 10. para 65).*

EPs finding ways to raise their school leaders' awareness of the links between emotional well-being and learning was raised as important in maximising the impact of EP input, particularly in relation to staff who had purely curriculum related goals and no pastoral responsibilities or interests. When asked about the benefits she brought, one EP explained:

*'I would like to be a bit more effective in terms of the whole system and thinking about well how do we shift into something more nurturing and there's more continuity between all the different teachers and linking up that idea of learning and behaviour and emotions...'* (Int. 8. line 107).

Obtaining access to information about what training secondary schools are receiving, had received and were planning to receive was seen as a strategic need. One EP admitted:

*'Well I would go down the pathway of thinking about language development, thinking about ASD...thinking about those sorts of topic areas and I'm not sure whether secondary school staff get much training in those sorts of areas at all. If they do, they're not getting it from EP services. So I don't quite know where they are getting it from if they are at all'* (Int. 7. line 253).

EPs seeing themselves as having staff development skills and creating opportunities to be involved in joint thinking with school leaders to negotiate systemic inputs could be beneficial. Actively listening out for training and staff development needs during everyday consultations and continually examining provision gaps was seen as potentially useful in maximising their role and seen as useful. In relation to these developments, one EP suggested:

*'..to take a breather and to think in a different way. To think of what's underneath, what's going on...?'* (Int. 8. line 111).

In relation to staff development, the consultant raised the importance of considering transfer of skill as a measurable outcome when evaluating the impact of the work that has been done.

*‘And actually when consulting agreements are sold, one of the sorts of deliverables is a transfer of skills. So when you look back on a project and say, have we actually transferred the skill in this particular area to you, so that’s quite relevant’*(Int. 10. para 11).

Whilst widening the range of staff EPs worked with, one EP considered there needed to be a recognition that many secondary school staff had limited experience of working with external agencies and therefore may be unsure of the expectations surrounding this work.

EPs recognised new SENCOs as a potentially valuable opportunity to reset ground rules and to articulate the EP role. EPs being flexible, establishing a good rapport with SENCOs and highlighting SENCO strengths and supporting and empowering them to identify and work through change agents, encouraging them to protect time for projects and to disseminate good practice was seen as beneficial. As one EP commented:

*‘About the relationship with the SENCO, it isn’t just that but that’s perhaps where I’m starting and building up that overall relationship. I think it’s about making sure that personally I’m adapting to ensure that I’m working at my best with that person...build up that rapport’* (Int. 9. line 188).

When working with staff less familiar with external agencies or new to role, the consultant pointed to the importance of establishing ground rules, sharing mutual expectations and reviewing whether mutual expectations were being met.

*‘One thing we do a lot of on consulting engagements....at the beginning of an engagement or project we would say, ‘Okay, this is what we’re going to do, this is our plan.....lets share our expectations as to how we’re going to work together...what you could then do is at the end or partway through the engagement you could say, you know, ‘We had these expectations at the beginning, how are these going...’*(Int. 10; para 38)

Recognising the possibility that newly qualified EPs could lack confidence working in the secondary school context was highlighted as a potential need.

Lastly, it was suggested within in the data that offering more routine appointments could help ensure that school leaders used their time more consistently and effectively.

#### **4.6.2.2 EPs' Motivation to Work Systemically**

The next focussed code, 'EP motivation to work systemically' related to the universal wish of the EPs to work more systemically with a greater range of need. This is illustrated by the following quote:

*'I suppose my imagined scenario is to sit down with them (school staff) and have a bit of an exploration – you know what are the issues in the school? What things are going wrong and trying to do more of a systems view. Thinking about the whole school and how I can be supportive in shifting some of the thinking, some of the thoughts. Helping issues that are through the school and seeing where I could be helpful' (Int. 8. line 54).*

EPs enjoying working at different levels of the organisation and wanting to have more opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills base more systemically was highlighted within the data. EPs saw the potential of and felt frustrated when opportunities were not taken up.

The EPs within the study had many suggestions regarding what they could offer at a more effective systems level. These suggestions included; behaviour management and emotional well-being support; language and communication training; training adolescent development; parenting support; conciliation skills support for school leaders who are trying to change teaching practice on the ground and supervision and coaching. Working with a wider range of children at a more universal level to enhance learning and using approaches that are more therapeutic were also suggested as potential contributions.

One EP stressed the importance of the EP who delivers the SLA being directly involved in commissioning conversations with those on the front line who had responsibility for following through what was agreed.

*'Well I'd be interested to know why she's (the head teacher) bought into the SLA in all honesty, and I think in terms of the commissioning, I think what's really*



*difficult is the fact that the conversation that was had with her when the SLA was commissioned did not involve me. So I have no sense of what she was hoping for...that was a conversation that happened between the service manager and her. Neither I nor the SENCO had any knowledge really of what that conversation was about...*' (Int. 7. line 183).

In relation to the negotiation of work with a school leader, the consultant talked about clients preferring continuity from negotiation to delivery.

*'It's the consultants...well the senior consultants who will do the sales not someone different from it. Because typically the clients want to see the person who is going to do the work....'* (Int. 10; para 32).

#### **4.6.2.3 The Importance of Communication with Head Teachers**

The third code, 'the importance of communicating with head teachers' indicated the need for commissioned EPs to recognise that although EPs were rarely working directly with them, head teachers were often the key people who made the decision as to whether an EP SLAs should be entered into, terminated or extended. The school leaders within the study highlighted the dilemma that head teachers were often perceived to be unaware of the contribution and the impact of EP involvement. When head teachers had some awareness, it was often limited to the statutory elements of the EP role. When one school leader was asked how much her head teacher knew about the contribution of EPs, she responded:

*'I don't think an awful lot. We did have a meeting last week to discuss our SLA time of which he was a part of but I don't necessarily know that he knows the ins and outs of what they provide to us as a service. I think he knows that they work with students and write reports for us but I don't know he knows advice that they give and the background work that goes on'* (Int. 4. line 140).

When asked how her head teacher felt about the contribution of EPs, another school leader reflected:

*'I think he feels benevolently towards it. He values the good work that EPs do. I don't think he knows much about what goes on one day to day level' (Int. 2. line 3).*

School leaders also highlighted that the head teacher was often entirely reliant on whoever was working directly with the EP or this person's line manager to give feedback about the service that had been received from the EP. This feedback often took the form of face-to-face or written feedback and involved the school leader justifying the need for the service, or having to demonstrate that value for money had been received highlighting the benefits the service brought. When asked about her head teacher's awareness of the contribution of the EP, one school leader explained:

*'He always gets a feedback form because I have to explain where I've spent the money but he always gets a feedback form of this is what we've done, this is what we've done' (Int. 6. line 222).*

When discussing purchasing of Educational Psychology, she added:

*'Everything is costed. I don't like it but that's part of my role as manager you have a budget and you have to spend it wisely and making sure you're getting the best value for money' (Int. 6. line 470).*

Only one school leader referred to the EP being involved in such a feedback process. This involvement seemed to be ad hoc and informal in style. When asked about her head teacher's involvement with the EP, she recalled:

*'Every now and then he will ask if x is in school he can meet with her to have a quick chat about what's going on and things' (Int. 6. line 223).*

Some school leaders talked about seeing the work of the EP in school as being completely delegated to them to manage and they were in control of how the time was spent with the head teacher having little awareness of the process. In relation to this, one school leader reported:

*'So they kind of know that I wanted to make use of the EP service but in terms of what the EP who might come in I guess they probably don't know because they kind of trust me to make decisions about it' (Int. 3. line 339).*

Another school leader highlighted that when a SENCO was not part of the School's leadership team it was often the deputy head (as line manager who line managed the SENCO) who had the task of convincing the head teacher that they had exhausted their resources as an SEN department and needed Educational Psychology input to move forward with challenging students. Another school leader considered that managers within the system who had pastoral responsibilities were more likely than those with learning responsibilities to attempt to influence the level of EP support being purchased.

*'We've got a Behaviour and Well-being manager... I think she spends more time liaising with the EPs than we do....she deals more directly with the EP and would have more influence over the Deputy Head as to what support we need in the future' (Int. 5. line 249).*

Some school leaders were aware of school budget restrictions and reported feeling guilty about asking for more support from external agencies such as EPs.

Despite head teachers being perceived by school leaders to be key players in the commissioning of EPs, data from the EPs within the study indicated that some EPs had never met the head teacher and were often unaware who they were.

Some EPs saw head teachers as distracted by other aspects of their role with one EP reporting that the only conversation she had ever had with a head teacher was initiated by the head teacher and centred on his agenda relating to his exclusion statistics. Another EP considered the head teacher to be completely disinterested in his role, having fully delegated all aspects of his involvement to the SENCO. He talked about his frustrations in trying to secure a face-to-face meeting with the head teacher and said dejectedly:

*'But actually she will meet with me but actually she's not interested in meeting with me because she sees the work as being delegated. It's the SENCO's job to negotiate that; she doesn't feel the need to get involved. She doesn't see herself as somebody that needs to be involved at that level. All she needs to know is it's being done' (Int. 7. line 290).*

This EP also acknowledged the importance of securing the commitment of the management team in school to secure time and commitment regarding project work. He explained:

*'I think ...any systemic work needs to have the engagement of the Head because in my experience without that there's no sense of priority'* (Int. 7. line 311).

When asked to clarify if he meant the Head or the leadership team he elaborated:

*'Well the senior management team but ultimately the Head if they're the people that are dictating what happens and doesn't'* (Int. 7. line 315).

All the EPs recognised the importance of trying to build some relationship with the head teacher and spoke of their efforts to move forward in relation to this. When asked what could make her more effective as an EP, one EP offered:

*'I'm starting to get more in touch with the Heads...I suppose I'm widening the influence'* (Int. 8. line 270).

When asked how a head teacher could be made more aware of her contribution one EP optimistically suggested:

*'I think its good practice.....really important to have a meeting with the Head teacher at the beginning. Sort of explain a little bit about your role and we're opportunists as EPs'* (Int. 9. line 271).

This EP also spoke about the benefits involving a head teacher in a consultation meeting to model the EP role. Another spoke of the benefits of having the opportunity to communicate with a deputy head with inclusion responsibilities rather than directly with the head teacher.

Later, she spoke of the benefits of measuring the impact of her involvements and communicating these to the head teacher either in a face-to-face situation or by letter. When describing what she said to head teachers, she explained:

*'This is how it's going, just thought I'd make you aware' that's really important that they know it's making a positive impact'* (Int. 9. line 292).

The issue of EPs not taking an active role in checking out the feedback others were giving about them was also raised by this EP.

*‘...I suppose what we normally rely on is for it to be fed back through the staff we’re in regular contact with..’* (Int. 9. line 295).

When asked how that feedback looked, she constructively replied:

*‘That’s hugely important. We probably rely on it heavily and actually how do we know what that looks like. How do we know whether that’s positive or negative or indifferent’* (Int. 8. line 300).

Lastly, the potential commissioning power of governors was raised by one EP. When asked about what she thought influenced commissioning conversations she said:

*‘..the governors will have to be involved somewhere along the line as well as the head teachers, so it’s not one-person. I suppose the fantasy is the head’* (Int. 8. line 228).

When talking about head teachers having commissioning power but often being unaware of the contribution and impact of EP services, the consultant proffered:

*‘So over time if you had someone like a head teacher, who initially..you know. As you say, in their journey as being a commissioner of your service, was high in support but low in understanding and remained low in understanding over time, is it a possibility that support could slip?’* (Int. 10. para 72).

He then elaborated:

*‘Yeah, because if you support it....Someone who supports it but doesn’t really understand it sounds to me a bit risky, a bit sort of vacuous, because they’ll say,’ Ah yeah, brilliant, great, great, love it, brilliant, excellent, do your stuff, really good to have you’ and then wanders off because he doesn’t really understand it (Laughs). And then the first thing that goes wrong, he might say, ‘Actually no, I’m not sure about that’. As I say the support but not the understanding, this is probably a bit dangerous’* (Int. 10. para 74).

He raised the importance of making sure that all stakeholders understood the rationale and purpose of a consultant's involvement and were supportive of it. If people, such as head teachers, were not, he suggested that over communicating with them and making more of a personal approach could be a beneficial way to secure greater knowledge of role, knowledge of impact and a higher level of commitment.

#### **4.6.2.3 Perceiving Customer Intent**

The last code, 'perceiving customer intent', related to the need for EPs to monitor the future buying intent of their school leaders and their emotional responses to having to purchase EP services. This code highlighted that all the school leaders within the study indicated a positive intent to buy and seemed accepting of, although sometimes frustrated by, the fact that EP services were no longer free at the point of delivery. This code also highlighted the issue of school leaders being aware how valuable their time was and how every minute in contact with an EP counts. One school leader talked about intending to continue to commission an EP and when asked how she felt about buying this service she added:

*'Well, I'd rather I didn't have to buy you in. I'd rather not feel that oohh do I use them for this or use them for that and even still on the phone to the EP and I'm being charged for this' (Int. 3. line 548).*

The uncertainty of funding streams was indicated by another school leader. When asked if she would continue to purchase she said:

*'Yes, I would like more. I don't know if we're going to get it but I would like it' (Int. 6. line 442).*

When asked how she felt about purchasing she reflected:

*'It's just the way of the world now. I'd love to be able to say, 'Can I have x for one day a week please but it's just the way of the world. Everything is costed....It isn't pleasant but it's the way of the world' (Int. 6. line 469).*

After indicating her positive intent to buy, another school leader communicated:

*'I think it's a shame it's not provided because if it was provided schools would obviously benefit from more support...I think it's a shame it's not a free service anymore but I understand why it's not' (Int. 4. line 196).*

#### **4.7 Theme Five: Recognising the Need to Improve the Marketing Strategy of Educational Psychologists**

This main theme, 'Recognising the need to improve the marketing strategy of EPs', highlighted the need for EPs to improve the clarity and proactivity of how EPs market their services to school leaders. This need was highlighted by the fact that many school leaders within the study lacked awareness of what the role of a commissioned EP was and were unclear about what EPs could potentially offer to help them meet their professional goals. This theme, the contributing categories and the contributing focussed codes is illustrated in Figure 4.7.

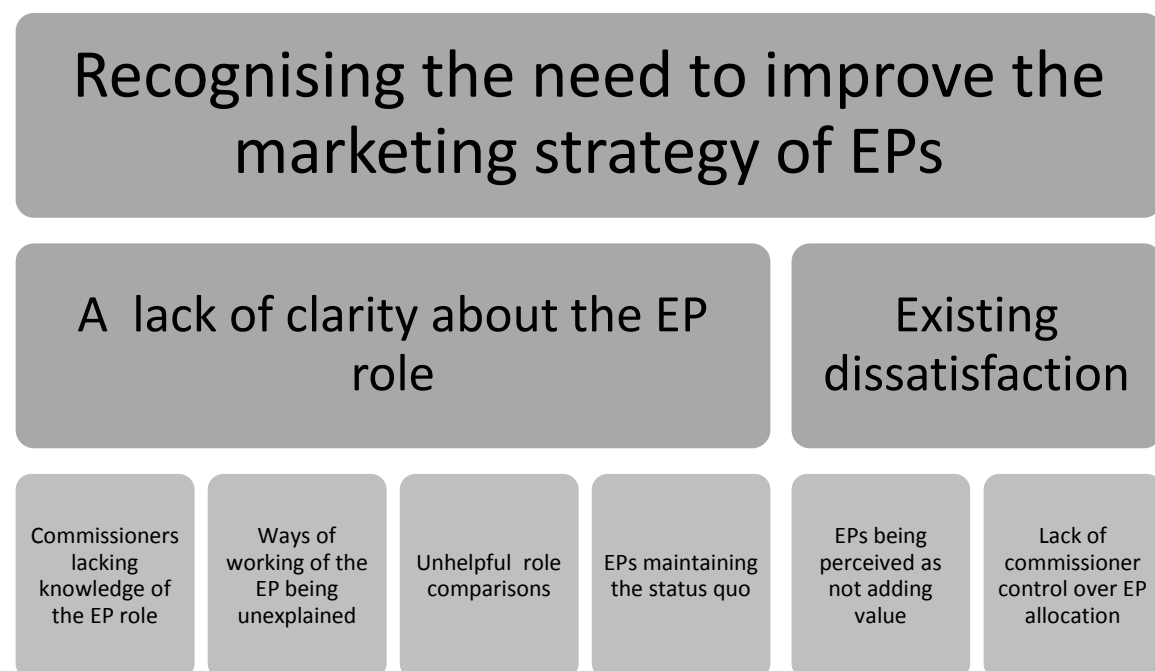


Figure 4.7- A visual model of theme five and the contributing categories and focussed codes

This theme had two contributing categories, 'commissioners lacking knowledge of clarity about the EP role' and 'existing dissatisfaction'. These two categories and the focussed codes which contributed to them are outlined below.

