Angela Price

How can the Role of the Educational Psychologist, as a Multi-agency Partner within the Area of Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs, Be Understood?

Doctorate in Educational Psychology

School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences

Newcastle University

April 2017

Declaration

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not include material that is the work of others without acknowledgement, that I have consulted all materials cited and have not submitted this assignment for any other academic award.

……………………………………………………

Angela Price

Abstract

The Bercow Report (2008) set out recommendations in support of children's speech, language and communication skills, including the need for agencies to work together. The literature suggests that sharing information and negotiating roles is vital in multi-agency working, and this study examines the potential of using 'partner voice' to understand the educational psychologist (EP) role as a multi-agency partner. Participants were asked initially how EPs could work in schools to support children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), but, as this appeared restrictive, the study became wider.

Three focus groups of key professional partners – three speech and language therapists, four special educational needs coordinators and three Children's Centre staff – gave their views on how EPs could support children with SLCN, alongside the potential barriers.

The views of seven EPs were gathered through a questionnaire distributed to all those working in the city, asking them to outline current ways of working to support children with SLCN and how they would like to work, again considering the barriers.

The importance of involving 'parents as partners' was recognised through the participation of six parent/carers, who completed a questionnaire on their experiences of working with EPs during a group meeting for parents of children with SLCN. Minutes were taken and used as data.

The results highlighted four roles for EPs in supporting children with SLCN: 'assessor', 'trainer', 'supporter of other professionals' and 'supporter of children and families'. Partners were able to suggest how EPs could work from their perspective, including potential barriers. Some were innovative and useful to carry forward. Professional partners could all identify a unique role for EPs.

For an EP seeking to widen the EP role for children with SLCN, the participants' information has great value and supports the idea that 'partner voice' informs and enhances practice.

Acknowledgements

First, I should like to express my sincere thanks to all the partners who gave up their valuable time to take part in this project. Without their enthusiasm and commitment to make a difference and consider this topic with me, it would not have been possible. Thanks also to my educational psychologist colleagues, who have asked about the project along the way. I am particularly grateful to my friend and colleague Dr Linsey Smith, who provided encouragement and words of wisdom when I needed them most.

I should also like to thank my supervisors, Dr Wilma Barrow and Professor Liz Todd, for believing in me and providing a much-needed boost to complete this thesis. I can't thank you both enough and will be eternally grateful.

Finally, my long-suffering family: thank you, Eddie, for putting up with this thesis hanging over family life for so long – the 'dreaded T'. We can now look forward together. To my two sons, Nick and Dan, for giving me space when I needed it most and being mindful of when not to visit with the grandkids.

Last, but by no means least, thanks go to my daughter, Georgia, who has kept me going with 'Mickey moments'. Georgia, you have been my inspiration. Your encouraging words and culinary skills have gone a long way in supporting me through to completion. I love you so much.

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Abbreviations

ASD   Autism Spectrum Disorder

BESD   Behavioural, emotional and social difficulties

CAF   Common Assessment Framework

CAMHS   Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service

CC   Children's Centre

CLLD   Communication Language and Literacy Development

CP   cerebral palsy

CPD   continuing professional development

DCSF   Department of Children, Schools and Families

DfE   Department for Education

DfES   Department for Education and Skills

ECAT   Every Child a Talker

ECM   Every Child Matters

EHCP   Education health care plan

EP   educational psychologist

EPS   educational psychology service

EYFS   Early Years Foundation Stage

FSA   formal statutory assessment

HCPC   Health Care Professions Council

ICT   Information and communication technology

IDP   Inclusion Development Programme

IEP   individual education plan

LA   local authority

LD   learning difficulty

LLL   Language Literacy and Learning

MLD   moderate learning difficulty

NC   National Curriculum

PCT   Primary Care Trust

PEP   principal educational psychologist

PSED   personal, social and emotional development

RCSLT   Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

SALT   speech and language therapist

SEN   special educational needs

SENCo   special educational needs coordinator

SEND   special educational needs and disability

SLA   service level agreement

SLC   speech, language and communication

SLCN   speech, language and communication needs

SLI   specific language impairment

SLT   speech and language therapy

SMART   specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time related

TF   Theoretical framework

YOS   Youth Offending Service

Chapter 1. Introduction

> The ability to communicate is an essential life skill for all children and young people and it underpins a child's social, emotional and educational development. (Bercow, 2008, p. 6)

1.1 Aims of the Research

Educational psychologists (EPs) work to support children and young people (0–25) with a wide range of special educational needs and disabilities, a proportion of whom will have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN). These children are educated in both mainstream and specialist settings, and a range of professionals are potentially concerned with meeting their needs (Department for Education, 2015). There has been an emphasis on multi-agency working for a number of years (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2003), and it has been suggested that EPs can work effectively in such contexts, with their background and training making a distinctive contribution (Farrell et al., 2006). This way of working, however, is not without problems (Todd, 2011). My role has been that of an EP concerned with SLCN, and I was interested in how the EP role with other professionals could be enhanced. This seemed a timely topic for my doctoral thesis.

The main question in this study is:

> How can the role of the educational psychologist, as a multi-agency partner, in the area of children with speech, language and communication needs, be understood?

As an EP working with a range of partners, I wanted to make sense of the EP role in supporting children with SLCN within a multi-agency context. It therefore seemed sensible to explore this question with partners. This research aimed to explore partners' perceptions of the role of EPs in their work to support children with SLCN, based on their unique perspective and, by creating an opportunity for dialogue, gauge the value of using 'partner voice' to inform and enhance EP practice. In order to provide a rounded picture of support, in addition to professional partners, EPs and parents were included.

To help to answer the main question, the following supplementary questions were considered:

1. How do other professionals perceive the role of the educational psychologist in supporting children with SLCN and how does this compare to how EPs would like to work and what parents want?

2. What might impact on EPs supporting children with SLCN within the local context?

3. Do professionals consider EPs to have a unique role in supporting children with SLCN and can the current role be widened in the local context based on partners' perceptions?

