Parental Experiences of Taking Part in Collaborative Psychological Assessment Meetings within the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment for their Child's Special Educational Needs

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Abstract

The Children and Families Act (2014) and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (Department for Education [DfE] & Department for Health [DoH], 2015) emphasises collaboration with parents during the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) of their child's special needs. Despite this, parents continue to express dissatisfaction concerning their involvement within the EHCNA process. In response, one Educational Psychology Service in England introduced a novel approach to the educational psychology EHCNA, namely, a 'Collaborative Assessment Meeting' (CAM). During these meetings, parents, Educational Psychologists (EPs) and other professionals jointly record the child's strengths and needs, alongside suggested outcomes and educational provision. This study explores parents' experiences of taking part in CAMs. The experiences of three parents were gathered via semi-structured interviews and responses analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Four group experiential themes were identified: 'power', 'emotional aspects', 'collaboration' and 'impact of the wider EHCNA process and education system'. Findings indicate the pivotal role of professionals, notably the EP, in mitigating the negative impact of power upon parents, utilising interpersonal skills to support emotional demands, and enabling parents' full involvement during the process. The implications for EPs and other professionals involved with parents during the EHCNA process are outlined.

Student Declaration

University of East London

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Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

Declaration:

I declare that while registered as a research degree student at UEL, I have not been a registered or enrolled student for another award of this university or of any other academic or professional institution.

I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

I declare that my research required ethical approval from the University Ethics Committee (UREC) and confirmation of approval is embedded within the thesis.

Signed: Louise Malkin

Dated: 16.04.23

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List of Abbreviations

BPS: British Psychological Society

CAM: Collaborative Assessment Meeting

CASP: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

CYP: Children and Young People

DfE: Department for Education

DoH: Department of Health

EHCP: Education, Health and Care Plan

EP: Educational Psychologist

EPS: Educational Psychology Service

EThOS: Electronic Theses Online Service

EYFS: Early Years Foundation Stage

GET: Group Experiential Theme

HCPC: Health and Care Professions Council

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Key Stage 1: Key Stage 1

Key Stage 2: Key Stage 2

LA: Local Authority

PET: Personal Experiential Theme

PTMF: Power Threat Meaning Framework

SDT: Self-Determination Theory

SEN: Special Educational Needs

SEND CoP: Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice

TEP: Trainee Educational Psychologist

UEL: University of East London

UK: United Kingdom

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the research area and rationale for the study. The national and local context framing the research are described, along with the researcher's interest in this area and an exploration of key terms. Relevant psychological theory is outlined, and the purpose of the study described.

1.2 National context

Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) are legally binding documents, unique to England in the United Kingdom (UK) and embedded within The Children and Families Act (2014) and Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (SEND CoP; Department for Education [DfE] & Department for Health [DoH], 2015). They outline the needs of a child or young person (CYP) aged up to 25 years who requires more support than is usually available within their educational setting and state the provision that must be provided to meet these needs. In September 2014, EHCPs replaced Statements of Special Educational Needs, which were introduced shortly before the 1981 Education Act, and had faced criticism for undervaluing parents' opinions and expertise regarding their child (Ofsted, 2010; Pinney, 2002). The 2014 SEND reforms championed co-production with parents and CYP, alongside a novel focus upon identifying outcomes for CYP, rather than solely their needs.

To obtain an EHCP, those supporting a CYP, including parents and carers, can request the local authority (LA) to carry out an Education, Health, and Care

Needs Assessment (EHCNA). A young person aged 16 to 25 can also request this themselves. The LA decides whether to issue an EHCP following the needs assessment. The Children and Families Act (2014) and SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) state the assessment should include psychological advice and information provided by an Educational Psychologist (EP). The requirement for the involvement of parents and CYP is also stated.

Involving parents meaningfully in decisions about their child is recognised as a significant contributor to positive outcomes for CYP and their families (Adams et al., 2018). The Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1978) was the first comprehensive review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) and argued for parents of children with SEN to be viewed as equal partners with expertise. Whilst this notion prevails in current SEND legislation (Lamb, 2019), parents across England continue to report mixed satisfaction with the EHCNA process, including varying feelings of involvement in decisions regarding their child (Ahad et al., 2021; Cochrane & Soni, 2020; House of Commons Education Select Committee, 2019; Lindsay, et al., 2020).

Indeed, a green paper concerning the future of SEND and alternative provision; 'SEND review: right support, right place, right time' (DfE, 2022) was recently published in response to parents' widespread dissatisfaction with the SEND system. The green paper highlights a need to develop more inclusive mainstream education, supported by the recent white paper 'Opportunity for all: strong schools with great teachers for your child' (DfE, 2022). It also reiterates the importance of co-production with families and involving them in decision-making. This indicates that, whilst the benefits of collaborating with parents are recognised within policy,

progress towards this ambition has been limited in recent years and remains a national priority.

1.3 Local context

A recent local area SEND Ofsted inspection highlighted low parent confidence in the ability of the researcher's placement LA to meet children's additional needs. In response, the placement Educational Psychology Service (EPS) introduced a novel approach to working with parents during the EHCNA. This approach will be referred to as a 'Collaborative Assessment Meeting' (CAM), a term created by the researcher to maintain the anonymity of the LA. This approach aims to enable EPs to co-produce written psychological advice, including strengths, needs, outcomes and provision, with parents and educational settings. It aims to increase collaboration with parents and involve them more fully within the EP EHCNA process.

Before the CAM, the EP may meet with the CYP in-person or remotely to gather their views and/ or to undertake assessment activities. They might also speak individually with parents and the educational setting. Parents and professionals involved with the CYP are then invited to attend the CAM, which takes place in-person or remotely via Microsoft Teams. During the CAM, the psychological advice template is displayed on a screen for all to view. The EP leads participants through each section (parent/ CYP views, strengths, needs, outcomes and provision), inviting contributions from all attendees. These contributions are entered directly into the shared psychological advice template either by the EP, or an Assistant Educational Psychologist, thereby producing a shared record of the discussion. The CAM usually lasts around two hours, often including a short mid-point break, or may be completed

across two one-hour sessions if required. The psychological formulation is written independently by the EP following the CAM.

The researcher's placement EPS recommend EPs use CAMs, where feasible, for all early years EHCNAs, and additionally encourage their use in Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2). Whilst the EPS sends feedback questionnaires to parents following a CAM to gauge their overall satisfaction with the process, the experiences of parents taking part in CAMs have not yet been explored in-depth.

1.4 Researcher's interest in topic

Here the researcher explores their connection with the research from the standpoint of their personal and professional identity and experiences. Due to the nature of this section, it will be written in first person.

Regarding my personal life, I am a parent of school-aged children. Although my children do not have SEND, becoming a parent has provided me with greater awareness of the unique knowledge parents possess regarding their children and the benefits of parent-professional collaboration.

As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), I have further reflected upon my positioning as an 'expert' during my previous roles working with children with SEND and their families, and the potential impact upon parents. As EHCNAs frequently feature within my placement activities, I have consequently considered how to approach these in a collaborative manner that empowers parents and creates positive change for CYP. I was intrigued by the CAM approach in my placement EPS and felt it had potential to support these goals. I wondered, however, how parents experienced this activity.

Finally, but perhaps most influentially, I have friends who have navigated the SEND system for their children. I experienced dismay hearing their experiences of an EHCNA process that left them feeling uninformed, disregarded and disempowered. I felt compelled to elevate their voices. Researching this study further increased my unease as I heard the chorus of dissatisfied parent voices reflected within the literature. These catalysts intensified my motivation to pursue this research.

1.5 Research rationale and purpose

Based upon the current local and national context, this study focuses upon the research question: 'What are the experiences of parents/ carers taking part in Collaborative Assessment Meetings involving themselves, an Educational Psychologist, and other professionals, as part of the Educational Psychology Education, Health and Care needs assessment of their child?'

Despite debate concerning whether conducting statutory assessments are the most effective use of EP time, compared to, for example, preventative work (Florian, 2003), EPs are frequently involved with families for this purpose (Farrell et al., 2006). Hence, the EHCNA is highly relevant to EP practice and research in this area presents opportunities to enact positive impact for CYP and their families.

In the spirit of the 'Nothing about us without us' movement (Charlton, 1998), it is pertinent to hear the voice of parents as a key group the CAM aims to serve. Exploring parents' experiences of CAMs may additionally prove useful for professionals wishing to work collaboratively with parents in other contexts.

This research sits within the key values of autonomy; believing parents have the right to make choices about their own lives, beneficence; placing the well-being

and interest of families foremost, and social justice; aiming to advocate for parents, whose opinion may not be well represented. It aims to be emancipatory, amplifying parents' voices, and transformative, hoping to inform the practice of EPs and other professionals in relation to collaboration with parents during the EHCNA process, and other activities. Next is an exploration of the term 'collaboration'.

1.6 Defining Collaboration

Collaborative working enables groups to identify solutions they might not individually (Fewster-Thuente, 2015; Rose, 2011), with home-school collaboration appearing to improve outcomes for CYP (Carlson & Christenson, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001; Glueck & Reschly, 2014; Paccaud et al., 2021). Parents' sense of collaboration with professionals within the EHCNA process has also been linked with greater parental satisfaction and increases in person-centred provision (Boddison & Soan, 2021; Sales & Vincent, 2018; Skipp & Hopwood,2016). Despite the well documented benefits of 'collaboration', a unitary definition of this term appears lacking in the literature (Press et al., 2012), with a range of terms used interchangeably (Gajda, 2004; Widmark et al., 2011). Within the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), for example, the terms 'involvement', 'participation' and 'partnership' are used interchangeably with 'collaboration'. Further, despite a range of models of collaboration, and research indicating factors that enhance this process (e.g., Laluvein, 2010; O'Connor, 2008), a lack of consensus regarding how professionals should work collaboratively with parents remains (Hornby and Lafaele, 2011). Similarly, whilst the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) states parents should be enabled to share their knowledge about their child and given confidence their contributions are valued, how this might be achieved in practice is unclear.

Against this backdrop, Griffiths et al., (2021) conducted a systematic literature review of studies examining 'collaboration' within education, community, and health care settings. The review aimed of identify a comprehensive definition of collaboration, alongside a model for use in schools. The resulting 'building blocks of collaboration' model presents collaboration as a dynamic and multi-levelled process. This model comprises four levels. At the base sits 'relationship building', which is underpinned by communication, trust, and mutual respect between individuals. The second level, 'shared values' incorporates shared goals and common understanding. The third level 'active engagement' involves individuals sharing responsibilities and actively participating. Finally, the top 'block' is 'collaboration', involving shared decision making and implementation of plans. The description of this model implies collaboration is a process that takes place over an extended period and the systematic review upon which it is based included explorations of both professional-parent and inter-professional collaboration. Despite these caveats, this model has clear relevance to understanding collaboration in the context of a CAM.

Whilst Griffith's et al., (2021) model of collaboration suggests a sense of equality and shared resources between parents and professionals, terms such as 'involvement' might indicate a less equitable partnership (Cohen & Mosek, 2019; Rommetveit, 2011). Fox's 'Pyramid of Participation' (2016) was developed as a tool to examine children's engagement within the EHCNA process. The Pyramid incorporates three areas; the degree to which views are heard and acted upon, the areas of involvement (e.g., needs, outcomes, provision) and the depth in which views are gathered. Due to its specificity to the EHCNA process, this model may also be useful to consider parental involvement in the CAM.

Within the recent SEND review: right support, right place, right time (DfE, 2022), meanwhile, the term 'co-production' is favoured to describe the process by which CYP and their families contribute to decisions about support and provision. Whilst the SEND review does not explicitly define 'co-production', the term has been described as a process by which different organisations work together to produce goods or services (Ostrom, 1996). This definition has been expanded to include features such as service users as active agents who are equal to professionals, a mutually beneficial professional - service user relationship, and service user participation transforming service delivery (Elwyn et al., 2020; Heaton et al., 2016). In healthcare research, the terms 'collaboration' and 'co-production' are often conflated (Realpe and Wallace, 2010; Rycroft-Malone et al., 2016), or certain types of collaborative practices described as a form of co-production (Heaton et al., 2016). Williams et al., (2020), however, argue that whilst 'collaboration' may be achieved by individuals working jointly, 'co-production' should additionally result in decisions relating to service planning and delivery being more egalitarian. Indeed, addressing power imbalance has been viewed as key to co-production (Cahn, 2000; Turnhout et al., 2020). In relation to urban planning, Watson (2014), suggests co-production involves service users and communities at all stages from planning to construction, whilst collaboration may involve communities at only a single stage. Given that the key aim of the CAM is to work jointly with parents and professionals within one stage of the EHCNA process, the term 'collaboration', as defined by Griffiths et al., (2021) is used throughout the current study.

In sum, 'collaboration', and associated terms, appear relatively poorly defined in the literature and SEND legislation. This brings challenges for professionals aiming to work collaboratively with families, including measuring the extent to which

'collaboration' was achieved. However, some potentially useful models have been identified that may inform professionals' collaborative practice, including within EHCNAs (e.g., Fox, 2016; Griffiths et al., 2021). Models of professional-parent partnership working may also guide practice, as outlined below.

1.7 Models of professional-parent partnership working

Multiple models of professional-parent partnership exist within the literature. Each implies varying levels of collaboration between parents and professionals. Towards one end of the scale lies 'The Expert Model' (Cunningham & Davis, 1985). Here, professionals rely upon their own opinion to make decisions about CYP. Whilst information may be gathered from parents, they are not actively involved in decision making. 'The Empowerment Model' (Appleton & Minchcom, 1991), contrastingly, requires professionals to enable parents to be involved in decision making and actively increase their sense of agency in this process. This model has, however, received criticism for placing professionals in a position of power, as it remains their role to ensure parents are involved (Dale, 1996). Within the 'The Partnership Model' (Hornby, 1989, 2011), meanwhile, professionals are viewed as experts in their area of expertise and parents viewed as experts on their child. In this model, both parties share expertise to create better outcomes for CYP, within a more equitable partnership.

Within these models, differing equity of power between parent and professionals is evident. In comparison to models of interprofessional collaboration (e.g., Rose & Norwich, 2014), it is likely power considerations are more pertinent in professional-parent relationships. Notably, greater opportunities for parent-professional collaboration are linked with greater parental empowerment (Dunst &

Paget, 1991). In turn, greater empowerment of parents in educational settings is linked with better outcomes for CYP (Kim & Bryan, 2017). Professionals might, therefore, aim to move away from an expert model towards a more collaborative and empowering partnership-based model. Issues relating to power are now discussed.

1.8 Power

Previous qualitative studies exploring parents' experiences of the EHCNA process note elements that appear related to empowerment (Redwood, 2015; Bentley, 2017). Considerations around power may, therefore, also be pertinent to parent experiences of the CAM. Whilst the concept of 'power' has been explored by a number of influential theorists (Gaventa, 2003), a universally agreed definition is lacking in social psychology (Brauer & Bourhis, 2006). Rather than static, power may alter based upon the context, and be viewed an analytical lens for the study of social phenomena (Mazur, 2015). The parental empowerment framework (Kim & Bryan, 2017; Kim et al., 2018), for example, identifies six components encompassing personal and community empowerment, which differ among parents based upon racial, language, and socioeconomic background. This indicates power is multifaceted and influenced by numerous factors. A contemporary framework that supports thinking around the operation of power in individuals' lives is the Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF; Johnstone & Boyle, 2018), discussed below.

1.9 Relevant Psychological Theory

1.9.1 Power Threat Meaning Framework

The Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF; Johnstone et al., 2018) provides a conceptual alternative to the diagnostic model of psychological and

emotional distress (Read & Harper, 2022), drawing upon the expertise of mental health service users and carers (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). It is underpinned by the principles of trauma-informed practice and formulation (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). Importantly, the PTMF emphasises that individuals' responses are influenced by socio-economic policies and the context of events, hence, representing a shift from a medical-model approach that questions what is wrong with an individual, towards asking what has happened to them (Harper & Cromby, 2022). The operation of power within peoples' lives is a fundamental aspect of the PTMF (Boyle, 2022), as demonstrated within the following questions around which the PTMF is structured:

- "What has happened to you?" (How is **power** operating in your life?)
- "How did it affect you?" (What kind of **threats** does this pose?)
- "What sense did you make of it?" (What is the **meaning** of these situations and experiences to you?)
- "What did you have to do to survive?" (What kinds of threat response are you using?)

  In therapeutic work, two further questions may be added:
- "What are your strengths?" (What access to power resources do you have?)
- "What is your story?"

  (Johnston et al., 2018, p.9)

These questions envelop the key elements of the PTMF, namely the operation of power, threats posed to individuals by power, the meaning individuals make of this, and the threat responses they use. These elements are proposed to have relevance to all individuals, not just those with a psychiatric diagnosis (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). Each element will now be briefly outlined.

The PTMF references key theories of power, for example, Foucault (1991), who linked power with knowledge and stated that 'power is everywhere', and Bourdieu's Theory of Capital (1986) which suggests an individual's social, economic, and cultural capital impacts upon their position and related influence in a given context. With reference to these theories, the PTMF outlines multiple sources of power (see Table 1.1). Each 'type' of power can operate positively, for example, providing support, access to resources or protection, or negatively, being experienced as threatening or invalidating. The sources of power outlined within the PTMF may provide a grounding to consider how power is operating within a given context, including the experiences of parents taking part in a CAM.

Table 1.1

Areas of Power as outlined within PTMF *(adapted from Johnstone et al., 2018, p.206)*

Types of Power	PTMF Definition
Biological or embodied	Operates both positively and negatively through embodied attributes and their cultural meanings: for example, strength, physical appearance, fertility, skin shade and colour, embodied talents and abilities, and physical health and wellbeing.
Coercive	Any use of violence, aggression, threats or greater physical strength, to intimidate or ensure compliance.
Legal	May involve coercion, such as power of arrest. Also refers to rules and sanctions which regulate and control many areas of lifes and

	behaviour, support or limit other aspects of power, offer or restrict choices, protect people's rights, maintain social order etc.
Economic and material	Having the means to obtain valued possessions and services, to control others' access to them and to pursue valued activities.
Social or cultural capital	A form of power characterised by a mix of valued qualifications, social identities, knowledge and social connections which can be passed indirectly to the next generation.
Interpersonal	Although all forms of power can operate through relationships, this refers more specifically to the power to protect someone, to help or abandon, to give/withhold love and care, undermine or support others in the development of their beliefs and identities, and so on.
Ideological	Involves control of meaning, language and 'agendas'. It also includes power to create narratives which support particular social and economic interests, to create beliefs or stereotypes about particular groups, to interpret your own or others' experience, behaviour and feelings and have these meanings validated by others, and the power to silence or undermine.

1.9.1.2 Power Threats

Within the PTMF, a 'power threat' refers to risks posed to individuals or groups by the negative operation of power. The power threats named within the PTMF, alongside the description provided for each, are listed within Table 1.2. These potential threats may be useful when considering any apparent impact of power upon parents within the CAM.

Table 1.2

Power Threats as outlined within the PTMF *(Johnstone et al., 2018, p.206)*

Threat	PTMF Description
Relational	Relating to relationships e.g., abandonment, betrayal, isolation, shaming and humiliation, rejection, autonomy.
Emotional	Feeling emotionally overwhelmed and unsafe.
Social/community	e.g., isolation, exclusion, hostility, social defeat, injustice/unfairness, loss of social or work role.
Economic/material	e.g., poverty, inability to meet basic physical needs, or access basic services for oneself and/or dependants.
Environmental	e.g., lack of safety, physical threat, entrapment, loss of connection with homeland or the natural world.
Bodily	e.g., ill-health, chronic pain, bodily disability, injury, loss of function, physical danger, exhaustion.
Knowledge and meaning construction	Lack of opportunity, support or social resources to access and use information and make sense of one's experiences; devaluing of one's own knowledges, understandings and experiences due to unequal power relations; imposition of meanings by social discourses and by more powerful others.
Identity	Lack of support to develop one's own identity; loss of identity; the adoption or imposition of devalued, subordinate or shameful identities relating to oneself or one's social group.
Value base	Loss of purpose, values, beliefs and meanings; loss of community rituals, belief systems and practices

1.9.1.2 Meaning

Within the PTMF, 'meaning' refers to the manner in which the operation of power is experienced and interpreted. The meanings of experiences and situations to individuals might include, for example, feeling unsafe, afraid or attacked, helpless and powerless, emotionally overwhelmed, excluded and/ or trapped. The PTMF proposes that these meanings form via social, relational and personal factors (beliefs and feelings), as well as through bodily reactions. These too may be useful in exploring parents' experiences of CAMs.

1.9.1.3 Threat Responses

Threat responses are described by the PTMF as ensuring *'emotional, physical, relational and social survival in the face of the negative impact of power'* (Johnstone et al., 2018, p.209). They include, for example, preparing to 'fight', anxiety, withdrawal, ruminating, imagining, emotional dysregulation and distrust. The PTMF additionally outlines a range of ameliorating and exacerbating factors that increase or decrease the need for an individual to engage in a threat response. Factors proposed to exacerbate the experience of a threat include lack of a person to support, lack of control over threat, and a sense of betrayal by individuals or institutions. Ameliorating factors, conversely, protect against the negative impacts of power, for example, having support from others and feeling a sense of control. Consideration of threat responses, including the factors that influence the need for these, may also support thinking around parents' experiences of CAMs.

Given its theoretical underpinnings, structure, and practical approach, the PTMF provides a useful guide to consider how power is operating in given contexts, including its impact upon individuals. The PTMF, therefore, may be particularly relevant when considering parent's experiences of power in CAMs.

1.9.2 Positioning Theory

Closely related to considerations of power, Positioning Theory (Davies & Harré, 1990) concerns how individuals view their influence, power and agency within social contexts. This process is proposed to be dynamic, with individuals positioned by themselves and others based upon what is valued in a given situation (Harré et al., 2009). Positioning theory is, therefore, viewed as an alternative to thinking about individual roles, which may be presumed to be fixed (Fox, 2013). Positioning theory also acknowledges the morally based rights and duties individuals assume for themselves, and others, which impact upon their behaviours. This indicates a change in an individual's position requires a shift in values and the moral principles underlying these (Fox, 2015).

Given the multiple participants present within a CAM, positioning theory may present a useful frame of reference to consider how parents feel positioned in comparison to others within the CAM, alongside their expectations of others and themselves during the meeting.

1.9.3 Self-Determination Theory

A final theory that may have relevance to parents' experiences of CAMs is Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This provides a framework for exploring human motivation and personality (Ryan & Deci; 2017), stating that

humans have three key needs that contribute to psychological wellbeing (Deci & Ryan, 2012). First, 'autonomy' refers to an individual's sense of volition. Rather than being synonymous with independence, autonomy involves the ability to choose whether to assent to external influences (Ryan & Deci, 2006). Second, 'relatedness' is associated with a need to experience warm connections with others. Finally, 'competence' involves experiencing a sense of mastery and effectiveness, including opportunities to utilise one's own expertise. Having these needs met is linked to benefits including enhanced individual wellbeing (Ryan, 2009). If these needs are not well-supported, conversely, motivation and engagement for activities can decrease.

All three components within SDT may feasibly be present within a CAM. The extent to which these needs are met may impact upon parents' experiences of the CAM, hence this theory is of relevance to the current study.

1.10 Summary

This research seeks to explore parents' experiences of taking part in Collaborative Assessment Meeting (CAMs) within the EP EHCNA for their child. This chapter has outlined the national and local context in relation to the introduction of CAMs and described the purpose of the current study. The term 'collaboration' has been explored and delineated, alongside models of professional-parent partnership working. Finally, key psychological theories with relevance to this study have been outlined, including those relating to key concepts such as power and autonomy. The next chapter reports a literature review of the existing literature relating to parents' experiences of the EHNCA process.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Overview

To explore current understanding of parent and carer experiences of taking part in an Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) for their child in England, a literature review was undertaken. Whilst this literature review was undertaken in a systematic manner, it is not labelled a 'systematic literature review', as the search approach was flexibly adapted by the researcher during the process to meet the aims of the review (see section 2.2). Nonetheless, a systematic approach was utilised to maximise transparency within the search and research selection process, aiming to strengthen the reliability and accuracy of the conclusions drawn (Booth et al., 2016). The literature review focuses on two closely related questions. The first is broader, asking 'What is known about parent/ carer experiences of involvement within the EHCNA process for their child within England?' As the current study specifically examines parent/ carer experiences of the educational psychology assessment during the EHCNA process, a second slightly narrower question is also included; 'What is known about parent/ carer experiences of interacting with professionals, including Educational Psychologists (EPs), within the EHCNA process?'

This chapter first outlines the literature search process, followed by a summary and critique of the identified research. Themes and gaps in the literature emerging from the reviewed research are then summarised, and overall conclusions drawn.

2.2 Literature search

2.2.1 Search method

A literature review was undertaken in August 2022 and reviewed in January 2023. Initial search terms were selected based upon the research question then each expanded to include words with similar meanings, for example, 'collaboration' was expanded to include words, such as 'participation' and 'involvement'. The search terms were entered into EBSCOhost (including Academic Search Complete, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete, ERIC and APA Psycinfo) and Scopus as follows (parent* OR carer OR mother OR father OR guardian) AND (experience* OR view OR opinion OR voice OR perspective OR perception) AND (collaborati* OR participation OR engagement OR involvement) AND ("Education health and care" OR ehc OR ehcp OR "statutory assessment" OR "professional meeting" OR sen). Within EBSCOhost the search field option was set to the default, which returned 345 results. The initial Scopus search stated the key word could appear in any field. This, however, returned 36,308 results. As reviewing this number of articles was beyond the scope of the current review, the search parameters on Scopus were altered to search only within the title, abstract and key words. This returned 56 articles (see PRISMA diagram in Figure 1, below).

The search engine filters were used to remove articles published before 2014, as per the exclusion criteria (Table 2.1, below). Titles and abstracts of the remaining articles were then scanned for relevance, with any articles clearly unrelated to the research area excluded. The full texts of the remaining articles were then read and further filtered based on the inclusion/ exclusion criteria. For the remaining articles, the full text was scrutinised to ensure all inclusion criteria were met before making the decision to include findings in the review.

Table 2.1

Initial inclusion and exclusion criteria and rationale

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Empirical study	Literature review only	To access primary data, extract level of detail required for critique, and avoid repetition.
Published from 2014	Published in 2013 or earlier	Research has taken place since the SEN reforms and introduction of EHCPs, and associated focus on including parents in the process.
Published in a peer reviewed journal	Not published in a peer reviewed journal	To increase level of trustworthiness of included findings.
Includes parent/ carer experiences	Includes only experiences of other stakeholders	The current review concerns parent experiences. Views of other groups may detract from this.
Includes parent/ carer experiences of taking part in the EHC assessment process for their child in England	Experiences of the statutory assessment process in other education/ legal systems	The questions for the review concern the EHCNA process in England. Other countries use different statutory assessment procedures so findings may not be relevant to this context.

Qualitative data reported	Only quantitative data reported	To facilitate greater insight into parents' experiences in line with aims of research.
Written in English	Written in a language other than English	Accessibility to researcher

Following the initial search, only two peer reviewed published articles met the inclusion criteria. Given the importance of this topic, this was unexpected and felt insufficient to answer the literature review question. Within the filtering process, published articles were noted to most frequently focus upon experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCos). This trend was also reported in a systematic literature review on a similar topic (Ahad et al., 2021). Expansion and refinement of search terms did not improve the number of returned articles meeting the inclusion criteria (see Appendix A), suggesting this area is currently relatively underrepresented in peer-reviewed journals. It was, therefore, decided to broaden the inclusion criteria.

The possibility of including research regarding the statutory assessment process outside of England was dismissed as the focus was specifically upon parent experiences of the EHCNA process within in the English legislation system. Similarly, including parent experiences of contributing to assessment outside the EHCNA process (for example, during annual review meetings) was discounted as such meetings have a different purpose and context, hence experiences may not be comparable. Expanding the search to include studies published prior to 2014 was also rejected due to the significance of the new SEND CoP in England and related

legal requirement for parents to be involved in the EHCNA process introduced at this time. It was, therefore, decided to extend the search beyond peer-reviewed articles published in journals, to include doctoral theses. As theses undergo a thorough process of review during the viva process, it was felt findings would be suitably trustworthy, whilst maintaining focus on the research questions of this review.

To identify relevant doctoral theses, a search was conducted through the Electronic Theses Online Service (EThOS) using the terms 'education health care assessment parent'. Identified studies were assessed following the same criteria as above. Using this method, four theses that met inclusion criteria were identified (see Figure 1).

It remained desirable to extend the literature review further, without losing the focus on parental experiences of involvement within the EHCNA process. Via a process of snowballing, the reference lists of the two peer reviewed papers and four doctoral theses were examined for studies that met inclusion criteria. Using this method, four relevant research reports commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) were identified. Whilst the potential impact of commissioning research upon reported findings was considered when interpreting the conclusions drawn by these studies, given the findings of these reports were highly relevant to the current area of interest, it was decided they provided a useful addition to the review of the current literature. Inclusion of 'grey' literature within reviews may also reduce publication bias (Paez, 2017). The number of papers identified and excluded at each stage in the process are shown in Figure 1, below.

Figure 1

PRISMA Diagram outlining study selection process

Identification	Records identified through database searching EBSCOhost = 345 Scopus = 56	Additional records identified through other sources EthOS = 56

Records after duplicates removed (n = 430)

Screening

Records screened (n = 430) → Records excluded based on date, title or abstract (n = 416)

Eligibility

Full-text records assessed for eligibility (n = 14)

Published articles (n = 9)

Theses (n = 5)

Full text records excluded with reasons (n = 8)

Did not include parent experience of EHC assessment (n = 3)

Review publication (n = 2)

Data collected outside England (n = 2)

Unable to access full text (1)

DfE reports identified via snowballing (n = 4)

Included

Studies included in review (n = 10)

Published articles (n = 2)

Theses (n = 4)

DfE commissioned reports (n = 4)

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2.2.2 Initial quality check

The identified studies were assessed using the first two items of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme qualitative checklist (CASP, 2018). That is, whether they contained a clear statement of the aims of the research and whether a qualitative methodology was appropriate to address the stated aims. All studies met these criteria. This search process therefore resulted in the inclusion of 10 studies within the current literature review, of which two were published peer-reviewed articles, four were theses and four were DfE commissioned reports. The studies were further assessed for quality using the remaining items of the CASP check list, as detailed below.

2.2.3 Existing literature reviews identified within the search

Within the database searches two relevant literature reviews were revealed. Whilst their findings are not incorporated into this review, it is appropriate to acknowledge these existing reviews. The first was conducted by Cochrane and Soni (2020) in December 2019 and examined the implementation of EHCPs in England. It included studies examining the views of a range of stakeholders of the EHCP process as a whole, including parents. Some conclusions were drawn by the authors around parental involvement, stating participation of parents in the EHCNA process was mainly positive, albeit noting the dissatisfaction shared by some parents. The review suggested that parent participation within the EHCNA process ought to be carefully considered and planned, but how this might be achieved was not explored. Importantly, the review lacked a clear description of how studies were selected for

inclusion, or quality checking, bringing into question the reliability of the conclusions drawn.

The second review was conducted by Ahad et al., (2022) in June 2020. It similarly aimed to identify service users' (child, parent and professional) experience of the EHCP process as a whole, including whether it was collaborative. The system used to identify studies was clearly outlined and the CASP (2018) used to assess included research as high quality. Studies were drawn from both published and 'grey' literature, reducing publication bias. Relevant to the current review, Ahad et al., (2022) found a need for parents to be more consistently involved in the EHCP process. Parents felt, for example, their views were not always included in the final plan, with some feeling the process was dictated to them by professionals. The authors concluded that parents are not consistently involved as equal partners and that professionals would benefit from better valuing and understanding how to involve families, including enabling parent's feelings of empowerment. Relevant to the second question of the current literature review, relating to parents' experiences of EPs within the EHCNA process, they noted a focus upon the experiences of SENCos within the existing literature, with the role of other professions neglected.

Due to the recency of the Ahad et al., (2022) publication, the studies identified in the current review were all included in their article. However, Ahad et al., (2022) reported parent feelings of involvement across the whole EHCP process including, for example, opportunities to provide feedback on draft plans or being kept informed of the progress of their child's plan. They did not separate experiences of involvement relating specifically to contributing to the assessment process. They also included the experiences of multiple stakeholders, meaning findings relating to parental experiences lacked depth. It was, for example, unclear which professionals

parents had experienced involvement with during the process. Details of studies, such as data collection and participants, were also not consistently reported, making it harder to assess the quality and relevance of each included study.

In summary, whilst two existing literature reviews explored parental experiences of the EHCP process, conclusions related to the process more broadly (not only involvement in assessment) and included a range of stakeholder views. They therefore miss an in-depth analysis of parental experiences of involvement within the EHCNA, including interactions with specific professionals such as EPs. Booth et al., (2016) note that justification to revisit an existing review may include a need to examine specific sub-groups, in this case, experiences of parents (versus children or professionals). The literature review presented in this chapter, therefore, enhances current understanding by including specific questions related to parent experiences of involvement within the EHCNA process, encompassing an examination of interactions with professionals, including EP's.

2.3 Findings and critique of the literature

Full details of participants and methods in each study can be viewed in Appendix B. Studies identified within the literature review will be discussed under three categories, first peer reviewed articles, next studies reported within theses, and finally DfE commissioned research reports. The critical appraisal skills programme (CASP, 2018) qualitative research check list was utilised to assess the quality of research included. Following this overview of research, a summary of findings and gaps in the literature will be presented. As papers often examined parental experience of the EHCP process as a whole, individual findings were scrutinised and only those relevant to the question for this review reported. For example, parental

experiences unrelated to direct involvement within the assessment process, such as satisfaction around waiting times, are not included.

2.3.1 Peer-reviewed articles

Two peer reviewed articles met inclusion criteria. Firstly, Sales and Vincent (2018), examined a range of stakeholder views regarding whether the introduction of EHCPs had improved the statutory assessment process. Participants included parents who had experienced both the EHCNA and previous statutory assessment process. Transcripts from two interviews with parents, alongside comments written on post-it notes by a further five parents and notes taken by the researcher during a focus group discussion, were analysed using thematic analysis. Among the identified themes was 'involving and valuing parents'. The two parents interviewed, and three of the five parents from the focus group, expressed that the EHCNA system had improved their involvement in the statutory assessment process, feeling their input in meetings was taken seriously and their views heard. Experiences varied, however, with two parents within the focus group feeling they had not been listened to. Parents feelings of involvement appeared heavily reliant upon the personal qualities of individual professionals involved. Interestingly, parents who experienced good multi-agency working also expressed feeling more satisfied with the process.

A further theme linked to parents feeling listened to was 'outcomes and provision within plans'. For example, one parent reported disagreeing with the provision outlined within the final report, feeling her views had been ignored. The authors concluded that parental involvement had improved as a result of the introduction of the EHCNA process but ensuring all parents' views were consistently heard and valued remained an aim.

Regarding the CASP criteria, whilst using a range of methods to collect information (interview/ focus group) may have enabled more parents' views to be gathered, there was a lack of consideration regarding how the different methods may influenced parents' responses. Parents may have felt, for example, less forthcoming within the focus group, or alternatively emboldened upon hearing the experiences of others. Similarly, views shared via post-it notes likely lacked depth compared to those gathered verbally. Parents were also recruited via a Parent Partnership Service and had previous experience of the statementing process. They may, therefore, have possessed enhanced knowledge of the EHCNA process, meaning their experiences may not be representative of parents with less knowledge. There was also no record of how the researcher had examined the influence of their own bias within data interpretation. For example, if the authors were parents themselves this may have influenced their interpretation of responses. Finally, it was unclear whether there were conflicts of interest for the researchers, for example an existing link with the LA where the research took place, which may have influenced interpretation of data.

The second peer reviewed article to meet inclusion criteria was Cullen and Lindsay (2019). Whilst this study focused upon the experiences of parents who had appealed against LA decisions regarding their child via the SEN Tribunal system, the interview included a question concerning parents experiences of the EHCNA. Findings of this study were, therefore, deemed relevant to the questions of interest in this literature review. Thematic analysis was utilised. Within a theme of 'engaging with the statutory processes', it was reported that parents noted the EHCNA process felt 'stressful' and 'exhausting'. There was a sense that parents invested time, effort and emotion in the process, and this was felt wasted when the outcome was not as

wished. Moreover, it seemed one of the most demanding elements was contributing views, with parents frequently feeling their views were ignored. In addition, parents felt professionals did not consistently meet their expectations in terms of competency, for example, making paperwork errors. Some professionals were described by parents as 'unpleasant' and 'unprofessional', for example, dismissing parent's view as invalid. Parents further noted they engaged in uncharacteristic behaviour in response to the actions of professionals, for example, losing their temper or taking a combative stance. The authors suggest it would be beneficial for professionals to demonstrate understanding of parents' emotional state within both the EHNCA process, and act in line with expectations of their roles.

With consideration of the CASP criteria, the experiences expressed by parents within this study appeared resoundingly negative. This is likely related to all participants having appealed to the SEN Tribunal and, by association, feeling dissatisfied with the EHCNA process. This suggests caution in applying the findings of this study more widely. Further, whilst 'professionals' were frequently mentioned, their roles were unclear. A significant strength of this study, however, was the large sample size and diversity of participants, including a total of 78 parents from a range of backgrounds. This meant a variety of parents voices were represented.

2.3.2 Empirical studies reported in theses

Four theses were found to meet the inclusion criteria for the current review. First, three theses that found mixed parent experiences of the EHCNA process are outlined and critiqued, followed by a thesis that reported unanimously positive parent experiences. A strength across all theses was rigour around many aspects of the CASP criteria. All, for example, contained clear considerations of the researchers'

theoretical stance, and a high level of detail regarding methodology, data analysis, and reflexivity.