#### **4.7.1 A Lack of Clarity about the Educational Psychologists' Role**

This category highlighted that the school leaders within the study were often unclear about what exactly an EP does or can offer. The four contributing focussed codes include, 'commissioners lacking of knowledge of the EP role', 'ways of working of the EP being unexplained', 'unhelpful role comparisons' and 'EPs maintaining the status quo'.

##### **4.7.1.1 Commissioners Lacking Knowledge of the EP Role**

The first focussed code, 'commissioners lacking knowledge of the EP role' related to some school leaders within the study being unaware of the details of what an EP does. When asked about the success an EP had had in resolving difficulties for a child, one school leader shared:

*'.....he worked individually with the student ...we did have review meetings....No I don't know exactly what methods he used to improve his behaviour' (Int. 2. line 46).*

Some school leaders were unaware of the full range of skills that EPs possessed and what their training involved. When asked what skills other than knowledge they had one school leader responded:

*'I don't know really. I don't know much about how they're trained. I don't know what else they can offer' (Int. 4. line 92).*

For one school leader it was difficult to articulate what it was EPs brought when they made their contribution and for another it was a challenge to describe the benefits she was seeking when an EP was commissioned. One school leader was unaware of potential approaches being available such as supervision from an EP. She highlighted this by saying:

*'It's not something I've thought of before because it's not on offer but that would be a very positive thing' (Int. 3. line 531).*

Some school leaders considered that young people in school were unaware of the presence of EPs generally and others considered them to hold a similar role



to advisory teachers. One school leader had tried to overcome this issue by including the commissioned EP on the main staff photo board.

All of the EPs involved in the study were aware that often school leaders did not know what their role currently or potentially entailed. When asked how much knowledge the school had of her potential role, one EP gave this account:

*'Not much. I suppose it depends on the school....I don't know what the explicit understanding is of what we do and what is possible so I think it's more an implicit understanding rather than a this is what you do' (Int. 8. line 40).*

When asked about a specific time that a school had enlisted his support, another EP admitted:

*'There's a sense that actually they don't quite know what to do with me actually...' (Int. 7. line 39)*

When asked about the sort of work she had been involved in and talking about why a piece of work was unfinished, the third EP said:

*'Probably because they didn't understand the best use of EP time and also it was the deputy head that didn't have a huge amount of knowledge of the role and how best it could be used' (Int. 9. line 40).*

Some actions that could be taken to enhance school leader knowledge of the EP role were indicated by the EPs within the study. EPs being assertive in advertising the opportunities that they could potentially offer when they first enter into an SLA contract with a school was indicated in the data as being potentially helpful. One EP recalled:

*'I went in with a very clear, 'this is what EPs do, this is what sorts of work I can offer' and actually hand to them an example menu if you like of the sorts of things they could use the time for' (Int. 9. line 56).*

Later in relation to improving commissioning, she added:

*'I think it's just improved understanding. If they understand what we do and you're making that explicit and more tangible and you're going with examples and it can be really meaningful to them. Especially around outcome' (Int. 9. line 286).*

#### **4.7.1.2 Ways of Working of the Educational Psychologist Being Unexplained**

The next focussed code, 'Ways of working of the EP being unexplained', highlighted that EPs had an awareness that commissioning school leaders did not always fully understand and appreciate why EPs engaged with school leaders in the way they did and what the intentions behind particular approaches were. When asked how school leaders perceived working with an EP compared to other services, one EP explained:

*'....I'm not sure they see working with EPs as a collaborative process. I think they see external professionals maybe as doing a separate role or a separate job; a contribution to. A perception that the EP has come to do something rather to actually support them in thinking about how to meet this child's needs ...So I think secondary schools don't really understand that the role of an EP being one of actually collaborative problem solving.....tell me what I can do and I can do it' (Int. 8. line 130).*

When asked how much knowledge a school had of her role, this EP elaborated:

*'they had the words and they ask for those words... like consultation but I don't know what the explicit understanding is of what we do' (Int. 8. line 43).*

This indicated that whilst EPs saw themselves as empowering, being involved in joint thinking and collaborative problem solving there were times when they experienced school leaders as being frustrated by the reflective processes they implemented and wanting direct advice to be given promptly. When talking about how school leaders perceived her contribution, one EP explained:

*'I imagine it's experience that's a bit round the houses rather than just get on with it. Why are we having this conversation? Why are you asking these questions? Just go and sort it out' (Int. 8. line 163).*

The consultant saw consultants as having parallel skills in being able to empower, structure thinking, identify action plans and bring solution focussed thinking skills. In contrast to the above, he did not refer to clients being frustrated

by the process but did talk about the need to be clear and educate school leaders about the role and way of working.

In relation to these two codes, 'school leaders lacking knowledge of the EP role' and 'ways of working being unexplained', the consultant offered the opinion that it might be helpful for psychologists to detail the skills they brought in any advertising material or briefs and suggested modelling the advertising of EPs on current mainstream consultancy web sites. He also talked about EPs specialising in specific areas and advocated a balanced approach.

*'I think some diversity is useful. If it's pushed too far and if one is just...you know does anything in any sector then actually one's offering becomes very watery (laughs). So I think one has to get the balance right...And marketing, I think the marketing is about ...it's very much about educating them (the school leaders) in terms of so they know what you do' (Int. 10. para 32)*

Giving information to school leaders that makes how psychologists work explicit was seen by him to be crucial.

*'And actually I think there's a big part in making sure you educate ...(inaudible 0:14:02) business contacts but you educate the client in terms of what you can do and what you can bring so that they can truly make the best of you. I think that in itself is a sort of marketing strategy, so they're aware...' (Int. 10. para 28).*

The potential of using post engagement reviews to highlight processes, skills and benefits received was also raised.

#### **4.7.1.3 Unhelpful Role Comparisons**

The third focussed code, 'unhelpful role comparisons' refers to EPs' beliefs that school leaders may have inaccurate expectations of EP involvement based on their experience of other external agencies who often work more practically and directly with young people. When talking about such professional comparisons one EP stipulated:

*'The kind of 'Oh there's this child and he's touching inappropriately' and then somebody else comes in and does a programme whereas we wouldn't do that..' (Int. 8. line 142).*

Another said:

*'You're thinking about that child and the environment and the SENCO in their environment, it's thinking about the problem with a bigger contextual problem in mind that makes them feel really supported, that you're not just going down the tangent perhaps as some other agencies would because they've presented with a problem they address that problem'* (Int. 9. line 210).

#### **4.7.1.4 Educational Psychologists Maintaining the Status Quo**

The fourth code, 'EPs maintaining the status quo' is a minor code which relates to the impact on school leader perception and role expectations of EPs being reluctant to challenge the role expectations that are placed upon them by school leaders. One EP within the study talked about conforming to traditional role expectations and maintaining the status quo in preference to challenging inappropriate expectation. This was potentially a lost opportunity to introduce new ways of working, particularly when a new contract was being set up with a new school. When asked what sort of work she had been involved in, this EP honestly recalled:

*'When I first started it was a Deputy Head that was acting as SENCO. She asked for a lot of individual work which I went along with because that was their request....the Deputy Head didn't have a huge amount of knowledge of the role ...So we went through the motions of that because it was a newly acquired school'* (Int. 9. line 28).

#### **4.7.2 Existing Dissatisfaction**

This core category relating to a few school leaders raising issues that were related to being less satisfied with service delivery. There were two minor focussed codes relating to such dissatisfaction. These were 'EPs being perceived as not adding value' and 'Lack of commissioner control over EP allocation'.

##### **4.7.2.1 EPs Not Being Perceived as Adding Value**

This focussed code highlighted the important point that there are times when school leaders consider that the involvement of an EP has not led to them feeling more informed or moved them further forward with the challenge they were

facing. Again this was a minor focussed code with not many references to this issue, and the two that did exist came from school leaders who job-share within the same school. The following quotes are illustrative:

*'We've always just asked for advice and often we get, 'well have you tried this and this'... 'and we have and so sometimes it's about unpicking what we are doing' (Int. 4. line 93).*

*'The feedback was helpful because it confirmed that we were doing the right things unfortunately it didn't move us any further forward....we didn't find that from that we learnt anything different but it was nice to know that we were supposedly doing the right things' (Int. 5. line 41).*

Later she also stated, *'We don't always find that the strategies that we're given actually are helpful because they're just the things we're already doing ... I think some of the advice we've been given hasn't necessarily been that innovative; it's just been what we've done anyway. I don't know if that's fair to say' (Int. 5. line 106).*

In relation to adding value, the consultant highlighted the need for consultants to carefully define the scope of the task with their clients and to be absolutely clear at the outset if they considered that their skill set does not match the task in hand.

#### **4.7.2.2 School Leaders Having no Control over Educational Psychologist Allocation**

This minor code related to a comment by one school leader who considered she had no control over which EP she was allocated and the specific expertise they may have. Commenting on the expertise a psychologist brings to helping remove barriers to learning, this school leader expressed,

*'I don't know really because you don't get...it's like you really get a choice, you kind of get the EP that you get and they may have their area of expertise and that may be really useful but I wouldn't know what that area of expertise might be because you've got who you've got and you've got whatever the issue is and that still needs to be dealt with whatever their area of expertise' (Int. 3. line 292).*

When asked about allocating personnel to organisations the consultant talked about consultancy firms working in a range of ways from allowing the school leader to interview their consultant to allocating personnel with little negotiation. He indicated that it was important for the school leader to have trust in the consultancy firm to be able to allocate the correct person for the job.

*'So I think one has to trust the skills of the firm, the consulting firm or the psychologist or a group of psychologists and trust that they will apply the right people who are available at that time if that makes sense' (Int. 10. para 34).*

This section has presented the main themes and their supporting data. The next section will outline the conclusions drawn in relation to the findings as a whole.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

The constructed themes illustrate some disparity of view between the views of school leaders and the views of EPs with school leaders continuing to experience EPs as knowledgeable experts and continuing to value the more traditional aspects of the EP role. EPs tended to minimise their expert role and the more traditional aspects of their role preferring to focus more on collaborative problem solving activities such as consultation with problem owners and their potential for systemic work. They tend to be modest about the quality of personal and professional process skills they bring.

Despite this professional modesty, school leaders considered the EP to be a highly valued resource within the secondary school context. They experienced EPs as being knowledge and process experts who routinely support schools in intervening with challenging youngsters with the most complex needs which are often of an emotional nature. They considered that EPs were experienced as being comparatively more able to do this work based on a well-developed knowledge of schools and education more generally. School leaders wanted to access more of the services, particularly in relation to children with complex needs whom often had mental health related difficulties. School leaders were clear about what they wanted from EPs in terms of receiving more but there were many barriers such as wider legislative and governmental changes and financial cuts getting in the way of them working more often and effectively with EPs.

These were impinging at a time when they were experiencing greater challenges relating to low levels of emotional well-being and increasing mental health needs in young people and school staff.

A Substantial Theory has been generated which reflects the dilemma that EPs and school leaders are currently experiencing. It seeks to illustrate and acknowledge the gap between current levels of need and the provision of Educational Psychology services within secondary schools. This gap first became apparent within an earlier theme, entitled, 'The Missing Link'. The categories within this earlier theme indicated the lack of clarity, knowledge and proactive planning and the ineffective systems and processes present in secondary schools. This situation is exacerbated by the level and complexity of mental health needs within young people at this time (Weare, 2015). This early theme highlighted EPs as professionals, currently working in schools who have a distinct and required knowledge base and skill set. This theme was amalgamated into the current themes, particularly theme one, two and three, which highlight what psychologists bring; what commissioners want and what is getting in the way of building a bridge between the difficulties schools are experiencing in meeting need and the knowledge and skills EPs possess.

It appears from the findings that the EPs who are currently working in schools are providing a valued service but this service is narrow due to the time limitations of current Service Level Agreements and funding restrictions.

The Substantive Theory, 'The direct commissioning of EPs is the missing link in improving emotional well-being and attainment for young people in 21st century secondary schools', highlights that although EPs are highly valued and appreciated by school leaders in secondary schools, and well placed to work in this area, school leaders are currently failing or are unable to target sufficient resources to securing adequate EP support.

Within this chapter, the main themes and the Substantive Theory have been outlined and evidence from the supporting data in relation to these has been provided. Within the next chapter, the themes, and the Substantive Theory will be explored in more detail and related to the original research questions and the established literature. A critique of the chosen method will be offered, followed by

an outline of the professional implications of what has been found and an outline of suggested areas for future research.



## **CHAPTER FIVE - DISCUSSION**

### **5.1. Introduction**

This study aimed to examine the meanings that school leaders attribute to the work of EPs. It also sought to explore how school leaders view their own particular professional needs and the support they require. The original research questions were as follows:

1. What meanings do school leaders attribute to the contribution of EPs?
2. How do these attributed meanings of school leaders' impact on engagement and purchasing behaviour, in the context of trading?
3. As commissioners of Educational Psychology services, how do school leaders view their wants and needs?
4. What benefits do school leaders seek from the Educational Psychology profession?

These questions are addressed within a discussion of the respective themes and the substantial grounded theory. A critical evaluation of the methodology is provided, followed by recommendations for the professional practice of EPs and a proposal for future research.

### **5.2 Discussion of Constructed Themes**

#### **5.2.1 Theme one: The Skills and Activities Involved in the Commissioned Work of Educational Psychologists in the Secondary School Context**

This theme provided an understanding of how the knowledge and skills base of EPs, including the professional approach they implement, is experienced by school leaders. In addition, it illustrated some existing similarities and differences between how school leaders and how EPs experience the knowledge, skills base and approach of EPs. The findings within this theme largely addressed the first research question, 'What meanings do school leaders attribute to the contribution of EPs?'

### 5.2.1.1 EPs as Change Partners, Knowledge Experts or Both?

This theme illustrates that some discrepancy exists with regard to the extent to which EPs were considered to be knowledgeable experts. School leaders clearly saw the EP as being a knowledgeable expert who was able to share his/her expertise and provide specific advice to allow the enhancement of the knowledge of school staff. EPs being considered knowledgeable experts, is consistent with the findings of Ashton and Roberts, (Ashton & Roberts, 2006), and those of Nottingham Community EPS (2006). In contrast, the EPs did not see themselves as experts. However, they did acknowledge having a specific knowledge base in psychology and child development. This finding is consistent with Ashton and Roberts (2006) and resonates with the profession's legacy of the 1970s and 1980s that encouraged EPs to 'give psychology away', a legacy which initiated the reconstruction (Gillham, 1978) of the profession. This reconstruction involved EPs moving away from traditional within child centred ways of working and towards more facilitative, collaborative and systemic approaches (Gillham, 1978; Stobie, 2002). This professional shift repositioned EPs, more as partners in change processes than experts, and may have led to EPs trading their expert status for a more facilitative one. EPs not choosing to attribute expert status to themselves could also point towards on-going professional confidence issues that stem from Gillham's historic criticisms of the profession (Gillham, 1978) which have resulted in the profession having '*a massive insecurity complex and a crisis of confidence*' (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009, p. 81). Coupled with subsequent and on-going debates and associated changes surrounding the EP role, this has made it difficult for professional confidence to be retained (Lunt & Majors, 2000).

In relation to changes surrounding the role, today's presence of a thriving market place may be the exact impetus the profession needs to continue the evolution of its role and identity. To enable this, EPs need to celebrate the continued contribution of educational psychology and advertise their distinctive contribution as expert applied psychologists. By advertising this EPs will be highlighting the very asset school leaders want to commission and this is likely to have a positive influence on the future commissioning of EPs.