1.2 Rationale

This research is considered to be an important study on a variety of levels. On a personal level, I wanted to ensure that I was using all of my skills and all of the opportunities provided within the workplace and beyond, and to do all that I could to make a difference in supporting children and young people, including those with SLCN.

At the beginning of the study, language and communication were an area of focus for the local authority (LA) in which I worked. I also had a personal and professional interest in following the Bercow review and subsequent report (Bercow, 2008). These were the main drivers for this research.

The Bercow Report (2008) had been commissioned by the Labour government in power at that time to consider support for children with SLCN.

I was interested in the five main themes indicated in the report:

- Communication is crucial;

- Early identification and intervention are essential;

- A continuum of services designed around the family is needed;

- Joint working is critical;

- The current system is characterised by high variability and a lack of equity.

The report made 40 recommendations designed to improve the delivery of services to support children with SLCN and highlight the need for high levels of service.

Bercow highlighted the ability to communicate as a life skill that underpins a child's social, emotional and educational development. It was suggested that there was

insufficient understanding of the centrality of SLCN among commissioners and policy makers, as well as service providers and professionals, and therefore insufficient priority was given to it. An increased profile for all types of special educational needs was called for.

This government focus led me to reflect on the role that EPs take in their work to support children with SLCN, and whether this could be enhanced within the local context by taking account of a range of perspectives from partners. Given the assertion that 'language is fundamental to all learning and crucial for development in primary schoolchildren', and that 'poor language skills will impact on children's attainment in school' (thecommunicationtrust.org.uk) it seemed sensible to assume that EPs would be involved in supporting children with such needs. EPs are professionals trained in child development, including speech, language and communication (Lindsay, et al., 2008). They work in conjunction with partners to identify barriers to learning and provide support to further development (see Chapter 2 for details on the role of EPs).

Working as an EP within an LA, I considered the EP role with regard to supporting children with SLCN to be narrow, dictated chiefly by schools. I wondered whether there might be a wider role for EPs to support children with SLCN and an improved way of multi-agency working, as within the current model there seemed to be a tendency to work separately.

Moreover, as EPs, in my experience, take account of the whole child, it seems sensible to assume that they will liaise with a number of professional partners, in addition to parents/carers and the child themselves, in working to meet a child's particular educational need. As a senior manager in an EPS and an EP team leader in a newly formed locality team, I was aware that new ways of working had opened up access to a range of partners and I wondered about the value in exploring a range of views on EPs' work in support of multi-agency working practice.

As a senior psychologist, I was unaware of any attempts by other senior officers/management within the LA to consult with EPs about meeting the needs of children with speech, language and communication difficulties in the city, and I was curious to know how such needs were being planned for at a local level. This project therefore served two purposes for me, as a practitioner–researcher: to find out what

was happening locally regarding support for children with SLCN, and how EPs could work to support it.

Working within one of the five newly established locality teams in the city, and with Bercow's suggestion in mind, that joint working is critical, I was aware that co-location did not translate easily into co-working. I was aware that, within my locality, children's SLCN were being targeted by other professionals, yet I was conscious that I did not have a full picture. This made me wonder how a continuum of services could be designed around the family if all professionals with a potential for working with them were unaware of what other support was available.

I was also aware that a city strategy had been written on speaking, listening and communication that highlighted a recognition within the LA that communication is crucial and that early identification and intervention were essential, but it was unclear to me how this was being shared with key partners. My educational psychology service (EPS) had not been invited to be part of the working group for the strategy, although I did have the opportunity to attend a small number of the later meetings after I learnt of its existence. This made me wonder about the value placed on EPs regarding their work to support children with SLCN and how this 'fitted' with other support, both from a top-down perspective (government, LA) and a bottom-up perspective (partners and clients). I considered these perspectives important to consider in order to inform and possibly enhance the work that EPs could do to support children with SLCN within the locality, and I was interested to explore them, given the theme highlighted by Bercow that there was great variability in support and a lack of equity.

As a senior psychologist with responsibility for oversight (for the EP team) of Specific Language Impairment (SLI) provision in the LA, this research felt like a natural extension to my role, exploring ways that EPs could work to support children with wider SLCN. Initial discussions with an EP colleague supported this. She indicated that she would have difficulty explaining how she supported children with SLCN. I had also had a conversation with a speech and language therapist (SALT) who had made very clear what she felt would be useful for EPs to do when working to support children with SLCN. These two discussions highlighted the importance to me of understanding others' perceptions when delivering a service.

Another reason for carrying out this project was that, whilst a preliminary review of literature had highlighted an abundance of research on how to support children with SLCN in general, there was little mentioned about the EP role specifically, and less on how partners perceived the role. As a doctoral student, I was particularly interested to read that local evaluations of service delivery with regard to meeting the needs of children with SLCN can provide valuable information and complement university studies (Lindsay, Dockrell, Desforges, Laws, & Peacey, 2010). Furthermore, I noted that this was an area 'ripe for development' and that doctoral training in educational psychology could provide resources for local research. This was an acknowledgement that EPs are in a good position to look at what is happening locally, regarding SLCN support.

From a top-down perspective, the Bercow Report (Bercow, 2008), mentioned EPs, but not how specifically they might work to support children with SLCN. More recently, there have been changes to SEN guidance with the introduction of the Children and Families Act (2014) that highlighted the EP as one of a range of professionals who would support children in the four areas of need (of which communication and interaction form one). Government documentation will be explored more fully in Chapter 2, and the point I would like to make here is that EPs are recognised as a key group of professionals who can support children with a range of needs. However, at times of austerity, as at present, experience suggests that this 'recognition' may be forgotten.

The initiative Every Child Matters (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2003) had highlighted the importance of multi-agency working, and I saw value in linking up with those who I considered to be key partners to help to inform my own practice, and possibly that of the team. Whilst fully acknowledging the need to work in a multi-agency/collaborative way to meet the needs of children, the best way of doing so is not always clear. This research is an attempt. I considered it important to listen to others' views (their hopes and expectations of the role), as I felt that they may highlight possible ways for EPs to work that, in the local context, EPs themselves had not considered. I also felt it was important to gain partners' views, as I wondered about the extent to which their understanding of the EP role impacted on how they 'collaborated'.