Utilising interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) Eccleston (2016) explored experiences of family members, including parents, in engaging with the EHCNA process. The themes emerging from parent interviews were helpfully distinguished from other participating stakeholders. Several master themes relevant to the questions posed by the current review emerged. First, within a theme of 'family engagement', parents reported feeling listened to by professionals, with their views heard and incorporated into the EHCNA. This was interpreted by Eccleston (2016) as reflecting that these parents experienced a sense of empowerment. Parents also noted being pleased that views were gathered from a range of family members during the EHCNA, feeling this reduced the pressure on them. They also appreciated support to prepare to contribute within meetings. Second, within a theme of 'not feeling engaged in the process', parents appeared to feel under pressure to do and say the 'right' thing during the assessment process. They also felt they had to take pre-conceived roles, such as acting as an advocate for their child. Parents also felt they lacked control regarding how they engaged in the process, for example, where and how they met with professionals.

Finally, within a master theme of 'now we're not alone', a subordinate theme of 'multi-agency support' emerged, (including the role of the EP as assessor of needs). The involvement of multiple professionals was valued by parents for bringing a fresh perspective, although the precise nature of their involvement was not detailed. Parents also reported feeling reassured that their views about their child were shared by a range of professionals. One parent noted appreciating EP support to better understand their child's needs, but no other references to EPs were

reported. Eccleston (2016) acknowledged the role of the EP was noted due her personal interest as a TEP, rather than being a common theme. In summary, whilst parents in Eccleston's study felt involved in the EHCNA, and some appeared to experience empowerment, an imbalance of power with professionals was also evident within some experiences.

The use of IPA within this study provided a detailed exploration of parents' experiences, and useful insights into what mattered most to parents during the EHCNA. As it examined parent experiences of the process as a whole, however, it lacked detail concerning the factors that influenced feelings such as empowerment within meetings with professionals during the process.

Cochrane (2016) similarly aimed to explore how key individuals, including parents, experienced the EHCNA process. Amongst the themes identified during thematic analysis was 'experience of collaboration', which contained findings relevant to the questions posed by the current literature review, including a sub-theme of 'involving parents'. Whilst some parents shared experiencing collaboration with professionals, others experienced the process as directive, with some feeling their views had not been adequately represented. Despite fully engaging in the process, one parent felt their views were ignored. In line with previous studies outlined here, this highlights the disparity between parental experiences of involvement within the EHCNA process. Notably, all parents within this study had their child's EHCP finalised. The author justifies this decision as a method to ensure parents are clear the interview will not influence the outcome of the EHCNA. It is, however, possible that the outcome influenced their views, including descriptions of encounters with professionals within the process.

Bentley (2017) also utilised semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of parents currently undergoing the EHCNA process. Research questions included parent experiences of multi-agency meetings and whether parents felt properly listened to and empowered within the process. Analysing data via thematic analysis, several themes relevant to the current literature review questions emerged.

Firstly, within a master theme of 'empowerment' sub-themes of 'barriers' and 'enablers' were identified. Within 'barriers', a sub-ordinate theme of 'parents' own SEN' was outlined. One parent within the study shared feeling her own diagnosis of dyslexia meant she found it hard to comprehend information shared by professionals during meetings. A second parent reflected meetings with professionals felt rushed. Within 'enablers', a sub-ordinate theme around parents utilising their own 'professional skills' emerged. Here, parents reported feeling more empowered throughout the process (including during meetings with professionals) when they utilised their own professional skills, for example, to argue clearly for the educational provision they felt most suitable for their child.

A second master theme of 'professionals' was outlined, with a sub-theme of 'helpful professionals'. Here, some parents shared feeling professionals had demonstrated 'genuine care' for them and advocated effectively for them during meetings. One parent felt the SENCo was able to read her body language to respond appropriately to her emotional state, noting this was helpful. A sub-theme of 'The EP' was also included within the 'professionals' master theme. Bentley (2017) noted that parents did not frequently refer to EPs, however, similarly to Eccleston (2016), as the researcher was a trainee EP, she acknowledged her interest here. Where parents mentioned an EP, they typically spoke positively of their involvement,

for example, feeling the EP had listened to their views. One parent shared she felt her discussions with the EP had helped her better understand her son's needs. However, another parent reported feeling the EP had not contributed much to a multi-agency meeting, whilst others could not recall any EP input.

Finally, within a master theme of 'process', a sub-theme relating to 'meetings' emerged. One parent described feeling judged by professionals within a meeting for their son's behaviour. Several parents, meanwhile, appreciated support to prepare for meetings, for example, encouragement to consider their child's strengths beforehand.

In summary, Bentley (2017) again found a mixed picture of parent involvement within the EHC process. Notably, identifying discourses related to feelings of empowerment (or disempowerment) within all parent's accounts. As within previous studies, parents often referred to 'professionals', but EPs were rarely mentioned. Parent accounts tended to focus upon school-based professionals, such as the SENCo. Hence, implications for EPs are tentative.

In contrast with studies reported thus far, using mixed methods, Redwood (2015) found parents to unanimously report positive experiences of the EHCNA process. They explored key stakeholder experiences, including parents, focusing on multi-professional collaboration and the extent to which parents (and children) felt a sense of choice and control in decisions. The study aimed to identify the extent to which the LA met the aims of the new SEND CoP. Participants first categorised a range of statements relating to their experiences of the EHCNA process as 'true', 'false' or 'unsure'. These statements were grouped based upon the realistic evaluation framework (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) into three elements; 'contexts' e.g.,

positive attitude to parental involvement, 'mechanisms' e.g., active listening, and 'outcomes' e.g., feel listened to and respected. The research aimed to explore potential links between statements within the three elements. Parents were encouraged to expand on their responses to each statement via follow-up questioning and then supported to consider how the statements they selected as 'true' (i.e., the elements present in their assessment) were linked together. Statements purported to relate to parent empowerment, for example, the outcomes 'I felt listened to throughout the process' and 'I was supported to participate fully in the assessment' were included.

Parents conveyed their sense of empowerment was bolstered by the interpersonal skills and attitudes of the professional involved in the process. Feeling listened to, for example, was linked by one parent with enabling feelings of choice and control over decisions. Another parent described feeling empowered during the assessment because professionals valued her contribution. The factors contributing to feelings of being listened to were also considered, with one parent linking feeling listened to with the active listening skills of professionals. Having pre-established relationships with professionals was also identified by parents as improving debates within assessment meetings. Similar to findings from Eccleston (2016) and Cochrane (2016) parents also valued support to feel fully prepared for meetings.

The unanimously positive experiences reported by parents in this study contrast with the mixed experiences reported in previous studies. Parents within this study had children with a wide range of ages and primary need, suggesting satisfaction was not influenced by these factors per se. The LA, however, was described as promoting a person-centred culture. As the professionals knew they were taking part in research based on person-centred approaches, it is possible they

mindfully engaged in person-centred practice during data collection, contributing to positive experiences of parents. The encouragement to categorise statements as true or false may also have resulted in parents responding more positively to the questions posed, or some of the subtilties of their experiences being underexplored. Finally, as the researcher was a TEP on placement in the LA, they may have unconsciously interpreted findings more positively.

2.3.3 DfE commissioned research

The following studies were identified via snowballing from the previously reviewed paper and theses. It is important to acknowledge these studies were funded by the DfE. There was no explicit reflection on this in any of the research reports, which clearly flaunts CASP criteria regarding researcher bias. Given this caveat, all four reports met CASP criteria for containing valuable research, as they contributed to existing knowledge, and identified areas for further research.

Two of the DfE commissioned studies meeting the inclusion criteria for this review came from the Pathfinder Programme. This programme aimed to pilot the planned reforms to the statutory SEN assessment and statement framework in England, involving 31 LAs. Firstly, in a thematic report, Smith et al., (2014) explored families' experiences of the Pathfinder Programme. Pertinent to the second question posed by the current literature review, parents reported positive interactions with professionals were related to feeling listened to during meetings, being able to provide their opinion, be honest about their concerns, and able to ask questions. One father, for example, noted professionals were kind, friendly and demonstrated empathy for his child. Parents also noted helpful behaviours of professionals such as allowing time during discussions, taking notes to show they were listening, and demonstrating a sympathetic manner. That said, similar to the findings of Bentley

(2017), some parents felt meetings were rushed, with insufficient time allocated. One parent noted feeling a multi-professional assessment meeting may feel intimidating to some parents, whilst another commented feeling unsure of the roles of the professionals present. Unfortunately, several parents in this study reported difficulty recalling the details of the EHCNA, including some who were unsure which meetings were related to the assessment, and which were related to other school meetings. This has clear implications for the extent to which findings are reliable or accurately represent parent experience of the EHCNA process.

The second Pathfinder study to meet inclusion criteria (Thom et al., 2015) constituted a final review of the programme. Within this evaluation, Thom et al., (2015) aimed to explore parent experiences of the EHCNA process using mixed methods. Again, experiences varied between parents, with some feeling their suggestions were listened to and views reflected in decisions about their child's support, and some dissatisfied with these elements. Whilst the reason for this discrepancy was not thoroughly explored, one area of parental dissatisfaction emerged around meetings. Similar to findings of other studies described here, some parents, for example, reported lacking clarity regarding who professionals were, feeling intimidated or unable to follow the terminology, and feeling meetings were rushed. Again, due to the elapsed time between the EHCNA and interview, some parents had difficulty recalling the process, including which professionals were involved at different stages. This may again have impacted upon the detail and accuracy parents were able to provide.

In a third DfE funded study, Skipp and Hopwood (2016) aimed to ascertain service user satisfaction of the EHCNA process, including parents, and explored factors related to these feelings. They found increased parental involvement was

related to higher levels of parental satisfaction with the process, this again included feeling listened to, and that their contributions were valued. Parents also appreciated conversations with professionals focusing on strengths, rather than deficits, and appreciated professionals who sought to understand the family and child's needs, alongside providing time for the parent to consider their options. As with some other studies reported here, data was collected within the first year of the national implementation of the new EHCNA process. It is, therefore, possible the findings may be less applicable to current parent experiences some eight years on from the SEND reforms.

Finally, Adams et al. (2018) aimed to better understand experiences of the EHCNA and planning process among a range of stakeholders. They interviewed parents who had previously described feeling either 'satisfied' or 'dissatisfied' with the EHCNA process. Findings highlighted a need for increased involvement of families, with several parents expressing a desire to have a greater role in developing the plan, most notably in relation to decisions around outcomes and provision. Some felt they would have liked more opportunities to be involved in meetings. Parents also expressed a desire to have the opportunity to meet with professionals on multiple occasions. This echoes previous findings that suggest advantages to families having existing relationships with professionals. Some parents felt professionals did not listen to their opinions, whilst one parent was told they could not attend meetings within the process as they were designed to only include professionals. Parents in this study were selected for their polarised satisfaction of the process, with the rationale of examining the reasons for these feelings in greater depth. However, this method of participant selection means the experiences of parents reporting mixed levels of satisfaction were unexplored.

2.4 Themes emerging from literature review

Whilst the literature reviewed suggests parents' experiences of involvement within the EHCNA process are mixed, some broad themes emerged across studies. These themes are outlined below. Whilst caution was exercised around findings from DfE funded research due to potential researcher bias, much similarity is evident between the findings of peer-reviewed, thesis and DfE commissioned research.

2.4.1 Desire for involvement (which is not always met)

Across all studies, parents referred to the importance of feeling involved within the EHCNA process. The extent to which parents experienced this differed, with some reporting they did not feel involved at any point (e.g., Adams et al., 2018) and others reporting feeling highly involved throughout (e.g., Redwood, 2015). Across studies, a desire was also consistently expressed by parents to feel their input was valued and their views heard. Indeed, feeling listened to was frequently noted amongst factors that enhanced or diminished feelings of involvement by parents (Bentley, 2017; Cochrane, 2016; Cullen & Lindsay, 2019; Redwood, 2015; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016). All but one study (Redwood, 2015) reported discrepancies between parents in the extent they felt listened to within the EHCNA process. As previously outlined, the professionals in Redwood's (2015) study were aware of the research aims, which may have influenced their behaviour, and therefore contributed to positive experiences reported by parents in this study.

2.4.2 Involvement in agreeing outcomes

Whilst some parents felt their views were heard regarding their child's strengths and needs, they often felt their voice became lost in relation to decisions around outcomes and provision (Thom et al., 2015; Cochrane, 2016; Sales &

Vincent, 2018). Parents expressed a desire to have their views more greatly represented within the planned outcomes for their child (Thom et al., 2015; Adams et al., 2018).

2.4.3 Personal qualities of professionals

The personal qualities of professionals, such as their interpersonal skills, were frequently related to a range of positive outcomes for parents, such as greater feelings of involvement and empowerment (Bentley, 2017; Redwood, 2015; Sales & Vincent, 2018; Smith et al., 2014). Having pre-existing relationships with professionals was also reported by parents to enhance their experience of involvement within meetings (Adams et al., 2018; Redwood, 2015), with parents feeling more listened to when a positive relationship with professionals was experienced (Smith et al., 2014). Parents also appreciated professionals demonstrating they 'cared' and took time to understand children's needs (Bentley, 2017; Skipp & Hopwood, 2017). In contrast, when professionals behaved unprofessionally or unkindly, this negatively impacted upon parents' experiences of the process (Cullen & Lindsay, 2019).

2.4.4 Anxiety in relation to meetings

Some parents reported feeling intimidated within meetings with professionals, not knowing the roles of the professionals present and having difficulty understanding terminology. Others were reluctant to attend meetings due to concerns around their ability to contribute based upon individual needs (Adams et al., 2018; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016; Thom et al., 2015). Some parents reported feeling judged within meetings with professionals (Bentley, 2017) or feeling 'stressed' (Cullen & Lindsay, 2019). Parents also expressed concerns around the pressure to

do and say the 'right thing' (Eccleston, 2016), whilst some experienced meetings as rushed (Bentley, 2017; Smith et al., 2014; Thom et al., 2015). Parents appreciated support to prepare for meetings (Bentley, 2017; Redwood, 2015) and being provided time to consider their options (Skipp & Hopwood, 2016). Some parents expressed a desire to meet with professionals on more than one occasion (Adams et al., 2018). These findings suggest many parents find meetings with professionals a particularly challenging part of the EHCNA process.

2.4.5 The value of multi-agency working

Parents who experienced multi-agency working expressed feeling more satisfied with the EHC process (Sales & Vincent, 2018). In particular, they appreciated the fresh perspective that the involvement of multiple professionals brought regarding understanding of their child's needs (Bentley, 2017; Eccleston, 2016).

2.4.6 Empowerment

Two studies within the current review aimed to examine parent's feelings of empowerment within the EHCNA process (Redwood, 2015; Bentley, 2017). In addition, although Eccleston's (2016) research question did not aim to examine power, parent's feelings of empowerment emerged as a theme in their study. As previously noted, the interpersonal skills and attitudes of professionals were found to be related to feelings of empowerment, in particular feeling listened to (Eccleston, 2016; Redwood, 2015). Parents also reported that utilising their own professional skills within the process enhanced feelings of empowerment (Bentley, 2017). Feeling involved in decisions was further linked to feelings of empowerment, which also

appeared linked to feelings of choice and control within the process (Eccleston, 2016; Redwood, 2015).

Some studies, however, highlighted a power imbalance between parents and professionals during the EHCNA process. Some parents, for example, expressed a desire to have more control over certain aspects of interactions with professionals, feeling the process was dictated to them (Eccleston, 2016; Thom 2015). Others described feeling they had to 'battle' to make their views heard within the process (Cullen & Lindsay, 2019). These findings suggest experiences of empowerment are particularly relevant within the EHCNA process.

2.5 Summary of critique and gaps in literature

All studies within this review examined parent/ carer experiences of the whole EHCNA process. Additionally, most gathered views from a range of stakeholders, with only three studies (Adams et al., 2018; Bentley, 2017; Cullen & Lindsay, 2019) exclusively reporting parent/ carer experiences. Whilst findings from these studies highlight that feeling 'involved' within the EHCNA process is important to parents, the ways in which parents experience involvement is less clear. No study included, for example, an in-depth examination of parent experiences around the way in which their views are gathered during the EHCNA, nor experiences of contributing to specific elements, such as, strengths, needs, outcomes and so on.

Given that the granting of an EHCP is associated with enhanced provisions for children, parent's feelings of empowerment were also discussed surprisingly infrequently within the studies included in this review. Whilst aspects related to empowerment appear important to many parents, and some related factors were

suggested within the reviewed studies, exploring parents' experiences in a level of detail that enables further insights into the operation of power may be beneficial.

A deeper level of questioning and data analysis may allow a more in-depth understanding of parent experiences. IPA, for example, enables an examination of how individuals make sense of their lived experiences via careful analysis of accounts of significant experiences in their lives (Smith et al., 2022). Only one study meeting inclusion criteria used IPA (Eccleston, 2016), and this study explored parents' experiences of the whole EHCNA process, therefore potentially missing nuances within experiences of involvement in the assessment process, including interactions with professionals.

Further, the studies reviewed here tended to lack detail regarding the nature of meetings that parents experienced within the EHCNA process, for example, the professionals present. Experiences of interacting with an EP appear particularly overlooked, only mentioned in two studies (Bentley, 2017; Eccleston, 2016). Given that some parents felt unsure which professionals they had been in contact with (e.g., Smith et al. 2014; Thom et al., 2015), identifying experiences of involvement of EPs was particularly challenging.

In addition, parent demographics were not always reported in detail. As parents are a heterogeneous group, some voices may be underrepresented in the reviewed literature. In Sales and Vincent (2018), for example, LAs are described as 'ethnically mixed' with 'areas of high and low social deprivation', but no further detail is provided. It is hard to draw conclusions regarding the representativeness of a sample without this information. Further, families within the studies included in this review were at a range of stages within the EHCNA process when they participated.

Some had final plans issued, whilst others were still within the application process. The outcome of an EHCNA is likely to influence parents' feelings about the process and this was rarely considered within the existing literature.

Finally, the majority of the research reviewed here was undertaken around the time EHCPs were introduced in 2014, with the most recent study published over three years ago in 2019. It will, therefore, be useful to revisit parent experiences of the EHCNA process now it has had a greater opportunity to become embedded.

2.6 Limitations of the current review

Traditionally, published peer-review studies are considered to be the gold standard in terms of trustworthiness. The findings of the current review may hence be brought into question as only two such studies met the inclusion criteria. As outlined above, however, a thorough and robust search was conducted, revealing unpublished and DfE commissioned studies. Rather than a failure of the current review to identify papers relevant to this topic, for example, due to inefficient search terms, this instead suggests the continued need for research in this area. As described above, the search strategy utilised within this review enabled a broader range of research to be synthesised, without losing emphasis on original questions of the review. The consistently high number of EHCNA requests across much of England illustrates the pertinence of a renewed and enhanced understanding of this topic.

2.7 Summary

This literature review aimed to answer two related questions, firstly, 'What is known about parent/ carer experiences of involvement within the EHCNA process for

their child within England?' and secondly, 'What is known about parent/ carer experiences of interacting with professionals, including EPs, within the EHCNA process?'

In relation to the first question, parents' experiences of involvement within the EHCNA appear mixed, with parents reporting differing levels of satisfaction in this regard. In extreme cases, it appears parents are excluded from the assessment process altogether. This ties in with the conclusions drawn by two previous literature reviews examining a range of stakeholder views of the whole EHCP process (Soni & Cochrane, 2020; Adad et al., 2022), that is, involvement for parents within the EHCNA could be improved.

Regarding the second question, parents often referred to professionals within the assessment process, for example, sharing the behaviours they found helpful or counterproductive to their involvement. Even when parents are physically present during the assessment, the extent to which they experience a genuine sense of involvement appears heavily influenced by the professionals involved. Again, this is in line with conclusions drawn by Soni & Cochrane., (2020) and Adad et al., (2022) that professionals have a vital role in ensuring parent/ carer involvement. Notably, no research to date has exclusively examined parental involvement with the educational psychology assessment during the EHCNA process, and interactions with EPs were rarely mentioned by parents.

Based upon the findings of this review, the current study aims to contribute to current understanding of parent/ carer experiences of the EHCNA process by exploring parent/ carer experiences of taking part in the educational psychology EHCNA for their child. With the aim of gaining the in-depth examination of parent

experience often missed by previous studies, parent/ carer responses will be

analysed using IPA. The next chapter describes the methodology utilised within the

current study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Overview

This chapter outlines the researcher's world view, alongside the conceptual frameworks guiding the current research. It provides a rationale for the qualitative and phenomenological approach selected, and detailed description of data collection and analysis. Ethical considerations are also described. The research framework outlined in Table 3.1 below provides an overview of the key features of the study.

Table 3.1

Research Framework

Research Consideration	Approach Selected
Epistemology and ontology	Epistemology: critical realist
	Ontology: relativist
Theoretical perspectives	Phenomenology, hermeneutics,
	idiography.
Methodology	Qualitative
	IPA
Data Collection	Interviews – semi-structured
Participants	3 parents who have participated in a
	CAM with an EP, within the EHCNA for
	their child's special educational needs

3.2 Researcher's ontological and epistemological position

Ontology is concerned with the nature of social entities (Bryman, 2016). At one end of the spectrum lays the realist paradigm, which assumes that there is an objective reality, independent from the human mind. Here, research involves testing hypotheses, with the assumption that a single 'truth' can be identified. At the other end sits a relativist paradigm, where reality is assumed to be constructed through people, groups, and cultures. Here, individual's construct reality and meaning via their subjective experiences of the world (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Multiple factors will impact on parent experiences of CAMs within the EHCNA process. It is, therefore, asserted that a single 'truth' regarding the meeting may not exist beyond individual experience. The current research, therefore, leans towards a relativist ontology.

Epistemology refers to the assumptions a researcher makes regarding routes to acquiring knowledge (Blaikie, 2009). Epistemological stances are often categorised as positivist, interpretivist or critical. A positivist epistemology takes an objective stance, in as much as entities are presumed to exist independent of consciousness and experience (Crotty, 1998). An interpretivist epistemology, meanwhile, proposes knowledge is known, or constructed, through the subjective experiences of people (Grix, 2018). Finally, a critical epistemology suggests that reality exists outside the mind and may be constructed and shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender related factors (Cohen et al., 2017).

Sitting within these viewpoints, is a critical realist epistemology, whereby knowledge is viewed as a social product, dependent on those who produce it (Bhaskar, 1975). This study adopts a critical realist standpoint, as it explores the meaning that parents assign to their experiences, whilst acknowledging the influence

of factors external to the individual, for example, the overarching EHCNA process, related legislation, and processes that the CAM sits within.

3.3 Research purpose

The current study aims to be exploratory. The research additionally aims to be emancipatory, giving a voice to parents, and transformative, informing EP and other professionals' practice. It is hoped the findings will be useful not only in relation to the educational psychology EHCNA process within the researcher's placement LA, but also within other EPSs, and collaborative activities with parents.

3.4 Research design

Methodology should be driven by the purposes of the research and informed by ontology and epistemology (Tuli, 2010; Creswell, 2003). The current research aimed to explore parental experiences of a given phenomenon (CAMs), within a relativist ontological position and critical realist epistemology. Qualitative methods were, therefore, selected to allow an in-depth analysis of each participant's individual experience, rather than a quantitative approach which would be more positivist and reductionist in nature (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990; Phoenix & Griffin, 1994).

3.4.1 Selecting a qualitative approach

The current study explores individual and subjective lived experience of parents taking part in CAMs. Interviews enable a richness and level of contextual detail that is unlikely to be gained through, for example, questionnaire surveys (Jain, 2021), hence a semi-structured interview format was utilised. As highlighted by the literature review described in Chapter 2, previous studies examining parents' experiences of the EHCNA process have most frequently used thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis focuses upon the creation of themes via coding, rather than focusing in-depth on individual cases (Braun & Clarke, 2020). The richness within individual experience may therefore be lost within this method. Thematic analysis has also been criticised for sometimes failing to adequately address issues surrounding trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017).

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), meanwhile, is a qualitative approach that involves examining the detailed experience of individual participants, before making more general claims via the creation of themes (Smith et al., 2021). It explores how individuals perceive events, and the meanings they give to a phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), and is recognised as a methodology suitable for exploring complex and emotionally laden subjects (Smith & Osborn, 2015). The current study aims to provide insight into parents' lived experience of a phenomenon (CAMs), which may be viewed as a complex and emotional event for parents. As IPA is an approach that enables experience to be explored in-depth for individuals, as well as to draw wider understandings common across parental experience, it was selected as the preferred method of data analysis for this study.

3.4.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

3.4.2.1 Theoretical Underpinnings

IPA is interested in human lived experience and draws upon three related areas of philosophical thinking (Smith et al., 2021). Firstly, *phenomenology*, which is concerned with how an individual experiences the world. It includes ideas related to how we might explore and understand lived experience, aiming to comprehend how people relate to the world. Husserl (1931) suggested a descriptive phenomenology, where the aim was to find the 'essence of experience'. Heidegger (1962),

meanwhile, suggested an interpretative element to lived experience, that is, he acknowledged that humans make sense of the world and one another based on their particular context and this should therefore be considered when making sense of human experience. IPA emphasises interpreting the meaning that participants make of their experiences, for example, a particular event, rather than understanding of the event itself (Smith et al., 2021).

The second area of philosophy underpinning IPA is *hermeneutics*, which is the theory of interpretation (Smith et al., 2021). It includes the concept of a 'hermeneutic circle', which relates to how the parts are related to the whole, and vice versa. The hermeneutic circle is relevant to the process in IPA whereby the researcher attempts to make sense of what a participant says and update their own sense making following engagement with a participant (Smith, 2007). Smith and Osbourne (2003) label the process by which a researcher tries to make sense of the participant, whilst the participant aims to make sense of their personal experience, as a 'double hermeneutic'. Notably, IPA seeks not only to consider the participant's viewpoint (an 'empathetic' stance), but also how the researcher interprets what the participant has said (a questioning stance). Incorporating these ideas, Smith et al., (2021), suggest IPA as an iterative process requiring the researcher to move back and forth during data analysis, rather than adopting a linear process. The aim is 'understanding', both in regard of the individuals' experience, and sense made of this by the researcher.

The third philosophical idea influencing IPA is *idiography*, that is, focusing on the 'particular'. Within IPA, this entails using a systematic approach to achieve a suitably detailed analysis, and the careful selection of small samples to enable exploration of how specific experiences are perceived by specific individuals in specific contexts (Smith et al., 2021).

3.4.2.2 Relevance to Current Study

The current study aims to understand how a specific experiential phenomenon (a CAM) is understood from the perspective of particular people (parents of CYP with SEND) within a specific context (the psychological EHCNA process). As detailed above, IPA aims to explore and carefully interpret human experience, from each individual's perspective within specific contexts, via an in-depth examination of the language used by the participant (Reid et al., 2005). IPA, therefore, may move the analysis beyond the superficial and descriptive, hence, it was felt IPA would enable the current study aims to be met.

3.4.2.3 Limitations of IPA

Whilst IPA remains a popular qualitative approach, some limitations have been suggested. Four key points of critique are identified in the literature (Willig, 2013; Tuffour, 2017). Firstly, that IPA lacks a recognition of the role of language. Smith et al., (2021), however, have responded that consideration of language is integral to IPA as it involves analysis of participant accounts, including, for example, metaphors. A second criticism is that IPA typically requires the participant to express the richness of their experience via spoken language. If the participant is less able to articulate their feelings and thoughts the richness of their experience may be missed. This potential barrier may be counteracted, for example, via careful data collection that allows time for the researcher to draw sufficiently detailed accounts from the participant, or utilising visual approaches (Willig, 2013). Thirdly, it has been suggested that IPA's focus on perceptions is problematic as it describes, but does not explain, the conditions that influenced lived experiences. Smith et al., (2021), however, argue that the contextual and hermeneutic nature of IPA illuminates the

cultural aspects of experience. Further, the current research does not seek to necessarily 'explain' parents' experiences, but rather to explore and understand the meaning participants have made of them. Finally, the role of cognition within IPA is questioned. 'Eidetic intuition', suggested as central to phenomenology (Husserl, 1983), concerns 'catching sight of what things are themselves essentially' (Uehlein, 1992). Van Manen (2017), therefore, argues that exploring individuals' cognitive and emotional reactions, as within IPA, represents a psychological understanding of experience, rather than a phenomenological one, which should be more existential in nature (although see Zahavi, 2019, for a critique of this viewpoint). Smith (2018), however, rebuts this notion, arguing that IPA might be considered both psychological and phenomenological. He states a core concern of all phenomenological approaches is a focus upon allowing an experience to appear in its own terms. As the purpose of the current research is to explore participants experiences, IPA, therefore, appears a suitable approach.

3.4.3 Alternative qualitative approaches considered

3.4.3.1 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is concerned with 'the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research' (Glaser & Strauss, 2017, p. 2). It is considered to be closely related to IPA (Smith et al., 2021). Both approaches, for example, move from an individual to more holistic understanding of individual experience of a phenomenon of interest, via the identification of themes and categories at first the individual, then wider group level. They also adopt a similarly inductive approach, that is, both approaches acknowledge the role of the researcher within data analysis (Willig, 2013). A key difference between the approaches is that

grounded theory aims to create a theoretical framework identifying the processes accounting for a given phenomenon, whilst IPA is more concerned with gaining an in depth understanding of the lived experience (Cuthbertson et al., 2020). As this study aimed to explore parents' experiences of taking part in CAMs, rather than, for example, the factors influencing parental satisfaction with the meeting, it was felt that IPA would be the more appropriate methodological approach for the current research question.

3.4.3.2 Narrative Analysis

Narrative analysis is interested in the stories individuals tell about their lives and emphasises the cultural and social factors that influence their life (Reissman, 2008). It examines how individuals represent past events, and the connections they make between past, present, and future (Reissman, 1993). Narrative analysis considers that the way a participant structures their story and describes events provides information about the way in which they wish their story to be perceived, enabling them to construct their own identify (Hyden, 1997). As the current research was interested in participant experiences of a specific event, it was felt that IPA would better enable the aims of the study to be met.

3.4.3.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) explores the relationship between language and power, focusing primarily upon social problems and political issues (Van Dijk, 2015). It aims not only to explore relationships between discourse and social elements such as social identities, institutions, and ideologies, but also to explain, for example the associated mechanisms and forces influencing these (Fairclough,

2013). It, therefore, intends to challenge power imbalance and social inequality (Willig, 2013). Whilst CDA aligns with the current research's emancipatory aims (Liasidou, 2008) and critical realist standpoint (Newman, 2020), it was felt IPA best met the aims of the current research question, which seeks to explore parents' experiences of the CAM, rather than the role of language in shaping and reflecting related social power structures and ideologies, per se.

3.5 Research methods and data collection

3.5.1 Participant recruitment and characteristics

Following ethical approval from the university's ethics board (Appendix C), parents of CYP who had taken part in a CAM as part of the educational psychology EHCNA process (virtual or co-located) within the researcher's placement LA were invited to participate in the study. This was achieved by the EPS administration team sending the study information sheet (Appendix D) and consent form (Appendix E) to individual parents following their involvement in the CAM. As the information was sent when the formal written record of the meeting was received by the administration team, parents typically received an invitation within a maximum of two weeks of completing the meeting. Aside from the requirement to have taken part in a CAM, there were no additional eligibility requirements. Participants therefore self-selected, contacting the researcher by e-mail if they were interested in participating. Whilst the researcher was transparent with participants regarding her role as a TEP within the LA, participants communicated with the researcher via a university e-mail address to highlight the research was part of her studies, rather than commissioned by the LA.

Parents/carers who contacted the researcher via e-mail were given the opportunity to ask any questions and, if they were happy to proceed, returned the signed consent and demographics form via e-mail to the researcher.

The focus of IPA is to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. Smith et al., (2021), therefore, suggest that a smaller sample size is appropriate. They note between three and ten participants is common, and that IPA could also be utilised within a single case study design. Following these recommendations, three parents were recruited to take part in the study, each completing a single interview lasting approximately one hour. Participant pseudonyms and characteristics are described in Table 3.2 below.

Table 3.2

Participant characteristics

Number/ Pseudonym parent/child	Parents Gender	Ethnicity	Highest qualification	Child's Key Stage	Professionals Present in CAM/ Modality
01 Jenny/ Emily	Female	White British	NVQ Level 3	EYFS	EP
					SEN Nursery Manager
					Mainstream Nursery Manager
					Microsoft Teams
02 Clare/ Milly	Female	White British	NVQ Level 3	KS2	EP
					SENCo
					Microsoft Teams

03 Sarah/	Female	White	NVQ	EYFS	EP
Ben		British			SEN Nursery
					Manager
					Mainstream
					Nursery Manager
					Microsoft Teams

3.5.2 Data collection – interviews

Once the parent had returned the consent form, a time to meet was agreed between parent and researcher. The parent was given the choice of conducting the interview online via Microsoft Teams, or in person. This flexibility was selected to maximise accessibility for participants. All participants selected to meet via Teams.

IPA requires a detailed, rich account of an individual's experiences, from their perspective. To gather data of this nature, semi-structured interviews were utilised. Interviews were based around several open-ended questions, with a range of prompts that could be used by the researcher to encourage the participant to provide a greater level of detail as required (See Appendix F). An interview schedule was developed by the researcher in line with principles suggested by Smith et al., (2021), for example, avoiding over-empathetic, manipulative or leading questions to avoid making assumptions about the participants experience and enable them to share their experiences openly. Interviews were recorded using the 'record' function on Teams to allow for later analysis.

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Transcription

Following completion of the interview, the researcher transcribed the verbal interaction between themselves and the participant by playing back the recording and typing all utterances verbatim into a Microsoft Word document by hand. If a portion of the text could not be comprehended the word 'unclear' was written in brackets. During this process, all identifying information, for example, names and places, were removed to ensure anonymity. This was in line with the agreed ethical procedures and also allowed the researcher to begin to engage with the data. An example of an anonymised transcript can be viewed in Appendix G.

3.6.2 Stages of analysis

Data analysis was based upon the seven stages outlined by Smith et al., (2021), which are detailed below. Given the idiographic underpinnings of IPA, Smith et al., (2021) recommend analysing one participant's responses in detail, before moving onto the next. This approach was, therefore, adopted in the current analysis. To maintain transparency within the data analysis procedure, the researcher recorded an ongoing description of the process and commentary of thinking throughout the process within a research diary. The seven stages followed are outlined below.

Stage 1: Reading and Re-reading

The aim of this stage was for the researcher to become familiar with the first transcript. In this stage, the transcription of the interview with Participant 1 was read from beginning to end multiple times. During these initial readings, the researcher made notes in the research diary regarding initial impression and thoughts.

Stage 2: Exploratory Noting

The aims of this stage of analysis were to begin to engage with the first transcript in greater detail, explore meaning within the transcript, and begin the process of interpretation. Within this stage, the first interview was re-read and the researcher initially underlined text that seemed important. These underlined sections were then examined to explore why they seemed important, focusing on consideration of the processes, relationships, principles and values of concern for the participant, and the important meanings placed on these by the participant, to gather information about their world. The researcher's thoughts were recorded in the right-hand margin of the typed transcript as explanatory notes (Smith et al., 2021). These comprised descriptive notes (relating to how something was described by the participant), linguistic notes (relating to how language was used by the participant, including metaphor and emotion words) and conceptual notes (questions raised for the researcher by the data which may be more abstract).

Stage 3: Constructing Experiential Statements

The purpose of this stage was to summarise key information recorded in the explanatory notes relating to the participant's experiences and the sense they make of these. The experiential statements (also referred to as emerging themes in previous accounts of IPA process) aimed to incorporate the participants descriptions, alongside the researcher's interpretation, to begin to convey key ideas relating to the participant's experience. Within this stage, the researcher examined the exploratory notes recorded in stage 2 and began to form statements relating to the participant's experiences, and sense making of these experiences, in the left-hand margin of the

manuscript. These statements reflected the researcher's emerging analysis of the transcript.

Stage 4: Searching for Connections Across Experiential Statements (Exploring Emergent Themes)

In this stage, the process of organising the experiential statements formed in stage 3 began. Statements were clustered together and potential themes emerging for the individual participant considered, with the aim of highlighting key aspects of the participant's account. This was achieved by initially placing each experiential statement on a separate piece of paper with the line number noted and spreading them out in a random order on the floor. This enabled the researcher to move from a linear to conceptual organisation of the statements. Statements were then moved around to enable potential connections between each to be examined, and clusters of related statements to be formed.

Stage 5: Naming the Personal Experiential Themes and Consolidating and Organising into a Table

Within this stage, each cluster of related themes created during stage 4 was given a titled based upon its characteristics, to create a set of Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) for the first participant, alongside associated sub-themes within each. For each sub-theme, the related experiential statements and associated key phrases and/or words underpinning the statement from the transcript were recorded in a Table (see Appendix H for an example).

Stage 6: Continuing the Individual Analysis of Other Cases

Within this stage, the process outlined above in stages 1-5 was repeated for each participant, resulting in an individual set of PETs and related sub-themes for each participant.

Stage 7: Working with Personal Experiential Themes to Develop Group Experiential Themes Across Cases

This stage examined patterns of similarity and difference across PETs for all participants, to create Group Experiential Themes (GETs). The aim was to identify how participants' experiences were similar to, and also divergent from, one another. This required a process of further interpretation and conceptualisation regarding participants' experiences and the meaning they make of them. Initially, the PETs were written on pieces of paper, with the participant number clearly labelled, and any that appeared to 'fit' together were clustered (see Appendix I for a summary of PETs for each participant). Following Smith et. al., (2021), the key was to ensure that participants' experience, and the sense they made of it, was reflected within the analysis. These clusters then formed GETs, which were assigned a broad descriptive label. To track how individual accounts were used to inform understanding of experience across the group, these GETs were placed into a table alongside the related group level sub-themes and underpinning experiential statements from individual participants (see Appendix J).