In addition to being seen by school leaders as experts, EPs were seen as contributing a valued and unique professional perspective, an asset acknowledged in the literature. Farrell et al. (2006), for example, highlighted that the background and training of EPs enabled them to make a distinctive contribution. Rothi, Leavey and Best (2008) further highlighted the distinctive role of the EP stating that the EP was one of the few professionals to work at the interface between education, health and schools. A view consistent with Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) who stated;

*‘Educational psychologists have an evidential base to their practice that underpins their unique position within the education system’ (p. 79).*

This finding also complements the report of EuroPsychT (2001) highlighted by Frederickson (2002) which acknowledges the distinct perspective of psychologists.

Some discrepancy existed however, between the views of school leaders and EPs with regard to perspective. In contrast to school leaders, EPs did not see their professional perspective as being unique, but did credit themselves as being objective in approach. This finding is surprising given the unique position of EPs within the education system as a whole. EPs are often the only applied psychologists working in schools (Mackay, 2007) and their training and qualifications are usually some of the highest in education (Lunt & Majors, 2000). The consultant involved in the current study, highlighted that consultancy firms often advertise the uniqueness of their view as a selling point.

#### **5.2.1.2 A Complementary Professional Skills Base**

School leaders and EPs both considered the EP as being resolution focussed. School leaders saw them as able to focus others, clarify, prioritise, illuminate situations, facilitate, mediate, influence and guide in a pragmatic way. EPs saw themselves as being observant, able to question, able to reframe, being thoughtful, responsive and empowering. This finding is consistent with the essential aspects of professional practice highlighted by Gersch (2004). The consultant reported that being resolution focussed was a key feature that consultants advertise as a selling point.

It was interesting to note from a marketing perspective that EPs were seen by school leaders as contributing a higher quality of service compared to other external agencies. This finding is particularly noteworthy given that other professionals within education often use psychological approaches including counsellors, advisory teachers and educational consultants (Norwich, 2005). It is inspiring to note that school leaders appear to be able to distinguish between the quality of service of those who are professional, applied psychologists and those who are not. Again, some discrepancy existed here, as the EPs did not acknowledge these qualitative differences between themselves and other professional groups. This finding contrasts with that of Ashton and Roberts who found that EPs particularly valued one qualitative difference, their knowledge of schools (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). When comparing the professional approach of EPs to other professionals, the consultant reported on similarities between the skills of EPs and the skills that consultancy firms advertise to their clients.

In relation to the focussed code, 'Being emotionally literate and containing' there was agreement between school leaders and EPs. School leaders saw EPs as having high levels of personal emotional literacy and contributing an emotional containment role. This finding is consistent with Nottingham Educational Psychology Service (2006) and consistent with the essential elements of practice outlined by Gersch (2004), and EPs saw themselves as being authentic, able to build rapport, offering rare active listening skills and being available to support clients and saw every interaction with them as an intervention. It is interesting to note that these skills are acknowledged by EPs, and fit with the more empowering, facilitation role of the reconstructed profession (Stobie, 2002). The consultant highlighted the similarity of the containment role that both EPs and consultants offered when working with clients. This professional asset is important given the pressures and anxiety school leaders can face within their role (Evans & Cowell, 2012).

In relation to the focussed code, 'Providing continuity', more discrepancy in views arose on the importance of service continuity, availability and having opportunities for relationship building. These were highlighted to a greater extent by school leaders than EPs. This contrasts with the findings of Ashton and Roberts (2006) where EPs openly expressed valuing relationships with clients.

This lack of attention to client relationship by EPs could be due to a tacit understanding of the importance of this but not directly expressed. It might perhaps indicate that EPs take relationships somewhat for granted. These findings indicate that EPs would benefit from being aware of recent developments within marketing which point to the importance of consumer and provider relationships. Such an approach, Relational Marketing (Baron, Conway & Warnaby, 2010), has a particular application to service industries, which are fundamentally underpinned by intangible resources such as the exchange of knowledge and skills, that can be difficult to compare and quantify. This highlights the importance of establishing lengthy, positive relationships with commissioners to give a service a competitive advantage. Longer relationships with commissioners are less costly, more satisfying and more effective from a service delivery perspective as longer-term customers become more collaborative, informed and can work together more efficiently, a situation which leads to higher quality service delivery ((Baron, Conway & Warnaby, 2010). It follows that those commissioners who experience positive relationships with EPs are more likely to commit to future commissioned work than those who do not (Wilson & Mummalaneni, 1986).

In relation to the importance of establishing quality relationships between EPs and their commissioners, a recent study by Gersch and Cowell (2014) indicates that many fairly recently qualified EPs anticipate pursuing a portfolio career and needing business advice (Gersch & Cowell, 2014). Given these findings, it is likely that Relational Marketing support and advice will also be needed to ensure customer relationships are nurtured and businesses subsequently successful.

#### **5.2.1.3 Are EPs More 'Hands on' or 'Hands off' in Approach?**

Some disparate views arose regarding the more visible, 'hands on' aspects of EP practice with school leaders particularly appreciating the context based observation carried out by EPs and assessments they carried out. EPs on the other hand, made little reference to this work. This disparity is possibly due to this work not being conducive to the empowering and collaborative approaches of the reconstructed profession. Interestingly, the assessment work that was referred to, by school leaders, tended to have an affective rather than, a traditional cognitive

or dynamic assessment focus. This finding may be due to increased emphasis on SENCO's completing initial assessments of children who are experiencing difficulty under the SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014c). This, in theory, may lead to schools making less assessment requests and could lead to EPs contributing to creative interventions at a more systemic level (Lunt and Majors, 2000). However, the findings indicate that such a shift has not yet occurred and the focus of input remains at an individual level.

Some discrepancy was also detected in relation to EP involvement in therapeutic work, with school leaders valuing delivery of direct therapeutic interventions by EPs and EPs, in contrast, failing to mention this work. School leaders talked about EPs using specific techniques to shift views and behaviours, and ultimately improving inclusion. One school leader valued Cognitive Behavioural Therapy being delivered by an EP in relation to exam stress. This finding fits with recent research commissioned by the National Union of Teachers that indicates that teachers are currently encountering high degrees of exam related anxiety, which is considered a by-product of current accountability pressures (Hutchings, 2015). It is interesting to note that this particular research report makes absolutely no reference to an actual or potential role for EPs in this area. In contrast to this omission, Farrell et al. (2006) found that EPs provided some therapeutic interventions and in his opinion, EPs did have the potential to broaden the scope of this work. EPs are undoubtedly well-placed to deliver therapeutic interventions in schools (Atkinson, Squires, Bragg, Wasilewski & Muscatt, 2013) and there is a need to articulate and advertise the potential of their role here, as their contribution is seen to bring benefits to children and may not be benefitting as many children as potentially possible (Rothi, Leavey & Best, 2008). Such action would be timely given the recent governmental recommendation of one to one therapeutic work for children with more complex mental health needs (DfE, 2015).

With regard to the EP role in collaborative problem solving there was firm agreement across school leaders and EPs that this was a particularly valuable approach. School leaders viewed EPs as contributing valued opportunities for problem solving work with a range of stakeholders, a finding that sits uneasily alongside that of Rothi, Leavey and Best (2008) who claimed that EPs were

found to be dismissive of others' perspectives. Effective and valued collaborative work would be impossible if EPs failed to take the views of others into account. When contributing collaborative problem solving processes, school leaders' experience of EPs were those of being involved with a wide range of need, significant degrees of educational and family turbulence and working collaboratively towards the promotion of learning and emotional well-being for all.

Although problem solving opportunities were particularly valued by SENCOs, other leadership team members tended to place a greater value on written reports, a finding consistent with MacKay (2007). This may be inhibiting opportunities for problem solving approaches and wider systemic approaches to take place. Research indicates that head-teachers also want more systemic approaches, pointing to them wanting 'more of everything' (MacKay, 2007, p. 169). With regard to problem solving consultation, EPs highlighted their active engagement in this approach and talked about enabling others to find their own solutions, working collaboratively, bringing people together and empowering others. This way of working is again consistent with training models and the 'reconstructed' (Gillham, 1978) profession, and the findings indicate that EPs want to do more of this work, with some EPs talking about striving to find opportunities to do more joint thinking, in preference to cognitive assessments. This is consistent with the historical practice shift of many EPs who have moved away from testing towards the adoption of other approaches (Lunt & Majors, 2000).

In contrast to views surrounding collaborative problem solving approaches, there was some discrepancy surrounding how the giving of advice was perceived by EPs and school leaders. School leaders saw EPs as having a significant and valued advice-giving role, consistent with the findings of previous studies (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Farrell, Jimerson, Kalambouka & Benoit, 2005; Farrell et al., 2006). In contrast, EPs did not refer to having advice giving and role modelling capacities. When questioned specifically about giving advice directly to commissioners, the consultant spoke about this dilemma being common to many professionals, particularly, those trained to empower others.

In addition to valuing receiving advice directly from an EP, school leaders also valued EPs working directly with young people on an individual basis. In contrast, EPs did not talk about this work, despite it being the main element of their practice, within the United Kingdom (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Stobie, 2002) and beyond (Ahtola & Kiiski-Maki, 2014; Bell & Mc Kenzie, 2013). This highlights the additional dilemma that exists for EPs regarding whether to engage mainly in work with individuals or to engage in more systemic approaches and attempt to bring about environmental change. From a marketing perspective, the existence of this dilemma creates the risk of needs prioritised by commissioners not being met. Dissatisfaction may be generated (Watts & Pasternicki, 1988), as EPs press on with delivering their professional priorities, as opposed to delivering the priorities of their commissioners. This has obvious implications for securing market niches.

Such dilemmas have existed over time. However, it is only now that they are experienced by EPs in a thriving market place, where the customer is actively deciding what is valued and what is not, and consequently what is purchased. In order to influence this situation EPs will need to clarify what school leaders want, whilst also promoting related benefits of their preferred ways of working, in order to influence value judgements.

#### **5.2.1.4 Impact of Statutory Assessment Demands**

In addition to the variety of roles outlined above, the data revealed that EPs were continuing to have a 'gate-keeper' role i.e. involvement in statutory assessment decisions. Some school leaders considered their SLA useful in helping to secure statutory assessment and exclusion evidence. At times, pressure was being exerted on SENCOs by head-teachers and other leadership team members, to obtain EP reports to support access to resources. This finding illustrates that statutory assessment demands continue to influence EP activity even within the confines of the SLA. Such demands could be inhibiting the EP's ability to be more empowering, creative and systemic in their commissioned work (Stobie, 2002). It is interesting to note that EPs did not acknowledge their work with individual children in relation to statutory assessment. This again may be due to perceived



pressure to work at a wider level, and discomfort in relation to admitting to making some contribution to rising statutory assessment rates.

It seems apt to highlight that at the time of writing, within the host authority, there has been a massive increase in statutory assessment requests with the introduction of Education Health Care Plans and the existing parental right to appeal against an authority's decision not to carry out a statutory assessment. This situation makes it even more difficult for EPs strike a balance between their statutory obligations and developing different activities (Stobie, 2002).

When considering the meanings the school leaders attribute to the contribution of the EP, it is interesting to note that, that neither the school leaders nor the EPs spoke about the advocacy role of the EP for young people or highlighting 'the voice of the child', roles often undertaken by EPs. This finding has relevance as the SEND code (DfE, 2014c) makes it imperative that all professionals see the child as 'the client'. EPs need to remind commissioners that EP services when commissioned are done so on behalf of the children and their parent (s), not on behalf of the school.

Overall, the findings of this theme were found to be in line with current research relating to the contribution of the EP that acknowledges the breadth and depth of EP knowledge and skills and expresses appreciation of their broad perspective (Farrell et al., 2006; Nottingham EPS, 2006). Encouragingly, the findings of this theme were not in line with the conclusions of Rothi, Leavey & Best who stated that educational psychology services were inconsistent, reactive, fire fighting and geared only towards emergencies (Rothi, Leavey & Best, 2008). In relation to the first research question of the current study, it seems that EPs continue to be valued by school leaders, continue to carry out valued work on behalf of children and young people individually in collaboration with others, and continue to strive to work at a more systemic level. It seems that, EPs today haven't 'given psychology away' but found a way to make it fit the settings and challenges they face, whilst continuing to work as naturalistic practitioner-researchers, applying intellectual/technical skills and having an innate ability to work with other people (Gillham, 2007). From a marketing point of view, EPs are seen by school leaders as expert, socially skilled professionals who can reliably deliver a range of

services which engender trust and give the profession a competitive edge (Baron, Conway & Warnaby, 2010).

### **5.2.2 Theme Two: Educational Psychology Commissioner Wants and Background Driving Forces**

This theme largely addresses the third research question, 'As commissioners of Educational Psychology services, how do school leaders view their wants and needs?' By providing an understanding of what secondary school commissioners value and want to receive when they commission EP services, this theme highlights some of the reasons behind their requests. It was noteworthy that within this theme and consistent with theme one, there were aspects of the EP practice that were mutually valued and acknowledged by school leaders and EPs, and aspects that were valued more by one than the other. Importantly, where disparity existed it often related to school leaders valuing activities and skills that were inconsistent with the reconstructed role of the EP (Gillham, 1978) and EPs valuing those that were consistent.

#### **5.2.2.1 The Advice Giving Role**

School leaders value receiving advice directly from an EP. There was, however, a disparity of views between School leaders and EPs. School leaders valued this highly, whilst EPs were less keen to acknowledge themselves as having a role here. School leaders valuing such a role is consistent with an international study carried out by Farrell et al. (2005) which highlighted that school staff appreciate general advisory work (Farrell et al., 2005). Interestingly, in addition to valuing direct advice, school leaders also appreciated having EPs model particular approaches which they emulated when unsure how to approach situations. EPs failed to acknowledge either their advisory role or their role modelling skills. This may be due to these aspects of practice fitting less easily with the collaborative ways of working that are encouraged in training, This is suggestive of an existing gap between theory and practice (Lunt & Majors, 2000), with EPs being trained to empower but in the reality of the everyday role often implementing a different approach.

### **5.2.2.2 Direct Work**

A disparity of view also existed in relation to EPs working directly with children and young people, with school leaders valuing this area of work far more than EPs, and giving this more prominence than group or systems work. In contrast, EPs' references to working directly with pupils were scarce. This finding may reflect potential historic pressure on EPs to work in a more systemic way (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009), and may also reflect EPs having a sense of shame (Boyle and Lauchlan, 2009) and being apologetic (Leadbetter, 2000) in relation to this area of work. Working directly with young people is a role EPs are well placed to do (Boyle & Lachlan, 2009) and one that has historically been consistently sought from them, by school leaders (Kelly & Gray, 2000). This role is held in high-esteem, not just by clients, but also by other professionals (Farrell et al., 2006) and is considered by some, to be the bedrock of educational psychology (Kirkcaldy, 1997). Given this and recent governmental policy shifts (DfE, 2014c; DfE, 2015; PHE, 2015), the profession may need to reflect upon the possibility of there being a greater call for this work, in the light of increased responsibilities and new guidelines outlined in the new SEND code of practice (DfE, 2014c) and the increased emotional challenges within society (Weare, 2015). It may, therefore, be ill advised and short sighted for EPs not to celebrate and market their skills in this area. It is likely that if EPs keep downplaying their skills here, an internal or external service provider will see the niche and take over the delivery of this valued service.

It is important to note that within this theme, the intended outcomes of direct work with young people varied amongst school leaders. Some saw this as contributing towards young people's emotional well-being and to reframing beliefs and perceptions whilst others viewed this as the provision of written advice to strengthen requests for alternative specialist placements. This finding may potentially reflect pressure on head-teachers to 'lose' young people from their data, as policy initiatives to raise attainment continue to dominate (Norwich, 2005; Ofsted, 2015), over those with a focus on emotional well-being. As the responsibility of schools increases in relation to mental health and emotional well-being in line with recent governmental recommendations (DfE, 2015; Ofsted, 2015), EPs may begin to see a shift in what school leaders value.