At the beginning of the project, traded services had just been introduced in the city (through a service level agreement (SLA)) and I was aware, through my own work,

that this had changed EPs' relationships with schools. When time is limited, experience suggests that schools can move from an early intervention/prevention model to one that is more reactive. By this, I mean those children who are at 'crisis point' and need intervention quickly. This did not sit neatly with the fact that the centralised EPS had recently been moved out into locality teams, where the focus on supporting children and families within local communities was through early intervention, or Bercow's key theme of 'Early identification and intervention are essential' (Bercow, 2008). Given this, I considered it important, through this project, to explore partners' views on what they considered to be the role of the EP in supporting children with SLCN and what they would consider valuable.

1.3 Context of the Research

This project adopted a case study way of thinking, as I was keen to explore the research question within a real situation. It was not intended to follow the stricter form of case study enquiry as described by Yin (2014). (This will be explained further in the introduction to Chapter 4, Methodology). Given the importance of context, therefore, this section will outline how EPs have worked in the city before moving on to describe the LA itself. Support for children with speech, language and communication skills will be described within this.

1.3.1 *Educational psychology service (EPS)*

Over the past five years, there have been major changes both in the way that EPs work across the city and in terms of team structure and 'place' within the council. This has largely been down to the drive towards multi-agency working, as well as austerity measures, which have not appeared to go hand in hand. This project considered the need to assess the impact of such changes on EP practice and to acknowledge that change is 'learning' (Stobie, 2002a).

At the end of 2010, the EP team was moved from its centralised work base and out into each of the five new locality areas, following a restructure of council services. The principal EP (PEP) at the time took up the post of manager of one of the localities, with the idea that each main professional area within the newly formed early intervention and locality service would be represented. In each locality, there was an EP team leader and a maingrade EP (the full-time equivalent of the service at that time was 10.6).

At the time of EPs moving from the centralised work base, the council was beginning to talk about schools paying for services that had previously been free to them, including educational psychology. Traded services began in April 2012, with about 75% of the city's schools choosing to purchase an SLA for the EPS. With this level of 'buy-in' continuing, and the introduction of education health care plans, the EPS found itself overstretched. This was further exacerbated by early retirement and voluntary severance within the EP team, which resulted in the loss of a third of the team's capacity. This was concerning, as constraints on time impacted on the increased 'early intervention' focus that the LA and EPs had hoped for when the locality teams were set up. Statutory work (work that the LA had to provide) and traded service work were given priority, which was at odds with other services in the locality team that provided a free service focused on early intervention.

As a team leader within the locality set up, I was concerned at the feeling of being co-located rather than co-working, though I was of the view that being co-located had helped to move away from 'silo' working, as EPs had become more aware of other support available for children and families within the local area. Although the locality office in which I worked was situated with a Children's Centre, there was no joint working taking place. This was because of the way that funding was organised for EP work and time pressures (by the latter, I mean that EPs could work with Children's Centre colleagues, but this would be in addition to their workload, and as a manager within the service I was aware that some EPs were already finding their workload unmanageable).

Despite the call from government for health and education to work more closely together (e.g. with joint commissioning), health colleagues were not part of the locality team, as such (there was some representation at a weekly panel where support for children and families was discussed). The initiative Every Child Matters (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2003) suggested the need for a skilled and confident workforce, and I do wonder within the context of locality working how this could have been better. This research was an attempt at a move towards this.

With limited team capacity, strategic work also came under pressure. However, as a manager in the EPS, I considered it important to maintain regular meetings with the manager of the SLI team, first arranged when the EPS was centralised, and this helped to keep both services informed of any changes. I was also responsible for

maintaining a strategic overview of language provisions in the city, for the EPS, and was part of a panel of professionals set up to discuss children put forward by SALTs for admission to language provision (although, latterly, I was unfortunately unable to attend due to other work pressures).

One issue raised during the meetings with the SLI manager was the impact of traded services on children involved with the speech and language therapy service. For example, when the EPS was free to schools, if a SALT asked an EP to see a child this could be negotiated with schools easily. Since schools had been asked to pay for services, this had proved more difficult, in some instances, as schools possibly had budgets in mind. Also, the opportunities for delivering training were reduced, as schools sought mainly to use their time for EPs to see individual children.

The other challenge was that schools purchased packages of days of EP time (which varied across schools), and there was the concern that children who might benefit from EP input may not receive it because of financial constraints. Thinking specifically about support for children with speech, language and communication needs, Mroz suggested that this potential loss of expertise will impact on the knowledge that teachers can have about children with SLCN and how their difficulties may impact on their learning (Mroz, 2012). It was further suggested that the loss of EPs could weaken the consistency of provision for children with SLCN, and the expertise that EPs bring to the identification of and support for children with SLCN. This is why I considered it important to explore with partners what was going on within the local context with regard to supporting children with SLCN and consider the EP role within that.

Because money had apparently been devolved to schools and they were buying their own services, as a 'deliverer' of the service I also felt that the relationship had changed. Not only were schools 'partners', but they were the 'customers' of the EPS. This research seemed useful, therefore, in terms of 'selling' the service to schools. In addition, it encouraged refection on how the role seemed more restricted following the introduction of traded services and SLAs and might be expanded. Schools in the city had historically been heavily reliant on the support of outside agencies and, in my view, benefited from encouragement to see beyond the 'individual priorities' (children) that they may have, and to think perhaps more innovatively on how to spend their EP time. I was also mindful of the need to consider alternative

perspectives from psychology when engaging in dialogue about change (Jenson, Malcolm, Phelps, & Stoker, 2002).

As well as not 'fitting' with the early intervention locality team ethos, the traded service model, in my view, did not sit neatly with the original locality organisation (5 localities each with a EP team leader and a maingrade EP), in that buy-in from schools through SLAs was not organised into those proportions (fifths). As a result, EPs worked across localities, yet were 'placed' in terms of budget, monitoring of holidays and sickness and so on in one locality. This, to me, raised questions not only about line management but also about professional identity (were EPs part of an EP team or part of a locality team, or, if both, which took precedence?). As a manager, this felt uncomfortable.