3.7 Quality assurance

Validity and reliability are long standing markers used to establish and assess the quality of quantitative research. Different strategies may, however, be required to ensure credibility in qualitative research (Noble & Smith, 2015). Guba and Lincoln (1994), propose that assessments of 'trustworthiness' (encompassing credibility,

transferability, dependability and confirmability) and 'authenticity' (encompassing ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity, alongside fairness) may be more applicable to qualitative research methods.

Within the present study, trustworthiness was addressed via several strategies. Firstly, concerning credibility, that is whether the findings can be considered accurate, the researcher engaged with the data for a prolonged period, and revisited initial thoughts through the iterative process inherent to IPA. Secondly, whilst generalisation of findings is not the primary aim of IPA, to aid readers to make decisions regarding transferability, 'thick descriptions', that is, a high level of detail regarding the context in which data was collected, are provided. Thirdly, dependability was addressed by adopting an auditing approach via a research diary and maintaining clear records to check current thinking and adherence to agreed procedures within the research process. Finally, to address confirmability, the researcher remained aware of their personal values and theoretical biases, remaining open about these during supervision and at decision points, and acknowledging them within the analytic process, in line with IPA methodology.

Issues related to authenticity were also addressed. Firstly, fairness was addressed by inviting all parents who had taken part in a CAM within the recruitment period, regardless of background. Secondly, parents were directly quoted when findings were reported. It is suggested this is one route to ontological authenticity, which involves increasing participants awareness of the complexity of the system and their role within it (Shannon & Hambacher,2014). Thirdly, educative authenticity was addressed by allowing parents to explore their understanding of school staff and EP within interviews. Fourthly, catalytic authenticity refers to the extent to which the research has enacted change. This will be achieved by disseminating findings at the

local level (EP service/ LA) and it is hoped that results will be disseminated to a wider audience, for example, via blog posts, professional social media outlets and seeking publication in a peer reviewed journal. Findings will also be shared directly with participants, in an easily digestible format. Finally, tactical authenticity is related to the extent to which the research influenced power dynamics, including empowering participants. This has been addressed by enabling parent voices to be heard by the LA and beyond.

The researcher was a TEP on placement in the LA where data was collected, and the EP service had invested in CAMs. To ensure this did not influence analysis of the data, it was important for the researcher to acknowledge this possibility at all stages, and question potential biases within interpretation accordingly, for example, via the use of a research diary and supervision. The researcher's experience to date had also focused on quantitative methods, with a positivist leaning. It was, therefore, also important to remain mindful of this during data analysis, avoiding the temptation to seek a single 'truth'.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

EPs work within the British Psychological Society (BPS) ethical guidelines. These include the 'Code of Ethics and Conduct' (BPS, 2021a) and 'Code of Human Research Ethics' (BPS, 2021b), with the latter relating to research with human participants. These were adhered to in this study. An initial discussion took place with the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) within the researcher's LA to ascertain whether they would, in principle, be willing to support the research and support with data collection. Once the PEP indicated they would be willing to support the research, ethical approval was sought from the University of East London's ethics

board (Appendix C). Following approval of this submission, permission was also sought from the researcher's placement LA, which was granted. Key ethical considerations and practices are outlined in detail below.

3.8.1 Informed consent and right to withdraw

Informed consent was gained from all parents before participation. An information letter outlining the purposes of the research, why they had been invited to participate, and what participation would involve, was shared via an e-mail sent from the EPS administration team (see Appendix D). This information letter contained the researcher's e-mail and indicated the parent could contact the researcher via e-mail if they were interested in participating. Parents were also sent the consent form in this e-mail (see Appendix E), which explained that they could withdraw their data at any time before analysis of the data without consequence. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher verbally reiterated these key points, and highlighted that the participant could cease the interview at any stage without needing to provide a reason.

3.8.2 Anonymity, confidentiality and data protection

The Research Data Management Plan (Appendix K) outlines the procedures followed to ensure data was stored securely. To ensure participants could not be identified within the data, any details that could identify them were removed, and their names replaced by pseudonyms. This was outlined in the participant consent form, and also shared with participants before and after the interview.

3.8.3 Minimising distress

Risk includes considerations related to whether participation may cause psychological harm. Research involving potentially sensitive topics may fall into this

category. In the current study, parents may have found recalling and discussing their experiences of the collaborative meeting emotionally challenging. It may, for example, have brought back difficult emotions in relation to their child's needs. This was addressed by the researcher during interviews by remaining vigilant to the participant's emotional state and providing reassurance, breaks, changes in the line of questioning or opportunity to cease the interview as appropriate. These considerations were included within the risk assessment completed by the researcher (Appendix L).

3.8.4 Debriefing and support

Immediately following the interview, parents were given the opportunity to ask any questions about the research, and the researcher sent the debrief sheet (Appendix M) to the participant via e-mail. The debrief sheet included signposting to appropriate sources of follow-up support for participants.

3.8.5 Power considerations

Given the researcher's position as a TEP within the LA where the research took place, it was important for parents to feel confident that anything they shared would not have repercussions for themselves or their child. To address potential power issues between researcher and participant, the researcher employed active listening techniques when receiving parents accounts to demonstrate acceptance of all contributions and minimise the likelihood of parents experiencing judgement. As outlined above, measures were taken to ensure participants' confidence that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential to support them to provide genuine accounts of their experiences. Before the interview began, the researcher

also explained that the participant did not have to answer any questions they felt uncomfortable with, readdressing the power between researcher and participant.

3.8.6 Reflexivity

Within research, reflexivity requires the researcher to identify ways in which their unconscious biases may alter how they interpret data, and the resulting conclusions they draw. In the current study, the researcher was a TEP within the LA where the research took place. As such, it was important to be mindful of any preconceived notions of how parents might experience CAMs, and how the researcher's role as a TEP might influence data analysis, for example, interpreting parent experiences as overly positive.

A second consideration for the researcher is their position as a parent themselves, albeit not of children with additional needs. Again, it was important for the researcher to acknowledge how their own experiences of parenting might influence their interpretation of the experiences shared by participants.

The role of reflexivity is highlighted within IPA (Smith et al., 2021), acknowledging that the way in which the researcher makes sense of the participants' experiences is influenced by their own experiences and related preconceptions. The researcher supported their own reflexive practice throughout the research process, for example, via the use of a research diary and during supervision with both their academic tutor and peers. This is discussed further within Chapter 5.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has provided a justification for the relativist ontological and critical realist epistemological positions informing the current research. It has outlined

the rationale for adopting at qualitative and phenomenological approach, driven by the nature of the research question, which is concerned with individual experience of a given phenomenon. Data collection and analysis methods (IPA) have been described, alongside the associated ethical considerations and practices. The next chapter summarises the research findings of the current study.

Chapter 4 – Research Findings

4.1 Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and constituent sub-themes identified following Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of the transcribed interview data (see Table 4.1 below for a summary). In line with the research question, the reported findings focus upon the researcher's interpretation of parents' experiences of taking part in collaborative assessment meetings (CAMs) involving themselves, an Educational Psychologist (EP), and other professionals, as part of the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment

(EHCNA) for their child. Four GETs were identified, namely, 'power', 'emotional aspects', 'collaboration' and 'impact of the wider EHCNA process and education system'. Each GET, and its constituent sub-themes, will be described in turn.

Table 4.1

GETs and related sub-themes

GET	Sub-Themes of GET
Power	Validation from professionals
	Strengths (power resources)
	Positioning of self and others
	Contributing
	EP unthreatening and approachable
Emotional Aspects	Difficult emotions
	Meeting anxiety provoking
	Desire for professionals to acknowledge emotional demands
	Supportive factors
	EP containing
Collaboration	Multiple perspectives and shared understanding
	Enhanced understanding of needs
	Facilitating factors
Impact of the wider EHCNA process and education system	EHCP paramount
	A necessary part of a multi-step process
	Time pressure
	Compromise

4.2 Group Experiential Theme 1: Power

The GET of '*Power*' relates to the extent to which parents experienced a sense of empowerment within the meeting, and the factors related to these experiences. The five sub-themes, and two sub-sub themes, within this GET are summarised within Table 4.2, below.

Table 4.2

Sub-themes relating to the GET 'Power'

Group Experiential Theme	Sub-Themes of GET	Sub-sub themes
Power	Validation from professionals	
	Strengths (power resources)	
	Positioning of self and others	
	Contributing	Opinions valued
		Missed opportunities
	EP unthreatening and approachable	

4.2.1 Sub-Theme One: Validation from professionals

Experiencing agreement from professionals appeared important to participants; all referred to the extent to which they felt professionals within the meeting shared their views about their child's needs. Sarah noted the agreement she experienced with professionals during the meeting: "*We're all on the same page*" (Sarah, line 69), and later: "*Everyone was on board*" (Sarah, lines 125-126). Clare similarly stated: "*We all sang the same tune*" (Clare, line 414). This validation from professionals seems important to both parents. Clare also spoke about the relief she experienced upon realising professionals agreed with her during the meeting:

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"*I instantly felt at ease because I was like, okay, I'm not gonna have to battle here. I'm not gonna go, okay, I don't agree because of this and the other. It all just came together. We were all kind of saying the same thing pretty much, just in different ways*". (Clare, lines 80-84).

Sarah shared a similar sentiment: "I knew he'd get an EHCP. I knew I'd have no fight, because I had everyone backing me up" (Sarah, lines 508-509). There is a sense that both parents felt empowered upon realising their views were confirmed by the professionals in the meeting. It also seems, however, they felt if their views were not confirmed by professionals, they would have to "fight" and "battle" to make their opinions heard. This suggests they felt professionals' opinions may be more influential than their own.

Clare appeared to view a key purpose of the meeting as ascertaining the level of agreement between various parties: "*Confirming, you know, the three of us, what our findings were regarding my daughter and whether they matched or didn't match*" (Clare, lines 9-11). The words 'matched or didn't match' again suggest agreement from professionals felt upmost to Clare. Her concerns seemed related primarily to securing an EHCP for her daughter:

"*I was thinking, oh my God, if this all goes wrong now, to get this far, um, not be listened to, or they don't agree with my, you know, input because it doesn't match theirs, could this now go wrong?*" (Clare, lines 40-43)

Sarah expressed a similar sentiment: "*If you don't have the professionals agreeing with you, then you're kind of screwed. You won't get to the EHCP level if no one's agreeing with you*" (Sarah, lines 703-705). This suggests both Clare and Sarah felt professionals' views would be perceived as more valuable than their own within the

EHCP decision-making process, indicating a sense of power imbalance between parents and professionals.

Clare further felt the EP sought verification of her views from the SENCo:

"*I suppose, very slightly, I felt like I wasn't taken 100% seriously because with a couple of things, the SEN teacher was asked if she agreed, and it seemed like because she agreed they got altered. I don't know, if the SEN teacher didn't agree, would my voice alone have been enough? I don't know because that it didn't happen. I didn't have that at all. I did find it interesting that it seemed like we needed to match in order to get anywhere*". (Clare, lines 204-211)

Here, Clare expresses concern that the EP may place more value on the views of the SENCo, with her views questioned if there was a discrepancy. She goes on to explain:

"*Not necessarily doubted, but might have maybe thought that maybe, you know, because I'm her mum, I'm too emotionally attached, maybe, and what I'm seeing is relevant, but maybe, not fully understood in regards to all her needs. Like maybe I'm thinking it's more extreme than it is because she's mine*". (Clare, lines 264-268)

Clare communicates a perceived disparity in power between herself and the professionals in relation to whose opinion is more accurate, with a sense that her opinion may be considered flawed due to its basis in emotion rather that fact. Sarah similarly shared a sense that if parent and professional views did not align, her opinion may have been doubted: "*If someone is not saying the same thing, who's*

telling the truth?" (Sarah, lines 721-722). Here, Sarah expresses a feeling that professionals sought a single "truth" regarding her son's needs.

Jenny, meanwhile, notes feeling her views were strengthened by agreement from the other professionals in the meeting: "*The nursery were able to then back that up*" (Jenny, line 660). This indicates Jenny felt her views alone may have lacked influence, with agreement from professionals strengthening her contributions. Jenny further hints at feeling her views might not hold as much influence as those of professionals, in relation to the EP not having met her daughter she recalled thinking: *"Would you not like to see what we're up against?"* (Jenny, lines 68-69). This suggests a concern her view might be disregarded as the EP has not witnessed her daughter's needs himself.

Jenny's discomfort regarding the EP not having met her daughter also appears to be associated with a desire for her own understanding of her daughter to be substantiated by the EP: "*If he'd have seen Emily, I don't know, I think I just would have preferred that, you know, verification*" (Jenny, lines 81-82), and later within the interview: "*I just wish he'd have met her and been like, you know, I just totally get everything that you have said, I totally get it*" (Jenny, lines 759-760). There is a sense that the EP's view is particularly valuable to Jenny, and she potentially holds their opinion in higher regard than her own. Jenny further described feeling the nursery might have felt bolstered via agreement from the EP, had he met with her daughter before the meeting:

> "*It just validated everything we said, and I just think, for me personally, like, for both me and the nursery, it just would have been, you know, nice to get that, if he'd (the EP) have seen her as well*". (Jenny, lines 113-116)

This indicates Jenny feels the nursery may also have benefitted from the validation of the EP. Correspondingly, when later asked if there was anything she would have changed about the meeting she responded:

"*Just a separate, you know, meeting where he could have then seen her, you know, within nursery. That's the only thing that I probably would have changed, erm, and it would have been nice to have, the psychologist, to have them, like actually agreed*". (Jenny, lines 817-820)

It seems receiving the EP's validation regarding her views about her daughter's needs would have felt reassuring, reiterating the precedence she places on their opinion.

Hence, for all three mothers, the extent to which they felt professionals agreed with their opinion within the meeting was significant. For Sarah and Clare, this seems most related to securing an EHCP for their child, whereas for Jenny it appears most related to seeking reassurance that her views were valid. The EP's opinion appeared upmost to Jenny. In all accounts, the value of professional opinion appears to reflect the power perceived to be held by professionals within both the meeting and wider EHCP decision making process.

4.2.2 Sub-Theme Two: Strengths (power resources)

Despite concerns around agreement with professionals, all participants mentioned personal strengths they brought to the meeting within their accounts. These were resources that appeared to enhance parents' feelings of empowerment. Firstly, all three mothers referred to the unique knowledge they brought regarding their child: "*I know educationally basic stuff like she can't read, but I also know all the emotional and behavioural, because she's mine*" (Clare, lines 319-320); "*Obviously*

I'm the one that knows my son very well" (Sarah, lines 383-384); *"I definitely was able to have that part where it was like, it was about me and Emily and, you know, her family life"* (Jenny, lines 665-666). These statements suggest all participants recognised the value they brought to the meeting in holding privileged knowledge regarding their child.

All three mothers went on to describe using this knowledge to contribute to the meeting: *"I was able to tell them the things that they hadn't known"*, (Sarah, lines 429-430); *"When did you start walking and things like that, so you know, I was like, yeah, that was me. I was kind of like, oh yeah, the nursery can't answer, this one"* (Jenny, lines 672-674); *"I was able to explain how she behaves, and I guess that, you know, that is the result of when she does get frustrated"* (Jenny, lines 36-38); *"We talked about not just the educational side of her but like, her personality, what she's like as a person"* (Clare, lines 679-380). These statements indicate all three parents experienced an enhanced sense of empowerment and confidence when sharing distinct information about their child within the meeting.

Clare additionally noted that her knowledge of her daughter enabled her to contribute to the recommended strategies to support her: *"There's different ways, isn't there of communicating, you've got like Makaton and things, and I said, I feel like Milly really responds well with images"* (Clare, lines 554-556). Here, Clare makes a direct reference to her knowledge of how her daughter learns best. Sarah, meanwhile, used her knowledge of her son's abilities, not only to contribute to potential outcomes for him: *"I was able to give what I thought would be a target and what would be reasonable and how we can work towards it"* (Sarah, lines 394-396), but also to challenge a target suggested by the EP: *"I was like, well, on this target, it could actually be 5 minutes"* (Sarah, line 422). Claire and Sarah's confidence

regarding knowledge of their children appears to enable them to contribute to the suggested strategies to support their learning, and outcomes, respectively. For Sarah, her confidence in her knowledge of her son allows her to go a step further and gently challenge the professionals' opinion.

When asked directly what increased their confidence to contribute, both Clare and Sarah shared that their prior knowledge of the SEN system as useful in this regard. Clare's knowledge came from her previous studies in this area:

"*I'm quite lucky because, obviously, I'm quite knowledgeable anyway in certain areas, but I imagine there's some parents themselves that have their own, you know, learning issues and difficulties and not understanding because this is quite complex. So, it's only really because of my studies that I've done myself that I have the knowledge that I do*". (Clare, lines 466-470)

Sarah's knowledge, meanwhile, was gained from previous experience of the process: "*I don't normally have confidence in myself in that sense, but I've gone through the EHCP once before* (with an older sibling)" (Sarah, lines 331-332). These statements indicate that having prior knowledge of SEN and the wider system were empowering for both parents within the meeting.

Finally, Clare referred to the personal traits she brought to the meeting that enhanced her confidence to contribute:

"*When it came to, like, putting my point across, as you can see, I'm quite confident when I talk so, I, yeah, I was going to go in there and I was gonna say what needed to be said, and I was gonna make sure that I was taken seriously, if I felt like I wasn't, I was going to make sure I was*". (Clare, lines 96-99)

In the final part of this statement, Clare alludes to a feeling before the meeting that her views might be disregarded by professionals, and a willingness to utilise her tenacity to defend herself if required. As she elaborates, there is a sense she has drawn renewed determination from her previous experiences:

> "*I didn't have that issue. I was taken seriously, but this was only because of from way back when we first started things that I wasn't taken seriously. That's where that comes from*". (Clare, lines 99-102)

Rather than feeling discouraged by her previous interactions with professionals, Clare describes these experiences as spurring her on. The resilience that she expresses appears to be recognised by Clare as a personal strength.

Hence, all parents referred to the strengths they brought to meeting. These were personal resources, including attributes and knowledge, that participants drew upon to enhance their sense of empowerment within the meeting and so increased their confidence when contributing.

4.2.3 Sub-Theme Three: Positioning of self and others

The personal strengths noted by all three mothers appeared to enable them to place themselves in a position of relative power during the meeting. Within the mother's descriptions, however, varying indications of how they positioned both themselves and others throughout the meeting were conveyed. Sarah, for example, noted her perception of the specialist knowledge of the EP: "*She was very knowledgeable, which was really, really good*" (Sarah, lines 45-46). This suggests Sarah might have positioned the EP in the role of "expert", albeit she views the EP's knowledge as a positive in this situation.

Clare similarly appeared to value the knowledge brought by the EP:

"*That's higher than me as a mum and that's higher than an SEN teacher. All we can do is say there's an issue here, why is this happening? It was down to the Educational Psychologist that said, yeah, that issue is real. In actual fact it's because she has this*". (Clare, lines 346-351)

Whilst this statement chimes with the first sub-theme 'validation from professionals' (section 4.2.1), with a sense the EP confirmed her daughter's needs, it additionally indicates the EP is viewed as holding privileged knowledge regarding the factors contributing to needs. This again appears to place the EP in an 'expert' position, relative to others in the meeting. Within the word 'higher', there is a sense Clare feels this knowledge placed the EP in a position of relative power.

In contrast to the perceived knowledge of the EP, all three mothers noted points in the meeting where they compared their knowledge unfavourably with professionals. Clare directly compares her own knowledge with that of professionals regarding understanding of her daughter's needs: "*Rather than just simply she can't read, what is attached to the can't reading? What is it that's the difficulty here? I wouldn't know that. Only they (the professionals) know that*" (Clare, lines 307-309). She also notes how feeling a lack of knowledge at certain points meant she had to trust the judgement of professionals: "*I just have to sit there and nod and go, okay, because I couldn't, you know, I'm not informed enough to know whether that's the case or not*" (Clare, lines 303-304). There is a sense that Clare views herself to be in a less powerful position at this stage in the meeting based upon the discrepancy in knowledge she feels between herself and professionals.

Both Sarah and Jenny similarly recall deferring to professionals from the nursery when they felt the professionals' knowledge was greater:

"*I wasn't sure on what the kind of target would be and what would be the need to be met by it, because I've not seen it, whereas I knew the nursery had, so I handed it to (nursery manager's name)*". (Sarah, lines 396-399)

"*I knew I had to step back because what she does at nursery is gonna be reflected when she goes to school*". (Jenny, lines 153-155)

Despite the nursery's potential position as 'expert' in these recollections, it is noteworthy that both mothers suggest it was their choice to handover to the professionals at these times, implying they maintained a sense of agency in this part of the process.

Indeed, present within all three accounts was a sense that the behaviour of professionals placed parents in a position of greater power. Clare explicitly states feeling positioned as equal to the professionals within the meeting:

"*They were just, you know, not only were they both, you know, very professional, but they were also very at ease, you know, they didn't make me feel like I was irrelevant and that they were like higher than me on the chain of things just because of their job title. I felt like an equal*". (Clare, lines 65-67)

Here, behaving professionally is valued, but also an ability to enable others to feel relaxed. There is a sense that, although this did not happen in the meeting, professionals potentially had the power to make Clare feel irrelevant.

Jenny notes feeing her views were respected by the EP during the meeting: "*He (the EP) acknowledged everything we were saying, and he never questioned anything that we said*" (Jenny, lines 74-76). Again, this indicates Jenny felt positioned as an equal by the professionals in the meeting. Sarah also appreciated the invitation to speak first, and this appeared to signal to her that her views were

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positioned as paramount: "*They asked me what I thought would be best first*". (Sarah, line 419), and later: "*She invited me to speak first*" (Sarah, line 626). This too appears to elevate Sarah's perception of her position within the meeting.

Whilst all three parents appeared to experience a more powerful position in the meeting as the result of the professionals' behaviour, there remained a sense that the EP maintained overall control of the dialogue:

> "*Obviously, the Educational Psychologist was the one that was going over all the points. It was her file, so she was reiterating the areas of concern, the conclusions, the findings, you know, so she led the way*". (Clare, lines 184-187)

> "*The answers he (the EP) was looking for, erm, he was able to drive like throughout the whole (Teams) call he was able to get the answers he was looking for*". (Jenny, lines 612-614)

In these statements Clare and Jenny suggest the EP is positioned as the leader of the meeting, following their pre-determined agenda. Sarah, however, notes that the EP maintains a collaborative approach by checking their thoughts align with the wishes of the parent and other professionals:

> "*The Educational Psychologist, she was gathering the information, she was working out what would benefit Ben, and at least realistic targets, and then she was consulting with us to make sure they were realistic*". (Sarah, lines 452-455)

There is a sense that through such behaviours, the EP consistently reaffirms the parent's elevated position within the meeting.

Clare uniquely described how her previous experiences of interacting with professionals negatively influenced her expectations and feelings at the beginning of the current meeting.

"*I wasn't taken seriously at the time, do you see what I mean, so it's always been a constant - I'm telling you something's not right, but you're not seeing it, so I'm dismissed. This is my child, you know? So, it's been those types of problems leading up till the present day, which has caused me to feel certain ways, but definitely not because of the recent Educational Psychologist or the SEN department from the school she's now in, they've been nothing but helpful, productive*". (Clare, lines 150-156)

In this statement, Clare reveals the impact of not previously feeling listened to by professionals, explaining that she felt "dismissed". There is a sense she therefore expected professionals to position her views as less valuable within the current meeting. She recalls how her fears were allayed when the meeting began: "*Once it obviously started, like, it was fine, as the conversations flowed, I could see that pretty much, overall, all three of us were of the same conclusion*" (Clare, lines 23-24). There is a sense Clare felt listened to, with the conversation "flowing", and this felt empowering. Linking with the sub-theme of 'validation from professionals' (section 4.2.1), there is a sense that professional agreement enables her to feel less defensive and potentially positioned as an equal.

The participants' accounts explored here reflect a complexity regarding the factors influencing how they experienced their own and others' positioning within the meeting. They also highlight the pivotal role of professionals' behaviour within this process.

4.2.4 Sub-Theme Four: Contributing

Another aspect of the participants' experience of power within the meeting related to the extent to which they felt their contributions were valued by professionals. This sub theme is further separated into two sub-sub themes; 'views valued' and 'missed opportunities'.

4.2.4.1 Sub-sub theme 1: Opinions valued

Notably, all participants seemed to feel their views were important to professionals in the meeting and this appeared to enable them to experience a sense of empowerment. Sarah, for example, shared feeling her views were welcomed throughout the meeting: "*There wasn't a time when I felt like I couldn't contribute"* (Sarah, line 628).

For Jenny and Clare, there is a sense their contributions were respected: "*I didn't feel that anything I said was dismissed. You know, I was listened to"* (Jenny, lines 411-412). Feeling listened to was clearly important to Jenny and seems to have helped her feel valued within the meeting. Clare similarly suggests she felt listened to:

> "*I don't think she dismissed anything at any time, which was good. Like even if it was something that maybe she hadn't herself witnessed or established when speaking to my daughter, she still took every part quite seriously"*.
> (Clare, lines 627-630)

In this statement, Clare notes that the EP demonstrated trust in her opinion, and senses respect from them. Having her view taken 'seriously' again reflects that she felt her opinions were valued.

Similarly, within Jenny's account was a sense that the EP was stringent in their approach to recording her views accurately: "*He (the EP) was really good in that he took it, he took all the information down, and it was, you know, received really well*" (Jenny, lines 421-423). Again, Jenny appears to interpret these actions as an indication her views were highly valued.

4.2.4.1 Sub-sub theme 2: Missed opportunities

Despite feeling able to participate within the meeting, two participants also felt they missed opportunities to contribute. Jenny shared a desire to contribute a need around her daughter's eating: "*I wouldn't say that they didn't give me the chance, it was just because the conversation was flowing and then it, kind of, it had gone and I was like, oh damn*" (Jenny, line 717-718). She reflected that her decision not to contribute was related to the conversation having moved on, and also a feeling her contributions in relation to provision for her daughter should be achievable within a school context: "*I thought, well, she's not gonna get that at school. So, you know*" (Jenny, line 734-735). This suggests that, although Jenny felt her contributions were valued, she was simultaneously mindful of their appropriateness. There is a sense she did not want to be viewed as a nuisance, or to contribute ideas that might be deemed irrelevant by professionals. This may be related to, possibly unconscious, concerns of feeling negatively judged.

Clare similarly reflected upon a desire to contribute more fully to the outcomes suggested for her daughter. Similar to Jenny, she held back from contributing based upon a sense her suggestions might be unachievable:

"*I would have liked to have had an input because, even if my goals themselves were unrealistic, at least they would have got an insight into what*

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it was that I was basically wanting my daughter to be able to achieve and the timeline". (Clare, lines 540-543)

The final part of this statement suggests a desire for professionals to better understand her views in relation to her aspirations for her daughter.

In sum, although participants unanimously felt their contributions were welcomed by professionals, which empowered them to contribute, there remained some perceived barriers to participating fully. These barriers seemed related to the notion that there were aspects that, whilst important to parents, might be viewed as irrelevant or unrealistic by professionals. Given the sense that the EP had a pre-determined agenda for the meeting (noted within the 'positioning of self and others' sub-theme, section 4.2.4, above) it is possible parents did not feel sufficiently empowered to make contributions they viewed as risky, or potentially superfluous to this agenda.

4.2.5 Sub-Theme Five: The EP as unthreatening and approachable

Also noted within the 'positioning of self and others' sub-theme above, parents' appeared to place EPs within the 'expert' role. Within their accounts, however, were references to aspects of their interaction with the EP that appeared to rebalance any perceived power differential. Jenny, for example, expressed the non-clinical manner in which the EP presented themselves as a pleasant surprise: "*He's a normal person"* (Jenny, line 536). She elaborated:

> "*I felt relaxed in the way that he presented himself, you know, knowing that he was at home and I was like, you know, he wasn't wearing a white coat in a, like, an office with, like, a big bookcase or library and that behind him"*. (Jenny, lines 570-573)

It seems that seeing the EP dressed in less formal attire at home was reassuring and helped to readdress any seeming power imbalance.

Further, the way in which EPs presented themselves appeared to have a positive effect upon participants feelings within the meeting. Jenny noted: "*His presence was really, it felt relaxed*" (Jenny, lines 480-481). Clare similarly expressed: "*I thought she was, yeah, lovely. She was professional. She made me feel at ease*". (Clare, lines 668-669). The words "relaxed", "lovely" and "at ease" all suggest the positive impact of the approachable manner in which the EPs presented themselves. Hence, despite feeling the EP was an "expert", participants did not appear intimidated by their presence.

Sarah additionally noted the benefit of having spoken to the EP before the meeting: "*It helped that we'd already had that conversation to have that open honesty and transparency from someone, you know, to do that before the meeting kind of really helped*" (Sarah, lines 149-151). Here, there is a sense that Sarah may have held pre-conceived ideas regarding the character of the EP, and experiencing them as "open", "honest" and "transparent" enabled her to feel confident she would be received as an equal within the meeting.

Hence, whilst all three mothers appeared to hold pre-conceived ideas of what an EP might be like, the inter-personal skills and relaxed physical appearance of the EP appeared valuable in enabling parents to feel comfortable in their presence and view them as unthreatening and approachable. It is likely that this impacted positively upon any perceived power imbalance with the EP.

4.3 Group Experiential Theme Two: Emotional Aspects

The GET 'emotional aspects', relates to the emotions participants experienced during the meeting, alongside the factors that supported these emotional demands. The five sub-themes within this GET are summarised within Table 4.3, below.

Table 4.3

Sub-themes relating to the GET 'Emotional Aspects'

GET Two: Emotional aspects	
	Difficult emotions
	Meeting anxiety provoking
Sub-themes	Desire for professionals to acknowledge emotional demands
	Supportive factors
	EP containing

4.3.1 Sub-Theme One: Difficult emotions

Within the accounts of each participant were references to the difficult emotions the meeting evoked. These emotions often appeared linked to discussing their child's needs: '*It was hard. It's always hard emotionally because, erm, when you have to lay it all out, it's like a realisation yet again just how much she has going on*' (Clare, lines 695-697). Clare's use of the words 'yet again' suggest she has faced these difficult emotions on multiple previous occasions, whilst 'you have to' suggests this was not something she wanted to do but felt she must.

For Sarah, meanwhile, her emotional reaction appears linked to a new awareness of her son's needs:

'*Part way through I did have a little cry because I didn't realise the severity of it. I do not mind this going in there, he is four years old, but he's at the level of an 18-month-old. So, they're arranging him in the bracket of 6 to 18 months and that's where it hit me'.* (Sarah, lines 465-469).

This suggests the information shared by professionals during the meeting was upsetting for Sarah. Jenny similarly noted the difficult emotions induced when hearing the nursery describe her daughter's needs within the meeting regarding peer relations: "*It's sad to think that, you know, that she goes off and plays on her own*" (Jenny, lines 187-188). It seems all three mothers felt confronted by their child's needs as described within the meeting, and this was emotionally overwhelming for them.

Jenny further noted the apparent focus on her daughter's needs within the meeting: "*It's not a negative conversation, because I know that the psychologist is just wanting to know the challenges we have, but that's all it seemed to be*" (Jenny, lines 194-196). Later in the conversation, she expressed that discussing her daughter's needs created an overly negative portrayal of her daughter within the meeting: "*It does feel disheartening, because I'm just like, you know, it sounds really bad, and day-to-day living with Emily is not all bad*" (Jenny, lines 795-797). Her description of the "disheartening" feelings brought about by the meeting suggest this negative depiction of her daughter was particularly emotionally challenging.

Sarah similarly alluded that the meeting had been an intense emotional experience: "*Come the end, I was a bit, feeling a bit drained*" (Sarah, line 477). She added: "*Emotionally and mentally, yeah*" (Sarah, line 489). This too indicates Sarah experienced a notable emotional toll of the meeting.

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It is evident that for all participants the meeting induced a strong emotional reaction, related mostly to feeling faced with their child's needs.

4.3.2 Sub-Theme Two: Meeting anxiety provoking

In addition to the difficult emotions raised within the meeting (e.g., sadness, disheartenment), all three participants expressed a sense that the meeting had induced anxious feelings. These feelings appeared linked to variety of factors across participants. When asked about her feelings at the beginning of the meeting, Clare directly named her anxious feelings:

> "*I was feeling quite anxious, but only because I've been fighting to get to this for so long that I just didn't want it to go wrong, erm, because if it hadn't gone the way it went, I don't know what I would have done*". (Clare, lines 21-23)

She links her anxious emotions to concerns around the outcome of the meeting, which is of clear importance to her. Her use of the word "fighting" suggests it has been a struggle to reach this point, whilst "so long" indicates this meeting was long-awaited. There is a sense she felt this was her single opportunity to succeed in securing an EHCP for her daughter, and that she experienced great pressure in relation to this.

Sarah's anxiety, meanwhile, appeared more specifically linked to the professionals in the meeting. This was reflected in her desire to know what the EP looked like before the meeting: "*Sometimes, the position of what someone looks like, so before this meeting I was thinking, kind of like, what do you look like?*" (Sarah, lines 119-120). There is a sense here that the EP's appearance is a critical factor for Sarah in terms of feeling comfortable. This statement links with Jenny's comments

around the EP's casual attire enabling her to feel at ease reported in the sub-theme 'The EP as unthreatening and approachable' (section 4.2.5).

Sarah went on to describe the value of speaking with the EP before the meeting: "*If I hadn't spoken to her, then I would have probably been a bit more nervous in the sense of like, who are you?*" (Lines 144-146). This suggests the opportunity to speak with the EP beforehand reassured her and that without this opportunity Sarah would have brought anxious feelings regarding the character of the EP into the meeting.

Jenny expressed a similar sense of uncertainty at the beginning of the meeting:

"*She's (her daughter) so young, erm, I don't know what she thinks half of the time, so, I kind of went into the meeting not really knowing. I was, not worried, but I didn't know how to answer because I couldn't get the answers from Emily. So, I guess you know, I didn't really know how the conversation was going to go because I don't know how Emily thinks*". (Jenny, lines 30-34).

This statement suggests Jenny had concerns about how she might be received by others within the discussion, and an expectation she should be able to answer the questions posed. These concerns appear partly related to having to speak on her daughter's behalf and not being able to gain her daughter's views due to her communication and interaction needs. The pressure she feels to accurately describe her daughter appears exacerbated by the EP having not met her daughter to enable him to form his own opinion: "*We were talking for her because, you know, she's not here and he hasn't met her*" (Jenny, line 830-831). Speaking on her daughter's behalf, therefore, appears particularly uncomfortable for Jenny.

Jenny's feelings of anxiety continued after the meeting, where she found herself questioning her performance: "*When the meeting finished, it was more like, have I done enough as a mum*" (Jenny, line 770-771). There is a sense that Jenny placed pressure upon herself during the meeting due to feeling, as a mother, she should secure the best possible outcome for her daughter. Her doubts included thoughts around whether she had provided sufficient responses: "*If there was something that, erm, we kind of didn't answer right, he was somehow able to then take a different route*" (Jenny, lines 616-618). When asked about feeling there was a "right" answer, Jenny clarified: "*In terms of whether I didn't answer questions right, I was never made to feel like that, it's just in my head*" (Jenny, lines 629-631). Jenny's reflections suggest both a sense of worry around being able to meet the expectations of the professionals in the meeting and also to fulfil her sense of duty to her daughter.

This sub-theme has revealed how the factors relating to feelings of anxiety surrounding and during the meeting varied between parents. A key message, however, is that the meeting seemed anxiety provoking for all participants.

4.3.3 Sub-Theme Three: Desire for professionals to acknowledge emotional demands

Alongside the strong emotions experienced within the meeting, all three mothers pointed towards the benefit of professionals recognising and empathising with these emotional demands. Sarah made a direct reference to the importance of professionals taking parents' emotions into account within the meeting: "*She sympathised with me, the Ed Psych, which was really nice, erm, and she knows how, you know, how hard it can be, and the SEN nursery was like, you know, it is hard to hear these things*" (Sarah, line 470-473). She later expanded: "*They need to have*

that empathy or knowing that it can be emotionally hard for the parent come the end of it" (Sarah, lines 520-522). Within these statements, Sarah highlights the importance of feeling professionals recognised and empathised with her emotions, both during and following the meeting.

Clare expressed a similar sentiment when speaking about her experience of completing the meeting via Teams. She noted, had the meeting been in-person:

"*She might have been able to tell more, you know, body language wise and stuff, like just how passionate I am about getting my daughter the help and support that she deserves. She might be able to see this really matters to mum. You know, she's really wanting this for her daughter*". (Clare, lines 453-460)

This statement suggests, for Clare, her wish to have her emotions recognised by professionals is related to a desire to feel they understand how deeply she hopes to secure the appropriate support for her daughter, via an EHCP. Sarah shared a similar sentiment regarding the importance of being open with her emotions in the meeting: "*They need me to be open and honest about my son, and how it feels, so they can kind of give the right help towards it*" (Sarah, lines 609-610). For both Clare and Sarah, therefore, it appears having professionals understand their emotions feels important for their children to access the required support within their learning.

Jenny, meanwhile, described appreciating a phone call from the nursery following the meeting, where her daughter's strengths were reinforced: "*They were (the nursery) able to put me like at ease that, you know, she has got these issues, but she comes with, you know, good things as well*" (Jenny, lines 240-242). In this statement, she notes that the supportive actions of the nursery positively impacted

upon her emotional state, allowing her to feel "at ease" following the meeting. She went on to describe the comforting words used by the nursery: "*It did sound all negative, but don't think like that, she's a nice little lady and she's got her own personality, and she's gonna do really well in school*" (Jenny, lines 253-255). There is a sense that the nursery recognised the emotional strain of the meeting and took steps following the meeting to mitigate this, which Jenny appreciated.