### **5.2.2.3 Impact on Teaching**

In addition to direct work with young people, school leaders wanted staff development opportunities to promote teacher understanding; change teaching practice and to develop self-awareness in teachers with regard to how they manage pupils. Training and support as a critical friend were highlighted as potential methods of developing staff skills. There are, however, many approaches EPs can draw on to meet what school leaders want in relation to the development of understanding and skills of teachers. These include: emotional wellbeing interventions (Sharrocks, 2014); enhancing communication systems within the classroom (Docherty, 2014); Solution Circles (Brown & Henderson, 2012) and enhancing the quality of pupil teacher relationships (Lloyd, Bruce & Mackintosh, 2012). EP references to work in this area were scarce. This points to the reality of most of their work being focussed on/or around individuals.

Supervision was a specific area of staff development that some school leaders wanted to receive in relation to overcoming feelings of professional isolation, allowing action planning and managing role conflict. However, a view was held that supervision would not be prioritised by other leadership team members, although ironically, this was also highlighted as an aspect of service delivery that leadership team members themselves would potentially benefit from. This finding points to some resistance within leadership teams to become involved with EPs possibly relating to time constraints, needing help being seen as an admission of inadequacy and/or fears associated with confidentiality (Gonzalez, Nelson, Gutkin & Shwery, 2004). EPs need to try to clarify why leadership teams are not currently recognising the potential contribution EPs can make here and to advertise the evolving role of the EP in supervision (Maxwell, 2013) and to make the potential benefits to commissioners clear.

Consistent with theme one, collaborative problem solving was an aspect of EP practice acknowledged as valuable by school leaders and EPs. School leaders wanted more opportunities to engage in this and were clear about the particular areas they wished to focus on; specific learning difficulty/dyslexia, attendance issues, SEN liaison, challenging behaviour, parenting and support during multi-disciplinary meetings. This finding is consistent with Rothi, Leavey and Best's

(2008) and points to EP consultation skills being valued highly by school leaders and the benefits of becoming involved in this approach being clear to commissioners. It is consistent with the findings of Farrell et al. (2005) who found that teachers wanted less statutory assessment work and more regular consultation opportunities.

#### **5.2.2.4 Moving from Reactivity to Proactivity**

Being less reactive in their approach to challenges was a quality school leaders wanted to attain. This finding indicates that they perceived their schools to be chaotic environments where staff lacked the skills, the knowledge or time to explore the difficulties young people were experiencing and this was increasing the risk of exclusion for some. EPs also experienced secondary schools to be reactive, chaotic and difficult contexts where it could be challenging to implement change. EPs are well placed to support school leaders in creating culture change (Rees, 2005) and to help them close any skills gaps by bringing expert knowledge, facilitative processes and advice to complement the skills base of curriculum leaders and their staff (Evans & Cowell, 2013).

School leaders expressed a need for more time generally with an EP. Often, this was expressed in association with school budget constraints with school leaders clearly wanting to access more but current budget constraints restricting purchase. This finding helps to inform the second research question, 'How do the meanings that school leaders attribute to EPs impact on engagement and purchasing behaviour in the context of trading?'. It appears from the findings that school leaders clearly value the services of EPs and want to access more, which is consistent with the findings of Rothi, Leavey and Best (2008). This leads to the question: Do clients value time with an EP enough to pay for more time?

School leaders also articulated a need for more evidence based approaches and spoke candidly about applying knowledge and strategies born from experience and intuition rather than evidence-based practice. This finding is significant given that the theory and implications of evidence-based practice are complicated for both EPs and teachers. In relation to this complexity, it is interesting to note that one school leader, although she clearly knew the term, found it difficult to give an accurate definition. For EPs, this area presents another professional dilemma

that stems from evidence-based practice beginning in medicine, not in educational contexts and being defined as:

*‘the conscientious, explicit, and judicious use of current best practice evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients’* (Sakett, Rosenberg, Muir Gray, Hayes & Richardson, 1996 p. 71).

As a concept, evidence based practice is now being generalised to other fields despite its applicability to other areas such as education remaining a debated topic (Biesta, 2007; Fox 2011 & Frederickson, 2002). Evidence-based practice is less suited to education due to there being less possibility of conducting positivist, randomised control trials, quasi-experimental trials and the existence of few systemic reviews of well-controlled research studies (Frederickson, 2002), the Gold Standard of research (Roth & Fonaghy, 2001). This coupled with the issue of there often being a much less direct link between intervention and outcomes outside the field of medicine makes evidence-based practice more problematic in an educational context.

Despite the complexities relating to evidence based practice, the findings indicate that school leaders want to access more of it and to access it at an earlier stage before situations deteriorate. The complexities surrounding evidence-based practice as a concept make it difficult for EPs fulfil this need. However, the existence of practice-based evidence, as a concept, may help overcome this difficulty (Fox, 2011). Practice based evidence is research carried out by practitioners themselves with the aim of building evidence bases that inform beliefs and practice in the field (Fox, 2011) and is far more applicable to educational psychology and education. In relation to EPs’ work with schools, it is likely that doctoral level training for EPs will continue to increase practice based evidence, as EPs continue to evaluate the impact of their involvement.

#### **5.2.2.5 Impact of Inspection Demands**

In addition to wanting evidence-based approaches, school leaders want support to manage the demands of the new Ofsted Framework (Ofsted, 2015). The findings indicate that they were finding it difficult to balance roles such as executing their managerial and leadership roles, whilst also maximising provision

for young people in the context of pending Ofsted inspections and shifting agendas. Within the findings, a potential negative impact of the Ofsted framework on the emotional well being of school staff was detected. Some school leaders were becoming anxious and frustrated and wanting to protect their teams from perceived pressures surrounding the approach of inspection teams. This finding is important given that it is documented within the literature that anxiety around school inspections can affect staff well-being and school improvement attempts. (Evans & Cowell, 2013). This finding ties in with the finding from theme one, that EPs were often experienced as being able to contain the emotions of staff and suggests the potential contribution supervision could make to enhancing the emotional well-being of staff. It highlights the importance of EPs becoming involved in countering the climate of threat generated by inspection regimes and supporting schools in improving emotional well-being and learning through value based, relationship oriented, solution-focussed culture change where fundamental values can be revisited and clarified in the light of the school as an organisation, and new government agendas (Rees, in 2005). EPs are well placed to appreciatively support schools in recognising and building on their strengths and enhancing levels of emotional well-being of young people and staff (Evans & Cowell, 2013).

The desire to be more inclusive in meeting the needs of all pupils was expressed by school leaders. Efforts to become more inclusive involved trying to enhance the quality of support offered, trying to maximise young people's sense of belonging and striving to develop, for example, their coping and attendance patterns, literacy skills, behaviour patterns and aspirations. EPs are well placed to support schools in promoting skills and effecting change in these areas (Ewen & Topping, 2012; Rae, 2014; Wilson & Newton, 2011).

#### **5.2.2.6 Wants and Needs of Commissioners**

In addressing the third research question, 'As commissioners of EP services, how do school leaders view their wants and needs?', it would appear from the findings within this theme, that schools are quite clear about which services they want and value from EPs and why they need particular approaches and interventions. In relation to this, it is important to also reflect on what school leaders do not want.

No school leaders made reference to wanting reports, a finding consistent with the recommendation that it may be time for EPs to move towards more consultative approaches (Farrell et al., 2005), allowing them to balance individual work with more systemic approaches to meet both individual and organisational needs. School leaders did not request support with data management, an area that is largely the responsibility of curriculum specialists at this time and an area where EPs are unlikely to want to compete. School leaders also did not request EPs involvement in relation to school development/ improvement plans. This finding contrasts with that of Nottingham EPS where school leaders within the study did involve EPs with this agenda (Nottingham Community EPS, 2006). Based on the knowledge and skills highlighted in theme one it would seem that EPs are well placed to make a stronger bid for greater involvement in school development plans, particularly in relation to enhancing emotional well-being, facilitating culture change and consequently improving learning (Evans & Cowell, 2013).

When responding to school leaders' requests, EPs will need to continue to respond in the spirit of principled negotiation and will need to listen closely for what is valued and wanted by school leaders, responding proactively to ensure needs are fulfilled wherever possible. In considering what school leaders value from the profession, EPs will need to recognise that value is uniquely and phenomenologically defined by the person who is benefitting from the service in question (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Therefore, they will need to acknowledge school leaders as active recipients of their service who bring their own professional skills, emotional responses, goals and cognitive judgements to service evaluation process. EPs should ensure they take full account of this co-creation of value, listening closely to school leaders' views and adapting services accordingly to ensure schools services received are what schools want and that these are valued and make a real difference in the eyes of school leaders.

### **5.2.3 Theme three: Barriers preventing Educational Psychologists from fulfilling their commissioners' goal related needs**

This theme provides an understanding of the potential barriers and challenges impinging on the ability of EPs to meet the wants and needs of their secondary



school commissioners. The barriers and challenges identified in this theme were seen to have a negative impact on the EP's ability to meet the professional needs of commissioning school leaders. These barriers were experienced as existing at a variety of levels, the school, the nation as a whole and the educational psychology service itself, and each of these will be discussed in turn below, beginning with those at the national level, moving to the level of the school, and subsequently the level of the EP service.

#### **5.2.3.1 Impact of Government Policy**

In relation to government policy, some school leaders expressed immense frustration and a sense of powerlessness relating to policy changes and the negative impact of these on budget levels. In relation to the second research question, which focussed on how their attributed meanings impact on their purchasing behaviour, school leaders described how decreasing rolls and other budget cuts were affecting their ability to buy in the level of service they needed. Services were judged as having been easier to access in the past and direct purchasing of non-local authority EP services (private EP services) was being considered to ease access to EPs. This finding points to the need for EPs to find a way to build in some increased and potentially more responsive capacity to EP teams to protect their current market position.

Education policy generally relating to Education Secretary, Michael Gove's time in office was seen as a barrier. School leaders considered that it was not inclusive and was not successfully applicable to children who were experiencing difficulties with learning. In addition, the ethos being generated was seen as being too traditional and to be decreasing vocational options. The recent introduction of Diplomas as a qualification for 14-19 year olds may help to overcome this perception, as it is designed to provide more options to learn work oriented skills, gain experience of work, and to encourage more young people to remain in school for longer (DfE, 2014b).

#### **5.2.3.2 Impact of Societal Change**

At a societal level, the findings indicated that particular challenges such as marital conflict and poverty were causing great stress and unhappiness for

children and young people, in the context of reduced resources and financial cuts. Specific symptoms such as aggressive behaviour and self-harm were highlighted by school leaders. These findings are consistent with statements made by Weare (2015) in the recent review, 'What works in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health problems in schools?' Weare highlighted that family breakdown and associated attachment disorders, self-harm and eating disorders are increasing problems for young people. The findings in the current study highlighted the specific pressures on young people such as the impact of media images on self-esteem and self-confidence, and the negative impact of cyber-bullying on a young person's sense of self which were raised by school leaders. Cyber bullying is defined by Childnet International as the use of technology such as a mobile phone or the internet to bully others (Childnet, 2014) and bullying is defined as behaviour by an individual or group repeated over time, that intentionally hurts another individual or group either physically or emotionally (DfE, 2014a).

Using a survey method, an unpublished study within the host authority (Hampshire Local Authority, 2014) highlighted that 15-30% of children and young people reported experiences of experiencing bullying at some time. It is important to note that there was an observable, increasing trend in bullying experiences between years six and nine, with 15% of children in year six experiencing bullying incidents, 24% in year seven and 27% in year nine. This indicates that bullying is a problematic issue for secondary schools. Cyber-bullying was reported by around 12% of children and young persons across these three age groups. Unfortunately, trend data relating to this was not available. Anecdotal evidence indicates many children are given a mobile phone as they transfer to secondary school and therefore may be more susceptible to such communications at transition and beyond. The particular developmental stage of young people in secondary school further increases their vulnerability to bullying as 'looks' and 'sexual orientation' were indicated in the survey as being the most common targets, these are both issues that are pertinent to most teenagers. Secondary school staff need support from EPs to help young people understand the issues involved in cyber-bullying and to protect themselves in relation to this and EPs are well placed to deliver such support (Ackers, 2014).

In summary given the extent of budget cuts and additional national and societal pressures on young people, it is likely that the EP role will continue to evolve and change incorporating need for effective therapeutic approaches and the delivery of more economical systemic approaches (Farrell et al, 2006). This, coupled with schools seeking to maximise the benefits of commissioned services, along with the need to gather evidence of impact, may continue to reconstruct and rebalance the extent to which EPs are involved in individual, therapeutic, collaborative and systemic activities.

### **5.2.3.3 Challenges at a School Level**

The challenges at a national level stemming from governmental agendas and national societal culture shifts have led to additional challenges for schools. At the level of the school, one significant challenge was the prominent tendency of school leaders to direct commissioned time towards individual pupils. Although individual work is valued and appropriate at times and EPs are well placed to carry it out (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009), it can be time consuming and the benefits may not be as far-reaching as some systemic approaches (Magi & Kikas, 2009). It also seems unlikely that this would make full use of the knowledge and skills base of EPs that EPs were perceived to have in theme one and fails to take account of the extensiveness of the staff development and inclusion goals articulated in theme two. The findings indicate that within the authority, where the research was undertaken, many school leaders had not considered involving an EP in systemic change processes and were continuing to choose to work at a less economical individual case level whilst holding the view that systemic work was less valuable than direct work with children. Some school leaders could see the value of working in a systemic way but pressure from head-teachers to obtain reports related to exclusion and placement decisions was a barrier to this work being undertaken. This pressure could be symptomatic of the short amount of time available within the SLA leading to school leaders and head-teachers prioritising assessment when time is in short supply (Watts & Pasternicki, 1988). This situation is exacerbated by the perception that other leadership members were often curriculum driven and did not recognise the importance of enhancing both emotional well-being and learning in young people. This was exacerbated by the belief that some leadership members have different and at times competing

priorities. For example, some teachers challenged the practicality of EP interventions within the classroom, a finding that concurs with Rothi, Leavey and Best who reported that EP interventions were too difficult and time consuming for class-teachers to implement (Rothi, Leavey & Best, 2008).

The range of EP work was inhibited further by the perception that some leadership teams held stereotypical beliefs of EPs, regarding them as having the ability to 'read minds' and perceiving them to be judgemental in approach. This finding may relate to a number of issues, professional defensiveness related to the risk of a psychologist exposing their incompetence and deficiencies (Gonzalez, Nelson, Gutkin & Shwery, 2004); the application of a deficit, medical model and leadership members having insufficient or inappropriate knowledge of what EPs can potentially offer them. Importantly, the existence of such beliefs was seen to be leading to the commissioning of educational leadership consultants in preference to commissioning EPs to be involved in leadership development and organisational change. In relation to this, the consultant drew attention to the importance of finding ways to establish trust, role transparency, clarity of purpose and clear ground rules to support the generation of mutual trust, understanding and relationships. This again points to the need for EPs to communicate their role more clearly and to carefully define and advertise the benefits of approaches that could be geared towards leadership teams.

The findings indicate that the lack of capacity of some school leaders to plan and organise systemic involvement of the EP was seen as a barrier to EPs being able to work effectively and meet commissioner needs. This finding contrasts with that of Farrell et al. (2006) and Nottingham EPS (2006) who both found that EPs did spend a significant amount of time at the 'systemic level', increasing capacity in schools. This contrast may reflect the fact that these studies were not specifically secondary school based. In line with the current findings, Farrell et al. (2006) also found that it was easier for other professionals to provide a distinctive function for EP work around pupils who have special educational needs, than the EPs contribution to strategic capacity building.

The difficulty of securing access to staff was also considered to inhibit the work of the EP. This finding was consistent with Nottingham Community EPS (2006) and

points towards a need for EPs to insist on particular setting conditions when negotiating involvement such as school staff having allocated time to interface with the EP.