The other change which affected the EPS, in my opinion, was the departure of the PEP in 2011. When the PEP left, the locality manager's job was not passed to an EP but to a colleague from another professional background. This not only meant, in my view, that educational psychology had a reduced voice on the management group (for localities), but also that team members were more dependent on locality managers passing down information about city-wide/locality issues. To add to the 'identity' issue, or perhaps to help it, it was agreed by management that maingrade EPs could be situated together in one of the locality bases in order to ensure professional support, which was felt to have been lacking when EPs were situated within locality teams. EP team leaders retained their place in the locality offices.

The EPS experienced what seemed like a quick succession of 'leaders'. Following the departure of the PEP (who was the third since I had joined the service in 2005), one of the EP team leaders took up the post of lead EP but left in 2013, at which time I took on the role. As lead EP, I was keen to work with colleagues/partners to establish/highlight how EPs could work with them in support of children with a range of SEN, but this seemed ever more difficult with the constantly moving sands within the LA. I was, however, mindful of the need to 'get it right' and be relevant to challenges at the time (Gersch, 2009).

In July 2015, the EP team was reduced to a statutory-only team in the LA. Reasons for this were difficulties with recruitment and retention, alongside austerity measures. The EP team had been decreasing and recruitment attempts had been unsuccessful, mainly because of the shortage of available EPs in the local area and also, I feel,

because of the unstable nature of traded services within the LA. This was explained by senior managers as being in line with the government's drive for schools to have more autonomy and do more for themselves. In terms of EP recruitment, another possible barrier was workforce transformation proposals ('equal pay for equal value') being proposed by the council, which sought to remove EPs from Soulbury pay and conditions of service. The new council pay grades were significantly lower than Soulbury pay grades (though a market supplement was indicated as 'likely'), which made me query even more the 'value' that the LA placed on the contribution that EPs can make. As I write, I am working as an independent psychologist, supporting the same schools that I did as a LA EP, having taken voluntary severance myself.

Changes in policy, procedures and ways of working had not resulted, certainly in my view as an EP, in collaborative working to the extent that was perhaps envisaged when the locality teams were first set up. There had been limited opportunities, certainly within the locality that was the focus for this study, for developing a real, shared understanding of issues and to plan the best ways of working together to meet the needs of children and families. In my opinion, it has not helped, as far as the EP role is concerned, that the 'early intervention' procedures seemed at odds with SEN procedures (by this, I mean Team Around Family and Code of Practice review meetings/meetings that are now part of the education health care plan needs assessment). There had been some attempt at this but, because of the many expectations placed on managers, the difficulty remained unresolved. This potential 'conflict' may also have contributed towards an 'identity' pull for EPs. The suggested opportunity for EPs to reposition themselves and possibly improve their contribution to support children and young people, following the introduction of new Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (Department for Education, 2015), seemed difficult (Fox, 2015).

As lead EP for the EPS, I was very clear of the value of working closely with colleagues from other professional areas. However, it was disappointing that EPs found themselves in the position which afforded little time to work with the team of professionals they were co-located with. To add to the difficulty, perhaps, over the short time that localities had been in existence a number of staff had moved on or been relocated, so I could understand when I heard EPs say that they did not feel part of the locality team.

1.3.2 *Provision for children with SLCN in the local authority*

The 'vision' for the council is 'of a city where people have confidence, aspiration, resilience, independence and the opportunity to maximise their potential'. The plan for the directorate under which I worked (2014–2017) highlighted three themes: 'Health and well-being' (self-care and sustainability), 'Safer stronger communities' (resilience and capacity building), and 'Education, skills and lifelong learning' (school-ready, work-ready, life-ready). Included in the strategic priorities are:

- to ensure the best start in life, with a focus on children from pregnancy to two years;

- to ensure joined-up planning, coordination and delivery of services with a focus on localities;

- to improve education and skills attainment at all stages, with a focus on narrowing the attainment gap between the most disadvantaged and others, and increasing skills for work;

- to broaden the education skills and employment opportunities, to enable individuals to fulfil their potential and aspirations, with a focus on over-16s.

The development of speech, language and communication skills would appear to me to feature heavily in the above priorities, and I would be interested to know whether plans to address SLCN needs specifically are included in the council's strategy.

The SALT service provides both universal and targeted services to children and young people in the city. Support is accessed through an open referral system. Parents/carers can refer, as can other professionals. Schools are required to complete a referral form to access the service.

In terms of specialist educational provision for children with SLI within the city, there are three primary schools and one secondary school which have 'units' attached. The focus is on intervention and there is a two-year limit on time in the primary provision, though this could be extended depending on the needs of the child. Children did not need a statement or education health care plan (EHCP) to be granted a place. Secondary was slightly different, in that young people required a statement/EHCP as this was considered a longer-term placement. One of the primary language provisions was situated in the locality in which this research took place. I was the EP

who provided support to the school hosting the provision, and was aware at the beginning of this research that there appeared to be no real links or sharing of expertise with other schools in the locality. This was another reason why I considered this research to be useful.

Within the locality, the EPS supported two secondary schools, 12 primary schools and one nursery school. An additional secondary school and three primary schools purchased educational psychology support from an independent EP. All schools in the locality were provided with a service through the LA's EPS for work deemed to be statutory (support that the LA must provide).

There were two Children's Centres and six day nurseries in the locality. The number of Children's Centres had been reduced since the beginning of the research project. I was aware that work was going on in the Children's Centres on supporting children with speech, language and communication needs. This was through posters on the walls of the building in which I worked (which had one of the Children's Centres located in it), linked to the 'Hello' campaign. This was the campaign in 2011 that marked a National Year of Communication, following the Bercow Report (2008). There was a different focus for each month of the year, in the Children's Centres. None of the professionals from the Children's Centre within the locality team had highlighted the 'Hello' campaign or shared what was being focused upon, although, as already indicated, finding opportunities to do so had been difficult.