Finally, Clare noted a perceived disparity between the emotional investment of herself and the EP when agreeing outcomes within the meeting:

"*The Educational Psychologist, yeah, like, she agreed, but I don't think her passion necessarily was there, but I think that's more because me and the SEN teacher know Milly on an emotional level. We know her, whereas I think that's the only part that was missing, but I don't necessarily think that that's wrong. You know, in some ways it's probably good that she doesn't have an emotional connection to Milly because she does keep it purely professional.*" (Clare, lines 581-586)

Within this statement, Clare compares her own emotional response within the meeting to that of the EP, indicating their differing levels of emotional involvement with her daughter. There is a sense that if the EP experienced strong emotions within the meeting this could cloud her judgement. Hence, whilst Clare wishes the EP to recognise her passion, she simultaneously values the EP's apparently less emotionally laden perspective.

It is clear that sensing the professionals in the meeting were mindful of their emotional state was important to all three mothers, and this seems a key factor that enabled them to feel emotionally safe with in the meeting. Next some general factors

that appeared to support parents' emotional states within the meeting are discussed, before examining the specific role the EP played in containing parents' emotions.

4.3.4 Sub-Theme Four: Supportive factors

Whilst the meeting appeared emotionally challenging for all participants, they noted elements they experienced as helpful during the meeting. Jenny describes feeling the nursery shared her understanding of her daughter was reassuring: "*When the nursery do say what she gets upset about, I feel like it's shared. I'm like, well, at least I'm not alone*" (Jenny, lines 211-212), and later: "*When the nursery she did talk about Emily, I was totally, you know, relieved like, well, yeah, I'm glad that it's not just me*" (Jenny, lines 369-371). These statements illustrate the calming effect of feeling others shared her concerns about her daughter within the meeting. Her use of the phrases "at least I'm not alone" and "at least it's not just me" suggests this shared understanding enables Jenny to feel a shared sense of responsibility for her daughter, which is comforting to her.

Clare similarly noted a shared understanding of her daughter with professionals, in this case relating to ambitions for her daughter's academic progress: "*The SEN teacher, absolutely, I felt like she completely agreed, like, we need to get this child being able to read and write at the very least, like it's important*" (Clare, lines 578-579). There is a sense that feeling a shared sense of purpose in what her daughter will achieve in the future was reassuring for Clare during the meeting. Perhaps similarly to Jenny, this was related to feeling less alone in this endeavour.

Sarah, meanwhile, noted other sources of support within the meeting. Interestingly, she was the only participant where both parents joined the CAM. She

appreciated the flexible approach taken to ensure her husband could be included in the meeting via Microsoft Teams: "*He doesn't like going to a face-to-face meeting. He doesn't like people. He finds it very hard to interact with people, but he was in the background*" (Sarah, lines 347-349). She went on to note the reassuring influence of her husband's involvement: "*He (her husband) could hear, obviously just didn't want his face in, and he was looking over smiling*" (Sarah, lines 356-357). This suggests that Sarah drew confidence from the positive reactions of her husband.

Sarah additionally described drawing confidence from the reactions of familiar professionals within the meeting. Regarding her confidence in the EP she noted: "*On Teams you can see people's faces, so I would have detected from (SEN nursery manager) straight away if she wasn't feeling confident about it* (what the EP was saying)" (Sarah, lines 306-308). It seems having familiar adults within the meeting enabled Sarah to feel calm and confident. Indeed, when asked about factors than enabled her to be open with her emotions within the meeting, Sarah responded: "*I knew two people in the room*" (Sarah, lines 608). There is a sense that knowing these professionals increased her feelings of trust and therefore ability to share her emotions without judgement.

The professionals' response when Sarah shared her emotions additionally appeared to support her to normalise her feelings: "*I surprised myself by getting emotional during it, but they got it and they understood*" (Sarah, lines 515-516). Here, there is no sense of embarrassment regarding expressing her emotions, which appears to result from professionals signalling that her emotions are a natural response of which she should not feel ashamed.

For Jenny, meanwhile, the manner in which she accessed the meeting was reassuring. She noted that joining the meeting from her home via Microsoft Teams helped to ease her nerves:

"*Getting set up to, you know, the getting yourself ready for it, and then come into it, you know, like I'm at home it was like it was, I took a day off, but Emily was still in nursery, so I was like not dressed for work, so yeah it was, I don't know if like, definitely the settings helped*". (Jenny, lines 554-558)

She goes on to explain how the setting of a meeting influenced her feelings, recalling a previous meeting with a paediatrician:

"*I don't know, if I was to go to a hospital or, you know, like when we've seen a paediatrician, we've went to a hospital and it is very much like, it's very clinical and, you know, the white coat*". (Jenny, lines 560-563)

Jenny describes this previous meeting setting as feeling "clinical", which suggests the hospital setting made the meeting feel more formal, inhibiting her ability to relax. This appears to be in contrast to the current meeting, where being able to attend from the informal setting of her home reduced her anxiety.

It is clear that each participant experienced different aspects of the meeting as helpful in both regulating their emotions and feeling safe to express them. These factors included feeling their hopes and concerns were shared with professionals, having familiar adults in the meeting and not feeling judged for emotional responses. Having the flexibility to control some aspects of the meeting, such as who was present and the modality through which the meeting took place, was also experienced as helpful.

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4.3.5 Sub-Theme Five: EP containing

Amongst the factors that appeared protective within the participants' emotional experience of the meeting, the influence of the EP shone through. There was evidence in all accounts that the EP's approach supported difficult emotions and reduced anxiety. Clare and Sarah noted the EP's skill in supporting their heightened emotions within the meeting:

> "*She could tell that at times it was upsetting, but she was lovely. She didn't make it more difficult than it had to be. She was really understanding. There was times when I had to pause a minute, cause I got a bit upset and she didn't, I didn't feel like I was on a time limit*". (Clare, lines 730-732)

This statement indicates Clare felt neither judged nor rushed by the EP, who took a flexible approach to meet her emotional needs. In relation to sharing her emotions, Sarah cited the EPs experience helped her feel able to be emotionally open within the meeting: "*I knew this Doctor would have dealt with it all before*" (Sarah, lines 608-609). There is a sense here that she did not feel the EP judged her display of emotion.

Jenny also noted the non-judgemental approach of the EP, which appeared to enable her to relax within the meeting: "*He was very open to, you know, me rattling on and he was fine*" (Jenny, lines 18-19). She added: "*There was a lot of questions asked, erm, but there was an acknowledgement as well. So, it wasn't like I'd said something and, it was either wrong or right*" (Jenny, lines 40-42). Here, Jenny's comment contrasts with her sense of providing the "right" answers within the sub-theme 'meeting anxiety provoking' (section 4.3.2, above). Whilst she felt there were certain things she should say within the meeting, it does not appear this feeling was

conveyed to her by the EP. On the contrary, the EP's approach appears to reduce her anxiety regarding the suitability of her contributions.

Regarding emotional support, Sarah felt the EP brought specialist skills in recognising and supporting other's emotional needs: "*This is what she is trained to do and to understand*" (Sarah, lines 518-519). This suggests Sarah felt the EP had a unique role regarding this aspect of the meeting. She went on to describe: "*She just spoke sympathetically, you know, and kind of knew what to say as well and it wasn't, it wasn't fake*" (Sarah, lines 594-595). Here, Sarah indicates feeling the EP responded naturally, with kindness and warmth. The importance of the EP being honest and genuine is also communicated when she notes "it wasn't fake". Earlier in the interview, she made a direct reference to experiencing the EP as honest: "*She (the EP) spoke with my husband, was really honest with my husband, and that's what my husband likes. He likes honestly from people, doesn't like to be fobbed off*" (Sarah, lines 73-75). Again, the EP's transparency appears reassuring for Sarah.

Jenny also described experiencing the EP as genuine, which appeared to positively impact on her feelings of trust within the meeting: "*The way that he (the EP) came across, it didn't feel like it was scripted*" (Jenny, lines 14-15). Within this statement there is a sense that Jenny felt the EP was fully present and engaged within the process, rather than approaching it as a perfunctory exercise. Jenny also noted that the EP's genuine interest in her daughter enabled her to respond openly within the meeting: "*He really wanted to know what she was like. So yeah, that was a big thing for me because it then allowed me to be open*" (Jenny, lines 5-7). Again, the EP's approach seems reassuring and to reduce Jenny's anxiety in contributing within the meeting.

Sarah also noted the EP's openness regarding the limitations of her own knowledge: "*The only thing that she wasn't knowledgeable was on the sensory impairment, but she explained what she would do to ensure that those were filled out*" (Sarah, lines 255-257). Sarah appears to view this as an indication of the EP's integrity, which strengthens her trust. She notes the steps the EP described to overcome this gap in knowledge, which simultaneously appears to reassure her of the EP's thorough approach.

Interestingly, Sarah noted the EP having the title of 'Doctor' as a positive factor: "*I knew straight away she was knowledgeable when I saw the name Doctor, because you don't get a doctorate easy*" (Sarah, lines 266-268). This seemed to enable her to feel confidence in the EP and alleviate her worries. Experiencing the EP as competent seemed essential to Sarah: "*She said how many years' experience she had, and what she'd done, which really helped as well, and I think that kind of gives you peace of mind knowing that that's what you get*" (Sarah, lines 274-276). Again, Sarah expresses feeling reassured by the experience of the EP. She also described: "*She knew what she was talking about. She was able to tell you what she was doing*" (Sarah, lines 239-241), going on to express the importance of the EP's competence: "*We need to know that we're doing this properly and this is done in the right hands*" (Sarah, lines 314-315). This reflects the gravitas this meeting held for Sarah, and her relief in the EP appearing knowledgeable and conscientious within the process. There is a sense this perceived competency of the EP enables her to relax.

Clare also noted the thorough approach of the EP: "*Just to make sure that she didn't miss anything. Umm, that she got everything exactly how it should be*" (Clare, lines 237-238). There is a sense in the phrase "exactly how it should be" that

she felt the EP's approach to recording information was precise and accurate. Consistent with Sarah, this enabled Clare to sense the EP's diligence, and this seemed reassuring.

Throughout these accounts it is apparent that all parents experienced the behaviour of the EP as containing. This related to experiences of emotional support within the meeting, and a range of factors that alleviated anxious feelings, such as experiencing the EP as genuine, conscientious, non-judgemental and trustworthy. All these elements reflected the resoundingly positive impact of the EP's presence in mitigating the emotional demands of the meeting.

4.4 Group Experiential Theme Three: Collaboration

The GET of 'collaboration', relates to the participants' references to working with professionals within the meeting and the associated benefits they noted. This included how they experienced working jointly with professionals and the factors that facilitated this process. The three sub-themes within this GET are summarised within Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4

Sub-themes relating to the GET 'collaboration'

GET Three: Collaboration	
Sub-themes	Multiple perspectives and shared understanding
	Enhanced understanding of needs
	Facilitating factors

4.4.1 Sub-Theme One: Multiple perspectives and shared understanding

All participants referred to the range of stakeholders within the meeting and reflected upon the variety of views and knowledge this brought to the discussion. Clare noted how she felt collaborative input from different contexts and sources enriched the meeting: "*When you put the three* (school, parent and EP) *together, it paints a much bigger picture of what's going on, you know, in the individual areas*" (Clare, lines 327-328). This statement suggests Clare felt each participant in the meeting brought unique knowledge which, like puzzle pieces, could be combined to create a more holistic understanding of her daughter.

Sarah, meanwhile, explained: "*You need all of them involved. You need to gather all the information and evidence to help him*" (Sarah, lines 740-742). The word "evidence" hints Sarah feels the case for her son receiving an EHCP might be strengthened via gathering contributions from multiple professionals. Of all the parents interviewed, Sarah noted the widest range of professionals currently involved with her son. Not all these professionals, however, attended the meeting. When asked her feelings about this she responded:

> "*I think the right people were in the room because they're the ones that deal with him all the time. As a parent I'm at home with him all the time and then the nursery, they see him like, you know, mostly every day, and that's when the evidence comes in play, the reports come in from Speech Therapy, Specialist Teachers*". (Sarah, lines 772-778).

Sarah appears content for some professionals' opinions to be contributed via written reports, rather than directly within the meeting. Hence, while Sarah valued the multiple perspectives contributing to the meeting, gathering opinions of those who

best know her son seems upmost to her. Earlier in the interview she commented: "*The SEN nursery manager could give a lot of detail because she'd seen Ben for the first term*" (Sarah, lines 97-98). This reiterates she feels the key is to include those who have the most detailed knowledge of her son.

Jenny's references to collaboration appear slightly different to that of the other participants, and this seems driven by the EP not meeting her daughter before the meeting: "*Even though he's not met her, you know, between the three of us (herself and the two nurseries her daughter attends), we've painted like this picture, and it's the same person*" (Jenny, lines 93-95). Jenny's comment highlights that, for her, a key benefit of working in this collaborative manner was having a shared understanding of her daughter with professionals at nursery, that could be communicated to the EP. As noted throughout the themes discussed above, sensing a shared understanding of her daughter's needs appeared important to Jenny throughout her account.

It is, therefore, clear that parents valued the opportunity to work collaboratively with professionals and found the incorporation of multiple perspectives valuable, albeit for different reasons across participants.

4.4.2 Sub-Theme Two: Enhanced understanding of needs

Within the benefits of combining multiple perspectives during the meeting, parents specifically referred to the improved understanding of their children's needs resulting from the collaborative nature of the discussion. Clare, for example, noted that her knowledge of her daughter's needs was enhanced by information the EP had gathered during their assessment activities: "*I found out that, actually, she does have a diagnosis of something, you know what I mean? So yeah, without the*

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Educational Psychologist, I don't know whether I would ever have found that out"
(Clare, lines 344-347). Here, Clare points to appreciating the unique knowledge the
EP contributed to the meeting. She goes on to describe how the EP's contributions
enhanced her understanding of her daughter: "*I now know why, and I can*
understand better why she behaves in certain ways like she does" (Clare, lines 357-
358). This suggests that taking part in the meeting has enabled Clare to gain a
deeper understanding of her daughter's needs.

Clare further describes that the EP was also able to glean new information
about her daughter during the meeting, via questioning: "*She (the EP) would still*
document it like, Mum says duh, duh, duh, SEN department have agreed. You know,
I (the EP) didn't pick this up myself, but it's clearly there" (Clare, lines 631-633). This
demonstrates how Clare felt the EP incorporated a range of opinions to enhance her
own understanding. Relating back to issues discussed within the 'Power' GET
(section 4.2), this suggests Clare felt the EP was open to altering their understanding
of her daughter's needs based upon the information she provided.

Sarah similarly felt the joined-up approach within the meeting enabled the EP
to amalgamate a range of views and use this to identify the most effective provision
for her son: "*Everyone was kind of working together and I think, for the Educational*
Psychologist, she was gathering the information, she was working out what would
benefit Ben" (Sarah, lines 451-454). She goes on to describe how this reflected
positively within her son's EHCP: "*I got a draft of the EHCP and it just described my*
son to a tee" (Sarah, lines 638). Sarah clearly felt the written summary of her son's
needs was strengthened by the contributions of multiple professionals, with his
needs accurately understood and recorded as a result.

In relation to her daughter's needs, Jenny noted valuing the nursery providing information that supported her contributions: "*The nursery, like, with the experience she has, was able to, like, give answers which was then able to open it up more*" (Jenny, lines 620-621). Again, there is a sense that Jenny feels more is achieved in collaboration than would be achieved by any one person individually.

It is apparent that, for all participants, a key benefit of the collaborative endeavour within the meeting was a richer understanding of their child's needs. There is also evidence that both parents and professionals reformulated their understanding of children's needs within the meeting, based upon the discussions that took place.

4.4.3 Sub-Theme Three: Facilitating factors

Within the accounts of all participants were references to aspects of the meeting that enabled collaboration between attendees. Two parents noted how the behaviour of those in the meeting was helpful in this regard. Firstly, Sarah noted: "*We all kind of respected each other to talk and have their own say. Everyone kind of listened to each other*" (Sarah, lines 403-406). Secondly, Jenny stated: "*There was never a part that everybody was just talking over*" (Jenny, lines 589-590). Both these statements reflect the importance that participants placed upon being respectful of one another's views within the meeting. In both cases, this appears linked to providing space and listening to one another.

There were also several direct references to the EP's role in facilitating collaborative working. Clare described how the EP took a systematic approach to ensuring all voices were heard: "*I was asked first, do I agree with the findings? Is there anything I want to add? Is there anything I don't agree with? And then the SEN*

teacher was asked, what does she think?" (Clare, lines 214-216). There is a sense here that Clare feels the EP seeks to gain knowledge from all CAM participants.

Sarah similarly describes how the EP gathered the opinions of those in the meeting in relation to the suggested outcomes for her son: "*Then she was consulting with us to make sure they were realistic targets*" (Sarah, lines 454-455). Both these accounts suggest that the EP encouraged all attendees to contribute equally. Sarah had further recollections relating to the EP welcoming contributions: "*He* (her husband) *did raise one* (issue) *and then we kind of like, you know, went forward with that*" (Sarah, lines 375-376). This suggests that Sarah appreciated the EP's willingness to change the course of the conversation to follow the issues that were important to her husband within the meeting, again demonstrating a flexible approach.

Sarah also felt comfortable to interject within the meeting: "*When there was a moment, we were like, can we add something?*" (Sarah, lines 404-405). Sarah appears to feel the content of the meeting is jointly negotiated between participants, within the wider objectives of the meeting held in mind by the EP. This notion is also present within Jenny's comment relating to the behaviour of the EP within the meeting: "*He was able to get the answers he was looking for, but still giving that time for everybody*" (Jenny, lines 613-614). This reflects that Jenny recognises the EP had an agenda regarding the purpose of the meeting but managed this in a manner that enabled participants to work collaboratively to meet these.

Finally, Sarah noted a logistical feature of the meeting that enabled collaboration: "*There's not too many people there so everyone can get their right to*

speak" (Sarah, lines 169-171). Here she points to the small number of attendees as a factor that facilitates collaboration, by making it easier for all to contribute.

Not only, then, did participants appear to appreciate the collaborative nature of the meeting, they also noted a range of factors that facilitated this joint way of working. These included participants respecting one another's opinions by listening attentively and providing space for all to speak, the EP guiding contributions to ensure equal participation, and the limited number of participants.

4.5 Group Experiential Theme Four: Impact of the wider EHCNA process and education system

The final GET is 'Impact of the wider EHCNA process and education system'. This includes the parents' apparent awareness of the wider goals of the meeting, namely, to secure an EHCP for their child. It also incorporates references to the EHCNA process and wider education system in which the meeting is embedded. The four sub-themes within this GET are summarised within Table 4.5, below.

Table 4.5

Sub-themes relating to the GET 'Impact of the wider EHCNA process and education system'

GET Four: Impact of the wider EHCNA process and education system	
	EHCP paramount
Sub-themes	A necessary part of a multi-step process
	Time pressure
	Compromise

4.5.1 Sub-Theme One: EHCP paramount

Providing the backdrop to all participants' experiences of the meeting was the underlying purpose of securing an EHCP for their child. The meeting, therefore, appeared to be viewed primarily as a gateway to achieving this. This preoccupation with the outcome of the meeting was apparent throughout all participants responses and appeared to significantly impact upon their experience of the meeting. There was a strong sense across all three participants that an EHCP was invaluable for their child's future.

Jenny linked receiving an EHCP with enhanced support for her daughter: "*For all that, the help she's gonna get in school will then come to our favour*" (Jenny, lines 165-166). Clare concurred: "*She'll get what she deserves with the help and support*" (Clare, line 172). Within these statements is the notion that an EHCP will ensure improved outcomes for their children.

Sarah and Clare, meanwhile, note that an EHCP provides an opportunity for their children to access a specialist educational setting: "*Having these needs, obviously stand a chance of getting into a SEN school, which is what he needs*" (Sarah, lines 756-757), "*She can't go to a specialised school without an EHCP, so now we've got that, I feel much more confident about her overall emotional wellbeing*" (Clare, lines 649-651). Both these statements indicate the specific value both parents place upon the possibility of securing a placement in a specialist setting for their child, and their lack of confidence in a mainstream setting to meet their needs.

The EHCP appears a precious commodity to all mothers. Jenny recalls the words of a professional in a children's centre: "*Do you know, you're so lucky,*

because if a child's borderline, they struggle, they won't accept them" (Jenny, lines 385-387). Sarah shared a similar sentiment: "*I feel quite, I can't use the word privileged, but I feel relieved that I've not had to fight*" (for an EHCP) (Sarah, lines 529-530). The use of the words "lucky" and "privileged" by Jenny and Sarah respectively indicate the high worth of an EHCP to them.

It is clear throughout all three accounts that the mothers' experiences of the meeting are heavily influenced by thoughts of the desired outcome, which they view as potentially life changing for their child. Jenny noted that her awareness of the desired outcome of the meeting (for an EHCP to be agreed) influenced her thoughts and behaviour during the meeting:

"*Where I say I had to watch what I said, it was more of, you know, the good parts of Emily that I held back on because I didn't want that to then influence what was put down in the report. So yeah, I did think, oh I hope I have said that right*". (Jenny, lines 396-399).

Jenny appeared to think before speaking to avoid saying anything that might jeopardise her daughter's chance of being granted an EHCP. She seemed to question her responses throughout the meeting and worry about how they might impact upon the final report. When asked directly about her use of the word "right" in relation to her responses she explained: "*I think it was knowing that, like, what value this meeting held*" (Jenny, lines 628-629), adding: "*There was just a lot riding on the answers*" (Jenny, line 634). It is clear that Jenny's ability to relax and contribute openly to the meeting was significantly curtailed by thoughts of how her contributions might impact the desired outcome of an EHCP being issued for her daughter.

As previously alluded within the theme 'emotional aspects', the purpose of the meeting similarly contributed to Claire's emotions: "*I didn't feel anxious about like having the meeting or being part of the meeting. I was anxious about what the outcome could be*" (Clare, lines 94-95). Moreover, when asked what mattered most to her in the meeting, Clare responded: "*That my daughter got the outcome she deserved*" (Clare, line 641). Clare signals that she viewed the aim of the meeting to be firmly focused upon an EHCP being agreed for her daughter.

When asked about her thoughts following the meeting, Jenny similarly recalled thinking: "*Oh, please, I just want this decision now*" (Jenny, lines 286-287). There is a sense of desperation here for Jenny, reinforcing how vital she views receiving an EHCP. She later referred to a "good outcome" being that an EHCP was agreed shortly after the meeting: "*We got a good outcome in that, well, she's now got the plan*" (Jenny, lines 750-751). This too highlights that, for Jenny, the most important feature of the meeting was that it resulted in an EHCP being issued.

It appears that for all three parents, due to the value they unanimously placed upon the EHCP, the primary value of the meeting was viewed to be securing this for their child. It seems this placed additional pressure on parents during the meeting.

4.5.2 Sub-Theme Two: A necessary part of a multi-step process

Rather than being described as an isolated event, all participants referred to the meeting within the context of the EHCNA process as a whole. Within these accounts were indications that participants viewed the meeting as an obligatory step to gain an EHCP. Regarding the position of the meeting within the overall process, Jenny and Clare felt it was the final stage: "*We've finally got there. This is the final hurdle and, my opinion was, this is gonna happen now*" (Clare, lines 381-382). Jenny

similarly referred to the meeting as: "*The final part of whether we were gonna get the plan or not*" (Jenny, lines 362-363). These statements highlight how the CAM was viewed as a step within a longer sequence of events required to gain an EHCP. The consistent use of "final" in both statements indicates that, for these two mothers, this stage was long awaited. Clare's description of the meeting as a "hurdle" suggests it may have felt a necessary, rather than preferred, event.

Jenny similarly suggested she viewed the meeting as somewhat of a trial: "*It definitely wasn't enjoyable. It was, yeah, it was hard*" (Jenny, line 304). This implies the meeting was completed through a sense of obligation and viewed as an obstacle to be navigated by Jenny. Clare similarly points towards the meeting feeling a task to complete: *"We could just be done with it, you know"* (Clare, line 449). These phrases give the sense the meeting was endured by these two parents as a seemingly unavoidable step towards obtaining an EHCP for their child.

Sarah, meanwhile, refers to the meeting as serving an almost perfunctory step within the wider process:

> "*She even said to me, there's no doubt in my mind that he won't be approved for his EHCP, it's just getting some things down on paper about him and logistics and what targets we can get him to meet*". (Sarah, lines 131-134)

Within Sarah's account, there was a sense she experienced less anxiety in relation to the eventual issuing of an EHCP, which may have contributed to her feelings that the meeting was simply a step required within the process. Her confidence an EHCP would be issued is indicated within the following quote: "*I've known since he was about 12 months old that he is severely behind, and I knew he'd get an EHCP*". (Sarah, lines 507-508)

Similarly for Clare, despite statements reported previously within this chapter, demonstrating less confidence overall regarding whether her daughter would be granted an EHCP, she too describes the meeting as having a 'box-ticking' quality: "*We were dotting the I's and crossing the T's, so to speak*" (Clare, lines 8-9). Hence, there is a sense Clare also viewed the meeting as somewhat administrative in nature.

In summary, despite parents indicating they experienced aspects of the meeting positively, all three appeared to primarily view the meeting as an unavoidable step towards securing an EHCP for their child.

4.5.3 Sub-Theme Three: Time pressure

Time featured within all three participants' accounts. These comments related to the length of the process, alongside associated time pressures related to upcoming transitions. Jenny appeared to have experienced the overall process as lengthy and arduous: "*It's just been such a long process*" (Jenny, lines 291-292). This indicates a sense of weariness for Jenny and suggests the process, including the meeting, felt effortful.

Clare similarly noted the overall time taken to gain an EHCP: "*Before that, we were dismissed and nothing was, you know, but we've got there in the end*" (Clare, lines 170-171). Her use of "in the end", suggests she experienced the journey leading up to the meeting as a long and difficult process. She goes on to describe:

> "*Finally, after five years, we've done it, you know, this battle of wills, you know, pretty much with Speech and Language Therapy and Health Visitors, Social Services, even, you know, SEN departments, different schools, different*

things, that finally this fight has all been worth it, because I've done it. I've

done this". (Clare, lines 415-419)

Clare's use of the combative language "battle" and "fight" indicates the effort she has exerted to reach this point. It seems likely that when Clare entered the meeting, she carried her previous efforts and frustrations with her, increasing the pressure she experienced. The phrase "I've done it", and immediate reaffirmation "I've done this" suggests she felt the burden of the process upon her shoulders alone.

In contrast, Sarah relays feeling pleasantly surprised with the speed of the process: "*I think they* (the Local Authority) *are trying to get through as many EHCPs as possible and trying to work their way out because the process for my son was very quick*" (Sarah, lines 7-9). She later added: "*I thought there would be a massive backlog on the EHCP, so I thought I'd be waiting a while*" (Sarah, lines 540-541). Within these statements, Sarah demonstrates her awareness of the wider system in which the meeting sits, being mindful of the local and national pressures surrounding the EHCHA process. In the following quote, she also communicates the time pressure she felt within her son's EHCNA journey, noting the importance of having the EHCP in place before the transition to primary school: "*I've got it* (the EHCP) *for school, so this is where we've been on the plus side*" (Sarah, lines 168-169). Again, this reiterates the concern expressed by other participants for the process to take place in a timely manner, and these thoughts likely impacted upon their experience of the meeting.

Jenny further referred to delays within the process:

"*There was a bit of a delay, and so I was to get a date on the decision, but they said that there's a bit of a conflict between the speech and language and*

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the psychologist, so we're just clarifying certain things with the psychologist,

and I just thought, this is my little girl's, you know, start of school". (Jenny,

lines 52-57)

Again, having the EHCP in place before primary school seems crucial to Jenny, and

likely impacted upon her thoughts within the meeting. Clare also shared her

motivation to have an EHCP in place for her daughter before her transition from

primary to secondary school:

"*What drove me more than anything is because she's Year 5 now, obviously*

Year 7 is secondary school. She will not survive in a mainstream secondary

school. It would be horrific. The bullying alone would probably be

astronomical". (Clare lines 647-649)

This indicates how all three mothers held in mind the importance of completing the

process, including the meeting with the EP within a desired timeline, to meet critical

transition points within their child's education. It also indicates a potential lack in

confidence regarding a mainstream settings' ability to meet their children's needs.

Finally, Clare described her frustration relating to the wider system, which as

described above in the sub-theme 'Positioning of self and others' (section 4.2.3),

influenced her feelings as she entered the current meeting: "*I do feel like my*

daughter has been failed along the way" (Clare, lines 168-169). There is a sense that

this feeling of being "failed" in this case relates to the timeliness of the process,

specifically, that the EHCP could have been issued earlier in her daughter's life.

These examples suggest concerns related to the timeframe of the EHCNA

process and wider education system impacted upon all parents' experiences of the

meeting. For two of the participants, it additionally appears the length of the process

resulted in feelings of frustration for one, and weariness for the other. These emotions seemed to taint their expectations of the CAM.

4.5.4 Sub-Theme Four: Compromise

Given the value placed by participants on the EHCP, within all accounts were references to certain compromises they made regarding the meeting to achieve their key aim of securing an EHCP. For Jenny, this compromise related to focusing upon her daughter's needs: "*I knew it had to be done, because I needed, need to get help for her*" (Jenny, lines 278-279). Jenny shared her feeling of having to focus on her daughter's needs as something that "had to be done". There is a sense she feels she did not have a choice in this, although it felt uncomfortable for her at the time. She clearly relates this to the outcome of the meeting: "*If I said good things, would that mean she doesn't need the help?*" (Jenny, line 307). Here, Jenny indicates a strong awareness of the wider system, and the notion a decision will be made based upon the evidence reported by the EP. It is clear that she changed her behaviour in light of this.

In addition to her discomfort focusing on her daughter's needs, Jenny communicated a strong desire to share her daughter's strengths: "*If anyone started to say good things, I would have went on a tangent of how good she is*" (Jenny, lines 508-510), adding: "*I just knew I had to hold back the good points*" (Jenny, line 631-632). Jenny seems to feel she had to censor her responses, with her use of "hold back" suggesting this required a palpable effort. Again, there is a sense Jenny did not feel she spoke freely in the meeting, because of her awareness of how it might impact the outcome.

Echoing the time pressure experienced by participants described in the 'time pressure' sub-theme (section 4.5.3), Sarah and Clare described making compromises relating to logistical features of the meeting to avoid delaying the process. Sarah indicated she would have preferred to meet in-person: "*I don't like how everything's moved over to Teams since COVID, but I get it*" (Sarah, lines 160-161) and: "*You've gotta do what you gotta do at the moment, you know, and it's quicker and easier to do it on Teams*" (Sarah, lines 173-174). In the phrase "you gotta do what you gotta do", Sarah expressed a sense of duty and strong indication of compromising her preferences in order to move the process forward.

Clare similarly appears to prefer in-person meetings:

"*You get much better vibes and stuff, doing things in person, but it didn't fault me and I understood we were on a time limit and things to try and get the I's dotted and the T's crossed. So I didn't really mind at all. I just, I just wanted it done. It just got to the point where, that's fine, if that's how we need to do it, I can do it that way*". (Clare, lines 435-438)

"*I would much rather have done it over Teams than not done it and it got delayed*". (Clare, lines 446-448).

It appears both Sarah and Clare felt they had to choose between meeting in-person and the speed of the process, with both compromising by selecting the latter.

Sarah also described how her husband agreed to start the Teams call as she had a medical appointment that coincided with the beginning of the meeting: "*He* (her husband) *wasn't amused about it* (having to start the meeting without her), *but he was gonna do it because it's our son*" (Sarah, lines 368-369). There is a sense here that Sarah's husband is willing to make this compromise based upon his sense

of duty to his son. Regarding the length of the meeting, Sarah later noted: "*If it takes 2 hours to complete the meeting, it takes 2 hours, because you need them to have all the information and detail, so it doesn't impact your son*" (Sarah, lines 522-524). This implies Sarah was willing to accept the length of the CAM to ensure her son's needs were accurately recorded. She offered a similar sentiment when describing her readiness to challenge professionals if needed, although this may have felt uncomfortable: "*If it hinders my son, I'm going to say something*" (despite her lack of confidence) (Sarah, line 323). This too suggests a willingness to accept personal discomfort within the meeting to achieve the best outcome for her son.

In sum, it is apparent that parents felt a need to make varying trade-offs and compromises to meet the requirements of the longer process, and within the wider system.

4.6 Summary

This chapter has outlined the key themes emerging from the researcher's interpretative and phenomenological analysis of participant interview transcriptions concerning experiences of CAMs within the EHCNA process. Four GETs emerged, firstly, issues related to power were evident throughout all participants' accounts. Secondly, there was evidence that all participants experienced a range of emotions within the meeting, alongside the factors influencing and supporting these emotional responses. Thirdly, references to the benefits of working collaboratively were present for all participants, alongside the factors that appeared to facilitate this. The final GET related to how the wider EHCNA process and education system in which the meeting is embedded impacted upon parents' experiences.

In the next chapter, these findings are discussed in relation to existing literature and related psychological theory.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

5.1 Overview

Within this chapter, key findings of the current study are outlined and explored in relation to existing literature and psychological theory, focusing upon the research question 'How do parents experience Collaborative Assessment Meetings (CAMs) within the Educational Psychology Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) for their child?'. The limitations of these findings and implications for future research are discussed, alongside a description of the researcher's reflexive practice and plans for feedback to stakeholders. Implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs) and other professionals are also outlined.

5.2 Key findings

The literature review reported in Chapter 2 indicated no previous study had examined parents' experiences of the EP during the EHCNA process. The current study was, therefore, unique in exploring this aspect. Given that the CAM is a relatively novel way of working within EHCNA's for EPs, exploration of how parents experience this also represents a novel insight. Utilising IPA, four GETs were identified within parents' accounts, namely, 'power', 'emotional aspects', 'collaboration' and 'impact of the wider EHCNA process and education system'.

As outlined within Table 5.1 below, these four GETs share commonalities with the overarching themes identified in the literature review reported in Chapter 2. In particular, the current study reiterated the importance parents place upon contributing to all aspects of the EHCNA and the benefits experienced via collaborative working. There was also a reaffirmation of the anxiety parents experience in relation to the EHCNA process. The influence of professionals was additionally a theme across both the current and previous studies, with professionals' behaviour appearing to impact upon parents' involvement, empowerment and emotional state during the EHCNA process.

Each GET and its constituent sub-themes will now be outlined in turn, with a focus upon how findings extend current thinking. This will encompass an exploration of how findings relate to the existing literature and relevant psychological theory.

Table 5.1

Comparison of themes from literature review and GETs from current study

Theme identified within literature review	Related GET within current study	Commonalities
Desire for involvement (which is not always met)	GET 1: Power Sub-theme: 'Contributing'	Feeling involved in EHCNA important to parents.
Involvement in agreeing outcomes	GET 1: Power Sub-themes: 'Strengths (power resources)' & 'Contributing'	Contributing to outcomes important to parents.
Anxiety in relation to meetings	GET 2: Emotional aspects Sub-themes: 'Meeting anxiety provoking'/ 'EP containing'	The EHCNA process is anxiety provoking for parents.
The value of multi-agency working	GET 3: Collaboration Sub-themes: 'Multiple perspectives and shared understanding' and 'Enhanced understanding of needs'	Parents valued multi-agency working.

Empowerment	GET 1: Power	Feeling empowered within the process is important to parents. Parents experience differing levels of empowerment within the process.
Personal qualities of professionals	GET 1: Power Sub-theme: 'Contributing' GET 2: Emotional aspects Sub-theme: 'EP containing'	Professionals' interpersonal skills impact feelings of involvement, anxiety and empowerment. Experiencing professionals as empathetic is important.

5.2.1 GET One: 'Power'

All parents' accounts indicated that the operation of power impacted upon their experience of the meeting. This related to power held by themselves, professionals and the wider system. The 'power' GET consisted of five sub-themes; 'validation from professionals', 'strengths (power resources)', 'positioning of self and others', 'contributing' and 'EP unthreatening and approachable'. The 'contributing' sub-theme is further separated into two constituent sub-sub themes; 'opinions valued' and 'missed opportunties'.

<u>5.2.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Validation from professionals</u>

It seemed important to all participants in the current study to feel professionals within the meeting agreed with their views regarding their child's needs. This echoes Eccleston's (2016) finding that parents appeared reassured upon realising professionals shared their views. The current study revealed several factors potentially related to the value parents placed upon agreement with professionals.

For Clare and Sarah, the value of professional agreement appeared most related to a sense that professional validation was required to gain access to an EHCP. For Jenny, it seemed more related to seeking personal reassurance that her views were legitimate. In both cases, there is a sense that professional opinion is perceived as superior to their own. For Sarah and Clare, this seems related to a perception of how those outside the meeting view the relative status of both opinions, that is, a perception that decision makers favour professional opinion. For Jenny, despite the sense she too felt professional agreement would be beneficial in regards the issuing of an EHCP, she also seemed to place a particularly high value on the EP's opinion herself. Interestingly, although all three parents sensed a high level of agreement with professionals during the meeting, a feeling that the professionals' opinion would be considered superior in the case of disagreement prevailed.

Interpreting this within the areas of 'power' outlined by the Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF; Johnstone & Boyle, 2018), firstly, social and cultural capital appears to be at play. The qualifications held by professionals and presumed knowledge associated with these, for example, seem to have led Jenny to view professional opinion, most notably that of the EP, as more worthy than her own. Secondly, there is a sense that legal power is operating, with all parents highly aware

that the EHCP enables them to access greater choice and resources, and professionals seen as gatekeepers. Thirdly, the value placed upon professional opinion may be considered to indicate a more subtle ideological power operating within the meeting. In this case, social constructions of whose opinions are considered more accurate and trustworthy seem to impact upon parents' feelings that their view might be judged as less valid and, therefore, less influential than if shared by a professional. In this case, parents appear to feel they are a devalued group comparative to professionals. Hence, there is a sense parents perceive they may benefit from leveraging the ideological power held by professionals if their opinions align.