A lack of time, funding for more time, and time constraints to implement systemic projects were also cited as barriers, particularly to systems work. Interestingly, some school leaders appeared to view systemic work as a luxury that could take much needed time away from individual pupils. Some felt the need to protect their allocated time in case a crisis should arise and were cautious about spending it on systemic issues. This points to a potential need for EPs to negotiate carefully what is possible in the time package offered and the need to offer more extended time packages to schools, as those currently offered may be too short to deliver something systemically worthwhile. It may also highlight a need to introduce a system that allows schools to top up the level of time they have previously purchased, based on need. To enable this, the service will need to find a way to build more responsive capacity to prevent competitors meeting the needs and delivering the services that cannot be met. The school leaders' accounts of time constraints contrasted quite sharply with the experiences reported by some EPs within the study. Despite being seen as a highly limited resource, some EPs found themselves chasing school leaders to spend time in their schools. The consultant empathised with this challenge and stated that there were times when consultants found it difficult to get their clients to commit time in their diaries for the work they were to do together. He suggested that advanced planning and advertising the benefits of approaches could help school leaders understand that the time commitment was a valuable use of time.

**The findings within this theme have revealed numerous barriers and challenges** at the level of the school. In relation to national challenges, school leaders perceived the demands of the Ofsted inspection process to be a barrier with some making a conscious decision to find a balance between Ofsted demands and acting in a way that was in the best interests of young people in school. The perceived struggle between the attainment focus of Ofsted and the curriculum needs of each child was highlighted as an on-going dilemma. The findings revealed that senior leadership teams were often distracted by the need to respond to Ofsted demands, such as data recording. Feelings of threat and

anxiety were expressed in relation to the perceived lack of fairness and the perceived inconsistency of current Ofsted judgements. This finding highlights how school staff experience shifting goal posts that lead to anxiety and insecurity about how they will be judged. They are coping with new ideologies being espoused by different prime ministers and education ministers and new agendas where dominant attainment agendas may be leading to the neglect of the emotional well being of staff and pupils. EPs are well placed to support schools with school improvement models that remove the anxiety of traditional inspection approaches (Rees, 2005; Evans and Cowell, 2013). In addition to school based challenges and challenges at a national level, the findings indicate that there are some potential barriers within the educational psychology service itself which may be inhibiting EP practice in secondary schools.

#### **5.2.3.4 Challenges at a Service Level**

At a service level, SLA arrangements were seen by EPs as being generally successful, although some quandaries existed in the commissioning process that were potentially getting in the way of effective service delivery. These included the concern that the system had become too resource driven and a fear that some children who needed the services of an EP would not receive them if an SLA had not been purchased by their school. EPs differed in their view as to how directly involved individual EPs should be in initial commissioning conversations. Some discomfort was experienced in relation to having to directly sell services to schools, with one EP finding this to be incongruous with their being in a helping profession and considering that this should be left to senior managers and another EP wanting to be more involved in the sales process and the direct commissioning of his work. A fear of losing the opportunity for principled negotiation was also voiced which points to a need to continue to negotiate the EP role to ensure ethical standards and the best interests of children and young people are being met. Within the new SEN framework, EPs may need to advocate for young people more than they do currently, to ensure practice fulfils these standards and social justice as outlined in the Children and Families Act (HMSO, 2014).

Taken together, these findings point to a need for whole service discussion and debate to enhance agreement and establish service culture with regard to commissioning.

At a more pragmatic level, the findings indicated that a service marketing challenge existed that related to the EPs lacking awareness of their competitors' contribution to systemic training work in schools. EPs need to recognise that this lack of awareness, coupled with a lack of capacity to respond to commissioner demands and the increasing emergence of competing consortiums is dangerous, particularly given that these consortiums often have capacity and are in need of the business. The consultant concurred with the danger of this position.

The findings also indicated some challenges related to experience and competence. One such challenge was being less experienced as a commissioned EP. This was implied as potentially inhibiting the EPs' ability to challenge secondary school leaders and guide them towards more effective ways of working. This finding points to a gap between theory and practice for newly qualified EPs (Lunt & Majors, 2000) and a potential need for EPs to allow less experienced EPs to build their practice confidence before working within the secondary sector, possibly allowing them to work jointly with a more experienced EP for a period or the need to use mentoring systems. An additional challenge related to competence, was the problem that EPs experienced when working with a SENCO who was unable to influence others and was unsupported by the rest of the school staff. When such issues were encountered, the impact of EP contributions could be diluted or lost. EPs ability to use their knowledge of conciliation and supervision skills to empower SENCOs to develop their ability to influence will be important here.

Importantly, the tight time constraints (i.e. three day SLA time allocation), within which EPs were expected to deliver their role in a creative cost effective way was raised by school leaders, EPs and the consultant as a potential barrier to service delivery. Some EPs felt frustrated that some schools clearly did not have sufficient time in the three days to meet the needs of the young people they had there. In contrast, some schools were experienced as being reluctant to use the

time they had and were often having to be pursued by EPs to have the time they had bought delivered.

In summary, this theme highlights that there are many barriers positioned at a wide variety of systemic levels that can inhibit the ability of EPs to maximise their contribution within the secondary sector. Given the existence of such barriers, EPs need to tailor their delivery to maximise the impact of their involvement whilst working with and around any systemic limitations they might encounter such as staff access and incompatible systems and beliefs. Many of the barriers identified have been present over-time and are unlikely to disappear or change in the near future. Consequently, EPs need to apply their knowledge of human processes and organisations and work creatively with schools to ensure that they are working in an economic and effective way. Adaptability and flexibility will be crucial in over-coming barriers and supporting school leaders in maximising learning opportunities and emotional well-being within their schools.

#### **5.2.4 Theme Four: Maximising the Benefits of Educational Psychology Activity Related to Commissioned Services**

This theme provides an understanding of practices and attitudes that may support the ability of EPs to meet the needs of commissioning school leaders both within secondary school level and within the educational psychology service. The findings within this theme suggest potential practice shifts, potential keys to unlock some barriers and maximise the effectiveness of EPs working in a commissioned role. These keys include EPs having an awareness of how the setting conditions in the context of EP work, particularly the skills and attitudes of the school leaders they work with, can affect the success of their work. Factors relating to customer orientation and role negotiation; factors relating to the EP's motivation to work at a wider, more systemic level and the need to maximise communication with purchasing agents need to be considered. Each of these are discussed in turn.



#### **5.2.4.1 Negotiation of Setting Conditions**

The first of these was the need to be aware of setting conditions that can help to support the work of EPs. At a school level, the data indicated that it was helpful if particular assets, skills and attitudes were held by the school leader who facilitated the EP role. These included qualities such as having the ability to be curious about what an EP can offer; being willing to work closely and collaboratively, being able to plan, organise and time manage well and truly valuing the EP's professional contribution. This finding is entirely consistent with the finding of Farrell et al. who found that systems work was greatly facilitated by good working relationships where all recognise the need for change (Farrell et al., 2006). It also links to a phrase used by the consultant when he highlighted the need for clients being 'consultant savvy', that is, knowing how to work with and get the best out of their consultants. The findings showed that when the school leader who is interfacing with the EP has a good level of these assets, skills and attitudes the EP's opportunity to work effectively, collaboratively, and creatively is greatly improved. In addition, the school leader who holds such assets is more likely to be considered a 'true partner' (Christopher, Payne & Ballantyne, 2002) of the service and to be an effective, supportive, collaborative advocate. It follows that such advocates are more likely to become loyal, long-term SLA purchasers who will influence others by talking about their positive professional experiences of working with EPs (Baron, Conway & Warnaby, 2010). In reality, however, there may be times when despite effort on both sides of the SLA, assets and setting conditions fail to materialise and the SLA agreement may need to terminate. Such a move would free up capacity to direct service efforts towards other 'true partners' whom EPs can work with more successfully. Such steps will however present dilemmas relating to social justice and equality, as the EP could potentially be leaving needs unmet in some schools through no fault of the children who remain there. In reality, this could lead to schools and Children's Service potentially not meeting their responsibility towards to their clients.

EPs widening the range of staff they work with and recognising that, when they are working within secondary schools, many staff members potentially have limited experience of working with external agencies and therefore may be unsure of the expectations surrounding this, was raised as helpful. EPs also

recognising newly appointed SENCOs as a valuable opportunity to reset ground rules and articulate the EP role, was thought to be beneficial. In addition, EPs being flexible, establishing a good rapport with SENCOs and highlighting SENCO strengths, whilst supporting and empowering them to identify and work through change agents within their organisations, was also seen as constructive, as was encouraging them to protect time for projects and to disseminate good practice. When EPs are working with school staff, particularly those less familiar with external agencies or new to role, the consultant pointed to the importance of establishing ground rules, sharing mutual expectations and reviewing whether mutual expectations have been met. Lastly, the data suggests that offering more routine appointments could help ensure that school leaders used their time more consistently and effectively.

#### **5.2.4.2 Establishing Commissioner Need**

EPs continuing to recognise that most school leaders are trying their best to meet the needs of young people but are finding it difficult to do, could support not just stronger customer orientation but also the development of empathy and relationships between EPs and school leaders. This fits with Rothi, Leavey and Best's (2008) discovery that teachers have a strong desire to help but at times feel frustrated and powerless in their efforts to support pupils, particularly those pupils they suspect may have mental health difficulties .

EPs working to obtain a clear picture of what exactly it is that school staff are struggling with and working to detect patterns within the needs of school was suggested within the finding as being helpful in shaping a menu of potentially useful services. In addition, EPs being fully aware of what secondary schools today are trying to attain, especially if this, (in conjunction with government policy information) continues to shape the offer EPs make to secondary schools. The possibility of EPs investing time and resources into developing a universal offer that is specifically suited to secondary schools systems was highlighted. EPs being able to tailor their offer to meet the professional goals of school leaders and working to deliver services in a way that works with the strengths of the school, was suggested as a potential way forward. Such moves would help to ensure that EPs are continuing to offer value, school leaders are satisfied and are more likely

to reinvest in the service. They fit with the suggestion that EPs were often unsuccessfully pushing established ways of working onto secondary school systems, without carefully examining and reflecting upon these systems, to see what aspects of their offer fit best and changing those that do not.

Negotiating exactly what the EP contribution will be in secondary schools, the importance of the EP who delivers the SLA having direct commissioning conversations with those who have the responsibility of delivering the work, was highlighted. In relation to such negotiations, the consultant drew attention to clients preferring continuity of provider from negotiation to delivery. When negotiating, EPs should try to move towards more creative ways of working, that allow a balance of individual, systemic and empowering approaches to meeting both individual and organisational need. Given the three-day time period involved in a typical SLA with school leaders, the consultant highlighted the importance of being really clear with school leaders about what is possible in the time available and the importance of suggesting what might be possible to deliver. It will also be crucial for EPs to ensure that any work they agree to undertake meets with their professional and ethical standards ensuring that the best interests of the children and young people are upheld (HCPC, 2012).

#### **5.2.4.3 Establishing a Systemic Market Niche**

As a service, capitalising on the EPs being motivated to work systemically would support EP in meeting commissioner need. The findings indicated that EPs enjoyed working at different levels of the organisation and wanted to have more opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills base more systemically. Within the current study, school leaders made few references to experiencing systemic work, which is consistent with the literature (Farrell et al., 2006; Rothi, Leavey and Best, 2008). The findings indicate that EPs consider they could make a greater contribution at a systems level, particularly in the following areas: behaviour management and emotional well-being support; language and communication training; training adolescent development; ; parenting support; conciliation skills; support for school leaders who are trying to change teaching practice on the ground and supervision and coaching. Working with a wider range of children at a more universal level to enhance learning and using approaches

that are more therapeutic was suggested as potentially enhancing the EP contribution. The importance of securing the commitment of the management team in school when planning projects was also raised and the importance of finding ways to improve leadership team members' awareness of the links between emotional well-being and learning was evidenced in the data.

EPs obtaining access to information about what other training the schools they are working with are receiving will be essential in the future to ensure that EPs secure a competitive edge and are able to plug gaps in the market. Along with this, EPs will need to advertise themselves more widely as having the staff development skills commissioners want. They also need to actively create opportunities to be involved in joint thinking with school leaders that allows the negotiation of systemic input and make sure they are ready to deliver. This recommendation does not necessarily fit with Farrell et al. (2006) who state that EPs should seek an alternative provider where possible. This lack of fit almost certainly reflects more recent market changes. In relation to staff development, the consultant raised the importance of considering transfer of skill as a measurable outcome when evaluating the impact of the work carried out. This is important, particularly in relation to EPs building their bank of practice based evidence (Fox, 2003) as well as providing evidence of impact and outcome measures to commissioners of services and LAs.

#### **5.2.4.4 Establishing Clear Communication Systems**

Continuing with a marketing perspective, EPs communicating with head-teachers was raised as a very important issue. Despite head-teachers being perceived by school leaders as key players in the commissioning process, the findings indicated that some EPs had never met the head-teacher and were often unaware who they were. Head-teachers were seen, by some, as being disinterested and distracted by other aspects of their role, while EPs building some relationship with the head-teacher was considered crucial. The consultant highlighted the danger of head-teachers having commissioning power but not being unaware of the contribution and impact of EP services. He highlighted the importance of making sure that all stakeholders understood the rationale for and the purpose of an EP's involvement and were supportive of it. In his view, if

people, such as head teachers, were not aware, over-communicating with them and making more of a personal approach could be a beneficial way forward. EPs do not always have the opportunity to interface with those school leaders who hold formal and informal strategic budget decision making responsibility and this makes it crucial that effective communication systems are set up to facilitate the flow of information about what they have done, how effective it is and whether or not value for money was received.

Lastly, the data highlighted that all the school leaders within the study indicated a positive intent to buy and seemed accepting of, although sometimes frustrated by, the fact that EP services were no longer free at the point of delivery. They also demonstrated awareness of how valuable time with an EP was in the context of uncertain school budget levels, a reality that has also been acknowledged by Rothi Leavey and Best (2008).

This theme addressed the research questions 'How do the attributed meanings of school leaders (in relation to the contribution of EPs) impact on engagement and purchasing behaviour, in the context of trading?' It highlighted that decreasing school rolls and other budget cuts are affecting the ability of school leaders to buy in the level of service they need. Although school leaders experienced some frustration at services no longer being retained centrally, they appeared to understand why EP services now have to be purchased directly. They also experienced frustration with regard to the difficulty of accessing sufficient support to meet the needs of young people within schools and some considered that a way to resolve this difficulty was by purchasing of non-local authority EP services (private EP services), as a potential way forward to allow schools to have increased EP presence and support. Despite budget restrictions, school leaders demonstrated intent to continue to justify the need for SLA access to head-teachers. It is also encouraging to note that directing future funding streams such as Pupil Premium funding to the purchase of more EP time was being considered by some school leaders as a way of enhancing their access to educational psychology services.

In summary, this theme brings an understanding of what elements of current practice can be taken more into account, adapted and changed to optimise the

ability of EPs to work effectively and economically with commissioners. This theme shows that a range of practice shifts have been noted within the findings, some of which have a school personnel focus whilst others have particular implications for the developing practice of EPs, with some being more under the control of EPs, as providers, than others. Most importantly, the findings with this theme suggest that EPs need to begin to take the secondary school context much more into account when deciding what to offer, what is worth trying and demonstrating what they are effective in delivering (Stobie, 2002).

### **5.2.5 Theme Five: Recognising the Need to Improve the Marketing Strategy of Educational Psychologists**

This theme provided an understanding of why EPs need to improve the clarity and proactivity of how they market their services to school leaders.

#### **5.2.5.1 Raising Awareness of the Role of the Educational Psychologist**

The findings indicated that some school leaders lacked knowledge of the potential scope of the EP role and were unaware of the full range of EP skills and training. This is important, given that how EPs are experienced and viewed is likely to affect what they are commissioned to do. If commissioners experience only a traditional approach they may be unaware of other possibilities. Some school leaders had difficulty articulating what it was that EPs contributed and some found it difficult to describe the benefits they wanted in commissioning an EP. This inability to describe the benefits is an important finding in relation to final research question, 'What benefits do school leaders seek from the EP service?' These being difficult to describe, is consistent with marketing theory that acknowledges the differences between service features and benefits. Such theory states that compared to acknowledging features i.e. facts about a product or service, 'defining something as simple as a Benefit is much harder than it seems' (Rackman, 1988 p. 100), and being able to define this is reliant on the providers' ability to develop and define explicit needs (Rackman, 1988) in their commissioners. It follows that if explicit needs are clear, benefits will need less explanation.