Given this focus in Children's Centres, I wondered what was going on in schools to support children with speech, language and communication needs, and particularly what had been planned as part of the 'Hello' campaign. I had not heard any mention of this in schools during my visits or through information from the LA. This may have been due to the fact that the EPS had been moved, in the restructure, to the area of 'early intervention', a different strand of the council to schools and SEN (special educational needs unit). I did have an awareness that, as a result of being in a different 'strand', EPs were often 'out of the loop' in terms of strategic planning. I had also heard nothing from SALT colleagues specifically about any events being organised in schools.

From the strategy, a draft policy had been produced in 2010 on speaking, listening and communication. I was also aware of guidance from the Office of the Communication Champion to LA and Primary Care Trust commissioners regarding

how they could improve effectiveness and value for money in terms of speech, language and communication services. (Unfortunately, the indicated links to this document, e.g. through the Communication Trust, now lead to a French website, which adds weight to concerns that work conducted previously has lost status). I wondered who was taking the policy on speaking, listening and communication forward in the LA and what was being done across the city in terms of the 'Hello' campaign and the drive to support children with SLCN.

These unanswered questions led to me ask what more EPs could be doing to support local children with SLCN. I also saw a need for structures of support and any strategic work going on within the LA to be more transparent. Without clear planning, I am not sure how professionals can work together effectively to meet the needs of children. This project was regarded as a way of unravelling what seemed like a web of mystery, focused on those partners regarded as 'frontline'.

In order to progress my idea, I was able to meet with one of the senior members in the council at the time who was keen to support research in the area of speech, language and communication, given that this had been highlighted as a priority area within the council. I was invited to one of the partnership meetings in order to gain an overview of what was going on within the city with regard to meeting children's needs in this very important area of development. There were presentations from some of the authors of the draft policy on speaking, listening and communication, as well as one of the schools in the locality and the local college. Information shared included an outline of support for children in the early years, which included 'I CAN Early Talk' (a communication and language programme aimed at the early years workforce in partnership with parents), ECAT (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008b) and CLLD (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008a). It was indicated that a steering group had been set up for all practitioners to discuss how best to support the 'Hello' campaign. As far as I was aware, EPs had not been invited to be part of the steering group.

Regarding support for schools, the importance of 'Quality First' teaching and the Inclusion Development Programme (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008c) were highlighted. There was mention of the city being nominated as a lead authority for speech, language and communication. It was explained that the intention had been to build the capacity of staff in schools in the identification of SLCN and how they could provide guidance and support, but high changeover of

staff had caused difficulties. One of the authors of the draft explained that, due to LA needs (from Early Years Foundation Stage profile data), the early years had been targeted. Eight settings with a range of needs had been selected to champion the Inclusion Development Programme (IDP) in SLCN for early years (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008c) and that a multi-agency team had been set up to work with and support the settings. Planning for this had not been shared with the EP team and I was unaware of any team members who had been made aware of this work going on in their schools/settings. This, again, made me wonder about the value placed on EPs within the authority in this field of work.

The eight settings mentioned all had a lead practitioner and had had training on the IDP SLCN early years. All settings worked together and agreed to report on impact, in terms of CLLD scores and NI72 (this is a national indicator and refers to the achievement of at least 78 points across the Early Years Foundation Stage, with at least six in each of the scales in 'Personal Social and Emotional Development' and 'Communication, Language and Literacy'). In terms of the impact, it was reported that CLLD scores had improved in all eight settings and that the gap had been narrowed. With regard to what could be done better, the following were suggested:

- Ensure that there is a high focus on speaking and listening among the leaders of all settings, across the city.

- Encourage and support settings with good practice to take ownership and share their practice – reference made to the 'Schools White Paper' (Department for Education, 2010).

- Work with universities and colleges to ensure training of practitioners, including an emphasis on communication and language skills.

- Improve transition of information between services. Increased sharing of information, e.g. SALTs and schools.

- Establish a strategic vision for speaking and listening across the city (birth to 19), incorporating all agencies and all documentation.

- Accept that speaking and listening improvement will impact on reading, writing and maths.

- Incorporate links to LA poverty strategy.

When asked what was happening with regard to older children (given the focus on the early years), it was indicated that a date had been arranged to launch 'Hello' to schools.

Five years on from the presentations, and for the purpose of this write up, prior to leaving the council I sought to find out what had happened to the draft policy on speaking, listening and communication and who within the council had responsibility for this area. Information from current service managers and from one of the authors who had been involved in the draft policy suggested that there had been changes in the strategic board with responsibility for this area within the council, as well as changes to staff. However, it was indicated that the draft policy, although never finalised, had been brought to the attention of those responsible for drawing up a new education and skills strategy, which itself was reported to be in draft form. I asked for access to this when it was available, but unfortunately was never able to have sight of it.

With regard to the work that was carried out with the eight settings, it was indicated that none of the special educational needs coordinators (SENCos) who were in place at the time of the presentation that I had attended remained in the same setting (a SENCo is the person in school who takes responsibility for the provision made for children with special educational needs and disabilities). It was, however, reported that one nursery that had been involved in addition to the eight identified previously, continued to do a great deal to support children with SLCN. It was further indicated that there had been some discussions with schools, settings and support teams to see how the sharing of skills in SLCN could be restarted. However, as this work was not regarded as 'statutory', there was the suggestion that it might fall more under the remit of teaching schools in the city (funded to support special educational needs and early years). However, in an effort to ensure support, it was indicated that some of the original IDP SENCos had been contacted and that discussions had taken place on how to disseminate best practice. There was also the hope that I CAN Early Talk could be started up again, although there was a concern that staff who were trained in it might not be available. As a manager of a team within the council, this was a concern. Staff changes, staff reductions, council restructure and austerity measures all appeared as barriers to meeting children's needs. I did wonder how much further on the professionals/the children's workforce were in terms of their understanding of SLCN and the impact that such difficulties could have on other areas of development

and on life chances. I wondered about status of the recommendations from the Bercow Report (2008), seven years on. I had concerns that, with all of the other 'priority' areas in the council, other 'drives', other 'agendas', a focus on support for children with speech, language and communication skills, certainly within schools, might be lost from strategic vision.