These influences of power might be interpreted as leading parents to experience some of the 'threats' outlined within the PTMF. Firstly, there appears a perceived 'material' threat in relation to being prevented from accessing a certain type of educational environment for their child if professionals do not support their views. Secondly, parents appear to be experiencing a potential threat to their 'knowledge and meaning construction'. This is related to a sense their own understanding of their child may be devalued if the more powerful professional discourse does not match their own. Again, following the PTMF, the meaning parents appear to make of this is that they are relatively powerless within the decision-making process, without validation from professionals.

In sum, the value of professional agreement appears closely related to issues of power, the associated threats, and meaning parents make of this as outlined within the PTMF, during the meeting and wider EHCNA process.

<u>5.2.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Strengths (power resources)</u>

In the current study, parents described a number of strengths they brought to the meeting that appeared to enhance their sense of empowerment. These strengths included knowledge of their child and the SEN system, alongside personal character traits such as determination and resilience. All parents described how these personal resources enabled them to contribute with greater confidence to the meeting. Two previous studies similarly referred to parents' resources that appeared to strengthen their empowerment within the EHCNA process. These were their 'professional skills', which they described utilising to ensure better outcomes for their children (Bentley, 2017) and feeling informed regarding the SEND CoP, enabling them to challenge those involved in meetings (Adams et al., 2018).

As these personal qualities and knowledge appeared to moderate the potential negative impact of power within the meeting, they might be identified as 'ameliorating factors' within the PTMF. Through this lens, possessing knowledge of one's own rights as a parent within the EHNCA process, might be considered legal power, whilst possessing existing knowledge of SEN and the SEN system might be considered social or cultural capital. Meanwhile, character traits such as confidence and determination may be considered to counteract any potential negative impact of interpersonal power.

<u>5.2.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Positioning of self and others</u>

In relation to Positioning Theory (Davies & Harré, 1990), there were several indications of how parents experienced their position within the meeting. Firstly, participants appeared to position themselves as less knowledgeable than professionals, most notably the EP. Paradoxically, in relation to the EP's duties,

being knowledgeable, especially around the factors contributing to a child's needs, appeared perceived by parents as a duty of the EP. Their apparent superior knowledge in this area was, therefore, welcomed by parents, albeit they may have consequently felt positioned in the 'non-expert' role, and thereby less powerful in this regard.

A second element relating to positioning was the positive influence of professionals' behaviour within the CAM. Parents, for example, described professionals as 'at ease', 'relaxed', 'acknowledging' and 'helpful'. All parents described how feeling listened to, consulted with, and invited to speak first enabled them to feel their views were equally respected and valued, whilst enabling them to feel enhanced agency within the meeting. It seems likely this will have resulted in them feeling more favourably positioned and so able to influence the record of their child's needs. In contrast, Eccleston (2016) noted that parents viewed professionals as holding a position of power, feeling their own role was primarily to act as an advocate for their child. This suggests these parents viewed their position within the EHCNA process as pre-determined and fixed.

A third element relating to positioning in the current study was Clare's previous negative experience of interacting with professionals. Despite her preconception that professionals may take up a position of power during the meeting, there is a sense Clare re-positioned the professionals in light of her interactions with them, from viewing them as a potential threat to allies. Whilst Bourdieu (1986) suggests individuals are assigned a position by a group, based upon assumptions around their perceived capital, these second and third points indicate that parents experienced positioning within the meeting as a dynamic

process. They appear to have felt an increasingly influential position as the meeting progressed, based upon their interactions with the professionals present.

In relation to Clare's negative expectations upon entering the meeting, she acknowledged her worries around being dismissed by professionals were hypothetical rather than based upon actual events in the meeting. The PTMF notes that language-based responses such as imagining, anticipating and ruminating are natural responses to power threats. It is possible that Clare's previous negative experiences with professionals led her to picture 'worse case' scenarios, hence her uncertainty when joining the meeting, and sharing of imaginary negative scenarios in her account. The PTMF proports that when there are fewer threats, and more ameliorating factors, need to engage in threat responses reduces. Clare's initial assertion that she was ready to 'fight' within the meeting might, therefore, be considered a threat response, with the behaviour of professionals in the meeting serving to reduce the necessity to engage this.

The 'drama triangle' model, (Karpman, 1968), may also be useful to understand Clare's previous experiences, and the positive impact of the CAM. Grounded in transactional analysis, the drama triangle seeks to understand conflict within social interactions. It incorporates three roles; the 'victim' who is viewed as helpless and powerless, the 'rescuer' who takes responsibility for helping the victim, and the 'persecutor' who may control or belittle others, due to a belief their views are superior. As in positioning theory, individuals can change their 'role', or may be positioned in a non-preferred role. To end the drama triangle, it is necessary for the cycle to be broken. Clare appears to have experienced the school and LA as 'persecutors', placing her daughter in the role of 'victim', and herself as the 'rescuer'. Her positive experience of professionals within the CAM may be interpreted as

having interrupted this 'drama triangle', with professionals behaving in a respectful, warm and competent manner, enabling Clare to step out of the 'rescuer' role and break the triangle.

5.2.1.4 Sub-theme 4: Contributing

5.2.1.4.1 Opinions Valued

Closely related to parents' perceived position within the meeting, their sense of empowerment appeared to impact upon their experience of contributing to the discussion. Throughout all three accounts, parents indicated feeling their views were respected, for example, that the EP did not dismiss their contributions and recorded their views meticulously. This is in line with findings of previous studies where parents appeared empowered by the interpersonal skills and attitudes of professionals (Smith et al., 2014; Redwood, 2015; Skipp and Hopwood, 2016). In all cases, feeling listened to appeared to increase parents' sense that their opinion was valued, thus increasing their ability to contribute to the EHCNA process.

The respect parents in the current study experienced, contrasts with previous studies where parents felt their views had been ignored (e.g., Adams et al., 2018; Cochrane, 2016; Cullen & Lindsay, 2019) or where meetings felt rushed, leaving insufficient time for discussion (Bentley, 2017; Smith et al., 2014; Thom et al., 2015). Despite this difference in experience, there is consistency across studies regarding the importance to parents of feeling their contributions were welcomed and respected by professionals. In relation to the PTMF, parents in the current study seemed to judge professionals within the meeting to hold 'interpersonal' power. The PTMF suggests this type of power, which operates through relationships, can be

used negatively to exclude and undermine, or positively, to support and help. In this case, it seems the EP utilised their interpersonal power to achieve the latter.

Parents within the current study referred to contributing not only to the record of their child's needs, but also to suggested outcomes and strategies to support learning. This is again in clear contrast to parent accounts reported by Adams et al., (2018), who wished for more involvement in outcomes and provision planning. This may be due to the nature of the CAM, where the full assessment document including outcomes and strategies is completed jointly with parents. In relation to the 'areas of involvement' within Fox's (2016) Pyramid of Participation, this suggests the CAM provides opportunities for parents to contribute to a wider range of aspects of the EHCNA.

5.2.1.4.2 Missed Opportunities

Despite feeling their contributions were valued, two parents in the current study felt they missed opportunities to contribute. For one parent this was in relation to an element of her child's needs (Jenny), and for the other it related to a suggested outcome (Clare). This seemed due to a sense that suggestions should be realistic, alongside an associated concern their contribution might be viewed as unnecessary. Hence, even when parents felt that professionals prioritised their contributions, some reservations around contributing remained. These doubts may be related to concerns about how others within the meeting viewed parents, and who directed the agenda. This was a theme that did not appear to be identified within previous studies, possibly as they lacked the narrow focus on meetings with professionals present in the current study. Using the language of the PTMF, parents' behaviour might be interpreted as a response to a perceived 'relational' threat, where they

sought to avoid potential feelings of humiliation or shame for saying something that might be perceived as irrelevant.

5.2.1.5 Sub-theme 5: EP unthreatening and approachable

The current study was novel in focusing upon parents' experiences of taking part in the educational psychology EHCNA for their child. It was, therefore, more consistently possible to identify parents' experiences of interacting with the EP than in previous studies where, for example, parents did not consistently recall EP input (e.g., Bentley, 2017) or 'professionals' were referred to as a homogenous group (e.g., Smith et al., 2014).

One feature present within all three parents' accounts, relating specifically to the EP, was a sense they were experienced as unthreatening and approachable. These experiences seemed linked with their non-clinical appearance, relaxed demeanour and interpersonal skills, which appeared warm and non-judgemental. This seemed to enable parents to relax in their presence and reduce experiences of power imbalance. These features appear to chime with the first 'block' within Griffith's (2021) model of collaboration, 'relationship building', where feelings of trust and mutual respect are deemed to underpin effective collaboration between individuals.

In contrast, both Smith et al., (2014) and Thom et al., (2015) noted that the multi-professional meeting within the EHCNA was viewed as intimidating by some parents. Bentley (2017) similarly reported that some parents felt judged by professionals for child's behaviour. Although it was unclear whether an EP was involved in these interactions, there is a sense that professionals were again experienced by parents as posing a potential interpersonal threat. Parents in Thom et al., (2015), for example, felt unable to follow the terminology during meetings. This

suggests professionals use of jargon served to alienate these parents, resulting in them feeling uncomfortable interacting with these professionals and excluded from discussions. As in the 'contributing' sub-theme above, there is a sense the interpersonal power held by professionals can be exercised to strengthen parents' power, thereby enabling their involvement, or to exclude them.

In addition, the title of 'Doctor' might be considered a form of ideological power within the PTMF, with attributes such as superior knowledge potentially associated with this. Unexpectedly, the only participant to comment on this was Sarah, who viewed this title as an indication of knowledge that strengthened her confidence in the EP. Nonetheless, it is possible that this title might be viewed by parents more broadly as endowing greater power (via knowledge) to the EP, additionally increasing the EP's potential interpersonal power.

5.2.2 GET Two: 'Emotional aspects'

The use of IPA in the current study enabled details of parents' feelings during the meeting to be explored. Only one previous study examining parents' experiences of the EHCNA process (Eccleston, 2016) used IPA. As it examined the whole EHCNA process, some aspects of parents' emotions within meetings may have been unexplored. The 'emotional aspects' GET consisted of five sub-themes; difficult emotions, meeting anxiety provoking, desire for professionals to acknowledge emotional demands, supportive factors and EP containing.

5.2.2.1 Sub-theme 1: Difficult emotions

All parents expressed that discussing their child's needs within the meeting raised difficult emotions such as sadness and disheartenment. These feelings were related to both describing their own child's needs and hearing others describe them,

exacerbated by the apparent focus on needs over strengths in the meeting. Interestingly, this emotional toll did not arise as a discreet theme within previous studies. Parents within Cullen and Lindsay (2019), for example, described the wider EHCNA process as 'stressful' and described the 'emotional investment' they had made, but this appeared to focus on emotions such as frustration rather than sadness. Rather than indicating parents in previous studies did not experience such emotions, these feelings may not have been shared during data collection or identified during analysis. This has clear implications for professionals supporting parents within the process, discussed further in section 5.3, below.

5.2.2.2 Sub-theme 2: Meeting anxiety provoking

Parents in the current study also made references to the anxiety they experienced in relation to the meeting. For Clare, this was associated to the meeting feeling a long awaited, single opportunity to secure an EHCP for her daughter. Parents within Eccleston (2016) similarly described a meeting that took place before the decision to complete an ECHNA felt a 'one-off' opportunity to get things right, hence parents were anxious about saying something within the meeting that might jeopardise the outcome.

Sarah, meanwhile, experienced anxious feelings before the meeting in relation to the professionals present. Her worries were allayed following a reassuring conversation with the EP. In one previous study (Thom et al., 2015), parents described feeling intimidated within meetings with professionals and not knowing the roles of the professionals present. This suggests that concerns around the nature of the professionals present contribute to some parents' anxious feelings and may link

with the previous GET of 'power', whereby interaction with professionals might be anxiety provoking due to their perceived influence.

Finally, Jenny shared concerns around her ability to provide answers to the questions posed within the CAM. This was exacerbated by her sense that she had to speak for her non-verbal daughter whom the EP had not met. Whilst Jenny did not report having any learning needs, parents in previous studies reported feeling reluctant to attend meetings and contribute due to their individual needs (Thom et al., 2015; Skipp & Hopwood, 2016; Adams et al., 2018). This indicates parents may feel professionals have certain expectations around their ability to contribute and, if they feel unable to meet these, this could be a source of anxiety within the meeting. Whilst the EP and other professionals in the current study appeared to be viewed as warm and non-judgemental, there is a sense that some parents continued to hold concerns about being judged by professionals and needing to present themselves in a certain manner within the meeting. If this is not well managed, there is a risk parents may not contribute as a response to a potential threat around 'feelings of stupidity' (PTMF, 2018, p. 223), with avoidance of speaking reducing this threat.

5.2.2.3 Sub-theme 3: Desire for professionals to acknowledge emotional demands

Alongside parents' reports of the emotions they experienced within the meeting was a sense they wished professionals to demonstrate an awareness of, and compassion for, these emotions. This appeared related to feeling emotionally safe within the meeting. All parents described, for example, not feeling judged when they became upset, and the empathetic response of professionals. Within the PTMF, this might be understood as professionals positively utilising their interpersonal power (e.g., providing emotional care) to reduce potential emotional threats, enabling

parents to feel emotionally safe and regulated and hence more fully involved. Bentley (2017) similarly described how parents appreciated the SENCo's 'genuine care', feeling they read their body language and responded to their emotional state, whilst parents within Cullen and Lindsay (2019) wished for professionals to demonstrate greater compassion during the process.

Jenny described the positive steps the nursery took to reassure her following the meeting, appreciating a phone call where they reinforced her daughter's strengths. Alongside mitigating some of the effects of focusing upon her daughter's needs within the meeting, this seemed to indicate to Jenny she was held in mind by professionals, which she experienced as reassuring. Clare, meanwhile, felt the EP was less emotionally involved than herself and the school due to the brief amount of time they had known her daughter. That said, Clare noted the less emotional perspective of the EP as a strength. This suggests she may have felt the EP was more objective in her approach, and this was viewed positively. Similar to the 'duties' suggested within positioning theory (Davies & Harré, 1990), Clare appears to judge this objective approach to align with her expectations of the EP.

A final area relating to acknowledgment of emotions was a desire for professionals to recognise the value of the EHCP to parents, and the relating emotional toll. Rather than desiring an empathetic response, this seemed more related to parents wanting professionals to do all they could to support this outcome. These second and final areas represent findings novel to this study, possibly due to the in-depth exploration of emotions experienced in the CAM afforded by IPA.

<u>5.2.2.4 Sub-theme 4: Supportive factors</u>

Throughout all parents' accounts were references to aspects of the meeting that supported their emotional regulation and enabled them to share their feelings. Factors appearing to moderate the difficult emotions related to discussing their child's needs included feeling professionals shared their concerns (Jenny) and held similar ambitions for their child's future (Clare). Finding that displays of emotion were met with compassion and understanding also enabled these feelings to be shared without shame (Sarah). The value of professionals' interpersonal skills was similarly highlighted within previous literature, for example, parents valued professionals who were 'kind', 'friendly', and displayed empathy, noting this enabled them to be honest about their concerns (Smith et al., 2014). These experiences might be understood, in part, via the psychological need for 'relatedness' outlined within Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), with parents' experiences of warmth and care from professionals meeting this need. This likely contributed to feeling their emotional state was important to the professionals present, enabling their involvement.

Regarding anxious feelings, joining the meeting from home appeared to help Jenny feel calmer, whilst for Sarah having familiar people in the meeting was also reassuring. The benefit of having pre-established relationships with professionals before the meeting was similarly highlighted in previous studies (Redwood, 2015; Adams et al. 2018). Again, relatedness appears helpful here. Whilst no previous study reported emotions such as upset and disheartenment as a distinct theme, features of parents' experiences of the wider EHCNA process influencing anxious feelings were often noted. Whilst support to prepare for meetings appeared to reduce parents' anxiety (Redwood, 2015; Eccleston, 2016; Bentley, 2017), some parents reported lacking clarity around the roles of the professionals present and

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feeling intimidated or unable to understand terminology (Smith et al., 2014; Thom et al., 2015), both increasing anxious feelings.

In contrast, within the current study, Clare noted terminology was explained to her and that she felt comfortable to ask questions:

"*Just the way that they spoke, they didn't speak using terminologies that I didn't understand, because of that, you know, I didn't feel lost or confused at any point or if I did, if I said, well, what does that mean? It was explained to me*". (Clare, lines 74-77)

The families within Smith et al., (2014) similarly valued feeling able to ask questions within their interactions with professionals, although it was not clear whether this was during meetings or within the wider EHCNA process, this also appears to have reduced anxiety. Again, the role of professionals in mitigating parents' anxious feelings is apparent.

5.2.2.5 Sub-theme 5: EP containing

The current study focused upon the EP EHCNA. As previously noted, in contrast to previous studies, this meant experiences of the EP were consistently identifiable. One area in which the EP was frequently referred was as a source of emotional reassurance. Parents indicated experiencing the EP as, for example, non-judgemental, understanding, empathetic and genuine, all factors that seemed to lead parents to feel emotionally supported and able to express their emotions. Further, there was a sense parents viewed the EP as possessing specialist skills regarding others' emotions. The actions that led parents to experience the EP in this way included pausing to allow parents to regulate their emotions, attuned interaction skills and warm acceptance of contributions. In a previous study, Bentley (2017) noted

that, whilst references to the EP where rare, when they were mentioned, parents appreciated how they listened carefully to their contributions. This too suggests EPs utilised the principles of attuned interaction to enable parents to feel heard.

Bion (1963) describes a psychological process of containment whereby overwhelming emotions such as anger, sadness and fear are received, often unconsciously, by another, who in turn responds with empathetic words and actions that provide comfort. Hence, the apparent calming effect of the EPs' actions may be a result of parents' feeling their emotions are contained, enabling them to feel safe within the meeting.

In addition to emotional containment, there was a sense the EP was experienced as competent, diligent and trustworthy. All these qualities additionally seemed to relieve anxiety as parents felt they were in 'safe hands'. The EP actions and qualities that seemed related to these feelings included being honest regarding the limits of their knowledge, taking detailed notes and having extensive training. Note taking was similarly considered by parents a demonstration of active listening in Smith et al., (2014), whilst errors, for example, within paperwork, were noted as signs of incompetence by professionals (Cullen & Lindsay, 2019).

5.2.3 GET Three: Collaboration

All parents' accounts referred to working collaboratively with professionals. Given this is a key purpose of the CAM, this is perhaps unsurprising, yet it remained of clear importance to parents. This GET consisted of three sub-themes: 'multiple perspectives and shared understanding', 'enhanced understanding of needs', and 'facilitating factors'.

5.2.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Multiple perspectives and shared understanding

Incorporation of multiple perspectives within the meeting appeared to be appreciated by all parents and facilitate the formation of a shared understanding of their child's needs. In line with the findings of Eccleston (2016), that parents felt less pressured when views were gathered from range of family members, it is possible that working in this collaborative manner increased parental confidence that all aspects of their child been addressed. More generally, parents tended to report greater satisfaction with the overall EHCP process when they experienced efficient multiagency working (Sales and Vincent, 2018), although the reasons for this were unexplored.

The second building block within Griffith et al., (2021) model of collaboration, 'shared values' incorporates shared goals and common understanding. Within parents' descriptions is a sense that such shared understanding was experienced in relation to understanding of needs and agreeing suitable ways forward. Hence this this building block of collaboration appears in place within the meeting.

5.2.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Enhanced understanding of needs

Rather than the meeting having the sole purpose of assessing their child's needs, parents referred to how thinking about these needs appeared to develop throughout the discussion. The process appeared multi-directional, with parents seeming to feel all participants learned from one another. These findings are in keeping with previous studies (Adams et al., 2018; Bentley, 2017; Eccleston, 2016).

The finding in the current study that parents felt professionals updated their knowledge based upon the information they provided, indicates parents felt their views were valued as equal to professionals. Parents appeared to experience the

meeting as collaborative, moving beyond simply gathering views towards supporting

one another to form a fuller understanding of the child and their needs. This echoes

the 'partnership' model (Hornby, 1989) of collaborative working, which acknowledges

the expertise both parents and professionals contribute. There appears a similar

move away from the 'expert' model, where decisions about a child's education are

based solely on the judgement of professionals, with parents viewed only as

providers of information to improve professional decision making (Cunningham and

Davis, 1985).

Alongside the strengths parents noted bringing to the meeting within the

'power' GET, feeling enabled to collaborate with professionals may additionally meet

a need to experience 'competence' as outlined within Self-Determination Theory

(Ryan & Deci, 2000). This may be related to parents' ability to contribute unique

knowledge regarding their child creating feelings of expertise. Feeling skilled and

informed has been linked to the competence experienced by parents of children with

SEND when making decisions regarding their child (Beresford et al., 2007). Gaining

new knowledge regarding their child may, therefore, further parents' sense of

competence in supporting them more broadly.

5.2.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Facilitating factors

Alongside the benefits of collaboration noted by parents, were references to

aspects of the meeting that enabled this process. These incorporated participants'

behaviours, such as listening with respect to one another, the EP's facilitation

ensuring all had opportunities to contribute, and the small number of participants.

There was a sense parents felt all participants, including themselves, working jointly.

Sarah, for example, mentioned feeling able to interject within the meeting, and that

this was met positively. There is a sense of genuine collaboration here, where the pace and content of the meeting seems jointly negotiated, which Sarah appears to appreciate. This echoes the third block of Griffith et al (2021) model of collaboration 'active engagement', where participants share responsibility and actively engage in decision making.

Sarah further noted how the flexible approach to being on screen during the meeting enabled her husband to participate (detailed within the 'emotional aspects' GET, section 4.3.4). Whilst this contrasts with previous studies where some parents did not feel their own additional needs were supported during meetings (Bentley, 2017; Adams et al., 2018), both experiences highlight the importance parents place upon being enabled to join collaboratively with others in the process. The flexible approach shared by Sarah might be considered to fit within the 'empowerment' model of parent-professional collaboration (Appleton & Minchcom, 1991), whereby professionals tailor their approach to meet the needs of parents. As noted previously, however, caution might be exercised regarding this model as the onus remains with the professional to include the parent, which is potentially disempowering.

5.2.4 GET Four: Impact of the wider EHCNA process and education system

This study focused upon parental experiences of CAMs. Whilst many features described by parents related to events within the meeting itself, during analysis it became clear multiple factors relating to the wider system in which the meeting is embedded impacted upon parents' experiences. Four sub-themes emerged within this GET: 'EHCP paramount', 'a necessary part of a multi-step process', 'time pressure' and 'compromise'.

<u>5.2.4.1 Sub-theme 1: EHCP paramount</u>

Throughout the accounts shared by all three parents were thoughts within the meeting relating to their desired outcome of securing a highly valued EHCP for their child. It was clear these thoughts impacted significantly upon parents' feelings within the meeting, for example, raising anxiety. Within the PTMF, this may be interpreted as a negative impact of legal power exerted by the wider system, along with a 'material' threat, whereby access to resources for their child might be denied.

There was evidence that parents altered their behaviours within the meeting in view of the wider goals they sought to achieve, which might be viewed as a threat response. Jenny, for example, shared feeling she had to 'think before she spoke' and minimise contributions related to her daughter's strengths, focusing instead upon her needs. Parents within Eccleston (2016) similarly shared feeling they had to focus upon the negative aspects of their child's abilities. Mirroring Jenny's experience, they described minimising the positives and concern over saying the 'right' thing in relation to indicating their child required an EHCP. Jenny's account suggested this feeling stemmed from previous conversations with professionals, she noted: "*I was already advised, for it to be, you know, a good reflection of Emily, but make sure my examples were where you have the more struggles with*" (Jenny, lines 334-336). She continued: "*I also got given an example document as well and the example document literally did have like all the negative parts*" (Jenny, lines 345-346). She clarified "*From then, I knew that everything that was going to help get Emily this plan, it had to be like the negative part*" (Jenny, lines 338-339). Hellawell (2017) describes how such communication 'between the lines' from professionals risks preventing parents from contributing to the EHCNA process in a transparent way and undermines genuine collaboration.

The use of combative language within parents' accounts such as 'fight' and battle' suggests parents felt the SEND system pitted them against the LA in a struggle for their child's rights. This is in line with accounts of parents reported by Cullen and Lindsay (2019), who additionally noted a greater presence of combative language in reports of parents with older children. Of all three parents, combative language was most frequent in Clare's account. As a parent of a school-aged child, Clare appears to have experienced a longer, more challenging journey to reach the EHCNA. This may aid understanding of her more frequent use of combative language compared to Jenny and Sarah, who were parents of pre-schoolers.

Interestingly, the extent to which parents felt they had to alter their behaviour also appeared to vary based upon their confidence that their child would be issued an EHCP. Sarah, for example, did not refer to monitoring her contributions, and this may have been related to the confidence she expressed that her son would be issued an EHCP, due to his apparent level of need.

5.2.4.2 Sub-theme 2: A necessary part of a multi-step process

There was a strong sense within all accounts that parents did not relish the prospect of the CAM. Whilst parents described some benefits they perhaps had not expected, such as better understanding their child's needs and feeling their concerns were shared, there remained a sense the meeting was viewed as an obligatory step towards obtaining an EHCP. Given previous accounts from parents who wished for greater opportunity to be involved in the EHCNA process (e.g., Eccleston, 2016), inviting parents to join a CAM might seem a positive approach. It is noteworthy, then, that parents could view the meeting as compulsory and therefore experience this as being 'done to' rather than 'done with'. One possibility is that handing more

responsibility to service users might be experienced as an additional burden by the individual (Cribb & Gewirtz, 2012). In this case, involvement in the meeting might have caused parents to feel an increased sense of accountability for the outcome. Indeed, parents in the current study described feeling a sense of duty in relation to the meeting which may have caused them discomfort.

In line with this, Jenny shared wishing for the EP to have met her daughter to gain their professional opinion. This seemed related to a desire to reduce her feeling of responsibility to describe her daughter's needs accurately within the meeting. In a previous study, SENCo's similarly acknowledged discomfort in expecting parents to share responsibility, exercise personal judgement, work collaboratively and follow prescriptive processes, not wishing to portray this as empowerment (Hellawell, 2017). In sum, there was a sense parents felt the meeting was an obligatory step towards achieving an EHCP for their child and that they would have appreciated greater choice regarding how they participated in the EP EHCNA.

Within these accounts is again a sense power is perceived to be held by professionals and the wider system. Parents appear to seek a greater sense of agency regarding how they participate within the process, which speaks to issues of 'autonomy' as outlined within SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000). With regards to Fox's (2016) Pyramid of Participation, it appears the 'degree' of participation is sufficient, with the parents' voice reflected within the EHCNA. Regarding the 'depth' of participation, however, it appears beneficial to agree the techniques and strategies used to gather information with parents, rather than a CAM seeming compulsory.

5.2.4.3 Sub-theme 3: Time pressure

Alongside references to appreciating time within the meeting to regulate their emotions (EP containing sub-theme, section 4.3.5), and feel genuinely listened to (contributing sub-theme, section 4.2.4), parents appeared highly aware of the wider time pressures of the meeting in relation to pre-determined deadlines, for example, around school placement. These feelings were echoed in Adams et al., (2018), where parents spoke about the importance of the EHCP being in place before their child transitioned to primary or secondary school. These imposed external pressures again demonstrate the power held by the SEND system and appear to impact upon parents' sense of autonomy, a notion that is explored further within the following sub-theme 'compromise'.

5.2.4.4 Sub-theme 4: Compromise

As a result of the factors listed previously within this GET, parents referred to a variety of compromises they made to complete the meeting. These included logistics, such as meeting remotely and making a significant time commitment, alongside behaviours such as minimising sharing their child's strengths and overcoming personal barriers such as lacking confidence in speaking. These compromises all appeared linked to avoiding delays in the process and/ or increasing the likelihood they would secure an EHCP for their child.

These findings echo those of Cochrane (2016) that parents experienced the wider EHCNA process as directive. Families within Eccleston (2016) similarly shared feeling a lack of agency concerning how they met with professionals within the process, often feeling forced into social interactions with unfamiliar professionals. In the current study, whilst Sarah noted being able to direct who attended the meeting

to a certain extent: "*I wasn't having the old nursery involved*" (Sarah, line 202), there remained a strong sense that all participants experienced some restrictions around the meeting.

A key element on which parents in the current study consistently commented was the move to remote working following the COVID-19 lockdown. As all previous studies took place before this event, the opinions parents shared regarding these adaptations were novel. For all three parents, the CAM took place via Teams, which seemed to be viewed as a compromise by some parents. For Clare, this was related to the emotional aspects of the meeting, with attuned interaction being considered easier in person. Whilst Sarah also explicitly shared preferring to meet in person, she also noted how meeting remotely enabled her husband who finds social interaction challenging to be involved. Jenny, meanwhile, noted a desire for the EP to have met her daughter in-person, but also shared that meeting on Teams helped to ease her nerves. In summary, whilst the factors relating to preferences for in-person or remote meetings are unique to each parent, this logistical element of the meeting was important within all participants experiences.

Further, Jenny noted a strong desire to share her daughter's strengths, which she stifled. Parents in previous studies similarly shared appreciating opportunities to speak about their child's strengths within the EHCNA process (Skipp and Hopwood, 2016) and support to consider their child's strengths (Bentley, 2017). Alongside the emotional toll parents described in relation to focusing on their children's needs in the current study, this finding highlights the importance for parents of feeling their child's strengths are acknowledged, without feeling this will jeopardise the possibility of an EHCP being issued.

These accounts of compromise may be understood with reference to the psychological need for 'autonomy' as outlined by Self-Determination Theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), whereby it seems parents perceive their sense of agency to be constrained by elements within the wider system. Ryan and Deci (2017) describe how a lack of autonomy can result in feelings of pressure and conflict, including feeling pushed in an unwanted direction. These accounts of compromise suggest this may have been the experience for some parents within this study and appear closely related to feelings of power within the meeting.

5.3 Implications for EPs and others

The findings of this study have implications for EPs and other professionals engaging with parents during the ECHNA process. The recommendations below incorporate factors that parents' accounts indicate work well within the CAM, alongside possible ways forward.

5.3.1 Acknowledging and supporting emotional demands

Within all parents' accounts, was an indication the CAM was experienced as distinctively emotionally demanding, due to the perceived 'high stakes' in relation to receiving an EHCP for their child. This suggests there may be additional considerations for EPs when they are interacting with parents during the EHCNA process, compared to other meetings, such as annual reviews or EP assessments conducted for other purposes. A key implication for EPs, therefore, is to acknowledge the heightened emotional states that are experienced by parents within the wider EHCNA process and take measures to support these.

<u>5.3.1.1 Anxiety</u>

Anxious feelings were prevalent amongst parents within the current study in relation to their desire to secure an EHCP for their child, and these feelings impacted significantly upon their experiences of the CAM. Parents noted behaviours of the EP that eased anxious feelings. These included the use of interpersonal skills to reassure, avoiding jargon, phoning parents before the meeting to enable a relationship to be formed, having met their child in-person, and making it clear all contributions would be welcomed without judgement. Interestingly, parents seemed to wish for EPs to strike a balance between being professional enough to inspire confidence, whilst simultaneously interacting with a humanness that made them relatable rather than imitating. To achieve this, EPs might utilise the principles of attuned interaction (Biemans, 1990; Kennedy, Landor & Todd, 2010) to build a positive relationship, including being attentive (e.g., looking interested with a friendly posture, use of non-verbal communication), encouraging initiatives (e.g., showing emotional warmth through intonation, waiting), and receiving initiatives (e.g., repeating/ using other's words or phrases, being friendly and/or playful as appropriate). EPs might also use behaviours to demonstrate competence, such as seeking to gather all information thoroughly and accurate recording.

For parents such as Clare who have previous negative experiences of interacting with professionals it appears particularly imperative for the EP to provide an opportunity to build a trusting relationship with parents before the CAM. Given the importance parents placed upon gaining validation from professionals, and experiencing shared understanding with others, it appears the EP meeting with the CYP before the CAM may also be reassuring for parents.

5.3.1.2 Upset and disheartenment

Regarding feelings of upset that arose within the meeting, parents appreciated the empathetic response of the EP. This appeared to allow them to feel contained and emotionally safe, enabling them to remain open regarding their emotions. Clearly, EPs should strive to respond with empathy toward parents at all times. It seemed that discussions around their child's needs were particularly emotionally challenging for parents. Given that a preliminary phone conversation with the EP was experienced as supportive by parents, acknowledging that the meeting might evoke a range of emotions, and normalising this possibility, could form part of this pre-meeting discussion. At the beginning of the meeting, it may also be useful to highlight participants they can take a break if needed. It may also be useful to share sources of emotional support for parents following the meeting, such as local or national support services for parents of children with SEN.

As a child's attainment in months and years may be included within the written summary of the EHCNA, it may be useful to explain the context of these assessments to parents, as noting these to be significantly below age expected levels was particularly upsetting for one parent. Given that some parents reported leaving the meeting with feelings of disheartenment, EPs might actively invite descriptions of the child's strengths throughout and reflect these in the written report. EPs should also reassure parents that recording strengths will not reduce the likelihood of their child receiving an EHCP. To conclude the meeting on a hopeful note, the EP might invite participants to share a positive about the child or hope for their future at the conclusion of the meeting.

5.3.2 Trustworthiness

Parents also noted the importance of experiencing the EP as genuine and trustworthy, for example, appreciating EPs acknowledging the limitations of their own knowledge, and outlining the compensatory steps they would take in these instances. This suggests that, despite the apparent 'expert' role in which they are placed by parents, EPs might aim to be transparent with parents regarding areas that fall outside their skill set, therefore, demonstrating not only integrity but also a vulnerability that might serve to readdress the power balance between EP and parent.

5.3.3 Mitigating the negative impact of power

The references parents made to the meeting as embedded within a process that culminates in a decision regarding whether an EHCP will be issued, and associated access to resources, indicates they felt at the mercy of a powerful wider SEN and educational system. The role of the EP within the EHCNA process contains complexities in this respect. The 2015 SEND CoP states EP advice must be 'independent'. The Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP; 2020) highlights the need for EPs to simultaneously respect the process of the LA, who has commissioned their services, whilst maintaining awareness of their professional duty of care for the CYP. This juxtaposition must be carefully balanced by EPs when providing psychological advice to avoid parents feeling the EP represents the LA. It also, however, potentially places them in a position to mitigate the negative impacts of power exerted by the wider system. EPs should, therefore, actively seek to empower parents within the process. This may be achieved via behaviours previously described as helpful, such as welcoming parents' contributions, amplifying their voices, and mindful use of interpersonal skills, for example, active listening. It

may also be achieved by identifying parents power resources and explicitly highlighting these strengths. These measures provide initial efforts towards elevating the position of parents within the meeting and the wider assessment process.

Regarding feeling able to contribute, whilst parents reported feeling their views were respected, two parents shared aspects they would like to have contributed but chose not to for fears their thoughts might be considered inappropriate. It would be beneficial for EPs to explicitly state that parents should contribute all thoughts, even if they are unsure of their relevance. EPs might additionally invite parents to send additional contributions via e-mail within a given number of days following the meeting, to reduce the sense the meeting is a 'one-off' opportunity.

To further reduce the power differential, and enable parental involvement, EPs should provide clear explanations and reduce jargon that might exclude parents from the discussion. EPs might also ensure parents feel able to ask questions, perhaps naming this may feel difficult, but highlighting the benefits of seeking clarity where required. An EP assessment meeting that enables parents and professionals to collaborate on an equal footing, has the potential to be a key step towards empowering parents and strengthening their voices within the EHCNA process as a whole.

Conversely, parents also noted appreciating EPs' expertise, with their perceived competence appearing containing. This suggests parents may sometimes feel reassured by the EP assuming the 'expert' position and that parents should be enabled to indicate when they wish to seek a reassuring 'professional opinion', versus when they wish to express their own.

5.3.4 Challenging the bases of ideological power

Ideological power, which may result, for example, in negative stereotyping of certain groups, is held by the PTMF as being relatively 'hidden'. It is possible that such stereotypes may form for 'parents' as a group. Hence, it is vital that EPs remain conscious of the language used when referring the parents, and the associated meanings that may be subtly constructed and communicated, for example, that their opinions are less valid than professionals. EPs should not only avoid colluding with these ideas, but actively challenge them. Within the CAM, this may be achieved through highlighting the unique valuable contribution of the parent and amplifying their voice within the written summary. Re-positioning the EP from the 'expert' role requires a similar change in the discourse, which EPs themselves might influence. (Fox, 2015).

5.3.5 Enabling autonomy

The importance of autonomy was evident within all parents' accounts. This related to the overall EHCNA process, alongside choices in relation to the EP EHCNA meeting itself. Given that parents tended to view the meeting as obligatory, EPs should first support parents to make an informed decision as to whether they wish to participate. They should ensure parents understand the CAM is non-compulsory and provide alternative options for being involved in the EP EHCNA if this is preferred. Whilst making the rationale, purpose, and potential benefits of the meeting clear, EPs should also explicitly state that parent can decline to participate without consequence to the outcome of the EHCNA.

For parents who wish to be involved in the meeting, personal preferences should be ascertained in relation to factors such as the format, timings, participants invited to attend, and how the parent would feel most comfortable contributing. This

should include strategies to cater for additional needs in agreement with the parent. Within the current study, it was clear that each participant experienced different approaches as helpful so it is unlikely a 'one size fits all' approach will be effective. It is, therefore, important for EPs to involve parents in decisions relating to all aspects of the meeting and strive to honour their preferences.