It is also interesting to note from a marketing perspective, that in addition to school leaders being unaware of what EPs can do, young people in school were considered unaware of the presence of EPs generally and if they were aware, they considered EPs to be similar to advisory teachers. This finding concurs with the finding of Rothi, Leavey and Best (2008) who found that pupils thought EPs were psychiatrists. This raises the question of why EPs are not more commonly recognised as psychologists. This may link to young people considering that there is a stigma related to being involved with a psychologist, such a perceived stigma was detected by Rothi, Leavey and Best, (2008). It also points to the need for young people to have more universal access to psychologists working away from deficit models in areas such as Positive Psychology (Wilding & Griffey, 2015) to increase their understanding of the potential of the role and decrease any associated stigma. These findings reiterate the need for EPs to market more clearly what they do and can do whilst ensuring customer wants are registered. These findings concur with the recommendations of both Farrell et al. (2006) and the Nottingham EPS (2006) where clear documentation about the range of work offered by EPs should be provided that was explicit about the psychological nature of the contribution they can make and the importance of providing examples of good practice. It is interesting to reflect at this point on the empowering nature of the EP role and how potentially this empowering leads to the professional contribution of EPs being unseen by school leaders. This raises another interesting question. Is it that school leaders cannot see what EPs actually do or is it that EPs want to be seen to be contributing something else, such as being truly collaborative to bring about systems change?

#### **5.2.5.2 Building Commissioner Understanding of Psychological Processes**

The findings also suggest that the ways EPs work were unclear and unexplained to school leaders. This resulted in school leaders not having a full understanding and appreciation why EPs used particular approaches and became frustrated, at times, by the reflective processes involved in such approaches. Such frustration may link to the inspection pressures on staff to fix issues and continue to improve performance and attainment. Interestingly, the consultant saw his profession as having a similar skill set to EPs but he did not refer to client

frustration with processes. Consultants may be more proactive in educating their clients about their role and ways of working. Giving information to school leaders that makes how psychologists work explicit was seen by the consultant, to be crucial and the potential of using post engagement reviews to highlight processes, skills and benefits was raised.

The findings highlighted that some school leaders had more accurate expectations of EP involvement than others did. This was based on their experience of other external agencies who often work more practically and more directly with young people. Some saw the EP service as quite 'hands on' working directly with young people whilst others saw them as being 'quite hands off'. In contrast, Rothi, Leavey and Best (2008) found that EPs were seen as a 'hands off' service that observes, assesses and recommends. The presence of this inconsistency of role expectation within the findings of this theme points to the need to drive home the rationale and benefits of the different approaches EPs take to ensure school leaders are provided with accurate, clear and realistic information about the process and expectations.

#### **5.2.5.3 Challenging Inappropriate Commissioner Expectations**

Interestingly, the data indicated that traditional ways of working might be perpetuated by some EPs being reluctant to challenge the role expectations placed upon them by school leaders and therefore continuing to conform to more traditional role expectations. This could be maintaining the status quo of service delivery, in preference to challenging inappropriate expectations and changing traditional views of what an EP does. It could also potentially prevent EPs gaining opportunities to demonstrate the range of approaches and ways of working they can potentially provide, resulting in school leaders failing to gain experience of these, leaving their view and expectations of the role of the EP unchanged.

The findings showed that there were occasions when school leaders considered that the involvement of an EP had not led them to being more informed about the challenge they were facing. This may relate to the 'hand holding', empowering nature of the approaches received or to clients seeking reassurance rather than novel strategies from the EP. Interestingly, this issue was raised by the two school leaders who wanted to secure a wider role within the authority or had held



one in the past. The concept of 'professional rivalry', referred to in the introductory chapter, may be a potential influence here. It is interesting to note that with regard to these statements, inconsistencies were apparent, with the EP being referred to as 'an expert' at one time and as 'not adding value' at another. With regard to 'not adding value', the consultant highlighted the need for EPs to carefully define the scope of the task they are about to embark on with their commissioners and to be clear at the outset if their skill set does not match the task. In reality, EPs may be tempted to 'go with the flow' amidst the demands of their heavy schedule and not stop to define the task and reflect sufficiently on their contribution, including how their intervention will be evaluated (Fox, 2011). The consultant's recommendation is consistent with Rothi, Leavey and Best (2008) who recognised that outcomes were better when EPs were clear about the contribution they could make and commissioners were clear about what work was required and what benefits are being sought. In contrast, Rackman (1988) suggests that providers need to focus on clearly defining what school leaders want and the exploration of benefits will take care of itself.

One client considered she had no control over which EP was allocated to her school within the SLA and no control over what specific expertise they may bring. When commenting on allocating personnel, the consultant indicated that it was important for the client to have trust in the EPS to be able to allocate the correct person to the required service.

In summary, this theme points to the crucial need for EPs to be proactive and forceful in marketing what they currently do, what they potentially can do, and making sure there is a match between what their clients want and what they, as EPs, can deliver. The next section discusses the substantive theory pertinent to the commissioned role of Educational Psychologists in secondary schools.

### **5.3 Substantive Theory**

Together, these five main themes contributed to the construction of a Substantive Theory which is pertinent to the commissioned role of Educational Psychologists in secondary schools. This theory, 'The direct commissioning of Educational Psychologists is the missing link in improving emotional well-being and attainment for young people in 21st century secondary schools', offers a deeper

understanding of the role of EPs working with secondary school leaders to improve the emotional well being and attainment of young people within their schools. It highlights that Educational Psychologists are a resource which secondary school leaders recognise and appreciate as having the knowledge and skills they need to support them in making improvements in this area. The theory illustrates that although highly valued and appreciated by their school leaders, secondary schools are currently failing to target sufficient resources to securing adequate EP support. The theory suggests that EPs are well placed as professionals to work with secondary schools to improve the emotional well being and attainment of children and young people and they could and should be involved in this work to a far greater extent than they do so currently.

This theory fits with the conclusions of Farrell et al. (2006) who stated that school staff work more commonly with EPs than any other professionals and concurs with his statement in the introduction of the review of the role and contribution of EPs, that there is:

‘abundant evidence that EPs make a contribution to intervention and support for children and young people who present and/or experience behavioural, emotional and/or social difficulties (Miller & Black, 2001; King & Kellock, 2002; Lown, 2005) with work being wide ranging and including working directly with children and many stakeholders on a variety of foci’ (Farrell et al., 2006 p. 16).

It corresponds to Rothi, Leavey and Best’s (2008) unsubstantiated conclusion that EPs were perceived by teachers to be an essential part of the support system for pupils with mental health needs. It also concurs with their finding that teachers are frustrated about the lack of EP support because they recognise the potential benefits of involving an EP in improving emotional well-being in schools. Their study claims that teachers saw EPs as an essential part of the support system for pupils with mental health needs and having necessary skills to engage children and their parents and ability to offer many good and potentially useful strategies. Rothi et al. acknowledged the potential benefits of EP involvement in addressing school mental health issues.

This theory is supported by claims made by Evans and Lunt (2002) that the EP role should be involve supporting teaching staff to meet the needs of young

people and linked to the claim that children who experience emotional and behavioural difficulties in school are the most difficult to accommodate. This theory corresponds to the opinion of Mackay (2009) who stated that EPs were the most generic of psychologists, had the greatest level of post-graduate training in relation to child and adolescent development than any other branch of psychology and had an unparalleled knowledge of school settings. This opinion contrasts sharply with the unsubstantiated claim proposed by Rothi, Leavey and Best (2008) that EPs are not mental health specialists.

Given these claims and the recent failure of government publications such as, 'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools' (DfE, 2015) and 'Promoting children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing: a whole school and college approach' (PHI, 2015) to acknowledge any actual or potential contribution of EPs to this area of work, this Substantive Theory is particularly pertinent. It is also significant in the light of the recent mental health statistics which reveal that half of mental illness shown by children and young people starts by the age of 14, one in ten children and young people have a clinically diagnosed mental health disorder, one in seven have a level of difficulty that significantly impairs their learning and development and many have needs which go undetected (Weare, 2015). The pertinence of this theory is further highlighted by the statistic that suicide is one of the most common causes of death in young people and the trend in suicide attempts, eating disorders and self-harm attachment disorder continues to grow and is on the rise (Weare, 2015).

This theory has even further weight when the estimations of mental health prevalence are considered. In 2008, Rothi, Leavey and Best estimated that in relation to the EP capacity of one EP, there could be 50-1550 children with levels of mental health difficulty, with 250-800 considered to have moderately severe mental health needs, potentially requiring their service.

Finally, this Substantive Theory concurs with a recent statement within a recent review entitled, 'What works in promoting social and emotional well-being and responding to mental health in schools?' This stated:

'that having specialist staff such as educational psychologists work with the young person at school is an approach which both the national and some local

evaluations of TAMHS showed to be transformative in many cases' (Weare, 2015, p. 11).

It also concurs with an increased responsibility on schools to respond to the emotional wellbeing and mental health needs of young people and to take greater account of the 'non-cognitive side of education' (Weare, 2015). It is consistent with the observations of the review report commissioned by Young Minds, 'Better Outcomes New Delivery', that schools are desperate for specialist support in relation to managing emotional wellbeing issues in schools and some specialist providers such as CAMHS not being confident about their ability to support mental health problems in schools (Bennet Hall, 2014), possibly related to stretched resources and /or limited knowledge of schools.

#### **5.4 Critical Evaluation of the Methodology**

In undertaking this study, the aspiration was to fulfil the characteristics of good qualitative research proposed by Henwood and Pidgeon in 1992. In trying to maximise their first characteristic, 'importance of fit', great care was taken to ensure that the themes, categories and focussed codes offered corresponded closely to the original data set and that this correspondence was demonstrated through clear, explicit justification of how categories were developed. In doing this, I implemented a coding framework within Microsoft Excel that allowed more efficient tracking and organisation of data to be presented to the reader in digital form. This allowed the data to be viewed as a bottom-up hierarchy, a format that is considered to be the most helpful way to view data within a Constructivist Grounded Theory study (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Visual models were given showing where focussed codes fitted into sub-categories, how these sub-categories fitted with categories, categories with themes and ultimately how the themes fitted with the eventual Substantive Theory. It is recognised that it remains unusual to see a clear description of coding procedures within Grounded Theory studies (Urquart, 2007) and I have attempted to offer this openly and concisely to help ensure the fulfilment of their next characteristic, 'integration of theory. In trying to ensure this, attempts were made to articulate how the relationships have been constructed between codes, categories and themes and how these have been integrated or generalised to the construction of theory

whilst recognising that 'similarity is in the eye of the researcher' and recognising that as the researcher, I consistently, uniquely and personally interacted with the data.

This was done in the knowledge that such a bottom up derivation of the generated theory can make it difficult to think in an abstract way and that the very strength of Grounded Theory may also be its weakness, and this can lead to lower level theory being generated, such as was the case in this study (Urquart, 2007).

Attempts were made to meet the characteristic of 'reflexivity' by openly acknowledging and accounting for my role as researcher and by using analytical memos to increase the awareness of my impact on the findings. A reflexive journal and memos were written to capture how personal experience and assumptions affected the interview situation. A process of free-style memoing (Glaser, 2014) was carried out throughout the research process. These memos were supportive to moving the Grounded theory process away from description into conceptualisation and facilitated theory construction. Despite trying, it was difficult to remain immune to the issue of inadequate memoing, an issue that is the major challenge of almost all qualitative projects (Clark & Friese, 2007).

In fulfilling the fourth characteristic, 'documentation', attempts were made to provide a clear audit trail and give detailed justification of steps taken and decisions made at different parts of this Grounded Theory journey.

'Theoretical sampling' was used which allowed developing theory to guide the next data collection steps as gaps were perceived and questions were suggested by the data obtained to that point. With regard to, 'negative case analysis', cases that did not fit as well to the developing theory as others were integrated and explored. In relation to, 'sensitivity to negotiated realities', awareness was shown of the research context, appreciation of realities of individuals and differences between the participants' interpretations and my own were acknowledged.

In relation to 'transferability', it was not expected that the findings would be fully generalisable but suggested that these findings may have applicability to the wider context of educational psychology. It must be left to those applying them to

make their own judgment regarding the appropriateness of transferring these research outcomes to their own particular contexts (Robson, 2002).

In aspiring to these attributes, the evaluative criteria of credibility, originality, usefulness and originality, suggested by Charmaz (2006) were aspired to. The study was considered to be 'credible', in that, the codes and categories were constructed from a wide enough range of empirical observations and codes and categories firmly grounded in the data, data strongly linked to arguments made and the progress of the analysis process. It is recognised that a larger sample may have been beneficial in generating a wider range of views and potentially moving closer to attaining theoretical saturation. However, the sample size chosen, allowed for staying close to the data and recalling individual participants and their conversations more clearly.

The criteria of 'originality' was addressed through the generation of a new Substantive Theory and providing novel appreciative insights within this area of research in an area where appreciative studies have been rare. It is recognised that formal grounded theory was not generated but a substantive theory, specific to the challenges of Educational Psychology. The 'usefulness' of this study lies in its contribution to addressing the dearth of quality research studies related to the secondary school context and invoking in-depth qualitative approaches. The research has 'resonance', in that its findings are linked to established literature and new contributions have been generated which are likely to make sense to stakeholders within the field. At the time of writing, these findings have been shared with EPs but not as yet with commissioners. Some care has been taken to ensure that theoretical explanations offered might have sufficient abstraction, in terms of their applicability, at least in some degree, to the larger world (Stern, 2007), the larger world being other traded services who hold similarities and at times the profession as a whole. Most importantly, it has enabled the generation of some pragmatic suggestions about what the profession of Educational Psychology can do to hold a stronger market position in the new commercial context and raise its national profile in the context of governmental agendas relating to the mental health of children and young people.

## **5.5 Personal Reflections**

Being an experienced psychologist with a wide range of interview experiences to bring to bear, I was surprised by the extent of my nervousness and apprehension in relation to carrying out interviews during this study. These emotions lessened as the Grounded Theory journey progressed. Consequently, there were times when I may have missed some opportunities to follow up questions and drill down further. I was conscious that I experienced some participants as being easier to interview and build rapport with than others, and recognised that I considered some to be more informative than others, having more experience, more observations to discuss, being particularly reflective and articulate (Morse, 2007). However, I tried to remain reflexive, whilst valuing and integrating the contributions of all participants no matter how ideal. One major advantage of having produced typed transcriptions was the discovery when these were revisited that some contributions had been much more informative than originally thought.

When considering potential bias, the consultant who commented on the findings was a personal acquaintance and the psychologists involved were colleagues. This may have resulted in some reporting bias. Awareness was held that being an EP working within the host service, may have influenced participants' openness and honesty. They all knew that I was a member of the service and were aware that they had been referred by psychologists who were known to me. I attempted to overcome this by establishing rapport, building trust, and giving reassurances regarding confidentiality and anonymity. I made my position as a researcher transparent and ensured the rationale and aims of the study were clear. The chosen analytical approach, Constructivist Grounded Theory, was helpful in its acknowledgement of the Grounded Theory process being reliant on many factors including what we know, who we are, our interactions with participants, our interactions with the data and the impact of our unique developing ideas (Charmaz, 2006).

At the outset of the study, I considered myself a novice grounded theorist and therefore found the presence of the semi-structured interview reassuring. It was envisaged that I would move away from these original questions as the study

progressed. This actually occurred less than I thought. I found the interview format to be useful in generating information that could further saturate the categories I had constructed and influence the construction of new ones. It helped me hold in mind that each participant was telling me a specific story at a specific time and place and in response to my questions and I tried not to lose sight of this in the process of analysis (Mruck & Mey, 2007). Keeping the numbers of participants relatively low and the questions relatively consistent made this more feasible. Such structure and consistency reflects the view of experienced Grounded Theorist, Janice Morse, who reports that as the quality of the data improves, fewer interviews and participants are required and the more targeted the content of the interviews, the better the data, hence fewer interviews are necessary (Morse, 2007).