The local offer for children with SLCN, based on the council website, includes information from the speech and language therapy service and Afasic (a national charity that supports parents and represents children with SLCN). The local offer for the EPS makes no reference to SLCN support, though the focus of the text was access to the service. There is another site on the council website that describes the EPS, including 'delays in talking and understanding what people say' as examples of types of need that EPs support. Given the suggestion that speech, language and communication skills are fundamental to all learning, I did wonder whether this went far enough.

The local offer on the city's family information service website makes no reference to support for SLCN. It was more about how requests could be made and the criteria for access to services. There was mention of the SALT service and Afasic. The information regarding the EPS was outdated and gave a different description to information on EPS that was available via other sources. I was unaware as to whether there were plans to link up information, ensuring consistency.

It is within the context of changes within the LA and ways of working for EPs described above, coupled with uncertainty as to how the needs of children with SLCN were being planned towards at a local level, that I became interested in what the role of the EP could be, in terms of making a positive contribution, in conjunction with partners, to supporting these children.

1.4 Thesis Structure

This thesis will next outline my position as a researcher before moving on to the literature deemed relevant to this study. Methodology used will next be outlined before presenting the results from the focus groups, EP questionnaires and parental data and then discussing this within the context of the research questions. Implications for practice and methodological issues will also be considered, before drawing final conclusions.

Chapter 2. Researcher's Position

2.1 Introduction

In this research, I take a social constructionist perspective, although arriving at 'my position' has proven to be quite a journey. In keeping with this position, I have drawn upon role theory and solution-oriented theory, both of which have guided this study. In approaching the research, I recognised that consideration of my view of reality was fundamental to the development of my research questions and my approach to data collection and analysis. This will be the focus of this section.

I have already outlined the context of the research in terms of the EPS and the LA. Along with the participants in this study, I consider myself to be part of the 'context', given that this was practitioner-led research. In carrying out this study, I was aware that I was in a good position to explore, make suggestions on changes to practice and challenge the status quo (Costley, Elliott, & Gibbs, 2010), given my position both within the EPS and the locality team. Other benefits were that there was a high degree of trust with colleagues and that I had an appreciation of the complexity of the context (Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2007). I do acknowledge that there are moral and ethical issues associated with practitioner research, and these will be outlined in Chapter 4, Methodology.

Given my position, in this research I considered it important to maintain a reflexive diary to help to monitor my methodological congruence. Willig suggests that reflexivity can be increased by documenting each phase of the process, and it also makes clearer how the research was shaped (Willig, 2008). By maintaining a diary, I was able to record how the project progressed and to make links between personal/emotional aspects and intellectual practice (see Appendix A for diary extracts). Reflexivity will be outlined further in Chapter 4.

Prior to carrying out this research, I thought myself to be a critical realist. This was based on my understanding of the term, alongside discussions with EP colleagues. As pointed out by Willig, however, a researcher's epistemological position is not straightforward and can shift (Willig, 2008).

In starting out on this project, I took the view that there is an 'independent world' but that it cannot be viewed objectively. In holding this view of 'reality', I considered that

partners would each have their own view of how EPs could work to support children with SLCN, based on their personal experiences and knowledge. I thought it important to learn about their 'realities' through this project, something which I felt needed to be respected and acknowledged. If I could achieve a greater understanding of how they perceived the world in terms of EPs, I hoped that this would support collaborative working. I also thought that their realities might have much to offer in terms of how EPs could work to support children with SLCN as they would be looking at the situation from a different perspective to EPs. I valued the concept of what I have come to think of as 'partner voice'.

Acknowledging that philosophical assumptions guide the research, I recognised the need to understand my views on reality better, in order to acknowledge potential impact on the methodology used in the study, including data collection, data analysis and my interpretation of it. I therefore began to explore the area of philosophy, a subject that I knew very little about. I was interested in the various ideas about knowledge, reality, human nature and society, and acknowledged the necessity of identifying the standpoint of the researcher in terms of their ontology and epistemology. Prior to this, I had been sceptical about their relevance to the area of psychology; this conception was based on lack of understanding in this new (to me) terminology.

I became interested in the idea that knowledge is created by the interaction between individuals in society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and that social constructionists, in attempting to make sense of the social world, view knowledge as constructed, as opposed to created. This resulted in further reflection on my understanding of both the nature of reality (ontology) and how we obtain that reality (epistemology). I could relate to Berger and Luckmann's suggestion that we construct reality according to the social groups in which we participate (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). In line with a social constructionist way of thinking, I do consider conventions, morals and meanings to be social products which impact on our relationships and ourselves. I also agree that social processes, particularly language, are central to everyday life and experiences.

2.2 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism looks at how individuals construct subjective meanings to understand their experiences and attempt to make sense of the meaning that they have about the world (Cresswell, 2003). This is what I hoped to do in this study. I was

aware, through experience, that partners would likely have had a variety of different experiences of EPs in their work to support children with SLCN, and this is what I was keen to understand. The range of partners selected for the project would, I felt, provide a broad spectrum of experience, ranging from EPs themselves, through three very different professional partners, to parents. I was interested in the sense that partners made of the EP contribution and, in the spirit of collaborative working, to use those perspectives to inform and enhance EP practice. I was also interested in how partners came to their understanding and incorporated questions regarding past experiences of EPs into the focus group sessions and in questionnaires. Although nothing regarding past experiences was included in the questions posed by this research, I did consider it important to know in order to understand how the partners may have arrived at their 'reality'.

In adopting a social constructionist viewpoint, I was interested in exploring the notion of agency, of partners adding to the construction of the EP role. The whole research project is one of social construction. Given my previous understanding of being a critical realist, I wondered there this fits. This is something I have struggled with. A paper by Zielke has helped here (Zielke, 2006). She critiques work by Ratner (Ratner, 2006). Ratner argues for critical realism against social constructionism, suggesting that a real world exists, informed through different kinds of evidence and that objective knowledge is increasingly known but always incomplete. He suggests that social constructionism denies errors and that beliefs are simply opinions, which can never be wrong as they are not describing something that is real. My own thought here is that reality is in the eye of the beholder. What is 'real' to one person may not be to another, as they may have a different perspective based on their own individual experience, knowledge and ideas.