5.3.6 Collaborative practice

Despite the importance of collaboration reflected in the literature, there remains a lack of clarity in defining this term, and the factors contributing to this process. This creates difficulty developing and assessing collaborative practice. The features of collaboration noted within parents' accounts seemed to map efficiently onto existing models of collaboration (Fox, 2016; Griffiths et al.,2021; Hornby, 1989). This suggests that EPs and other professionals might use these models to develop their collaborative practice and measure the extent to which parent-professional collaboration has been achieved.

5.3.7 Support for EPs

Relationship building before the CAM and providing sufficient space within the meeting for all views to be explored, emotions appropriately contained, and views accurately recorded, requires significant EP time investment. EPSs should support EPs by allowing them sufficient time to complete these steps. Given the containing role of the EP, it is vital they are also supported to maintain personal emotional wellbeing to enable them to practice effectively. This may be achieved via supervision that directly acknowledges and supports these demands.

5.4 Reflexivity

In a research context, reflexivity refers to the researchers' awareness of their role in the research, including how this is influenced by their relationship with participants (Haynes., 2012). It involves the researcher acknowledging how factors such as their background, values and assumptions affect the research process, including the conclusions drawn (Palaganas et al., 2017). The researcher took steps to maintain a reflexive stance throughout, for example, maintaining a reflective research diary, which, alongside supervision with the academic research tutor, was used to consider personal biases and monitor decision making throughout the research process.

As a white, British, educated female, who is concurrently a Trainee Educational Psychologist in the LA where data was collected and a mother of school aged children (albeit without additional learning needs) the researcher considered, for example, how this influenced their interpretation of power within the meeting. They considered how their own privileges might lead to underestimating parents' feelings of powerlessness and also acknowledged their status as a parent may have led to empathising with parents that could result in experiences of powerlessness being overestimated. It was crucial to periodically 'zoom in and out' of the data throughout all stages of analysis and write-up, as in the hermeneutic circle outlined by Smith et al., (2022). Returning to the direct statements made by participants, for example, enabled the researcher to ensure reported findings were grounded within the participants experiences, and the interpretive process was transparent.

Reflexivity also encompasses the researcher's consideration of how their own agenda may influence the research process (Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007). The researcher was on placement within the LA where the data was collected and

conducting CAMs within their own practice. The CAM is a model in which the EPS had invested and was generally favoured by EPs within the service. It was, therefore, important for the researcher to monitor any associated bias during data analysis. This process was reflected in the following entries in the researcher's reflective diary:

"*I'm trying to withhold a desire to paint the process in a resoundingly positive light due to using this approach myself and being within a LA where this approach is embedded. I'm seeking to see the meeting initially from the parents' perspective, rather than my own. IPA is helping me avoid generalisations. I remind myself each parents' context is unique and this impacts upon their experience*". February, 2023.

Creating tables of PETs and GETs was beneficial for the researcher to scrutinise where an assertion was based and revisit their assumptions. The researcher additionally acknowledged how the research impacted upon their own practice, as evident within the following diary entries:

"*I'm noticing how I'm altering my own practice following data analysis. I included a 'round of positives' at the end of a EHCNA meeting this week, and also had a conversation with a parent about the emotional strain of the meeting*". March, 2023.

"*I suggested the parent's hope did not have to be 'realistic' and could represent their best wish for their child's future. The parent responded well, sharing her best hopes, which we shaped into a workable outcome together*". February, 2023.

"*I'm becoming aware of the operation of power in my interactions with parents as a TEP and actively trying to avoid positioning myself in an 'expert' role*". January, 2023.

Following data analysis, the researcher additionally reflected upon the experience of other professionals in the meeting, for example, considering how to signal that their views were respected. Overall, the researcher became more aware of the potential power differential during meetings and using principles of attuned interaction to mitigate these to enable collaboration.

Finally, the role of the EP was prevalent within the analysis. Whilst given the focus of this study was the EP EHCNA, this is perhaps not unexpected. That said, it should also be noted that, as a TEP, the researcher likely also paid particular attention to these aspects within parents' accounts. Reading and re-reading within the IPA process enabled the researcher to pay attention to aspects of the parents' accounts that might not have initially been acknowledged.

5.5 Limitations of findings and implications for future research

The current study used a qualitative methodology. Whilst interpreter bias may, therefore, influence findings, stringent measures were taken to acknowledge these biases within interpretation by the researcher, as outlined above. Other potential limitations of the current study should be noted when interpreting the findings.

Participants were recruited via an e-mail that was sent from the EPS administrative team. Parents may have been discouraged from participating if they felt the research was undertaken by a representative of the LA. This risk was minimised by highlighting that the research formed part of the TEP's doctoral studies, and participant details would remain anonymous. It was also made clear at the

beginning of the interview that the researcher did not know the name of the EP who had conducted their child's EHCNA, encouraging parents to speak freely.

A further consideration regarding recruitment was that the title of the doctoral programme was included on the recruitment letter and the researcher stated as a 'Trainee Educational Psychologist'. This may have impacted upon parents' willingness participate. The perceived power of the TEP during the conversation might also have impacted upon parents' ability to share experiences openly. This was counteracted by providing time to build relationships with parents before beginning the interview, utilising the principles of attuned interaction to enable participants to relax and feel more able to share information openly.

Collecting data via interviews requires participants to articulate their experiences verbally. Arguably, this method of data collection is therefore limited by the participants ability to do so. The level of literacy and communication skills required to access the study may also have limited the diversity of parents feeling able to participate. Further, linked to the demographics of the LA in England where data was collected, parents were all White British with English as their first language. The views of parents from a range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds are therefore absent within the current study. Interestingly, all participants were educated to NVQ level, meaning opportunities to explore differences of experience based upon education level were also limited.

Given that the components outlined in the parental empowerment framework (Kim & Bryan, 2017; Kim et al., 2018), were found to differ among parents based on their socio-economic, racial/ ethnic and language backgrounds, these features might be particularly relevant to understanding the power dynamics operating within the

CAM. Whilst this suggests caution should be exercised when applying these findings to broader contexts, within its phenomenological spirit, IPA is clear that the purpose of analysis is not to identify universal truths, but to provide a detailed description of individual experience. It is hoped that the description of participants presented within the methodology chapter will enable readers to judge the extent to which these findings may be applicable to their own contexts. Seeking views of parents from more diverse backgrounds would clearly be useful in future research.

Relating to the diversity of participants, the CAM is typically (although not exclusively) utilised for children of early years and primary school age in the LA where data was collected. The parents within this study, therefore, all had children of primary school age or younger. It is possible that experiences for parents with older children may differ from those reported in the current study. In addition, no information was shared regarding the characteristics of the EP, other than gender. It might be useful to explore how experiences vary based upon the intersection between the characteristics of the parent and EP.

Notably, all parents in this study knew the outcome of the EHCNA before the research interview, with all being issued an EHCP for their child. This may have resulted in more positive feelings regarding the process. In future, it may be helpful to explore the experiences of parents whose child was not issued an EHCP following the CAM, or to collect data before the decision has been issued.

Within parents' accounts was a sense they held firm beliefs regarding how EPs and other professionals should behave. Despite multiple indications of EP and other professionals' behaviours that were experienced as helpful, future research might explore the precise expectations parents have for professionals, including

EPs, within the EHCNA process. In line with the drama triangle (Karpman, 1968), such information might better enable professionals to ensure these expectations are met and reduce the need for parents to take up non-preferred positions.

Finally, this study focused solely upon parental experience of the CAM. Within future research it may be useful to seek experiences of others in the meeting, for example, EPs and other professionals. An alternative approach might be to explore the experiences of all participants in the same meeting, following an approach such as that outlined by Russell (2020) who explored collaboration between parents and professionals within a pre-statutory SEND review meeting. Whilst interviewing all participants within the same meeting may introduce the possibility of participants curtailing their descriptions based on wanting to maintain relationships, it may also provide valuable insight into a range of stakeholder experiences.

5.6 Plans for feedback to stakeholders

Findings will be shared with participants and disseminated with a wider audience. This will be achieved by sharing a short summary outlining the purposes, methodology, findings and implications with participants via e-mail. The findings will additionally be shared with the EPS where data was collected via a verbal presentation during whole service CPD event. A leaflet summarising key findings and implications for EP practice will also be produced to share with the EPS where data was collected and other interested EPSs in England. Finally, the researcher will seek opportunities to publish this research within peer-reviewed journals or other media to reach a wider audience.

5.7 Summary

This research explored parents' experiences of participating in CAMs within the EP EHCNA for their child. Parents appeared to appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the assessment and experience the meeting as collaborative. Parents shared multiple features of the meeting they experienced as helpful, notably the experience of the EP. Despite these supportive elements, the negative influences of power were evident within all parent's accounts, especially in relation to wider SEND system which must be navigated to access an EHCP and associated resources.

These findings align with literature that suggests involvement within all areas of the EHCNA process for their child is important to parents. They also reinforce the anxious feeling parents experience during the process, and extend this to include other difficult emotions, such as sadness. The current findings solidify the importance parents place upon experiencing empowerment within the EHCNA process and extend current thinking by indicating how this might be achieved. Importantly, the current research spotlights how the EP is experienced by parents during the EHCNA process. This has not been achieved in any previous study.

It is clear that EPs have a key role to play, not only in supporting parents' emotional needs and mitigating the negative operation of power within the CAM, but also actively employing a range of strategies to empower parents. This includes maximising their agency within the process and amplifying their voices within the wider system. Given that collaboration, autonomy and empowerment appear intertwined, this might be achieved via consideration of the operation of power as outlined by the PTMF and positioning theory, alongside ensuring parents psychological needs as outlined within Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) are met. Finally, models of participation and collaboration such as Fox (2015),

Griffiths et al., (2021) and Hornby (1989) may provide useful frameworks for EPs and other professionals to consider the extent to which parents are meaningfully involved and explore the factors contributing to this.

It seems appropriate to conclude with a quote that may epitomise what was important to parents regarding their experiences of professionals in CAMs:

"They didn't make me feel like I was irrelevant and that they were higher than me on the chain of things just because of their job title. I felt like an equal".
(Clare, lines 65-67)

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Appendices

Appendix A: Examples of results returned during initial literature search when terms were expanded and refined

Database searched	Date	Keywords/ field	Number of articles returned	Meeting inclusion criteria
EBSCOhost (including Academic Search Complete, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete, ERIC and APA Psycinfo)	January 2023	(parent* OR carer OR mother OR father OR guardian) AND (experience* OR view OR opinion OR voice OR perspective OR perception) AND (collaborati* OR participation OR engagement OR involvement) AND ("Education health and care" OR ehc OR ehcp OR "statutory assessment" OR "professional meeting" OR sen) EBSCOhost default field	345	1 (Sales & Vincent, 2018)
EBSCOhost (including Academic Search Complete, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete, ERIC and APA Psycinfo)	January 2023	Parent AND "Education health and care" Default	26	1 (Sales & Vincent, 2018)
EBSCOhost (including Academic Search Complete, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research	January 2023	parent* AND "EHCP" OR EHC OR "statutory assessment" Default	45	1 (Sales & Vincent, 2018)
EBSCOhost (including Academic Search Complete, Child Development & Adolescent	January 2023	parent* AND "EHCP" OR EHC OR "statutory assessment" All text	2,469	Judged too large to review

Studies, Education Research				
EBSCOhost (including Academic Search Complete, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete, ERIC and APA Psycinfo)	January 2023	(parent OR carer OR mother OR father OR guardian) AND (view OR opinion OR voice OR perspective OR experience) AND (Collaborati* OR participation OR engagement OR involvement OR partnership OR joint OR co-production) AND ("Education health and care" OR EHC* OR statutory OR professional meeting) default	381	1 (Sales & Vincent, 2018)
EBSCOhost (including Academic Search Complete, Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete, ERIC and APA Psycinfo)	January 2023	(parent OR carer OR mother OR father OR guardian OR family) AND (view OR opinion OR voice OR perspective OR experience) AND (Collaborati* OR participation OR engagement OR involvement OR partnership OR joint OR co-production) AND ("Education health and care" OR EHC* OR statutory OR professional meeting) default	668	1 (Sales & Vincent, 2018)
Scopus	January 2023	(parent* OR carer OR mother OR father OR guardian) AND (experience* OR view OR opinion OR voice OR perspective OR perception) AND (collaborati* OR participation OR engagement OR involvement) AND ("Education health and care" OR ehc OR ehcp OR "statutory assessment" OR "professional meeting" OR sen) Title, abstract, key words	56	2 (Sales & Vincent, 2018; Cullen & Lindsay, 2019)

Scopus	January 2023	(parent* OR carer OR mother OR father OR guardian) AND (experience* OR view OR opinion OR voice OR perspective OR perception) AND (collaborati* OR participation OR engagement OR involvement) AND ("Education health and care" OR ehc OR ehcp OR "statutory assessment" OR "professional meeting" OR sen) All fields	36,308	Judged too large to review
Scopus	January 2023	Parent* AND "Education health and care" Title, abstract, key words	16	1 (Sales & Vincent, 2018)
Scopus	January 2023	Parent* AND "Education health and care" All fields	116	2 (Cullen & Lindsay, 2019; Sales & Vincent, 2018)
Scopus	January 2023	(parent* OR carer OR mother OR father OR guardian OR family) AND (view OR opinion OR voice OR perspective OR experience) AND (Collaborati* OR participation OR engagement OR involvement OR partnership OR joint OR co-production) AND ("Education health and care" OR EHC* OR statutory OR professional meeting) Title, abstract, key words	729	Not reviewed

Appendix B: Overview of studies included in literature review

Author(s) (Year)	Title	Publication Type	Parent Participant Details	Design	Measures and data analysis	Key findings	Themes	Critique
Adams et al., (2018)	Education, health and care plans: A qualitative investigation into service user experiences of the planning process	DfE Publication	25 parents with experience of EHCP process self-identified as either 'satisfied' (13 interviews) or 'unsatisfied' (12 interviews) with the process	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews Thematic Analysis	Parents did not consistently feel their views were listened to Parents desired greater involvement in the EHC process A pre-existing relationship with professionals useful	One individual can make a huge difference Working together with sustained face-to-face contact between family and professionals Need for increased involvement of family in the process	Lacks researcher reflection on potential bias in relation to study being funded by DfE
Bentley (2017)	What do parents report of the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process?	Thesis	8 parents of YP who had recently had their EHCNA accepted by the LA (1 couple and 6 individuals)	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews at three points in time during the EHC process Thematic Analysis	Parents employing own professional skills improved feelings of empowerment within EHC process Parents very rarely referred to EPs within the process Experiences differed across families	Importance of co-construction and meaningful participation for parents in EHP process (Dis)empowerment Helpful/ unhelpful professionals	Did not consistently examine parents interactions with EPs within the EHC process, therefore recommendations for EPs tentative
Cochrane (2016)	Exploring perceptions and	Thesis	5 parents (one single mother, two husband	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	Some parents experienced collaboration with	Creating a shared understanding	Examined experiences of parents and

	experiences of the education, health and care process		and wife) with experience of EHC process. EHCP finalised.		Thematic Analysis	professionals during the EHC process, others experienced the process as directive, feeling their views were inadequately represented or ignored.	Collaboration to involve parents Participation of parents Parent knowledge of process influences confidence	professionals during the whole EHC process, therefore did not examine parent experiences of involvement during meetings within the process in-depth Parents knew outcome of decision, which may have influenced their views.
Cullen & Lindsay (2019)	Special Educational Needs: Understanding Drivers of Complaints and Disagreements in the English System M	Journal article	78 parents (inc. 4 male-female couples). 70 mothers, 8 fathers. All had appealed to the Tribunal. Ethnicities: White British (49), Black British, British Asian, British Indian, British Pakistani, Chinese, Greek, Irish, Mixed Skew towards above average qualification level	Qualitative	Thematic Analysis	Parents felt their views had been ignored during the EHCNA process. Expressed frustration at delays. Some professionals behaved unprofessionally. Experienced frustration and exhaustion.	These Children had Significant SEN Concern Over Unmet Needs Engaging With the Statutory Processes - Demands of process - Delays - Dissonances between role expectations and reality - Parents acting out of role The Number of Processes Over Time	All parents had appealed to tribunal, which may cause recollections of EHCNA process to be overly negative. Some parents going through process to convert statement of SEN to EHCP. Not always clear which parents were applying for the first time, and which were seeking a conversion.

| | | | | | | | Fear for the Future

The Cumulative Consequences on Family Life | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Eccleston (2016) | "We're one side of the wall and they're the other": An Interpretative Phenomenol ogical Analysis study exploring parents' and young people's experiences of family engagement during the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process. | Thesis | 4 parents currently undergoing the EHC process for their child | Qualitative | Semi-structured interviews

IPA | Parents experiences of engagement and power relations within EHC process differed across participants | Power hierarchy within process

Family engagement

Feeling empowered

Feeling under pressure (including saying the 'right' thing) | Explored empowerment and family engagement within whole EHC process, therefore did not explore specific processes that influenced these factors within meetings |
| Redwood (2015) | Insider perspectives of Education, Health and Care Plans | Thesis | 5 families with experience of EHCP process | Mixed methods | Semi-structured interviews supported by a card sorting task (categorise statements as true or false) | All parents reported positive experiences of EHC process

Feeling listened to increased the extent to which parents experienced a sense of choice and control | Skill of facilitator

Values

Interpersonal skills

Relationships | Professionals were aware they were taking part in research based on person-centred approaches, which may have influenced their practice |

| | | | | | Interview responses interpreted using a context-mechanism-outcome framework | Positive relationships linked to interpersonal skills of professionals

A pre-existing relationship with professionals useful | Positive attitude towards parent involvement

Empowerment | The potential bias related to the researcher being on placement in the LA where the research took place was not explicitly considered |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sales & Vincent (2018) | Strengths and limitations of the Education, Health and Care plan process from a range of professional and family perspectives | Journal article | 7 parents with experience of both the statementing and EHC statutory assessment procedure | Qualitative | Semi-structured Interviews (2 parents)

Focus group (5 parents)

Thematic analysis | Move from statementing to EHC process has improved involvement for some, but not all parents

Parent feeling of involvement influenced by professionals' personal qualities | Involving and valuing parents is dependent on individual professionals | Lack of consideration of how different data collection methods influenced parent responses i.e., interview vs focus group

Unclear which practices improved parent involvement |
| Skipp & Hopwood (2016) | Mapping user experiences of the Education, Health and Care process: a qualitative study | DfE Publication | 77 parents with experience of EHC process | Qualitative | Semi-structured interviews

Thematic and exploratory analysis | Satisfaction varies between local authorities and different stages of the EHC process

Support to understand, contribute and influence valued by parents

Parents appreciated being seen as equal partners and experts in child's/ family's needs | Importance of parental involvement in EHC process | Lacks researcher reflection on potential bias in relation to study being funded by DfE |

						Involvement improved when parents felt listened to and contributions valued		
Smith et al. (2014)	Evaluation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Pathfinder Programme	DfE Publication	31 parents with experience of the EHC pathfinder process	Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews Thematic Analysis	Quality of professional's communication and interaction led parents to feel the process was family centred	Parent involvement is crucial during assessment Multi-agency meetings within the process as a positive and valuable experience	Parents reported difficulty recalling the details of the process, including some who were unsure which meetings took place within the EHC process, and which were related to other school meetings
Thom et al., (2015)	The Special Educational Needs and Disability Pathfinder Programme Evaluation Final Impact Research Report	DfE Publication	Survey: 698 families who had received a completed EHC plan (and 1000 matched families with an SEN statement) Interviews: 40 of the above parents with experience of EHC pathfinder process	Mixed methods	Semi-structured interviews Thematic Analysis Questionnaires with scaling for satisfaction in different areas of EHC process	77% of parents felt listened to within the EHC process, but experiences varied between individual families 84% of Pathfinder families felt their views had been considered during assessment Within meetings, some parents reported lacking clarity of professional roles, feeling intimidated or unable to follow terminology,	Importance of face to face meetings involving parents within EHC process	Lacks researcher reflection on potential bias in relation to study being funded by DfE Due to the time that had elapsed since their child was assessed, some parents had difficulty recalling the process, including which professionals were involved and the distinct stages of the process

					and that meetings felt rushed Pre-existing relationships with professionals felt to make process more family-centred		

Appendix C: Ethics review decision letter

![University of East London logo]

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School of Psychology Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION LETTER

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

</div>

Reviewer: Please complete sections in **blue** | **Student:** Please complete/read sections in orange

Details	
Reviewer:	**Elizabeth Wilson**
Supervisor:	**Lucy Browne**
Student:	**Louise Malkin**
Course:	**Prof Doc in Educational and Child Psychology**
Title of proposed study:	Please type title of proposed study

Checklist (Optional)	YES	NO	N/A
Concerns regarding study aims (e.g., ethically/morally questionable, unsuitable topic area for level of study, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Detailed account of participants, including inclusion and exclusion criteria	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding participants/target sample	☐	☐	☐
Detailed account of recruitment strategy	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding recruitment strategy	☐	☐	☐

All relevant study materials attached (e.g., freely available questionnaires, interview schedules, tests, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Study materials (e.g., questionnaires, tests, etc.) are appropriate for target sample	☐	☐	☐
Clear and detailed outline of data collection	☐	☐	☐
Data collection appropriate for target sample	☐	☐	☐
If deception being used, rationale provided, and appropriate steps followed to communicate study aims at a later point	☐	☐	☐
If data collection is not anonymous, appropriate steps taken at later stages to ensure participant anonymity (e.g., data analysis, dissemination, etc.) – anonymisation, pseudonymisation	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding data storage (e.g., location, type of data, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding data sharing (e.g., who will have access and how)	☐	☐	☐
Concerns regarding data retention (e.g., unspecified length of time, unclear why data will be retained/who will have access/where stored)	☐	☐	☐
If required, General Risk Assessment form attached	☐	☐	☐
Any physical/psychological risks/burdens to participants have been sufficiently considered and appropriate attempts will be made to minimise	☐	☐	☐
Any physical/psychological risks to the researcher have been sufficiently considered and appropriate attempts will be made to minimise	☐	☐	☐
If required, Country-Specific Risk Assessment form attached	☐	☐	☐
If required, a DBS or equivalent certificate number/information provided	☐	☐	☐
If required, permissions from recruiting organisations attached (e.g., school, charity organisation, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
All relevant information included in the participant information sheet (PIS)	☐	☐	☐
Information in the PIS is study specific	☐	☐	☐
Language used in the PIS is appropriate for the target audience	☐	☐	☐
All issues specific to the study are covered in the consent form	☐	☐	☐
Language used in the consent form is appropriate for the target audience	☐	☐	☐
All necessary information included in the participant debrief sheet	☐	☐	☐
Language used in the debrief sheet is appropriate for the target audience	☐	☐	☐
Study advertisement included	☐	☐	☐
Content of study advertisement is appropriate (e.g., researcher's personal contact details are not shared, appropriate language/visual material used, etc.)	☐	☐	☐

Decision options	
APPROVED	Ethics approval for the above-named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice), to the date it is submitted for assessment.

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	In this circumstance, the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made **before** the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box at the end of this form once all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to the supervisor. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records. **Minor amendments guidance:** typically involve clarifying/amending information presented to participants (e.g., in the PIS, instructions), further detailing of how data will be securely handled/stored, and/or ensuring consistency in information presented across materials.
APPROVED - BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES	
NOT APPROVED - MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED	In this circumstance, a revised ethics application **must** be submitted and approved **before** any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application. **Major amendments guidance:** typically insufficient information has been provided, insufficient consideration given to several key aspects, there are serious concerns regarding any aspect of the project, and/or serious concerns in the candidate's ability to ethically, safely and sensitively execute the study.

Decision on the above-named proposed research study

Please indicate the decision:	Please select your decision

Minor amendments

Please clearly detail the amendments the student is required to make

I'm confused by the risk assessment. At first I thought the physical risk was to participant and researcher from Covid. Now I realise that Covid is not addressed at all and think it needs to be. I would look at the physical risk form and reassess whether the severity could be lowered to 1 if the likelihood of Covid can be reduced eg, by wearing masks, maintaining social distance, sanitising. You need to add this to physical risk or confine yourself to Teams inerviews where there is no risk of Covid.

But on a second look, it appears that the research is at physical risk from the partiicipants. Is this really likely? I would question keeping the door open when sensitive material is being discussed as it could inhibit your participants. I think that the ethical committee prefers a risk overall of 1, and if it is really as high as overall 2 from your participants, then I think you should possibly consider doing everything on Teams.

The other comment I have is a suggestion rather than amendment but wondering if six partiicipants for IPA methodology is not a bit much giving the time limitations. If themes are being sought (and they might not emerge in IPA), then thematic analysis might be a better method for this research as it would be less time consuming when you have six interviews to transcribe.
There is also not a rationale as I can see for why you would split the interviews into two. It would affect the parity of the interviews and seems a bit unnecessary. But if researcher wants it, then a rationale and problems of doing it this way would have to be addressed.

Major amendments

Please clearly detail the amendments the student is required to make

Assessment of risk to researcher

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?	YES ☐	NO ☐
	If no, please request resubmission with an **adequate risk assessment.**	

If the proposed research could expose the **researcher** to any kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard, please rate the degree of risk:

HIGH	Please **do not approve a high-risk application.** Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not be approved on this basis. If unsure, please refer to the Chair of Ethics.	☐
MEDIUM	Approve but include appropriate recommendations in the below box.	☒
LOW	Approve and if necessary, include any recommendations in the below box.	☐

Reviewer recommendations in relation to risk (if any):	See above. I'd change this to 1

Reviewer's signature

Reviewer: (Typed name to act as signature)	Elizabeth Wilson
Date:	01/03/2022

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

Confirmation of minor amendments
(Student to complete)

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data	
Student name: (Typed name to act as signature)	Louise Malkin
Student number:	2064597
Date:	04/03/2022

Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed if minor amendments to your ethics application are required

Appendix D: Study information sheet

Date: 11.02.22

Version: 1

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Title of the Study: Parental experiences of taking part in collaborative psychological assessment meetings within the Education, Health and Care needs assessment for their child's special educational needs

Researcher

Louise Malkin

Email: u2064597@uel.ac.uk

Invitation the take part in this research

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you decide whether to take part or not, please carefully read through the following information which outlines what your participation would involve. Feel free to talk with others about the study (e.g., friends, family, etc.) before making your decision. If anything is unclear or you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above email.

Who am I?

My name is Louise Malkin. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist, studying at the University of East London (UEL). As part of my studies, I am conducting the research that you are being invited to participate in.

What is the purpose of the research?

I am conducting research exploring parents/ carers experiences of taking part in psychological Joint Assessment Meetings between themselves, an Educational Psychologist, and member of their child's educational setting as part of the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment. The research aims to allow the voices of parents/ carers from a range of backgrounds to be heard, and to help Educational Psychologists, and other professionals, better understand how best to involve parents and carers in EHCP related meetings.

Why have I been invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part in this study as you have recently been involved in a joint assessment meeting with an Educational Psychologist for your child as part of the EHCP needs assessment process.

It is entirely up to you whether you take part or not, participation is voluntary.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to take part?

If you agree to your involvement, you will be asked to take part in a confidential interview (approximately one hour of your time in total). This would typically happen in one session. In the interview, you will be asked open questions to explore your experiences of taking part in a joint assessment meeting involving an educational psychologist as part of the statutory assessment process for your child.

The interviews will take place at a time and day that best suits you. You can complete the interview on-line via Microsoft Teams, or face-to-face with the researcher at a mutually agreed location.

Interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and completely anonymised. You will also be asked to provide some additional information about yourself (gender, ethnicity and socio-economic-status). All information collected will be fully anonymised and kept under the guidance of GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

Can I change my mind?

Yes, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. If you would like to withdraw from the interview you can let the researcher know you would like to stop the interview at any time. If you withdraw, your data will not be used as part of the research.

Separately, you can also request to withdraw your data from being used even after you have taken part in the study, provided that this request is made within three weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

Are there any disadvantages to taking part?

If you experience any psychological distress as a result of sharing your experiences within the interview, you can cease the interview at any time. Sources of support you can access following the interview will also be shared when you complete the interview, or if you cease involvement before this time.

How will the information I provide be kept secure and confidential?

Participants will not be identified on any material resulting from the data collected, or in any write-up of the research. Interview recordings will be transcribed and all identifying information removed. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym and your personal details will not be stored. Research data will be stored in password protected files that only the researcher and research supervisor will have access to, and destroyed after three years.

For the purposes of data protection, the University of East London is the Data Controller for the personal information processed as part of this research project. The University processes this information under the 'public task' condition contained in the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Where the University processes particularly sensitive data (known as 'special category data' in the GDPR), it does so because the processing is necessary for archiving purposes in the public interest, or scientific and historical research purposes or statistical purposes. The University will ensure that the personal data it processes is held securely and processed in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. For more information about how the University processes personal data please see www.uel.ac.uk/about/about-uel/governance/information-assurance/data-protection

What will happen to the results of the research?

The findings will be written up and submitted to the University of East London as a thesis for a Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology and an academic journal for potential publication. The thesis will be publicly available on UEL's online Repository. Findings may also be disseminated to a range of audiences (e.g., academics, clinicians, public, etc.) through journal articles, conference presentations, talks, magazine articles, blogs. In all material produced, your identity will remain anonymous, in that, it will not be possible to identify you personally. Identifying information will either be removed or replaced throughout.

You will be given the option to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed from Louise Malkin.

Anonymised research data will be securely stored by Dr Lucy Browne for a maximum of 3 years, following which all data will be deleted.

Who has reviewed the research?

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that the Committee's evaluation of this ethics application has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Who can I contact if I have any questions/concerns?

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me on the above e-mail address.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact my research supervisor Lucy Browne. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: L.Browne@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of School Research Ethics Committee: Dr Trishna Patel, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: t.patel@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet

Appendix E: Consent form

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Title of the Study: Parental experiences of taking part in collaborative assessment meetings within the Education, Health and Care needs assessment for their child's special educational needs

Researcher

Louise Malkin

Email: u2064597@uel.ac.uk

	Please initial
I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet dated 11/02/2022 (version 1) for the above study and that I have been given a copy to keep.	
I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time, without explanation or disadvantage.	
I understand that if I withdraw during the study, my data will not be used.	
I understand that I have three weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw my data from the study.	
I understand that the interview will be recorded using a Dictaphone or Microsoft Teams.	
I understand that my personal information and data, including audio/video recordings from the research will be securely stored and remain confidential. Only the research team will have access to this information, to which I give my permission.	
It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research has been completed.	
I understand that short, anonymised quotes from my interview/group level data may be used in material such as conference presentations, reports, articles in academic journals resulting from the study and that these will not personally identify me.	

I would like to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed and am willing to provide contact details for this to be sent to.	
I agree to take part in the above study.	

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

……

Participant's Signature

……

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

……

Researcher's Signature

……

Date

……

Appendix F: Interview Schedule

1. Could you tell me the thing you remember most from the collaborative assessment meeting?

   Prompts: Was there a particular moment that sticks in your memory? What were your feelings at the beginning/ middle/ end of the meeting? What had happened that made you feel that way?

2. How did you experience other adults in the meeting?

Prompts: 'How did you feel about relationships at the beginning/ middle/ end? Why did you feel that way?' 'What was your experience of being listening to?', 'Did you feel supported? How/ How not?', 'Which approaches of others in the meeting did you experience as helpful?', 'How did you interpret the behaviour of the EP/ SENCo?'

3. How did you feel about contributing to the meeting?

Prompts: 'What influenced your confidence to contribute?', 'Who did you feel was leading the conversation?', 'Was anyone talking more/ less? Why do you think that was?', 'How did you experience professional's responses to your contributions?', 'What influenced whether you felt heard?' 'Were there sections you felt more confident contributing to than others?'

4. Did you feel your child's needs were accurately understood and recorded?

If yes – what contributed to that? If no – what do you think might have improved that?

5. What mattered most to you during the meeting?

Prompts: 'What would you like the others in the meeting to know if you could tell them one thing?' 'Is there anything else?'

Appendix G: Example anonymised transcript

Participant 1 - Parent Pseudonym – Jenny, Child Pseudonym, Emily

Experiential Statements	Line number	Transcript	Exploratory Notes
	1. 2. 3.	I: So the first question is just a really open one and so it's just, could you tell me the thing that you remember most from the joint assessment meeting, so just the thing that kind of sticks in your head the most.	
	4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9.	P1: Yeah, the psychologist was very engaging. He really wanted to know Emily as a person, even though he's never met her. He really wanted to know what she was like. So yeah, that was a big thing for me because it then allowed me to be open. So yeah, yeah, that was the one thing when I came away, I was like, oh, you know, he really did want to know.	
	10. 11.	I: Umm. Yeah, so he seemed really engaged, and he seemed like he was genuinely interested, he really wanted to get to know Emily?	
	12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19.	P1: Yeah, but erm, you know, he's never met her. So, yeah. So the questions that, erm, I know the questions were formatted on what he was looking to get answers from, but I was able to, the way that he came across it didn't feel like it was scripted so yeah, so then I was able to explain like different scenarios where, that certain things happen with Emily. Erm, but yeah, erm. I would say that was the main thing that he was very open to, you know, me rattling on and he was fine. Yeah. Yeah, it was good.	
	20. 21. 22.	I: So, I wonder what your feelings were within the meeting? I don't know if you can remember back to how you were feeling at the very beginning? I wonder how you felt at the beginning of the conversation?	
	23. 24. 25.	P1: So when I initially got the invite like beforehand, when I think psychologist, you know, I'm just like, erm, so my little girl's waiting for an autism diagnosis erm but I didn't. I didn't really understand what like,	

	26.	what it was, you know, what it was about, erm, cause, you know, I know
	27.	it's like Emily's, you know, thinking and
	28.	I: Um hum
	29.	P: Well, because she's so young, erm, I don't know what she thinks half
	30.	of the time. So, I kind of went into the meeting not really knowing. I
	31.	was, not worried, but I didn't know how to answer because I couldn't get
	32.	the answers from Emily. So, I guess you know, I didn't really know how
	33.	the conversation was going to go because I don't know how Emily
	34.	thinks. I can always talk about her behaviour.
	35.	I: Yeah, yeah.
	36.	P1: Which was fine, you know, because of her age, I was able to explain
	37.	how she behaves and I guess that, you know that is the result of when
	38.	she does get frustrated, and the psychologist erm…
	39.	I: Um hum.
	40.	P1: I mean, there was a lot of questions asked, erm, but there was an
	41.	acknowledgement as well. So, it wasn't like I'd said something and,
	42.	erm, it, was either wrong or right. There was an acknowledgement that,
	43.	erm, there must be a reason for the way she is.
	44.	I: Yeah.
	45.	P1: We just until like until we get the diagnosis. We don't know. I don't.
	46.	I'm guessing she is, but yeah.
	47.	I: Um-hum. So you mentioned that the psychologist before the meeting
	48.	hadn't actually met Emily and I just wondered what your thoughts were
	49.	around that?
	50.	P1: Erm. Yeah. Really surprised on how. I mean his report was like a
	51.	big part of getting the decision, erm, which I didn't know until
	52.	afterwards cause when, when the decision was made there was a bit of a
	53.	delay, erm, and so I was to get a date on the decision but they said that
	54.	there's a bit of a conflict between the speech and language and the
	55.	psychologist, erm, so we're just clarifying certain things with the
	56.	psychologist, and I just, I just thought this is my little girl's, you know,

	57.	start of school and this decisions being made on, you know,	
	58.	professionals that haven't met her.	
	59.	I: Uh hum.	
	60.	P1: So yeah, and the speech and language I think she's had I think three	
	61.	appointments with so I could, I could understand that I can understand	
	62.	in her report what was put down because, like, I was there with the	
	63.	appointment, but I just found it really hard to think after the appoint,	
	64.	after, the teams call with the psychologist, how he's taken that	
	65.	information when he's never met Emily.	
	66.	I: Umm.	
	67.	P1: Erm, I mean he's he went off with what I said and the nurseries have	
	68.	said. But yeah, I just was a bit. Would you not like to see what we're up	
	69.	against?	
	70.	I: Yeah. So am I hearing it right that you, you kind of would have	
	71.	preferred in a way for the psychologist to have come and met with	
	72.	Emily in person?	
	73.	P1: Definitely, yeah, cause I, I think it's just, just to see what we are up	
	74.	against. You know like that for all that he acknowledged everything we	
	75.	were saying and, he, he wouldn't, he never questioned anything that we	
	76.	said I just thought would he have got even a better understanding. I	
	77.	mean his report was a big thing that was successful in us getting the	
	78.	plan.	
	79.	I: Umm.	
	80.	P1: But I do wonder, there may not have been a delay. You know, if he'd	
	81.	have seen Emily, I don't know, I think I just would have preferred that,	
	82.	you know, verification that, as you can see, there is this with her, yeah.	
	83.	I: Yeah, and how do you think it changed your experience erm, within	
	84.	the meeting itself, knowing that the psychologist hadn't met Emily?	
	85.	P1: Yeah, so, Emily goes to two nurseries, erm, so she goes to one for	
	86.	two days. And that's one that we pay for, for the days that we work. And	
	87.	the other one is term time, erm, so both nurseries were, like it's, it's not	
	88.	something, it's not something new that I've heard from the challenges	

89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94.	they're up against to what I'm up against. But I think collectively because we were all experiencing the same it, it was like this meeting was for the interest of Emily. So yeah, it was that that made me think, well, made me feel that, well, even though he's not met her, you know, between the three of us, we've painted like this picture, and it's the same person. So you know.	
95. 96. 97. 98. 99.	I: Yeah, so in a way, is it, again correct me if I'm wrong here, but is it, did, I guess, although at the beginning of the meeting you perhaps were slightly unsure, by the end, it sounds as if you, you kind of felt confident that actually you've got a really good idea of who Emily is and you've managed to get that recorded in the document.	
100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108.	P1: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I think afterwards I felt there couldn't have been anymore, that I could have spoke about Emily. Definitely the nurseries they put like their examples over. There couldn't have been anymore. And I think the psychologist definitely took like, all the information down there wasn't anything that, I didn't come away thinking oh but he missed, he might have missed that, like he was very engaging and everything we did say, you know, I did, at the end of it, I did feel he got, you know, a good like, a good, you know, likeness of what Emily is like.	
109.	I: Umm yeah.	
110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115.	P1: Am I mean, I still would have liked him to have seen her, just, so you know, I, I don't know. I just would have liked him to have still seen her. Erm, and I don't know. I just think it just validated everything we said and I just think for me personally like I, for both me and the nurseries, it just would have been, you know, nice to get that, if he'd have seen her as well.	
116.	I: Yeah.	
117. 118.	P1: But yeah, I definitely like. I don't think I've got no doubt that he never took anything down and.	
119.	I: Umm.	