## **5.6 Implications for the Practice of Educational Psychology**

The themes constructed within this study and the detailed information contained within them, have highlighted some key implications for the role of Educational Psychologists working within secondary schools in a traded context and indicated some key implications for the profession as a whole. These are addressed in the next sub-section.

### **5.6.1 Adopting a Balanced Approach to Service Delivery that Incorporates a Competitive Edge**

EPs need to acknowledge the successful and valuable work they do working directly with young people in secondary schools far more than they do currently. They need to begin to accept the reality that within the profession as a whole this work continues to prevail, despite the reconstruction agenda (Gillham, 1978). EPs need to begin to celebrate the contribution they make in this area, moving away from feeling contrite and apologetic about it, towards recognising that in practice, their expert work in this area continues to be valued by school leaders and presents the profession with a leading, competitive edge in the current market place. There are few people in education as qualified, equipped or willing to tackle work with individuals in schools (Farrell et al., 2006), in the way EPs do. EPs can remain involved in direct work with individuals whilst also continuing to contribute to work at a systemic level. EPs can use the experiences of young



people at an individual level, to become informed about what might need to change at a wider systemic level (Dessent,1992), and bring this to the attention of their commissioners, providing opportunities to deliver change within a more systemic role.

EPs are motivated to work at a wider systemic level but in doing so, they may meet more competition than they are currently used to and they may have less of a competitive edge (Farrell et al., 2006). However, as opportunities expand and the experience and expertise of EP working in this way continues to increase, EPs are highly likely to secure a greater market share. In order to do this, EPs will need to be proactive in suggesting and creating opportunities to demonstrate their capacity at a systems level and will need to demonstrate clearly how their knowledge, skills, expertise and experience are best placed to deliver the changes school leaders want. Showcasing examples of particular approaches and the use of testimonials will be useful here, that involve other school leaders sharing their experiences and describing the impact of working with an EPs in relation to particular psychological approaches and interventions. Such a marketing approach could also be useful in relation to piloting longer SLA agreements, for example, ten days not three, and allowing EPs to market the benefits of secondary schools buying more time.

EPs engaging in such practice shifts, in time will increase the likelihood that the overall balance of work of EPs will change. EPs can shift this balance further by widening their current offer to include more positive psychology based universal interventions. This might help shift misperceptions that are sometimes attributed to their role. Such approaches could include mindfulness; approaches to happiness; supervision; coaching; leadership sessions geared towards both teachers and senior pupils and preventive universal programs based on approaches such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. Interventions geared towards improving stress management capacity and emotional well-being have the potential of countering the climate of threat generated by inspection regimes and improving emotional well-being. EPs need to appreciatively support schools in recognising that levels of emotional well-being of young people and their behaviour patterns depend greatly on quality of teaching and learning, and the

quality of interactions within the classroom (Jones, Monsen & Franey, 2013; Woods, Stothard, Lydon & Reason, 2013).

To improve the effectiveness of their work generally, EPs need to be more assertive in negotiating the setting and conditions they need to allow them to work effectively within secondary school settings which are often large and complex organisations. They need to negotiate expectations and ground rules and to establish who their key point of contact will be, and to plan how staff access can be facilitated when needed. When negotiating systemic projects, it will be economical for EPs to take more of a facilitative role, as an external agency who cannot be present at all times. Such a role could involve the negotiation of a key team of individuals who can take on aspects of the project and influence direction and progress of this from within. For some projects, it may be beneficial for EPs to provide protocols relating to particular actions to support implementation, ensuring staff are clear about the actions they need to take and the timing of such action.

Any offers that EPs make at an individual or systemic level will need to take full account of an analysis of the needs of the young people within the school, the professional goals of key school leaders and particular school development needs. EPs will need to closely listen to commissioners and negotiate and tailor their offer to ensure their commissioners' are satisfied with the service received. They will have to ensure that their service is valued by commissioners and fits well with classroom and whole school demands. It will pay to continue to recognise that many school leaders are trying their best and an empathetic customer orientation is required to support the development of relationships between themselves and school leaders, particularly in this climate of austerity.

### **5.6.2 Rebranding and Repositioning Educational Psychologists in the Current Market Place**

EPs need to re-brand themselves in the light of their qualifications, extensive training and knowledge and experience of young people in secondary schools and the education context more generally. This will allow them to reposition themselves as applied psychologists who have a unique perspective on the needs of the young people in secondary school. EPs need to advertise that they

possess specialist knowledge of psychology and child development, spanning infancy through adolescence. They possess key knowledge about the impact of puberty on the neurology and consequent learning and emotional development of teenagers, and are a rich resource that is well placed to support school staff in meeting the emotional and attainment needs of young people.

EP will also have to be far more proactive and strategic in positioning themselves within the wider market. They will need to scrutinise the competition that is growing around them, compare all market offers and work hard to ensure they retain a competitive edge. Keeping abreast of developments in marketing theory will be important here, particularly theory relating to service industries where skills and knowledge are exchanged rather than tangible goods. EPs will benefit from taking account of relational marketing approaches to help ensure that those who currently have an SLA with the service continue to commit to purchasing in the future and are not tempted away by competitors, some of whom can often undercut local authority rates. It is also important for EPs to recognise that the more satisfied a commissioner is, the longer they have been buying a service, the less sensitive to pricing they become (Baron, Conway, Warnaby, 2010). It follows that being cheaper may not always give the competitors the edge on local authority services.

EPs being prepared to support schools in managing the impact for young people and school staff of societal challenges and changing governmental agendas will also be key to holding a strong market position. For example, EPs could support schools to enhance emotional well-being by developing and implementing whole school approaches related to the topical challenges such as cyber-bullying, depression or self-harm, topics which reflect the current rise in emotional disorders in young people (Weare, 2015) or offering to deliver one to one therapeutic support to young people with complex needs (DfE, 2015). Taking cyber-bullying as an example, EPs are well placed to assist school leaders and their staff, governors, young people in understanding the issues involved in cyber-bullying and how to support children in protecting themselves in relation to this (Ackers, 2014) and ultimately fulfilling the legal duty of school leaders to protect young people from experiencing bullying (Childnet, 2014). EPs can assist with the implementation of whole school preventative approaches and support

schools in managing incidents in a way that ensures the needs of all parties involved are taken into account whilst raising awareness that traditional power imbalances often involved in bullying do not necessarily pertain to cyber-bullying (Childnet, 2014).

### **5.6.3 Minimising Educational Psychologists' Involvement in Statutory Assessment Processes**

It will also be beneficial for EPs to develop scripts to support key school leaders in fending off requests for reports for exclusions and specialist placement moves, particularly when the time taken for such assessments and reports could often be more productively spent creating more positive inclusive options for a young person, through consultation and therapeutic approaches.

At a county level, it would be valuable for EPs to work at a strategic level with members of the SEN administration to help decrease and minimise the number of statutory assessments requested and initiated. EPs are well placed to be involved in such moderation processes at a strategic level and to enhance the skills base of SEN departments in relation to conciliation skills, mediation and the emotional well-being of staff. Moderation of statutory decision-making could release more time for EPs to be involved in more creative, preventative activities linked to SLAs with secondary schools and other stakeholders and allow the local authority to redirect savings to more preventative project work within the Children's Service as a whole.

### **5.6.4 Enhancing Communication Systems in Relation to the Educational Psychologists' Contribution and Impact**

EPs need to support school leaders to ensure that they are able to effectively communicate the impact of EP involvement so that the contribution of EPs is more fully recognised by leadership teams and head teachers than it is currently. EPs will need to negotiate ways of measuring impact that facilitate the development of practice-based evidence and complement EP knowledge of evidence-based practice whilst incorporating professional judgement. This will allow EPs to make informed decisions about how to tailor future packages delivered to secondary schools (Frederickson, 2002). As Hughes (2000)

highlighted, it is important for psychologists to bring a theoretical understanding of why interventions work (including the mechanisms involved in particular changes), to be able to judge the applicability of an intervention and to tailor it in an intelligent way to the needs of different clients in different settings.

EPs may need to support commissioning school leaders in understanding that evidence based practice although widely advocated, is debatable (Fox, 2003; Fox 2011; Frederickson, 2002 & Biesta, 2007). Although evidence based practice can inform problem solving by making the process more intelligent, it can only inform what has worked in a particular context at a particular time, supplying hypotheses not absolute rules. It can fail to take account of new approaches that haven't yet generated evidence and most importantly, by focussing only on 'what works', it can neglect more fundamental tasks such as determining what we, as a society, want from education (Biesta, 2007) .

Given this, EPs will need to continue to disseminate to school leaders their knowledge of practice based evidence, and contribute their increasing ability to ascertain the quality of research more generally. EPs will also need to continue to confidently bring their professional expertise and judgement to situations. Given the paucity of Gold Standard research in education, intelligent problem solving involving insightful professional judgement working with the next best evidence (Sackett, Rosenberg, Muir, Gray, Haynes, & Scott Richardson, 1996), is likely to continue to be the way forward that allows EPs to fulfil school leaders' needs in relation to evidence -based interventions.

It should be recognised that the context of budget cuts and increased trading might make it difficult for individual EPs who are no longer training to carry out evaluations. This is due to the difficulty of determining who will fund such projects, projects that can potentially prove more costly than the intervention itself. EPs may be able to overcome this problem by positioning themselves more as research facilitators than researchers with schools, working with key school leaders to implement research studies. Such an approach could have the advantage of generating core transferable skills and making economical use of EPs as applied psychologists.

In summary, EPs will need to ensure that their contribution and the impact are clear to commissioners and that the measurement of their impact takes full account of the complexities surrounding evidence based practice. Opportunities to communicate the EP role and the impact of this could be built into an annual review presentation where the EP involvement during the year is outlined and the impact made clear and plans for the current offer outlined to help support wider school involvement and commitment.

### **5.6.5 Repositioning the Profession as a Whole**

Finally, moving to the level of the profession as whole, it would be of significant benefit for EPs to position themselves more actively and more strategically in relation to current government initiatives that aim to support the mental health and emotional well-being of children and young people. Such a move will enhance the position of the profession generally and more importantly allow them to make a greater strategic contribution to ensuring that more children arrive at secondary school having the learning capacity and resilience to make the most of the opportunities offered there. One waits with anticipation, the impact of current efforts being undertaken by the Division of Educational and Child Psychology to demonstrate such contributions by producing a special issue of their journal demonstrating the professions contribution to supporting the mental health of children and young people. Such contributions, alongside the profession personally engaging with key governmental change agents, might lead to a better understanding of what governmental aims are and how EPs as a profession can support these. This might lead to some more revolutionary changes shifting, what might be seen as, a historic inertia surrounding the profession's engagement in governmental agendas relating to children and young people. The profession needs to continue to work together to raise the profile of the profession to become the profession that government officials within the Department for Education turn to for expert consultancy in relation to developing significant initiatives, particularly those that centre on the psychological development of children and young people.

In conclusion, EPs needs to begin to feel more at ease doing what they are good at; recognising what they are good at; communicating this and finding ways to

work that allow them to support others in learning about systems from the experience of individuals. This will support the implementation of more systemic approaches and ultimately allow EPs to work with school leaders to create a major culture shift in today's secondary schools which will help to ensure schools are places children and young people want to attend and enjoy being.

## **5.7 Future Research**

This study illustrates the usefulness of more in-depth qualitative approaches in the field of consumer research within service industries such as Educational Psychology which have a more psychosocial rather than outcome focus. Further research should seek to expand research that examines the meanings attributed to the work of EPs by their commissioners to a wider range of commissioners such as colleges and universities. Such research is particularly pertinent given the new legislation and guidance offered by the Children and Families Act (HMSO, 2014) and the SEND Code of Practice now applies to and includes children and young people up to the age of 25. This change has broadened the age range of the children and young people that EPs usually work with, and introduced the right of young people between the ages of 19 and 25 to request an assessment of their special educational needs at any time. Within the host authority, this has led to the commencement of further commissioning of work by EPs by further education colleges.

In relation to these new commissioners, it would be useful for future research to explore the meanings these new commissioners attribute to the EP role, how these attributed meanings impact on their engagement and purchasing behaviour, how they view their wants and needs and what benefits they seek from commissioning EPs. Involving these commissioners in an in-depth qualitative study such as this would support the advancement of consumer research studies into the role of the EP.

It would also allow EPs to continue to take account of how the current socio-political context is impacting on Further Education Colleges and to capitalise more on their ability to determine which provider is best placed to deliver specific services (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010). It follows, that the more knowledge EPs can construct about the views, experiences and assumptions held by college

leaders' (i.e. those involved in strategic planning and budget decisions), the more able EPs will as a profession be able to tailor their contribution and respond to ever changing needs in a rapidly changing context. Such a study would continue to support the profession in ensuring that it remains relevant and capable of providing real solutions for people, taking greater advantage of developing opportunities, ensuring they are fully involved and exerting influence at appropriate times (Gersch, 2009).

Widening the research lens to a much greater degree, a research project which explores the views, experiences and assumptions of a range of government officials holding pertinent educational and mental health briefs within the Department for Education in relation to children and young people would be timely. I believe that the profession needs to listen closely to the views of these officials, exploring the meanings they attribute to the EP role, how these attributed meanings impact on their engagement with the profession, how they view their wants and needs and what benefits they seek from those organisations and professions they have or are currently commissioning. Involving a range of officials, in an in-depth qualitative study such as this, would continue to support the advancement of consumer research studies into the role of the EP. However, far more importantly, it would shed light on the mystery of why there is a continued failure of government publications, such as 'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools' (DfE, 2015) to reference any actual or potential contribution of EPs to this area of work. This document states:

'Specialising in the mental health of young people, a child psychologist may provide help and support to those experiencing difficulties. A Child and CAMHS team will include a child psychologist, but it may also be possible for schools to use the services of an LA educational psychologist or to commission one directly themselves, depending on local arrangements.' (DfE, 2015).

This is despite EPs being the most generic of psychologists, the psychologists with the most extensive post-graduate training in relation to child and adolescent development and having a unique knowledge of school settings (Mackay, 2009). Despite the recent statistics quoted early in this study that describe the rising trend in mental health difficulties in children and young people, and the lack of



emotional well-being being experienced in the light of the societal challenges they face (Weare, 2015), this lack of acknowledgment is disappointing.

EPs need to become far more engaged in national agendas to assist schools in meeting the needs of a greater range of children with a greater range of learning and emotional needs. This needs to be done while ensuring that schools continue to be places where children and young people want to go and enjoy being.

## **CHAPTER SIX - CONCLUSION**

Within this chapter the contextual factors are revisited that led to the particular research questions contained in this research. The research questions are returned to and a synthesis of the findings in relation to them provided. Subsequently an outline of the constructed Substantial Theory is given and an exploration of how this impinges on existing theory and understanding is provided.

This research was originally prompted by a view that in the current, rapidly evolving political and socio-economic landscape, there was a strong need to reposition the profession of Educational Psychology. Within this changing context, it was considered that the skills and services of EPs, as extensively trained applied psychologists, would need to be more proactively marketed to ensure that EPs were considered by their commissioners, to be best placed to deliver services, to allow EPs to retain a strong market position in the context of increased internal and external competition.

There was a belief based on actual experience of delivering commissioned services to secondary schools that school leaders generally lacked awareness of what EPs could potentially offer to support them in meeting their professional goals and organisational aspirations. From a marketing perspective, this position was considered to be risky, as legislative changes had led to school leaders having increased freedom to make local decisions about the services they considered to be best placed to meet their needs. In relation to this, there was a need to gain insight into, and to take the full account of, the needs and views of such commissioners, to ensure that EPs were best placed to fulfil these needs could secure a leading position in the marketplace.

To gain insight into commissioner views it was proposed that EPs needed to become involved in consumer research in a way that went beyond the traditional approaches that had been taken by the profession by utilising in-depth, qualitative approaches. At this time, the sales figures relating to secondary

school commissioning levels within the host service were of concern and therefore the decision was taken to use such a qualitative paradigm to explore the values and assumptions that secondary school leaders held in relation to the role of the EP. To that point, such an approach to ascertaining the views of school leaders was not common as there had been, in line with consumer research more generally (Goulding, 2005) a dominance of positivist, quantitative paradigms and the use of associated quantitative approaches in relation to this field. It was hoped that the use of face-to-face interviews and the implementation of Constructivist Grounded Theory would support the bridging of any discrepancy between what EP commissioners wanted and what EPs wanted to offer (Kelly & Gray, 2000). This would help to ensure commissioner satisfaction and associated future commissioning and the acknowledgement of stakeholder views, as being at the core of the EP role (Turner et al, 2010).