Ratner described social constructionism as having a social–political basis which can be individual or group, and that people are free to construct the world in any way that they collectively choose. In my study, I was interested to explore how partners constructed their world of support for children with SLCN and how EPs might fit into that world. He goes on to say that social constructionism validates every opinion in every group and that no one can be wrong, that all opinions are laudable and that beliefs are valued as they represent the agency of the group. I can entirely relate to this perspective; in carrying out this study, I valued the opinions and beliefs of partners and sought to encourage their views (Ratner, 2006). Ratner argued that

everyone is a critical realist, not a social constructionist, and that nobody practises social constructionism consistently. He suggests that, on important issues, everyone believes that a real world is knowable, through evidence and reasoning, and commands general agreement. He proposes that social constructionism gives people licence to believe what they want under the claim that it is their interpretive frame (Ratner, 2006).

In responding, Zielke highlights the confusion that can be caused by extreme interpretations of the constructionist position. Whilst indicating respect for critical realism, she suggests that this may critiqued for its presupposition that some knowledge is beyond construction (Zielke, 2006).

I do think that understandings and meanings are developed in coordination with others, and that this fits well with work-based learning such as this project. It is suggested that multidisciplinary approaches to knowledge, which I was keen to explore, are necessary to answer society's questions (Costley et al., 2010). As already indicated, I considered this project to be the first step towards collaborative working regarding support for children with SLCN in the local context. Through my interactions with partners, I hoped to develop their understanding of EPs as well as to seek their perspectives on the role.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggest that an important way of maintaining a person's subjective reality is through conversation. Through this, it is proposed that we continually confirm our picture of reality. In carrying out this research and providing a platform for conversation, I hoped to add to partners' picture of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Gergen (1978) highlighted the importance of language, suggesting that knowledge is never abstract, objective and absolute; rather, it is concrete, situated and linked with human experience; further, that there is no Truth, just local truths (Gergen, 1978).

Social construction of reality is an ongoing, dynamic process in which people act on their interpretations. Social constructs are not given by nature, so they need to be maintained and reaffirmed if they are to persist. In carrying out this study, I wanted to find out about partners' constructs of the EP role, based on their particular understandings, and to use these possibly to inform a wider role in the area of children with SLCN. Hoffman suggested that social constructionism is really a lens about lenses (Hoffman, 1990)

It has been suggested that, whilst researchers may say a lot about their philosophical underpinnings, it is often left unclear how methodologies and method relate to theoretical elements (Crotty, 1998). Crotty explains that forms of method, methodology, epistemology and theoretical perspectives are often thrown into a bag as if they were comparable terms, rather than relating to each other. This is something that has proven to be frustrating during carrying out this research and working out what my epistemology was, and how this impacted on my chosen methods and so on.

Crotty identified with pragmatism (e.g. William James and John Dewey), which generally takes an agnostic view of ontological issues. I can relate to this in that, rather than worrying about the existence of a 'real world' that exists outside of human experience, it seems more productive to focus on a world of actions and consequences in order to consider what difference it makes to act one way rather than another (Crotty, 1998). Crotty's view seems to be that ontological positions do not matter, so long as you have a clear epistemological position, which in his case would be anti-realist. In other words, if all knowledge is subjectively constructed, then the 'true' nature of reality does not matter, because we can never get outside our socially based constructions.

It is suggested that social constructionism, despite being central to social sciences today, has, over time, become more and more opaque (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). Elder-Vass suggested that, in its extreme form, everything is a social construction (Elder-Vass, 2012). He proposed that we are just partly shaped by our social context and suggested that our capacity to reflect and decide is influenced by our knowledge, beliefs and experiences, as well as social structure. He went on to suggest that if something is socially constructed, then it follows that it could be differently constructed and therefore changes can be made to it.

Social constructionism suggests that all knowledge is derived and maintained through social interactions, and that the world as we experience it and the people that we are, are the product of social processes. Language is highlighted as an important means for sedimentation. 'Sedimented' is the metaphor used by Berger and Luckmann (1966) to explain how experiences and knowledge are stored as memory layers, in and between individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), and it is suggested that an important aspect of this is the transference of institutional meaning.

I can relate to the suggestion that knowledge of the meanings of institutions is transferred by 'special typifications' (which I understand as people in role) and controls (e.g. rituals and symbols). Berger and Luckmann, considered pioneers of social constructionism, describe how, in their typifications, individuals create roles for themselves and others. They describe how roles represent institutions and institutions exist and come to life by human enactment in roles. In the case of this research, the institution would be the LA, with the locality a part of this.

Roles are important for the development of self, as they are internalised and together will form a whole self, a subject. Further, by playing roles, the individual participates in the social world and, by internalising the roles, the world becomes subjectively real for the person (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). This idea is interesting to me and is the basis for this study. All partners play their role and their world is real to them. In carrying out this research, I hoped to add to their reality as well as to use their reality to inform EP role.

2.3 Role Theory

The word 'role' has been around since the 1920s, made more prominent through the work of such as George Herbert Mead, Jacob Levy Moreno and Talcott Parsons. George Mead (1863–1931) was an American philosopher, sociologist and psychologist whose most influential ideas were on the emergence of mind and self from the communication process. Mead theorised that a person's understanding of the social world is gained through play and game. He suggested that children take on different roles that they observe in society, and play them out to gain an understanding of the different social roles, for instance to act out being a policeman. Mead made reference to 'actors' and theatre, and suggested that changed conditions can render a social role outdated. This caused me to reflect on the new locality set up and new code of practice, and the possible implications of both on the EP role. Mead supported the concept of a symbolic interactionist role theory, in that actions are understood not by the actions themselves but by the perceptions of them, and the roles that are shaped by these understandings. This idea seemed to fit well with my study.