	120. 121.	P1: And um, and we did everything we could to, you know, to explain what Emily is like.
	122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128.	I: Umm, so it sounds that by the end, although you were slightly uncertain, you kind of felt happy with what you'd achieved with the educational psychologist with the nursery staff ? You mentioned that the psychologist, you felt that he was really engaged. I wonder if you could tell me a bit more about your feelings about the psychologist? How you experienced him? Were there certain things he did that there were particularly helpful or perhaps anything that you weren't sure about?
	129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134.	P1: erm, there was, erm, there was times that he might have asked for like examples and initially, a couple of things, erm, like with Emily's eating, erm, if I put down the same foods, she's got a good appetite, whereas she struggles in nursery, so I did step back at that, because I didn't want… She's gonna have the same challenge in nursery as she will in school.
	135.	I: Umm.
	136. 137. 138. 139.	P1: Erm, so there was a couple of instances where I stepped back because like, she's the only child, erm, so for all we do, a like a lot of things with her, we take her swimming and a lot, we do a lot of activities…
	140.	I: Umm.
	141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146.	P1: …she's not around other children. Well, you know she's not… we don't… I can't push her to make any friends because, you know, we're recently new in the area. I don't know children of her age around here, erm, so yeah, I would say the only times would be when he was looking for more specifics of Emily being in close contact with children, other children and.
	147.	I: Umm.
	148. 149. 150. 151.	P1: building friendships that, I knew that I couldn't, not that I didn't feel I couldn't answer, I just didn't think that, for all I said, 'Oh, you know, she likes the next door neighbour'. Well, the next-door neighbour's an adult. So yeah. So, you know, yeah, it was just then that I knew I had to

	152.	step back because from what she does at nursery is gonna be reflected
	153.	when she goes to school.
	154.	I: Umm, so it sounds as if you there were sort of almost times when you
	155.	felt that the nursery has more kind of knowledge around this particular
	156.	skill area? You know, perhaps you haven't because you're not in nursery
	157.	with her, so you sort of felt, you know, actually they're kind of better
	158.	placed perhaps to answer the question than me?
	159.	P1: Yeah, definitely. And they were good in that they did, they were able
	160.	to give the answers so there was never any awkward silences. Like
	161.	who's gonna answer this kind of thing, so yeah. I mean, when, when for
	162.	me the plan, is, is for when she starts school and for all that the help
	163.	she's gonna get in school will then come to our favour, when she, she is
	164.	at home and then whenever we do take her to a party and things like
	165.	that, it will then help with that. I think ultimately it is to try and make
	166.	sure she is settled in school.
	167.	I: Umm.
	168.	P1: So, yeah, that's when the nursery were really good, erm, in being
	169.	able to, to give their examples.
	170.	I: Umm, so you were pleased to have the nursery there, it sounds like.
	171.	P1: Yeah, definitely. Because I think if it was just my point of view,
	172.	erm, we handle her the best we can, erm, I think, not that like I, I give a
	173.	a fair reflection of Emily and Chris, my partner. He doesn't. He just
	174.	thinks she's brilliant and you know, she's there's no problems. And I'm
	175.	like but there is, it's like the repeating things over and over again I'm
	176.	like, that's not normal. Erm, so there's certain things, that, whereas,
	177.	yeah, I would definitely say that I like where we do handle her, like at
	178.	home and it's fine, nursery, you know, the challenges that they're up
	179.	against will then definitely go over to school.

| | 180.
181.
182.
183.
184.
185.
186. | I: Umm yeah, so how did it feel when you know when the educational psychologist was kind of asking those questions and saying, well, you know, tell me more about her friendships and then kind of nursery, you know, kind of answered that question in a way. How did you feel at that point? | |

Appendix H: Example table of PETs

Summary Table for Participant 1

Personal Experiential Theme	Sub-Theme	Experiential Statement	Quote from Text
Making contributions	Contributed unique knowledge	Contributed unique knowledge of daughter (p.22)	I was kind of like, oh yeah, the nursery can't answer this one. (Line 674).
		Took the lead regarding home life for daughter (p.21)	I was able to like you know give really good answers to that. (Line 656-657).
		Contributed knowledge about daughter's behaviour and reasons for this (p.2)	I was able to explain how she behaves, and I guess that, you know, that is the result of when she does get frustrated. (Line 36-38).
	Equal opportunities for all to contribute	EP balanced gathering information with allowing time to speak	'He was able to get the answers he was looking for, but still giving that time for everybody'. (p.613-614).
		Attendees were respectful, allowing all to share their views.	'There was never a part that everybody was just talking over'. (Lines 589-590).
	EP's approach enabled confidence to contribute	Felt able to respond without judgement. (p. 2)	'There was a lot of questions asked, erm, but there was an acknowledgement as well. So, it wasn't like I'd said something and, it was either wrong or right'. (Lines 40-42).
		Realising incorrect preconceptions of how an Educational Psychologist might look and act helped her to relax (p.17).	'He's a normal person'. (Line 536).

		EP's approach genuine. (p.1).	'The way that he came across, it didn't feel like it was scripted'. (Lines 14-15).
		EP approach non-judgemental, allowing her to be open. (p.1).	'He was very open to, you know, me rattling on and he was fine' (Lines 18-19).
		Views highly valued (p.14)	'He (the EP) was really good in that he took it, he took all the information down, and it was, you know, received really well'. (Lines 421-423).
		EPs relaxed approach and appearance enabled her to speak more openly. (p.16 & p.26).	'His presence was really, it felt relaxed'. (Lines 480-481). 'It definitely felt like an open meeting'. (Line 811).
		Felt views were respected (p.14).	'I didn't feel that anything I said was dismissed. You know, I was listened to'. (Lines 411-412).
	Missed opportunities	Regretted not sharing some details of need (p.22)	'I didn't get that over, but that's a reflection that afterwards, that I was like oh I wish I would have said that'. (Line 687-689). 'I wouldn't say that they didn't give me the chance, it was just because the conversation was flowing and then it, kind of, it had gone and I was like, oh damn'. (Line 717-718).
		Felt hard to re-visit a previously discussed point (p.23)	I couldn't really go back to it because it had gone. (Line 725-726).

		Held back by what she felt was realistic (p.24)	'I thought, well, she's not gonna get that at school. So, you know'. (Line 734-735).
Shared understanding	Reassuring to have a shared understanding of daughter	Wants to feel others understand daughter's needs (p.8)	'I can't get over to him (her husband), like, how frustrating it is because he is a calm person, whereas, I can with the nursery because they understand more'. (Lines 238-240).
		Reassuring to know that challenges are recognised by others (p.7).	'I know I'm not on my own and she doesn't just, you know, she doesn't act the way she acts just for me. She does it for them as well'. (Lines 201-202). 'When the nursery do say what she gets upset about, I feel like it's shared. I'm like, well, at least I'm not alone'. (Lines 211-212).
		Important to sense a shared agreement regarding daughter's needs (p. 3).	'Collectively because we were all experiencing the same'. (Lines 90-91). 'Between the three of us, we've painted like this picture, and it's the same person'. (94-95).
		Relieved to feel others shared her concerns (p. 12)	'When the nursery she did talk about Emily, I was totally, you know, relieved like, well, yeah, I'm glad that it's not just me'. (Line 369-371).
	Desire for EP to understand daughter's needs	Increased pressure to describe daughter accurately as EP had not met daughter (p. 10 & p.24)	'It's hard to explain without ever meeting her'. (Line 303).

			'I just hopped that we did everything we could in that we were able to describe Emily'. (Line 749).
		Importance of describing needs accurately (p.24)	'The biggest thing for me was that we got it right. Well, yeah, like, both me and the nursery were able to show what Emily is like in conversation'. (Line 744-746).
		Feeling she did all she could to make the report accurate (p.4)	'There couldn't have been anymore, that I could have spoke about Emily' (Line 101-102). 'We did everything we could to, you know, to explain what Emily is like'. (Lines 121-122).
		Clearly describing daughter was effortful (p.14).	'Where I'm trying to get my words out of like how Emily behaves'. (Lines 420-421).
		Felt a responsibility to speak on her daughter's behalf (p.27)	'We were talking for her because, you know, she's not here and he hasn't met her'. (Line 830-831).
	EP was genuinely interested in learning about her daughter	EP recorded details accurately and fully. (p.4)	'The psychologist definitely took like, all the information down there wasn't anything that, I didn't come away thinking oh, but he missed, he might have missed that'. (Lines 104-106).
		Felt the EP wanted to know her daughter. (p. 15).	'He really wanted to know Emily as a person, even though he's never met her'. (Lines 4-5). 'He did come across like he knew Emily'. (Lines 417-418).

			'Like he was really getting to, wanting to know Emily'. (470-471).
		The EP wanting to know her daughter demonstrated that he also wanted to achieve the best outcomes for her. (p.1)	'He really wanted to know what she was like. So yeah, that was a big thing for me because it then allowed me to be open'. (Lines 5-7).
Difficult emotions	Emotionally challenging to discuss child's needs	Difficult emotions when discussing daughter's needs (p.6)	'It's sad to think that, you know, that she, she goes off and plays on her own'. (Lines 187-188).
		Meeting did not feel positive, only the outcome. (p.7)	'The positive end to the meeting was that the report will go over'. (Lines 221-222)
		Focusing on negatives was disheartening (p.26)	'It does feel disheartening, because I'm just like, you know, it sounds really bad and day-to-day living with Emily is not all bad'. (Lines 795-797).
		Felt hard that meeting focused on challenges (p. 7 & p.9)	'It's not a negative conversation because I know that the psychologist is just wanting to know what the, the challenges we have, but that's all it seemed to be'. (Lines 194-197). 'There definitely was more of her challenges and what she's gonna really struggle with, I would say like probably 90% of, probably even more'. (Lines 271-273).
	A desire to acknowledge daughter's strengths	Appreciated nursery highlighting strengths (P.8 & 9)	'Whereas the nursery definitely were able to just reinforce the fact that, you know, she is her own little

			person and she does make us laugh every day'. (Lines 228-230).
			'It did sound all negative, but don't think like that, she's a nice little lady and she's got her own personality and she's gonna do really well in school'. (Lines 253-255).
		A desire to talk about positive aspects of daughter. (p.17)	'If anyone started to say good things, I would have went on a tangent of how good she is'. (Lines 508-510).
		Reassuring to hear daughter's strengths following meeting. (p.8).	'They're (the nursery) able to put me like at ease that, you know, she has got these issues, but she comes with, you know, good things as well'. (Lines 240-242).
	Feeling responsible for the outcome	Fearful of letting her daughter down (p.25)	'When the meeting finished, it was more like, have I done enough as a mum'. (Line 770-771).
		Questioned her performance following the meeting. (p.25).	'I just was like, right, did I do enough, I think'. (Line 782-783).
	Apprehension concerning ability to provide answers	Apprehensive because speaking on her daughter's behalf. (p.2)	'I didn't know how to answer because I couldn't get the answers from Emily' (Line 31-32).
		An assumption there was a 'correct' response. (p.22)	'In terms of whether I didn't answer questions right, I was never made to feel like that, it's just in my head'.
		Before meeting, was concerned there might be questions she could not answer. (p.1)	'She's so young, erm, I don't know what she thinks half of the time, so, I kind of went into the meeting not really knowing'. (Line 29-30).

			'I didn't really know how the conversation was going to go'. (Lines 32-33).
		Gained confidence of an acceptable answer by listening to examples from nursery. (p.19). The nursery leading the conversation gave her the confidence to contribute.	'It definitely helped me because then I knew what kind of things that they were, that, like I would, when I would think, oh I don't know how to answer that one, with what she said, it was like, ohh right okay, I know what they kind of, are looking for'. (Lines 598-602).
		Nursery support increased feels of ease in meeting (p.6).	'They were able to give the answers so there was never any awkward silences'. (Lines 161-162). 'The nursery were really good in being able to give their examples'. (Lines 170-171).
Positioning (of self and professionals)	The value of professionals confirming views	Desire for understanding of daughter to be independently formed by EP. (p. 26).	'Get a psychologist to say, yeah, I can see it myself'. (Lines 822-823).
		Would have felt reassured if EP had formed judgement of daughter independently (p.24)	'I just wish he'd have met her and been like, you know, I just totally get everything that you have said, I totally get it, I can see her, and just not getting that, I'm just like, I just hope we did everything that we could of'. (Lines 759-761).
		Views validated by nursery (p.21)	'Then the nursery were able to then back that up'. (Line 660).
		Seeking reassurance that needs have been identified by EP (p. 3)	'If he'd have seen Emily, I don't know, I think I just would have preferred that, you know, verification'. (Lines 81-82).

		Wants EP to agree with daughter's needs (p.3)	'Would you not like to see what we're up against?' (Lines 68-69).
		The value of views being validated by EP (p.4)	'For both me and the nurseries, it just would have been, you know, nice to get that (validation), if he'd have seen her as well'. (Lines 114-116).
	'Non-expert' in relation to the nursery	Conscious that nursery better placed to answer some questions (p. 5).	'I did step back at that'. (Line 134).
		Gained confidence from experience of nursery in the process (p.20)	'I think she'd been through this process with other children as well'. (Lines 604-605).
		Nursery bring a perspective around educational challenges (p.6)	'The challenges that they're up against will then definitely go over to school'. (Lines 180-181).
	Professionals hold the power	Professionals hold the power over the decision to issue an EHCP (p.24)	'You know, somebody's got, like, Emily's support in their hands it's just like, just such a big thing' (Lines 754-757).
		EP's opinion crucial in receiving EHCP (p.21)	'The weight that his report held in the final decision was a lot'. (Lines 636-637).
		Decision to issue EHCP based upon professional opinion. Feeling powerless.	'This is my little girl's, you know, start of school and this decision's being made on, you know, professionals that haven't met her'. (Lines 56-57).
Desired outcome (influenced thoughts and behaviour)	The meeting as a gateway to appropriate support, via an EHCP	The meeting was necessary to secure support (p. 9).	'I knew it had to be done, because I needed, need to get help for her'. (Lines 278-279).

		The process has required a personal investment of time and effort (p.10 & p.12).	'It's just been such a long process'. (Lines 291-292). 'I knew this, this was the last one that had to be done'. (Lines 293-294. 'The final part of whether we were gonna get the plan or not'. (Lines 362-363).
		Felt pressure in relation to the meeting (p.10).	'I also knew how important it was as well'. (Line 296).
		The value of an EHCP (p.20)	'Knowing that, like, what value this meeting held'. (Lines 628-629).
		Aim of meeting to receive EHCP (p.24)	'We got a good outcome in that, well, she's now got the plan'. (Lines 750-751).
	Outcome affects daughter's life	The process is hard but worthwhile (p. 6).	'For all that, the help she's gonna get in school will then come to our favour'. (Lines 165-166).
		An EHCP ensures success at school (p.25)	'She's gonna go on her first day and it's gonna be really good for her and we're not gonna have any problems'. (Lines 779-780).
	An EHCP as precious	An EHCP is hard to obtain (p.13)	'Do you know you're so lucky because not many… if a child's like borderline, they struggle, they won't accept them'. (Lines 385-387).
		Obtaining an EHCP top priority (p.10)	'I'm like, oh, please, I just want this decision now'. (Lines 286-287).
	Awareness of the purpose of the meeting when contributing	Had to focus on the negatives (p.11, p.12 & p.20 & p.25)	'If I said good things, would that mean she doesn't need the help?' (Line 307).

				'I just knew I had to hold back the good points' (Line 631-632). 'I was already advised, for it to be, you know, a good reflection of Emily, but make sure my examples were where you have the more struggles with'. (Lines 334-336). 'It does all sound negative, but unfortunately, that's what's needed'. (Lines 789-790).
			Conflict between wanting to share strengths but feeling she should focus on challenges to ensure EHCP felt necessary (p.15).	'It would have been nice for me to have said like the good things and not of then had an impact on all of the bad things, but I knew it would'. (Lines 464-466).
			Describing her daughter's difficulties crucial to secure help for her daughter via an EHCP.	Told by nursery: 'We've got to put the struggles that we have so she'll get the help'. (Lines 191-192).
			Worried to speak freely for fear it would mean EHCP would not be issued. (p.11)	'There was a lot of thinking before I spoke'. (Line 308).
			Felt comments should match nursery comments or might undermine what they had said. (p.11)	'I knew I had to watch what I say because I didn't want to then make it, that the actual, erm, like example had been taken away for what the nursery had said'. (Line 322-324).
			Limited her contributions based on what seemed realistic (p. 22).	'It's like a total conflict, because I'm like, well, the school haven't got an hour, to sit with somebody to feed them their food'. (Line 689-691).

		Feeling her answers would impact on the decision to issue an EHCP (p.20)	'There was just a lot riding on the answers'. (Line 634)

Appendix I: Summary of PETs for each participant

Jenny Participant 1	Clare Participant 2	Sarah Participant 3
Making contributions	Critical meeting	EP containing
Shared understanding	Power	Emotional response
Difficult emotions	Recognising emotional demands	Collaborative working
Positioning	Value of collaboration	Feeling able to contribute
Clear desired outcome	Impact of professionals	Pressure of system
		Agency

Appendix J: Table of GETs

Group Experiential Theme (GET)	Sub-Theme of GET	Experiential Statement (participant, page number)	Quote
Power	Validation from professionals	Desire for understanding of daughter to be independently formed by EP. (Jenny, p. 26).	'Get a psychologist to say, yeah, I can see it myself'. (Lines 822-823).
		Would have felt reassured if EP had formed judgement of daughter independently (Jenny, p.24)	'I just wish he'd have met her and been like, you know, I just totally get everything that you have said, I totally get it, I can see her, and just not getting that, I'm just like, I just hope we did everything that we could of'. (Lines 759-761).
		Views validated by nursery (Jenny, p.21)	'Then the nursery were able to then back that up'. (Line 660).
		Seeking reassurance that needs have been identified by EP (Jenny, p. 3)	'If he'd have seen Emily, I don't know, I think I just would have preferred that, you know, verification'. (Lines 81-82).
		Wants EP to agree with daughter's needs (Jenny, p.3)	'Would you not like to see what we're up against?' (Lines 68-69).
		The value of views being validated by EP (Jenny, p.4)	'For both me and the nurseries, it just would have been, you know, nice to get that (validation), if he'd have seen her as well'. (Lines 114-116).
		Views needed to match with professionals to receive an EHCP (Clare, page 2)	'I was thinking, oh my God, if this all goes wrong now, to get this far, um, not be listened to, or they don't agree with my, you know, input because it doesn't match theirs,

			could this now go wrong?' (Lines 40-43).
		Sensing agreement with professionals increased feeling at ease in meeting (Clare, p. 3 & p. 15)	'I instantly felt at ease because I was like, okay, I'm not gonna have to battle here. I'm not gonna go, okay, I don't agree because of this and the other. It all just came together. We were all kind of saying the same, thing pretty much, just in different ways'. (Lines 80-84). 'We all sang the same tune. Yeah, we all sang the same tune'. (Lines 414-415)
		A key purpose of the meeting was to identify whether all views matched (Clare, page 1)	'Confirming, you know, the three of us, what our findings were regarding my daughter and whether they matched or didn't match'. (Lines 9-11)
		Agreement between professionals required to obtain an EHCP (Sarah, p. 23)	'If you don't have the professionals agreeing with you, then you're kind of screwed. You won't get to the EHCP level if no one's agreeing with you'. (Lines 703-705).
		A need to gather 'proof' of need from multiple professionals (Sarah, p. 23/24)	'You need all of them involved. You need to gather all the information and evidence to help him. (Lines 740-742).
		All professional's views aligned (Sarah, p.5 & p. 22)	'Everyone was on board'. Lines (125-126) 'We're all on the same page'. (Line 69).

		Confident EHCP would be approved as professional agreement around needs (Sarah, p. 17)	'I knew he'd get an EHCP. I knew I'd have no fight because I had everyone backing me up'. (Lines 508-509)
		There is one 'true' account of her son's needs and the support required (Sarah, p. 23)	'If someone is not saying the same thing, who's telling the truth?' (Lines 721-722).
		Useful to have pre-existing relationships with professionals to know they agreed with her views (Sarah, p.22)	'We've had meetings together with all of them in the past and we're all on the same level for Ben'. (Lines 681-682).
	Strengths (power resources)	Contributed unique knowledge of daughter (Jenny, p.22)	I was kind of like, oh yeah, the nursery can't answer this one. (Line 674).
		Took the lead regarding home life for daughter (Jenny, p.21)	I was able to like you know give really good answers to that. (Line 656-657).
		Contributed knowledge about daughter's behaviour and reasons for this (Jenny, p.2)	I was able to explain how she behaves, and I guess that, you know, that is the result of when she does get frustrated. (Line 36-38).
		Personal determination (Clare, p.15)	'By not giving up, by keep saying to everyone, these issues, I'm really concerned, how are you not concerned? Why can't she do this? And then finally, people were taking note of me'. (Lines 421-423).
		Useful to have knowledge around SEN systems as a parent. (Clare, P.17)	I'm quite lucky because obviously I'm quite knowledgeable anyway in in certain areas, but I imagine there's some parents themselves that have their own, you know,

			learning issues in difficulties and not understanding because this is quite complex, so it's only really because of my studies that I've done myself that I have the knowledge that I do. (Lines 466-470)
		Parents provide a unique perspective and knowledge about their child (Clare, p.12).	'I know educationally basic stuff like she can't read, but I also know all the emotional and behavioural, because she's mine'. (Lines 319-320).
		Contributed knowledge about what helps her daughter (Clare, p.20).	'There's different ways, isn't there of communicating, you've got like Makaton and things, and I said I feel like Milly really responds well with images'. (Lines 554-556).
		Able to bring holistic knowledge of her daughter (Clare, p.24).	'We (parent and EP) talked about not just the educational side of her but like, her personality, what she's like as a person'. (Lines 679-380).
		Confidence to speak out/ Previous experiences influenced how she felt coming into the meeting/ Anticipated a need to re-position herself (page 4)	'When it came to like putting my point across as you can see, I'm quite confident when I talk so, I, yeah, I was going to go in there and I was gonna say what needed to be said, and I was gonna make sure that I was taken seriously, if I felt like I wasn't, I was going to make sure I was'. (Lines 96-99).
		Having previous experience of EHCP process increased confidence in meeting (Sarah, p.10)	'I've gone through this meeting before (with her older son) so I know what to kind of expect'. (Lines 305-306).

		Previous experience with EHCP process increased confidence to challenge professionals if needed (Sarah, p.11)	'I don't normally have confidence in myself in that sense, but I've gone through the EHCP once before'. (Lines 331-332).
		Brings personal knowledge of son (Sarah, p.13)	'Obviously I'm the one that knows my son very well'. Lines (383-384). 'I was able to tell them the things that they hadn't known'. (Lines 429-430).
		Identifies self as expert regarding appropriately challenging target setting for her son (Sarah, p.14)	'I was like, well on this target, it could actually be 5 minutes'. (Line 422).
		Able to contribute to outcomes (Sarah, p.13)	'I was able to give what I thought would be a target and what would be reasonable and how we can work towards it'. (Lines 394-396).
	Positioning of self and others	Conscious that nursery better placed to answer some questions (Jenny, p. 5).	'I did step back at that'. (Line 134).
		Gained confidence from experience of nursery in the process (Jenny, p.20)	'I think she'd been through this process with other children as well'. (Lines 604-605).
		Nursery bring a perspective around educational challenges (Jenny, p.6)	'The challenges that they're up against will then definitely go over to school'. (Lines 180-181).
		Professionals hold the power over the decision to issue an EHCP (Jenny, p.24)	'You know, somebody's got, like, Emily's support in their hands it's just like, just such a big thing' (Lines 754-757).
		EP's opinion crucial in receiving EHCP (Jenny, p.21)	'The weight that his report held in the final decision was a lot'. (Lines 636-637).

		Decision to issue EHCP based upon professional opinion. Feeling powerless. (Jenny, p.2)	'This is my little girl's, you know, start of school and this decision's being made on, you know, professionals that haven't met her'. (Lines 56-57).
		Feeling the SENCo's view would have been prioritised over hers if there was a discrepancy (Clare, page 8)	'I suppose, very slightly, I felt like I wasn't taken 100% seriously because with a couple of things, the SEN teacher was asked if she agreed, and it seemed like because she agreed they got altered. I don't know, if the SEN teacher didn't agree, would my voice alone have been enough? I don't know because that it didn't happen. I didn't have that at all. I did find it interesting that it seemed like we needed to match in order to get anywhere'. (Lines 204-211)
		Her opinion was judged to be equally valid as the SENCo's opinion (Clare, p.9).	'Do I feel, like it was evenly distributed, as in, do I feel like the educational psychologist took my opinion just as seriously, as the SEN teacher, I would say overall, yes'. (Lines 252-253).
		Concerned professionals might judge parent's views to be based on emotion, rather than fact (Clare, p. 10)	'Not necessarily doubted, but might have maybe thought that maybe, you know, because I'm her mum, I'm too emotionally attached, maybe, and what I'm seeing is relevant, but maybe, not fully understood in regards to all her needs. Like maybe I'm thinking it's more extreme than

			it is because she's mine'. (Lines 264-268)
		Prepared to argue case if school views differed to her own (Clare, p.5)	'No time was there, you know, where the SEN teacher would say well, when looking at this area, erm, Mum says that Milly has these issues at home, however, we haven't recognised those issues ourselves within school. Something like I that, I would have then gone, okay, you might not see them at school, but I'm telling you that is the case. Like, you know, I didn't have to do that because everything I said the SEN teacher was like, you know, I agree with mum'. (Lines 116-122).
		Professionals do not always take parents views seriously (Clare, p.5)	'Parents aren't taken seriously if their children aren't presenting the same in the classroom as they do within the home environment'. (Lines 138-140).
		Felt less knowledgeable than professionals in some areas (Clare, page 11).	'I just have to sit there and nod and go, okay, because I couldn't, you know, I'm not informed enough to know whether that's the case or not'. (Lines 303-304).
		There are some areas where professionals have more knowledge. (Clare, p. 11).	'Where her actual struggles are with her reading and why they're happening, obviously I can't comment, I'm not a teacher'. (Lines 299-301).

			'Rather than just simply she can't read. What is attached to the can't reading? What is it that's the difficulty here? I wouldn't know that. Only they (the professionals) know that.' (Lines 307-309).
		Awareness of own gaps in knowledge (Clare, p 11).	'I felt less confident contributing to how she is in the classroom because I'm not there'. (Lines 289-290).
		The demeanour of professionals helped her position herself as an equal in the meeting (Clare, p.3)	They were just, you know, not only were they both, you know, very professional, but they were also very at ease, you know, they didn't make me feel like I was irrelevant and that they were like higher than me on the chain of things just because of their job title, like, I felt like an equal. (Lines 65-63).
		Professional's jargon-free language helped her feel equal in the meeting. (Clare, p.3)	'Just the way that they spoke, erm, they didn't speak using terminologies that I didn't understand, because of that, you know, I didn't feel lost or confused at any point or if I did, if I said, well, what does that mean? It was explained to me'. (Lines 74-77).
		The EP positioned as the 'owner' of the meeting. (Clare, P.7)	So, obviously, the educational psychologist was the one that was going over all the points. It was her file, so she was reiterating the areas of concern, the conclusions, the findings, you know, so she led the way. (Lines 184-187).

		Appreciated invitation to speak first (Sarah, p. 14)	'They asked me what I thought would be best first'. (Line 419). 'She invited me to speak first'. (Lines 626).
		EP brought knowledge to the meeting and wider process (Sarah, p.2)	'She had a lot of knowledge about everything'. (Lines 40-41). 'She was very knowledgeable, which was really, really good'. (Lines 45-46)
	Contributing	Views highly valued (Jenny, p.14)	'He (the EP) was really good in that he took it, he took all the information down, and it was, you know, received really well'. (Lines 421-423).
		Felt views were respected (Jenny, p.14).	'I didn't feel that anything I said was dismissed. You know, I was listened to'. (Lines 411-412).
		EP recorded details accurately and fully. (Jenny, p.4)	'The psychologist definitely took like, all the information down there wasn't anything that, I didn't come away thinking oh, but he missed, he might have missed that'. (Lines 104-106).
		Felt EP respected her opinion (Clare, p. 22)	'I don't think she dismissed anything at any time, which was good. Like even if it was something that maybe she hadn't herself witnessed or established when speaking to my daughter, she still took every part quite seriously'. (Lines 627-630).

		EP enabled her to share her knowledge by seeking her opinion (Clare, p. 20).	'At the meeting, I remember we did discuss, erm, they did ask me how I felt they could help Milly meet the outcomes.
		Professionals recognising her concerns made her feel her views were respected. (Clare, p.4).	'This school have been nothing but supportive and understanding. They've jumped through hoops to get this done as quickly as possible because they recognised my concerns themselves. So, then I was taken seriously'. (Lines 102-105).
		Previous experience of not being listened to (Clare, p.2)	'A lot of the time in the beginning, my voice was never taken seriously'. (Line 39).
		Feeling listened to gives sense opinion is valued (Sarah, p.13)	'I didn't feel like anyone interrupted me, like, she (the EP) always came to me first to ask me of what I thought'. Lines (391-392).
		Contributions valued and encouraged (Sarah, p.20)	'I felt that I was able to respond all the time and she invited me to speak first'. (Lines 625-626). 'There wasn't a time when I felt like I couldn't contribute' (Line628).
		Regretted not sharing some details of need (Jenny, p.22)	'I didn't get that over, but that's a reflection that afterwards, that I was like oh I wish I would have said that'. (Line 687-689). 'I wouldn't say that they didn't give me the chance, it was just because the conversation was flowing and

			then it, kind of, it had gone and I was like, oh damn'. (Line 717-718).
		Felt hard to re-visit a previously discussed point (Jenny, p.23)	I couldn't really go back to it because it had gone. (Line 725-726).
		Held back by what she felt was realistic (Jenny, p.24)	'I thought, well, she's not gonna get that at school. So, you know'. (Line 734-735).
		Wanted professionals to understand her wishes for her daughter's future, even if they were unrealistic. (Clare, p.19)/ Wanting to have an input? Greater chance to contribute?	'I would have liked to have had an input because even if my goals themselves were unrealistic, at least they would have got an insight into what it was that I was basically wanting my daughter to be able to achieve and the timeline'. (Lines 540-543).
	The EP as unthreatening and approachable	Realising incorrect preconceptions of how an Educational Psychologist might look and act helped her to relax (Jenny, p.17).	'He's a normal person'. (Line 536).
		EPs relaxed approach and appearance enabled her to speak more openly. (Jenny, p.16).	'His presence was really, it felt relaxed'. (Lines 480-481).
		EP helped her feel relaxed within the meeting. (Clare, p.24)	'I thought she was, yeah, lovely. She was professional. She made me feel at ease'. (Lines 668-669).
		Would have helped to know what EP looked like before meeting (p.4)	'So before this meeting I was thinking, kind of like, what do you look like?' (Lines 119-120).
		Valued EPs honesty (Sarah, p.3)	'She was open and honest with me throughout it all'. (Lines 86-87).
		EP honest throughout the process (Sarah, p.5)	'She'd been open and honest from the start'. (Lines 146-147).

		Speaking with EP beforehand helped alleviate anxiety (Sarah, p.5)	'It helped that we'd already had that conversation to have that open honesty and transparency from someone, you know, to do that before the meeting kind of really helped'. (Lines 149-151).
Emotional aspects	Difficult emotions	Difficult emotions when discussing daughter's needs (Jenny, p.6)	'It's sad to think that, you know, that she, she goes off and plays on her own'. (Lines 187-188).
		Meeting did not feel positive, only the outcome. (Jenny, p.7)	'The positive end to the meeting was that the report will go over'. (Lines 221-222)
		Focusing on negatives was disheartening (Jenny, p.26)	'It does feel disheartening, because I'm just like, you know, it sounds really bad and day-to-day living with Emily is not all bad'. (Lines 795-797).
		Felt hard that meeting focused on challenges (Jenny, p. 7 & p.9)	'It's not a negative conversation because I know that the psychologist is just wanting to know what the, the challenges we have, but that's all it seemed to be'. (Lines 194-197). 'There definitely was more of her challenges and what she's gonna really struggle with, I would say like probably 90% of, probably even more'. (Lines 271-273).
		Has a unique bond with her daughter (Clare, p.2)	'I'm her mum, so I know her better than anybody. I know her on a level that the psychologist, and the SEN teacher don't know her on'.

		Discussing her daughter's needs within the meeting was upsetting. (Clare, p.25)	'It was hard. It's always hard emotionally because, erm, when you have to lay it all out, it's like a realisation yet again just how much she has going on'. (Lines 695-697).
		The meeting was emotionally and cognitively effortful (Sarah, p. 16)	'Come the end, I was a bit, feeling a bit drained' (Line 477). 'Emotionally and mentally, yeah'. (Line 489).
		Hearing professionals describe level of attainment upsetting and shocking (Sarah, p.15)	'Part way through I did have a little cry because I didn't realise the severity of it'. (Lines 465-466).
	Anxiety provoking	Fearful of letting her daughter down (Jenny, p.25)	'When the meeting finished, it was more like, have I done enough as a mum'. (Line 770-771).
		Questioned her performance following the meeting. (Jenny, p.25).	'I just was like, right, did I do enough, I think'. (Line 782-783).
		Apprehensive because speaking on her daughter's behalf. (Jenny, p.2)	'I didn't know how to answer because I couldn't get the answers from Emily' (Line 31-32).
		An assumption there was a 'correct' response. (Jenny, p.22)	'In terms of whether I didn't answer questions right, I was never made to feel like that, it's just in my head'.
		Before meeting, was concerned there might be questions she could not answer. (Jenny, p.1)	'She's so young, erm, I don't know what she thinks half of the time, so, I kind of went into the meeting not really knowing'. (Line 29-30). 'I didn't really know how the conversation was going to go'. (Lines 32-33).

		Worried to speak freely for fear it would mean EHCP would not be issued. (Jenny, p.11)	'There was a lot of thinking before I spoke'. (Line 308).
		Increased pressure to describe daughter accurately as EP had not met daughter (Jenny, p. 10 & p.24)	'It's hard to explain without ever meeting her'. (Line 303). 'I just hopped that we did everything we could in that we were able to describe Emily'. (Line 749).
		Importance of describing needs accurately (Jenny, p.24)	'The biggest thing for me was that we got it right. Well, yeah, like, both me and the nursery were able to show what Emily is like in conversation'. (Line 744-746).
		Feeling she did all she could to make the report accurate (Jenny, p.4)	'There couldn't have been anymore, that I could have spoke about Emily' (Line 101-102). 'We did everything we could to, you know, to explain what Emily is like'. (Lines 121-122).
		Clearly describing daughter was effortful (Jenny, p.14).	'Where I'm trying to get my words out of like how Emily behaves'. (Lines 420-421).
		Felt a responsibility to speak on her daughter's behalf (Jenny, p.27)	'We were talking for her because, you know, she's not here and he hasn't met her'. (Line 830-831).
		Anxiety because the meeting would lead to a decision about whether her daughter would receive an EHCP (Clare, p.1)	'I was feeling quite anxious, but only because I've been fighting to get to this for so long that I just didn't want it to go wrong, erm, because if it hadn't gone the way it went, I

			don't know what I would have done'. (Lines 21-23)
		The meeting was nerve inducing (Sarah, p.5)	'If I hadn't spoken to her then I would have probably be a bit more nervous in the sense of like, who are you?' (Lines 144-146).
	Desire for acknowledgement of emotional demands from professionals	Reassuring to hear daughter's strengths following meeting. (Jenny, p.8).	'They're (the nursery) able to put me like at ease that, you know, she has got these issues, but she comes with, you know, good things as well'. (Lines 240-242).
		Appreciated nursery highlighting strengths (Jenny, P.8 & 9)	'Whereas the nursery definitely were able to just reinforce the fact that, you know, she is her own little person and she does make us laugh every day'. (Lines 228-230). 'It did sound all negative, but don't think like that, she's a nice little lady and she's got her own personality and she's gonna do really well in school'. (Lines 253-255).
		EP would have better understanding of her emotions in person (Clare, p.16)	'She might have been able to tell more, you know, body language wise and stuff, like just how passionate I am about getting my daughter the help and support that she deserves'. (Lines 453-455). 'She might be able to see this really matters to mum. You know she's really wanting this for her daughter'. (Lines 458-460).