This research sought to answer the following questions:

1. What meanings do school leaders attribute to the contribution of EPs?
2. How do these attributed meanings of school leaders' impact on engagement and purchasing behaviour, in the context of trading?
3. As commissioners of Educational Psychology services, how do school leaders view their wants and needs?
4. What benefits do school leaders seek from the Educational Psychology profession?

The main findings have been summarised in chapter five and a synthesis of the findings in relation to the research questions, is offered here.

This research has allowed a modest contribution to the dearth of qualitative research that takes the commissioning context into account and specifically focusses on ascertaining the views of secondary school leaders, as direct or indirect commissioners as EP services, on the work of EPs. The qualitative studies that have taken place to date, within this field, have not had a mainly secondary school focus, have not sampled school leaders specifically and have not been positioned in a traded context. Holding such methodological differences

in mind, the studies that have taken place have indicated that school staff generally appreciate the expert role of EPs (Aston & Roberts, 2006); value relationships with them (Turner et al, 2010); want more access to their service (Farrell et al., 2006)); want EPs to support them with their school improvement agenda (Evans & Cowell, 2013); appreciate individual assessment (Ashton & Roberts, 2006) and have some awareness of the role of the EP (Nottingham EPS, 2006). Studies have also highlighted that EPs themselves appreciated having positive relationships with school staff (Turner et al, 2010) and that they valued their ability to shift the perspectives of those they were working with (Ashton & Roberts, 2006) . This study has allowed confirmation of most of these findings, with the exception of schools wanting support with their school improvement agenda. It has particularly confirmed the extent to which EPs are considered to be knowledgeable experts and has also highlighted how much school leaders appreciate the EP having an extensive array of the complementary professional and personal skills that allow them to empower others and to work in a truly collaborative way. Importantly it has illustrated that overall, educational psychology is a service that school leaders truly value, would like to access more but are struggling to purchase more of in the context of constrained school budgets.

The use of Constructivist Grounded Theory has allowed this study to go further than previous studies in identifying concerning discrepancies that exist between the views of commissioning secondary school leaders and EPs as commissioned providers with regard to the work of EPs. Although some differences in what school leaders and EPs consider to be unique about the role has been identified (Ashton & Roberts (2006) this study goes further in identifying a pattern in relation to how school leaders and EPs view the contribution of the EP. School leaders continue to value the more traditional elements of EP service delivery such as EPs working directly with young people, providing therapeutic input and providing direct advice. EPs however, acknowledge only the aspect of their role that relate to more systemic approaches such as collaborative problem solving, having a consultation role and their potential to be involved in wider systemic work. These findings suggest that EPs may be continuing to experience immense pressure from the reconstruction movement's (Gillham, 1978) dissociation from

the traditional role, a pressure that is leading them to deny, or at least, not acknowledge, the highly valued and skilled role they contribute when working with children and young people more directly.

This predicament is of particular concern, given the presence of today's thriving market place, as it is not reflective of a confident profession who is willing to advertise and celebrate aspects of their role that they are skilled in delivering, that paying commissioners value highly and which gives them a major competitive edge.

School leaders and EPs both value the actual and potential systemic role of the EP such as collaborative problem solving and wider systemic approaches. However, in relation to these, EPs appear to be trapped and inhibited by a vast array of systemic barriers that prevent them from being able to make a substantial contribution in this way. In addition to these barriers, competition in this arena is great and EPs will need to compete with psychologists and other professionals who have equal or more developed skills to secure a leading market position here. It seems, that if the balance of work is going to shift towards EPs delivering more at this level, EPs will need to be far more confident and proactive in showcasing their skills and expertise in this area and building a bank of practice based evidence which allows their skills and expertise in this area to be clearly communicated and observed. In relation to securing a competitive edge, EPs will need to focus on attaining the systemic commissions that require their psychological knowledge and skills and capitalise on their vast experience of schools and the educational context as a whole.

Meanwhile, it seems pragmatic that EPs continue to invest in their work with individual children who have the most complex needs and working therapeutically with those who need it. EPs must continue to advertise and celebrate this valuable contribution to assessing and meeting with the needs of young people who are experiencing complex difficulties particularly in relation to low levels of emotional well-being and complex mental health needs.

It is in relation to this contribution of EPs that the current study makes the most significant contribution. Where previous studies, examining the role of the EP within the context of child mental health, have struggled to substantiate the claim that EPs are sufficiently qualified and/or experienced, to warrant a role here, this study has allowed the construction of a Substantive Theory. This theory promotes EPs as, 'the missing link in improving emotional well-being and attainment for young people in 21st century secondary schools'. This theory offers a deeper understanding of the role of EPs, working with secondary school leaders to improve the emotional well being and attainment within their schools, and proposes that EPs are well placed as professionals to work with secondary schools in improving emotional well being and promoting mental health. There is much evidence to confirm that EPs have wide ranging skills in this area (Farrell et al., 2006; Weare, 2015); are perceived by school staff to be essential to the support system for pupils with mental health needs and have the professional skills to engage stakeholders and offer many strategies and potential benefits (Rothi, Leavey & Best, 2008).

EPs have historically been excluded and remain excluded from governmental initiatives related to the emotional well-being and mental health of children and young people. This is in the face of the rising mental health problems in children and young people (Weare, 2015) and despite the claim that those young people who experience emotional and behavioural difficulties in school are the most difficult to accommodate (Evans and Lunt (2002). This is worrying in the light of the consideration that EPs are well placed to support schools in meeting their responsibilities to respond to the mental health needs of young people and to take greater account of the 'non-cognitive side of education' (Weare, 2015).

This situation of EPs, as the most generic, applied psychologists, with the greatest level of post-graduate training in relation to child and adolescent development, and an unparalleled knowledge of school settings (Mackay, 2009), having no strategic role in the governmental initiatives relating to the mental health of young people in school is both a professional and a governmental lost opportunity. The continued investment of tax-payers' funds in a valued profession that the government continually fails to engage when developing public policy

and shaping children's lives, is a missed opportunity. This missed opportunity becomes more apparent in the light of the current desperation of school leaders to access specialist support in relation to managing emotional wellbeing and mental health needs (Bennet Hall, 2014). This is in the context of some specialist providers in health asserting that they are not confident about their ability to support mental health problems in schools (Bennet Hall, 2014).

In relation to this professional lost opportunity, the profession needs to question why it has not been able to take ownership of any public policy during the past decade and explore the reasons for this predicament. Is this due to historic professional rivalries? Is it that the profession has been too protectionist with regard to its specialist knowledge base and having a tendency to share this inside the profession for too long? Is it that our national bodies have not adequately prioritised the future direction of the profession? Has the statutory assessment role predominated to such an extent that EPs remain pigeon holed? Such questions need reflection to enable the profession to shape a more successful response, one that positions EPs as the 'go to' service for school leaders and government ministerial advisors when policy that will affect children's lives needs shaping. Efforts such as the recent move by the Division of Educational and Child Psychology to demonstrate the EP role in supporting the mental health of children and young people, may long be overdue, but provide a move in the right direction. A key challenge for the profession is the extension of its professional network, particularly the engagement of key governmental change agents. The profession needs to find ways of communicating with such change agents to ensure that the respected and valued profession of Educational Psychology has a much greater voice in the shaping of policy direction.

In conclusion, EPs need to recognise themselves as valued, knowledgeable experts who have well developed abilities to work in a collaborative way with others to affect change. EPs must become more confident and begin to feel far more at ease doing what they are good at. They must publically recognise and communicate this and work together to raise the profile of the profession as a whole and widen the profession's audience and network. I predict that such moves will allow EPs to work far more with school leaders and current

governments, at different and wider levels, to create real culture shifts in today's secondary schools. Shifts that will allow the learning, emotional well-being and mental health needs of young people to be more successfully accommodated, ensuring secondary schools remain, and become, places where children and young people are eager to attend.

In working together to create positive change for children and young people in secondary schools, commissioners and providers need to acknowledge that to be able meet the needs of young people, EPs must work with a wide range of adults including head teachers, as the environment in which children are functioning is controlled by adults, not by children, which makes intervention that focusses on children themselves at best palliative' (Magi & Kikas, 2009).

As a profession, it would pay to attend to the historic words of Conoley and Gutkin (1995):

'Our field will not evolve in positive and planful ways by considering where change in education will leave school psychology. Rather we must a) determine where we want to go b) network with local state and national policy c) put our collective shoulders to the wheel and make systemic changes happen' (Conoley & Gutkin, 1995, p. 213).



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## **APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>Information Letter to Participants</b>
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>Consent form for Participants</b>
<b>Appendix 3</b>	<b>Interview Schedule for school leaders</b>
<b>Appendix 4</b>	<b>Interview Schedule for EPs</b>
<b>Appendix 5</b>	<b>Ethics Approval Letter</b>

## **Appendix 1            Information Letter to Participants**

University of East London  
Stratford Campus  
Water Lane  
London  
E15 4LZ

### **Information for participants**

#### **The Principal Investigator**

**Name:** Lesley Webster

**Work address:** Children's Services, Educational Psychology Service, Fleet Local Office, Barley  
Way, Fleet, Hampshire GU51 2YB

**Telephone No:** 01252 814728

**email:** [lesley.webster@hants.gov.co.uk](mailto:lesley.webster@hants.gov.co.uk)

#### **Research supervised by:**

Professor Irvine Gersch

[i.gersch@uel.ac.uk](mailto:i.gersch@uel.ac.uk)

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

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

#### **Project title**

School Leaders' perceptions of the work of EPs in a changing socio-political context.

#### **Project description including confidentiality of the data**

The aim of the study is to explore school leader's experiences of the work of EPs and the meanings they attribute to these experiences. The data will be collected via interviews. During the interviews school leaders will be asked to consider their experiences of working with EPs and to reflect on these in relation to their own professional wants, needs and aspirations. The interview schedule will include a question about how long participants have held a strategic management post. Names will not be required in order to avoid identification and no reference will be made to the school where each participant works.



The interviews will be taped and transcribed verbatim by the principal investigator with the tapes and transcripts being carefully stored in secure facilities within the principal investigators place of work or home. Participants will be referred to by number only on the tapes and in the transcripts.

Interviews will be expected to take in the region of one hour

#### **Location**

Location: Participants will be interviewed at the schools where they work. A private room will be arranged

#### **Disclaimer**

You are not obliged to take part in this study, and are free to withdraw at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason, you are able to withdraw your consent for your data to be included in this study at any time prior to any analysis of the data.

## Appendix 2

## Consent form for Participants

### UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

#### Consent to participate in this study

##### Project Title

School Leaders' perceptions of the work of EPs in a changing socio-political context.

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

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

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me.

Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw consent for my data to be included in this study at any time prior to any analysis of the data without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Investigator's Signature

.....

Date: .....

## **Appendix 3            Interview Schedule for School Leaders**

### **Introductory Script**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. As discussed before, the research I am conducting aims to shape the way in which EPs work with schools in the future. As you are aware, I have sent you a consent form which you completed. I hope this, and our previous conversations have given you sufficient information about the nature of this research and you understand that all interview transcripts will be anonymised.

I would like to reiterate that you are able to withdraw your consent for your data to be included in this study at any time, prior to any analysis of the data.

We are going to talk about your experiences of working with EPs and relate these to the goals and aspirations you have for your school. This interview is about you and exploring your views. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions and all your views and ideas are valid contributions. Some of my questions may seem obvious or simplistic, as I am trying not to make any assumptions.

If you feel uncomfortable at any time, let me know and remember you can withdraw at any time.

### **Questions**

#### **Experience of working with EPs**

- 1) How long have you held a senior management post(s)?
- 2) Can you outline your experience of working with EPs to date?
  - a. Can you tell me about a specific time you have enlisted the support of an EP?
- 3) What benefits do you seek when you involve a psychologist?
  - a. What other benefits would you like?
- 4) What is your view of the range of expertise EPs offer?
- 5) How does working with EPs compare to working with other external agencies?
- 6) How do you think your school would be different if you did not involve EPs?

### **Professional wants/needs, aspirations and goals**

- 1) What are your main aspirations/ goals for your school?
- 2) In your view, what contribution can psychology make to achieving these?
- 3) What other areas would you choose to involve a psychologist in? Why?
- 4) What are your views about purchasing additional Educational Psychology services?

### **Potential probes**

Can you tell me more about that?

What do you mean by?

Reflecting back

Thank you for your time today. Are there any questions you would like to ask or anything you need clarifying?

## **APPENDIX 5            Interview Schedule for Educational Psychologists**

### **Introductory Script**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed today. As discussed before, the research I am conducting aims to shape the way in which EPs work with schools in the future. As you are aware, I have sent you a consent form which you completed. I hope this, and our previous conversations have given you sufficient information about the nature of this research and you understand that all interview transcripts will be anonymised.

I would like to reiterate that you are able to withdraw your consent for your data to be included in this study at any time, prior to any analysis of the data.

We are going to talk about your experiences of as an EP working within secondary school leaders who have purchased an SLA agreement. This interview is about you and exploring your views. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions and all your views and ideas are valid contributions. Some of my questions may seem obvious or simplistic, as I am trying not to make any assumptions.

If you feel uncomfortable at any time, let me know and remember you can withdraw at any time.

### **Questions**

#### **Experience of working with secondary school leaders**

- 1) How long have you been in post?
- 2) Can you outline your experience of working with secondary schools to date?
  - a. Can you tell me about a specific time that a school have enlisted your support?
- 3) In your view what benefits do school leaders seek when they involve a psychologist?
- 4) What particular skills do you think EPs bring?
- 5) For the school leaders you work with, how do you think working with EPs compares to working with other external agencies?
- 6) How do you think the schools would be different if they did not involve EPs?

#### **Professional wants/needs, aspirations and goals**

- 7) What do you think are the are main aspirations/ goals of the school leaders you work with?

8) In your view, what contribution can psychology make to achieving these?

9) What other areas within the secondary context that you could see psychologists being involved in?

10) How do you feel about having an SLA agreement, as an Educational Psychologist?

**Potential probes**

Can you tell me more about that?

What do you mean by?

Reflecting back

Thank you for your time today. Are there any questions you would like to ask or anything you need clarifying?



## APPENDIX 5

## Ethics Approval Letter

### SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dean: Professor Mark N. O. Davies, PhD, CPsychol, CBiol.

**UEL**  
University of  
East London  
[www.uel.ac.uk](http://www.uel.ac.uk)

### School of Psychology Professional Doctorate Programmes

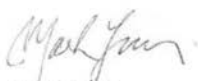
To Whom It May Concern:

This is to confirm that the Professional Doctorate candidate named in the attached ethics approval is conducting research as part of the requirements of the Professional Doctorate programme on which he/she is enrolled.

The Research Ethics Committee of the School of Psychology, University of East London, has approved this candidate's research ethics application and he/she is therefore covered by the University's indemnity insurance policy while conducting the research. This policy should normally cover for any untoward event. The University does not offer 'no fault' cover, so in the event of an untoward occurrence leading to a claim against the institution, the claimant would be obliged to bring an action against the University and seek compensation through the courts.

As the candidate is a student of the University of East London, the University will act as the sponsor of his/her research. UEL will also fund expenses arising from the research, such as photocopying and postage.

Yours faithfully,



Dr. Mark Finn

Chair of the School of Psychology Ethics Sub-Committee

Stratford Campus, Water Lane, Stratford, London E15 4LZ  
tel: +44 (0)20 8223 4966 fax: +44 (0)20 8223 4937  
e-mail: [mno.daves@uel.ac.uk](mailto:mno.daves@uel.ac.uk) web: [www.uel.ac.uk/psychology](http://www.uel.ac.uk/psychology)



The University of East London has campuses at London Docklands and Stratford  
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