		Might have been easier to gauge emotions in-person. (Clare, p.16)/ Easier to build a relationship?	'You get much better vibes and stuff, doing things in person'. (Line 435-436).
		The EP is less emotionally involved with the child, but this is useful in a professional capacity. (Clare, p.20)	'The Educational Psychologist, yeah, like, she agreed, but I don't think her passion necessarily was there, but I think that's more because me and the SEN teacher know Milly on an emotional level. We know her, whereas I think that's the only part that was missing, but I don't necessarily think that that's wrong'. (Lines 581-585).
		The EP cares about getting the best outcome for the child but is not emotionally connected to them in the same way as parents and teachers. (Clare, p.21)	'She was passionate about wanting the best for my daughter'. (Lines 607-608). 'It's just that she was more passionate because, you know, that's her job. It's her job to make sure these children get what they deserve so that's what she's there for. So, the passion for that was there, but you could tell that is because that's her job role. That's what she's paid to do, is to get these children, but there's no emotional as in, she doesn't care about the child on an emotional level. She cares because that's her job. That's what she's there for'. (Lines 616-622).

		Desired recognition of emotional challenge from professionals (Sarah, p. 17)	'They need to have that empathy or knowing that it can be emotionally hard for the parent come the end of it'. (Lines 520-522).
		Feels sharing emotions is important for professionals to understand and ensure support for her son (Sarah, p.20).	'They need me to be open and honest about my son and how it feels so they can kind of give the right help towards it'. (Lines 609-610).
	Supporting factors	Wants to feel others understand daughter's needs (Jenny, p.8)	'I can't get over to him (her husband), like, how frustrating it is because he is a calm person, whereas, I can with the nursery because they understand more'. (Lines 238-240).
		Reassuring to know that challenges are recognised by others (Jenny, p.7).	'I know I'm not on my own and she doesn't just, you know, she doesn't act the way she acts just for me. She does it for them as well'. (Lines 201-202).

'When the nursery do say what she gets upset about, I feel like it's shared. I'm like, well, at least I'm not alone'. (Lines 211-212). |
| | | Relieved to feel others shared her concerns (Jenny, p. 12) | 'When the nursery she did talk about Emily, I was totally, you know, relieved like, well, yeah, I'm glad that it's not just me'. (Line 369-371). |
| | | The nursery leading the conversation gave her the confidence to contribute. (Jenny, p.19). | 'It definitely helped me because then I knew what kind of things that they were, that, like I would, when I would think, oh I don't know how to |

			answer that one, with what she said, it was like, ohh right okay, I know what they kind of, are looking for'. (Lines 598-602).
		Nursery support increased feels of ease in meeting (Jenny, p.6).	'They were able to give the answers so there was never any awkward silences'. (Lines 161-162). 'The nursery were really good in being able to give their examples'. (Lines 170-171).
		Felt the EP wanted to know her daughter. (Jenny, p. 15).	'He really wanted to know Emily as a person, even though he's never met her'. (Lines 4-5). 'He did come across like he knew Emily'. (Lines 417-418). 'Like he was really getting to, wanting to know Emily'. (470-471).
		The EP wanting to know her daughter demonstrated that he also wanted to achieve the best outcomes for her. (Jenny, p.1)	'He really wanted to know what she was like. So yeah, that was a big thing for me because it then allowed me to be open'. (Lines 5-7).
		The empathetic approach of the EP helped her feel she could take her time. (Clare, p.26).	'She could tell that at times it was upsetting, but she was lovely. She didn't make it more difficult than it had to be. She was really understanding. There was times when I had to pause a minute, cause I got a bit upset and she didn't, I didn't feel like I was on a time limit'. (Lines 730-732).

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		The wider process would feel overwhelming without support from professionals. (Clare, p. 17)	'Even for me there were at times in the whole process overall where I was like, I don't understand what this means. What does that mean exactly? And then it got explained to me. But if you didn't have my knowledge as a parent, I can't imagine some parents must feel very overwhelmed with it all.' (Lines 475-479).
		Importance of professionals sharing progress of assessment. (p.24)	'I was kept in the loop the whole time'. (Line 664)
		EPs bring specialist skills in understanding and containing other's emotions (Sarah, p.17)	'This is what she is trained to do and to understand'. (Lines 518-519).
		Appreciated EPs empathy (Sarah, p.15 & p.17)	'I surprised myself by getting emotional during it, but they got it and they understood'. (Lines 515-516).
		Appreciated EPs flexible approach that took account of her emotional needs (Sarah, p. 19)	'We kind of just like stopped what we're talking about
		EP demonstrated genuine empathy (Sarah, p.19)	'She kind of just sympathised and just said some, I can't remember what she said, she just said some words, you know, being sympathetic towards it'. (Lines 586-589). 'She just spoke sympathetically, you know, and kind of knew what to say as well and it wasn't, it wasn't fake'. (Lines 594-595).

		EPs experience means they will not be judgemental (Sarah, p. 20)	'I knew this Doctor would have dealt with it all before'. (Lines 608-609).
		Speaking with EP beforehand helped alleviate anxiety (Sarah, p.5)	'Those conversations with the Ed Psych before going into the meeting kind of helped put your nerves to ease of right, this is going forward, this is what we're doing, okay, you get what you're talking about, you're understanding'. (Lines 759-762).
		Reassuring to have husband involved (Sarah, p.12)	'He (her husband) could hear, obviously just didn't want his face in, and he was looking over smiling'. (Lines 356-357).
		Deferring to nursery staff when unsure of answer reduced pressure (Sarah, p.13)	'I wasn't sure on how on what the target would be, and what would be the need to be met by it, because I've not seen it, whereas I knew the nursery had, so I handed it to them'. (Lines 396-399).
		Having familiar professionals involved in meeting increased comfort in speaking and sharing emotions (Sarah, p.20)	'I knew two people in the room'. (Line 608).
		Adaptations made to include needs of father (p. 12)	'He doesn't like, going to a face-to-face meeting. He doesn't like people. He finds it very hard to interact with people, but he was in the background'. (Lines 347-349).
	EP's presence containing (reduced anxiety and difficult emotions)	Felt able to respond without judgement. (Jenny, p. 2)	'There was a lot of questions asked, erm, but there was an acknowledgement as well. So, it wasn't like I'd said something and, it

				was either wrong or right'. (Lines 40-42).
		EP's approach genuine. (Jenny, p.1).	'The way that he came across, it didn't feel like it was scripted'. (Lines 14-15).
		EP approach non-judgemental, allowing her to be open. (Jenny, p.1).	'He was very open to, you know, me rattling on and he was fine' (Lines 18-19).
		Felt the EP was being thorough (Clare, p.9)	'Just to make sure that she didn't miss anything. Umm, that she got everything exactly how it should be'. (Lines 237-238).
		The EP brings specialist knowledge. (Clare, p. 12-13)	'Without the Educational psychologist, I don't know whether I would ever have found that out, because that's higher than me as a mum and that's higher than an SEN teacher. All we can do is say 'There's an issue here, why is this happening?' and it was down to the Educational Psychologist that said, yeah, that issue is real. In actual fact it's because she has this'. (Lines 346-351).
		Title of 'Doctor' inspires confidence (Sarah, p.9/10)	'I knew straight away she was knowledgeable when I saw the name Doctor, because you don't get a doctorate easy'. (Lines 266-268).

			'I knew she'd worked for that, and she knew what she was doing'. (Lines 270-271). 'I kind of felt confident that she knew what she was talking about'. (Lines 295-296).
		Desire to place confidence in EP (Sarah, p.7/8)	'You've gotta have someone who knows what they're doing and can manage it really well'. (Lines 186-187). 'She knew what she was talking about. She was able to tell you what she was doing'. (Lines 239-241). 'We need to know that we're doing this properly and this is done in the right hands'. (Lines 314-315).
		Reaction of trusted professionals during meeting indicated EP was capable (Sarah, p. 10)	'On Teams you can see people's faces, so I would have detected from (SEN nursery manager) straight away if she wasn't feeling confident about it as well'. (Lines 306-308).
		The positive opinion of other professionals prior to the meeting was reassuring (Sarah, p.9/ 10)	'When I've spoken to professionals, they've heard of her and they know she's really good, which gives you peace of mind knowing that as well. So, I kind of found that out before the meeting, which really, really helped'. (Lines 278-281).

			'Hearing good recommendations from other people, so, she obviously knows what she's doing'. (Lines 287-288).
		EP's level of experience was reassuring (Sarah, p.9)	'She said how many years experience she had, and what she'd done, which really helped as well. And I think that kind of gives you peace of mind knowing that that's what you get'. (Lines 274-276).
		EP provided a clear description of the structure and purpose of the meeting so shared understanding (p.7)	'She explained the process of how it would work'. Line (217).
		Valued EPs honesty (Sarah, p.3)	'She spoke with my husband, was really honest with my husband, and that's what my husband likes. He likes honestly from people, doesn't like to be fobbed off'. (Lines 73-75).
		EPs honesty regarding limitations of knowledge built trust (Sarah, p.9)	'There was one bit that wasn't her forte, but that was sensory impairment and that didn't bother me that she didn't know, because if that's not a trained forte, that's fine, and they've gone on the evidence that someone else has provided'. (Lines 48-51). 'The only thing that she wasn't knowledgeable was on the sensory impairment, but she explained what

			she would do to ensure that those were filled out'. (Lines 255-257).
		EP remaining in contact as a source of reassurance (Sarah, p.3)	'She remained in contact the entire time'. (Line 64).
Collaboration	Multiple perspectives and shared understanding	Value of incorporating multiple perspectives (Clare, p.12)	'When you put the three (perspectives) together, it paints a much bigger picture of what's going on. You know, in the individual areas'. (Lines 327-328).
		Pleased to have a range of professionals involved to gather information (Sarah, p. 4 & p. 25)	'The SEN nursery manager could give a lot of detail because she'd seen Ben for the first term'. Lines (97-98). 'I think the right people were in the room because they're the ones that deal with him all the time'. (Lines 772-774).
		Each person involved contributes a unique piece of the puzzle (Sarah, p.25)	'As a parent I'm at home with him all the time and then the nursery, they see him like, you know, mostly every day, and that's when the evidence comes in play, the reports come in from Speech Therapy, Specialist Teachers'. Lines (774-778).
	Enhanced understanding of needs (Learning from one another)	Knowledge sharing enabled all to learn from one another (Sarah, p.14)	'I learned things about my son there from the nursery that I had not known'. (Lines 427-428) 'So we're able to, you know, exchange that information and give that detail'. Lines (432-433).

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		EPs suggestions regarding strategies experienced as helpful (Sarah, p. 15)	'She (the EP) was suggesting what could be handy and they were things that you know could work towards my son's needs. Lines (444-445).
		Important to sense a shared agreement regarding daughter's needs (Jenny, p. 3).	'Collectively because we were all experiencing the same'. (Lines 90-91). 'Between the three of us, we've painted like this picture, and it's the same person'. (94-95).
		EP helped her understand her daughter's needs with specialist knowledge (Clare, p.12).	'I found out that actually she does have a natural diagnosis of something, you know what I mean? So yeah, without the Educational Psychologist, I don't know whether I would ever have found that out'. (Lines 344-347).
		Able to make a unique contribution to the written record (Clare, p.23).	'She (the EP) would still document it like, Mum says duh, duh, duh, duh, SEN department have agreed. You know, I (the EP) didn't pick this up myself, but it's clearly there'. (Lines 631-633).
		The meeting enhanced her understanding of her daughter's behaviour (Clare, p. 12).	'I now know why, and I can understand better why she behaves in certain ways like she does'. (Lines 357-358).
		A collaborative approach leads to the best outcomes for her child (Sarah, p.15)	'Everyone was kind of working together and I think for the Educational Psychologist, she was gathering the information, she was

			working out what would benefit Ben'. Lines (451-454).
		Written summary strengthened by contributions of multiple professionals (Sarah, p.21)	'I got a draft of the EHCP and it just described my son to a tee, so they've not missed anything out'. (Lines 638-639). 'Every professional was on the same level, (they agreed) and they all provided detailed reports'. Lines (647-648).
	Facilitating factors	EP balanced gathering information with allowing time to speak (Jenny, p. 20)	'He was able to get the answers he was looking for, but still giving that time for everybody'. (p.613-614).
		Attendees were respectful, allowing all to share their views. (Jenny, p. 19)	'There was never a part that everybody was just talking over'. (Lines 589-590).
		Need to trust that professionals will accurately identify difficulties and contributory factors (Clare, p.11).	'I'm putting my trust in them, that's their job to know what they're talking about, to know that they have recognised the reasons why and what the individual deeper struggles are'. (Lines 305-307).
		Would have helped to know what EP looked like before meeting (Sarah, p.4)	'So before this meeting I was thinking, kind of like, what do you look like?' (Lines 119-120).
		All attendees had an equal opportunity to contribute (Sarah, p.13)	'We all kind of respected each other to talk and have their own say'. (Lines 403-404).
		Number of attendees enabled everyone to contribute (Sarah, p.6)	'There's not too many people there so everyone can get their right to speak'. (Lines 169-171)

		Mutual respect from all within meeting enabled all to have their say (Sarah, p. 13)	'Everyone kind of listened to each other'. (Lines 405-406).
		EP checked for agreement from group (Sarah, p.15)	'Then she was consulting with us to make sure they were realistic targets'. Lines (454-455).
		Husband's contribution welcomed (Sarah, p.12)	'He (her husband) did raise one (issue) and then we kind of like, you know, went forward with that'. Lines (375-376).
		Requests to add information when not directly invited were received warmly (Sarah, p.21)	'When there was a moment, we were like, can we add something?' Lines (404-405).
Impact of wider system	EHCP Paramount	Felt pressure in relation to the meeting (Jenny, p.10).	'I also knew how important it was as well'. (Line 296).
		The value of an EHCP (Jenny, p.20)	'Knowing that, like, what value this meeting held'. (Lines 628-629).
		Aim of meeting to receive EHCP (Jenny, p.24)	'We got a good outcome in that, well, she's now got the plan'. (Lines 750-751).
		The process is hard but worthwhile (Jenny, p. 6).	'For all that, the help she's gonna get in school will then come to our favour'. (Lines 165-166).
		An EHCP is hard to obtain (Jenny, p.13)	'Do you know you're so lucky because not many… if a child's like borderline, they struggle, they won't accept them'. (Lines 385-387).
		Obtaining an EHCP top priority (Jenny, p.10)	'I'm like, oh, please, I just want this decision now'. (Lines 286-287).
		Having an EHCP will ensure her daughter gains the support she needs (Clare, p.6)	'She'll get what she deserves with the help and support' (Line 172)

		An EHCP will improve her daughter's emotional wellbeing (Clare, p.23)	'She can't go to a specialised school without an EHCP, so now we've got that, I feel much more confident about her overall emotional wellbeing' (Lines 649-651)
		An EHCP will lead to greater support, hence greater progression in learning (Clare, p.20)	'If there are slow bits of progress happening, then that is what I'm expecting. Like by the end of year six, I expect her to be year three with the help and support that she should now be given' (Lines 565-568)
		Meeting is a crucial step in decision to issue an EHCP (Clare, p.4).	'I didn't feel anxious about like having the meeting or being part of the meeting. I was anxious about what the outcome could be'. (Lines 94-95).
		The outcome of the meeting mattered most (Clare, p.23)	'Was that my daughter got the outcome she deserved'. (Line 641).
		Professionals may judge parent's motives (Clare, p.5).	'As disgusting as this is, parents will try and get their children diagnosed with behavioural issues in order to claim benefits for these children it's all about pound signs. So I feel like sometimes, because of that, parents aren't taken seriously if their children aren't presenting the same in the classroom as they do within the home environment'. (Lines 134-140).
		A mainstream school will not be able to meet her son's needs (Sarah, p. 16)	'He is not mainstream material he will be going into SEN and if he doesn't get a place in SEN, I will be

			holding him back a year because nowhere in (local authority) will have him in a mainstream school' (Lines 482-485).
		Goal to secure a placement in a specialist school (Sarah, p.24)	'Having these needs obviously stand a chance of getting into a SEN school, which is what he needs'. (Lines 756-757).
		Her son's needs mean he will require an EHCP (Sarah, p. 2)	'I think what helped me for my son is he had a lot of evidence stacking against him to go, yeah, he needs an EHCP'. (Lines 34-36).
		Having a EHCP as valuable (Sarah, p.17)	'I feel quite, I can't use the word privileged, but I feel relieved that I've not had to fight' (for an EHCP). (Lines 529-530).
	A necessary part of a multi-step process	The EHCP process as a set of obstacles to be overcome (Clare, p.14)	'We've finally got there. This is the final hurdle and, my opinion was, this is gonna happen now' (Lines 381-382)
		The process has required a personal investment of time and effort (Jenny, p.10 & p.12).	'It's just been such a long process'. (Lines 291-292). 'I knew this, this was the last one that had to be done'. (Lines 293-294. 'The final part of whether we were gonna get the plan or not'. (Lines 362-363).
		Viewed as a box ticking exercise (Sarah)	'She even said to me, there's no doubt in my mind that he won't be approved for his EHCP, it's just

			getting some things down on paper about him and logistics and what targets we can get him to meet. (lines 131-134)
		The meeting as something to endure. Another step towards an EHCP. (Clare)	We could just be done with it, you know (Line 449)
	Time pressure	An EHCP ensures success at school (Jenny, p.25)	'She's gonna go on her first day and it's gonna be really good for her and we're not gonna have any problems'. (Lines 779-780).
		It was effortful to find a date all relevant parties could attend (Sarah, p.7)	'She (the EP) managed to get us all together, managed to work out a date'. (Lines 188-189)
		The meeting requires a considerable time commitment from all involved (Sarah, p. 5&6)	'You can whittle out a little bit of information, that we'd already done on the phone before, kind of really helped, because if we hadn't done that then the meeting would have went on longer and it went on for two hours as it was'. (Lines 152-156)
		Importance of having EHCP in place before transition to school (Sarah, p. 6)	'I've got it (the EHCP) for school, so this is where we've been on the plus side'. (Lines 168-169).
		Surprised at speed of overall process, given current pressure in system. (Sarah, p. 18)	'I thought there would be a massive backlog on the EHCP. So I thought I'd be waiting a while'. (Lines 540-541).

'I can understand the 8 to 10 week wait on an Ed Psych meeting, so I was really surprised that we got it, you know, offered within a week |

			and then we had it two weeks later'. (Lines 554-556).
		Administrative errors potentially slow the process down (Sarah p. 1 & p.3).	I do find it frustrating that they did not know my number, which really frustrated me because they contacted me to start with and then had the wrong number and the psychologist couldn't contact me. (Lines 10-13). 'There was some things that she (the EP) didn't have which did frustrate me onto why she didn't have a copy of my son's diagnosis for ASD. That was a bit surprising, so I had to provide her that'. (Lines 81-84).
		The start of the EHCP process was long awaited. (Clare, p.6)	'Before that, we were dismissed and nothing was, you know, but we've got there in the end' (Lines 170-171)
		Feeling she had to fight throughout the process. (Clare, p.15)	'Finally, after five years, we've done it, you know, this battle of wills, you know, pretty much with Speech and Language Therapy and Health Visitors, Social Services, even, you know, SEN departments, different schools, different things, that finally this fight has all been worth it, because I've done it. I've done this'. (Lines 415-419)
		Effort to get to this point (Clare, p.1)	'I've been fighting for Milly since she was like three'. (Lines 35-36)

		Had to advocate for her daughter alone. (Clare, p.26)	'I'm her voice at the end of the day like. Without my voice, she probably wouldn't get half of this because it's my input that's made it happen'. (Lines 712-714).
		A sense of being alone in the process (Clare, p.15)	'Without me pushing and me questioning and me wanting better we wouldn't have got probably to where we are now'. (Line 425-427).
		Previous experience of not being listened to influenced how she felt the meeting might be. (Clare, p. 6)	'I wasn't taken seriously at the time, do you see what I mean, so it's always been a constant - I'm telling you something's not right, but you're not seeing it, so I'm dismissed. This is my child, you know? So, it's been those types of problems leading up till the present day, which has caused me to feel certain ways, but definitely not because of the recent educational psychologist or the SEN department from the school she's now in, they've been nothing but helpful, productive'. (Lines 150-156).
		Feeling let down by system and professionals within it previously. (Clare, p.6)	'I do feel like my daughter has been failed along the way'. (Lines 168-169).
		Had lost faith in professional's ability to recognise daughter's needs. (Clare, p.5).	'I was told oh no, there's, you know, we're not seeing this within school because, you know, children, mask. Which you would think that the SEN department would know'. (Lines 128-130).

		Aware of wider pressures of SEN system in which the meeting sits (Sarah, p. 1&2)	'I think they (the Local Authority) are trying to get through as many EHCPs as possible and trying to work their way out because the process for my son was very quick'. (Lines 7-9). 'I think they're bringing in people to try and whittle it down a little bit quicker'. (Lines 29-30)
	Compromise	The meeting was necessary to secure support (Jenny, p. 9).	'I knew it had to be done, because I needed, need to get help for her'. (Lines 278-279).
		Previous experiences influenced how she felt coming into the meeting. (Clare, p.4).	'I was gonna make sure that I was taken seriously. If I felt like I wasn't, I was going make sure I was, but I didn't have that issue. I was taken seriously, but this was only because of from way back when we first started things that I wasn't taken seriously. That's where that comes from'. (Lines 98-102).
		Meeting was long and draining, but completed process as only route to an EHCP (Sarah, p.6)	'If it takes 2 hours to complete the meeting, it takes 2 hours, because you need them to have all the information and detail, so it doesn't impact your son'. (Lines 522-524).
		Lack of control over timing of the meeting, compromised to benefit son (a sense of being 'done to'). (Sarah, p. 12)	'He (her husband) wasn't amused about it (having to start the meeting without her), but he was gonna do it because it's our son'. (Lines 368-369).

		Concerned might have to leave comfort zone to get son's needs met (Sarah, p. 11)	'If it hinders my son, I'm going to say something' (despite lack of confidence). (Line 323).
		Made compromises in manner of meeting to get process completed (Sarah, p.6)	'I don't like how everything's moved over to Teams since COVID, but I get it'. Lines (160-161). 'You've gotta do what you gotta do at the moment, you know, and it's quicker and easier to do it on Teams'. (Lines 173-174).
		A desire to talk about positive aspects of daughter. (Jenny, p.17)	'If anyone started to say good things, I would have went on a tangent of how good she is'. (Lines 508-510).
		Had to focus on the negatives (Jenny, p.11, p.12 & p.20 & p.25)	'If I said good things, would that mean she doesn't need the help?' (Line 307). 'I just knew I had to hold back the good points' (Line 631-632). 'I was already advised, for it to be, you know, a good reflection of Emily, but make sure my examples were where you have the more struggles with'. (Lines 334-336). 'It does all sound negative, but unfortunately, that's what's needed'. (Lines 789-790).
		Conflict between wanting to share strengths but feeling she should	'It would have been nice for me to have said like the good things and

		focus on challenges to ensure EHCP felt necessary (Jenny, p.15).	not of then had an impact on all of the bad things, but I knew it would'. (Lines 464-466).
		Describing her daughter's difficulties crucial to secure help for her daughter via an EHCP. (Jenny)	Told by nursery: 'We've got to put the struggles that we have so she'll get the help'. (Lines 191-192).
		Felt comments should match nursery comments or might undermine what they had said. (Jenny, p.11)	'I knew I had to watch what I say because I didn't want to then make it, that the actual, erm, like example had been taken away for what the nursery had said'. (Line 322-324).
		Limited her contributions based on what seemed realistic (Jenny, p. 22).	'It's like a total conflict, because I'm like, well, the school haven't got an hour, to sit with somebody to feed them their food'. (Line 689-691).
		Feeling her answers would impact on the decision to issue an EHCP (Jenny, p.20)	'There was just a lot riding on the answers'. (Line 634)

Appendix K: Research Data Management Plan

UEL Data Management Plan

Completed plans <u>must</u> be sent to <u>researchdata@uel.ac.uk</u> for review

If you are bidding for funding from an external body, complete the Data Management Plan required by the funder (if specified).

Research data is defined as information or material captured or created during the course of research, and which underpins, tests, or validates the content of the final research output. The nature of it can vary greatly according to discipline. It is often empirical or statistical, but also includes material such as drafts, prototypes, and multimedia objects that underpin creative or 'non-traditional' outputs. Research data is often digital, but includes a wide range of paper-based and other physical objects.

Administrative Data	
PI/Researcher	Louise Malkin
PI/Researcher ID (e.g. ORCiD)	N/A
PI/Researcher email	u2064597@uel.ac.uk
Research Title	Parental experiences of taking part in collaborative psychological assessment meetings within the Education, Health and Care needs assessment for their child's special educational needs
Project ID	To be confirmed
Research start date and duration	The research will start once ethics approval is achieved. The research project ends on **22nd of April 2023**.
Research Description	The process of statutory assessment for children with additional learning needs in the UK has been criticised for failing to meaningfully involve parents. The proposed research aims to explore the experiences of parents taking part in collaborative meetings between themselves, an Educational Psychologist (EP) and member of the child's educational setting as part of the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) psychological assessment process in one LA in England. This research aims to be emancipatory, allowing the voices of parents to be heard, and transformative, hoping to inform the practice of EPs and other professionals in relation to parental involvement in EHCP related meetings.

	Research question: What are the experiences of parents/ carers taking part in collaborative psychological assessment meetings involving themselves, an Educational Psychologist, and other professionals, as part of the Education, Health and Care needs assessment of their child? Participants will be asked to complete a semi-structured questionnaire with five open-ended questions, exploring their experiences of taking part in collaborative psychological assessment meetings involving themselves, an Educational Psychologist, and other professionals, as part of the Education, Health and Care needs assessment of their child. This is an exploratory qualitative study. Responses from the interviews will be transcribed and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis.
Funder	N/A
Grant Reference Number (Post-award)	N/A
Date of first version (of DMP)	11.02.2022
Date of last update (of DMP)	11.02.2022
Related Policies	Research Data Management Policy General Data Protection Regulation (2018) British Psychological Society Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018)
Does this research follow on from previous research? If so, provide details	No.
Data Collection	
What data will you collect or create?	Within consent forms, participants will share their full name and signature. They will also be asked to share general demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, highest qualification, occupation). Interview responses will be transcribed by hand into Microsoft word files. Only textual analysis will take place (i.e. without software). The data to be collected/created are:

	Interview recordings in .mp4 format (if Teams) or WAV format, if recorded with a Dictaphone Transcripts in .docx format It is anticipated that approximately six participants will take part in the study.
How will the data be collected or created?	Parents will take part in interviews where they will respond to 5 open-ended questions either in-person or via Microsoft teams. Their responses will be recorded on a Dictaphone when interviewed in-person and on Microsoft Teams for those completing interviews remotely via Microsoft Teams. The recording will be transferred to UEL OneDrive for Business and deleted from the Dictaphone as soon as possible after the interview has taken place. Interviews will be conducted and recorded remotely using Microsoft Teams installed on the interviewer's personal laptop, with the resulting .mp4. WAV files transferred to OneDrive. Recordings will be stored following the file-naming convention: [ParticipantNumber]-[Pseudonym].Ext An interview schedule will be developed so that a standard format is followed. Participants will be recruited via an e-mail sent by the local authority educational psychology administration team and Educational Psychologists employed by the local authority. When a parent/ carer has taken part in a collaborative meeting regarding their child the local authority has a protocol where a follow-up survey is sent to parents via the administration team. The study information will be attached to this e-mail. Participants will be asked to contact the researcher directly and consent to taking part before taking part in the interview both verbally and in writing. Participants will e-mail completed consent forms to the researcher's personal UEL e-mail.
Documentation and Metadata	
What documentation and metadata will accompany the data?	Participant information sheet, blank consent forms, information on file naming conventions and a codebook will accompany the data. A word-document containing file-naming conventions will be stored alongside the data.
Ethics and Intellectual Property	

Identify any ethical issues and how these will be managed	The qualitative data collection will involve face to face in-person and Microsoft Teams interviews. It is therefore not possible to anonymise data at source. During interview transcription all identifying information e.g., names/ locations of individuals/ schools/ local authority will be anonymised to protect confidentiality. Each participant will be attributed a pseudonym and number in chronological interview order. Transcription files will be named e.g., Participant 1 and pseudonym. No details that could link participants and pseudonyms will be kept. Pseudonyms will be used in all written reports of the data. Other potentially disclosive interview responses will be replaced with more general text. For instance, if a respondent gives detailed information about a child's medical needs which may make him/her identifiable due to their specificity/rarity, these will be replaced with more general text about the nature or complexity of the child's needs. To avoid the possibility of demographic data indirectly identifying participants, only a summary of participants demographic information will be reported. Demographic data forms will not be linked with individual interview recordings, any identifiable information such as names, or transcriptions in anyway. To comply with data protection legislation (e.g. DPA 2018 and GDPR), the amount of data collected will be minimised, data will be stored within the EU, and robust anonymisation of data will be undertaken. Participants will provide written consent for their data to be stored and reported anonymously.
Identify any copyright and Intellectual Property Rights issues and how these will be managed	N/A
Storage and Backup	
How will the data be stored and backed up during the research?	Dictaphone recordings will be uploaded onto the researcher's UEL OneDrive account as a WAV file immediately after the interview has ended. Recordings will then be deleted from the Dictaphone. Microsoft Teams recordings will be stored on the Microsoft Stream Library. A copy will additionally be downloaded for upload to UEL OneDrive as a back-up and any local copies deleted from the laptop once uploaded.

	Consent forms will be stored in a separate folder on the researcher's UEL OneDrive account and then permanently deleted from the researcher's personal UEL e-mail account. The researcher will transcribe all interviews (removing identifiable information in the process) using Microsoft Word. Each transcription will be saved on the researcher's UEL OneDrive account and password protected. Files will be titled as follows: 'Participant 1: Date of interview' and backed up on a SharePoint site. Participants demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, highest qualification, occupation) will also be anonymised and stored in a folder separate to interview transcriptions and recordings on the researcher's UEL OneDrive account.
How will you manage access and security?	Only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the raw data. Data will be accessed by the supervisor through a secure link via UEL OneDrive. Caution will be taken when accessing the data. The researcher will ensure that a private device and a secure, private internet connection will be used. The researchers will close the data documents when the data is not used and lock the computer/laptop. The data will be accessed via OneDrive for Business using multi-factor authentication by the researcher on a password protected laptop. No data will be stored on the Dictaphone. As soon as the interview has finished the recording will be transferred to the researchers OneDrive account. The Dictaphone will be stored in a locked cabinet within the home of the researcher when not in use.
Data Sharing	
How will you share the data?	The data will be completely anonymised. The findings will be written up and submitted to the University of East London as a thesis for a Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology and an academic journal for potential publication. The thesis will be publicly available on UEL's online Repository. Findings may also be disseminated to a range of audiences (e.g., academics, clinicians, public, etc.) through journal articles, conference presentations, talks, magazine articles, blogs. In all material produced, participants identities will remain anonymous. Excerpts from the anonymous transcripts will be added to the thesis, with written consent from participants. Anonymised transcripts will not be shared via UEL's Research Repository due to the possibility of participants being identified.

Are any restrictions on data sharing required?	Participants will be asked if they are in agreement with demographic details they provide being used in dissemination. If they are not in agreement with this, these will not be included in any written summary of findings.
Selection and Preservation	
Which data are of long-term value and should be retained, shared, and/or preserved?	Anonymised transcriptions of participants' responses and analysed data will be retained and preserved for 3 years after the researcher's graduation in case of further research. The Teams videos and audio recordings will be deleted once the researcher has completed their programme of study.
What is the long-term preservation plan for the data?	Data will be stored on the researcher's One Drive for Business accounts until graduation from the Doctorate. As the time for data retention is up to 3 years, the data will be transferred Dr Lucy Browne's One Drive for Business account once the researchers graduate from UEL. Should a participant wish to withdraw their data, this will be destroyed.
Responsibilities and Resources	
Who will be responsible for data management?	All researchers have equal rights and responsibilities in managing, preserving and keeping the data secure. In case researchers complete their doctorate course at UEL before the data is destroyed, the rights and responsibilities will be given to their supervisor (Dr Lucy Browne).
What resources will you require to deliver your plan?	Access to a Dictaphone and Microsoft Teams will be necessary for the completion of this project. It is not anticipated that any additional resources will be required.
Review	
	Please send your plan to researchdata@uel.ac.uk **We will review within 5 working days and request further information or amendments as required before signing**

Date: 18/03/2022	Reviewer name: Penny Jackson Assistant Librarian (Research Data Management)

Guidance

Brief information to help answer each section is below. Aim to be specific and concise.

For assistance in writing your data management plan, or with research data management more generally, please contact: **researchdata@uel.ac.uk**

Administrative Data

Related Policies

List any other relevant funder, institutional, departmental or group policies on data management, data sharing and data security. Some of the information you give in the remainder of the DMP will be determined by the content of other policies. If so, point/link to them here.

Data collection

Describe the data aspects of your research, how you will capture/generate them, the file formats you are using and why. Mention your reasons for choosing particular data standards and approaches. Note the likely volume of data to be created.

Documentation and Metadata

What metadata will be created to describe the data? Consider what other documentation is needed to enable reuse. This may include information on the methodology used to collect the data, analytical and procedural information, definitions of variables, the format and file type of the data and software used to collect and/or process the data. How will this be captured and recorded?

Ethics and Intellectual Property

Detail any ethical and privacy issues, including the consent of participants. Explain the copyright/IPR and whether there are any data licensing issues – either for data you are reusing, or your data which you will make available to others.

Storage and Backup

Give a rough idea of data volume. Say where and on what media you will store data, and how they will be backed-up. Mention security measures to protect data which are sensitive or valuable. Who will have access to the data during the project and how will this be controlled?

Data Sharing

Note who would be interested in your data, and describe how you will make them available (with any restrictions). Detail any reasons not to share, as well as embargo periods or if you want time to exploit your data for publishing.

Selection and Preservation

Consider what data are worth selecting for long-term access and preservation. Say where you intend to deposit the data, such as in UEL's data repository (https://repository.uel.ac.uk) or a subject repository. How long should data be retained?

	UEL Risk Assessment Form		
Name of Assessor:	**Louise Malkin**	**Date of Assessment:**	**20.01.22**
Activity title:	Interviews	**Location of activity:**	**MS Teams and Local Authority Office/ Children's Centre**
Signed off by Manager: (Print Name)		**Date and time: (if applicable)**	

Please describe the activity/event in as much detail as possible (include nature of activity, estimated number of participants, etc.).
If the activity to be assessed is part of a fieldtrip or event please add an overview of this below:

Interviews will be held with individual parents as part of data collection for a thesis for a Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology at the University of East London. The researcher will meet only one participant at a time, for a period of around one hour. In total, six parents will be interviewed. Participants will have the option to conduct the interview face-to-face (co-located) or remotely (MS Teams).

Overview of FIELD TRIP or EVENT:

See above

Guide to risk ratings:

a) Likelihood of Risk	b) Hazard Severity	c) Risk Rating (a x b = c)
1 = Low (Unlikely)	1 = Slight (Minor / less than 3 days off work)	1-2 = Minor (No further action required)
2 = Moderate (Quite likely)	2= Serious (Over 3 days off work)	3-4 = Medium (May require further control measures)
3 = High (Very likely or certain)	3 = Major (Over 7 days off work, specified injury or death)	6/9 = High (Further control measures essential)

Hazards attached to the activity

Hazards identified	Who is at risk?	Existing Controls	Likelihood	Severity	Residual Risk Rating (Likelihood x Severity)	Additional control measures required (if any)	Final risk rating
Emotional distress	Participant in study and researcher	Participants informed about study and may withdraw at any point. Researcher has a designated academic supervisor with whom she can discuss any concerns/ seek support if needed. Researcher trained on principles of attunement, supporting awareness of participants emotional needs.	1	1	1		1

		Researcher to monitor emotions of participant regularly and provide reassurance/ allow breaks/ cessation of interview as appropriate. Sources of follow-up support included for participants in de-brief materials.					
Physical safety whilst conducting in-person interviews	Researcher	In-person interviews will be conducted in a local authority office, or children's centre during normal working hours. Researcher will ensure a trusted individual (academic supervisor/ colleague/ family member) is aware of her whereabouts and communicate with them when the interview is complete.	1	1	1		1
Covid risk for in-person interviews	Researcher / Participant	Researcher and participant will take a lateral flow test before meeting in-person. During the meeting, face masks will be worn and a social-distancing guidelines will be adhered to. A window will be open to prevent ventilation.	1	1	1		1

Review Date: 01/03/2023

Appendix M: Participant Debrief Sheet

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF SHEET

Parental experiences of taking part in collaborative assessment meetings within the Education, Health and Care needs assessment for their child's special educational needs

Thank you for participating in my research exploring parents/ carers experiences of taking part in a Joint Assessment Meeting between themselves, an Educational Psychologist, and member of their child's educational setting, as part of the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessment. This document offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

How will my data be managed?

The University of East London is the Data Controller for the personal information processed as part of this research project. The University will ensure that the personal data it processes is held securely and processed in accordance with the GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018. More detailed information is available in the Participant Information Sheet, which you received when you agreed to take part in the research.

What will happen to the results of the research?

The research will be written up as a thesis and submitted for assessment. The thesis will be publicly available on UEL's online Repository. Findings will also be disseminated to a range of audiences (e.g., academics, clinicians, public, etc.) through journal articles, conference presentations, talks, magazine articles, blogs. In all material produced, your identity will remain anonymous, in that, it will not be possible to identify you personally.

You will be given the option to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed for which relevant contact details will need to be provided.

Anonymised research data will be securely stored for a maximum of 3 years, following which all data will be deleted.

What if I been adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise distress or harm of any kind. Nevertheless, it is possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways, you may find the following resources/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

NSPCC: Information about supporting children with special educational needs: https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/supporting-children-special-educational-needs-disabilities/

Young minds: support around your and your child's mental health: https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/

Who can I contact if I have any questions/concerns?

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Louise Malkin

e-mail: u2064597@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted, please contact my research supervisor Lucy Browne. School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,

Email: L.Browne@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of School Research Ethics Committee: Dr Trishna Patel, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: t.patel@uel.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking part in my study