Role theory suggests that each social role has a set of rights, duties, expectations and behaviours that a person has to fulfil. The model is that people behave in a predictable way and behaviour is context specific. Biddle defines role as behaviors

characteristic of one or more persons in a context (Biddle, 1979) and explains that, in role theory, members of social positions have expectations for their own behaviour and the behaviour of other people (Biddle, 1986). In terms of support for children with SLCN, I was aware that partners working within the local context would have views on how they were 'supporting' and also on the 'behaviour' of other people, that is, EPs. I was also aware that the context in which EPs were working locally had changed, with some partners now considered also as clients, and I was interested in the suggestion that the encounter between a client and provider is important to the overall success of whatever is being marketed (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985). The same authors define role theory as the study of a role and the 'conduct associated with certain socially defined positions' rather than a particular individual. Through this study I hoped to define, or at least begin to define, the role of the EP in their work to support children with SLCN in the local context.

Wikipedia defines role theory as a 'perspective in sociology and in social psychology that considers most of everyday activity to be the acting out of socially defined categories', and gives the examples of mother, manager and teacher. This suggests that everyone brings aspects of all of their 'roles' to a particular situation. My own 'roles' should therefore be acknowledged as some of which were driving this research. As a manager of the EPS and a strategic partner within the LA, given the economic and political climate I was keen to ensure that the role of EPs was as diverse and clear as it could be. I was also an EP working as a partner with schools and parents, a member of a new locality team and team leader within the locality, so a practitioner–researcher, as well as a mother and grandmother. Partners, of course, also brought knowledge/impact of their own individual roles to this project.

These viewpoints are of interest to me, though an alternative view is acknowledged. Dahrendorf suggests that people accept their own roles in society, rather than society imposing them. Ralph Dahrendorf (1929–2009) was a German socialist who thought of society as being held by enforced constraints, with some positions being delegated power and authority over others. I could relate to this perspective in some ways, in that in my experience EPs are quite autonomous in the way that they work and, in this respect, can shape their own role.

Role theory emphasises people as 'social actors' who learn behaviour appropriate to the positions that they hold, and that actors within a service adopt a relatively standard set of behaviours (Solomon et al., 1985). Whilst I was not intending to

consider 'behaviours' as such within in this study, I was interested in exploring whether partners perceived EPs to have a standard set of aspects to their role. Linked to this, I was also interested in the suggestion that satisfaction in a 'product' is determined by 'performance', and that managers require research evidence to help them in the decision as to the level of performance needed to satisfy the consumer (Churchill & Surprenant, 1982). Given the 'traded position' of the EPS within the LA, I thought it useful to consider role within this context.

Congruity is defined as 'the state or fact of agreeing or being consistent with each other or with something else' and 'the quality or fact of being suitable or appropriate for something' (Encarta dictionaries). In thinking about this research, I was interested in the concepts of 'inter-role congruence' and 'intra-role congruence' (Solomon et al., 1985). Inter-role congruence is the degree to which the provider and client share a common definition of service roles. If this concept is applied to this study, it is the degree to which EPs and partners share a definition of their role regarding their work to support children with speech, language and communication. I considered a number of aspects of inter-role congruence useful when thinking about the EP role:

•	The notion of 'relationship marketing' in services is interesting, satisfying customers wants and needs rather than simply 'acquiring' customers, said to be at the forefront of marketing practices (Berry, 1995). With an emphasis on quality, strategies for relationship marketing include customising the relationship to the individual customer. As already suggested, given the traded services position of EPs within the local context, all partners are potential customers.

•	Mutual understanding of what is expected from a role is required for a positive service experience and, as one partner identifies a salient role, the complementary role of the partner is defined at the same time (Solomon et al., 1985). In carrying out this research, I hoped to develop more of a mutual understanding and begin to think, with partners about how EPs may work to support children with SLCN and how this would fit with what they were doing, or could do.

•	The suggestion that the first impression of a service is the pervasive one led me to wonder about the effects of 'culture'. EPs had previously been part of an established centralised service within the LA, it could be argued, with a defined 'culture', and were moved into locality teams as a new way of working. By culture, I mean practices and policies, priorities, attitudes to schools/ children and

parents/guardians, as well as to other professionals and management (Barclay, 1997). I wondered how far the emphasis on multi-agency working/being co-located might result in a culture shift, and I recognised the importance of inter-role congruency in this. Some partners, particularly parents, may be coming across EPs for the first time and I hoped through this project to gain some awareness of partners' perceptions of how EPs could work to support children with SLCN, in order to work towards establishing greater inter-role congruency.

Intra-role congruency refers to the degree to which the service provider's (in this case EP's) perception of his/her role is concordant with the organisation's (in this case it could be the EPS's or LA's) perception. Whilst the focus of this study was more to do with inter-role congruence, I do think that intra-role congruency is useful to consider, as I wonder how much one impacts on the other. It is suggested, for example, that lack of role clarity is a major source of job dissatisfaction and reduced innovativeness, as workers are unsure about the exact role expectations (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964), and this reflected the discussion mentioned previously with one of my EP colleagues, who indicated that she would find difficulty in explaining her role in supporting children with SLCN, if asked. I wondered whether this was because, within my own experience, there was no defined role within the EPS (or the LA) for doing so, and it was left to the individual EP's professional judgement to work in whichever way they considered appropriate. I wondered how important intra-role congruence (EPs being clear about their role in supporting children with SLCN) may be to inter-role congruence (EPs and partners).

The suggestion that consumers have 'cognitive scripts' for encounters with services and that acceptance of a new service script is aided by integrating with the old is interesting (Solomon et al., 1985). Through this study, I wanted to explore partners' scripts of EPs supporting children with SLCN and, through the exploration (the focus groups/parents session involved giving information about how EPs work as well as taking on board their views and ideas), to identify new possibilities for ways of working.

2.4 Solution-oriented Approach

Through this study, I was interested in exploring any potential adjustments to EP practice that may benefit children with SLCN and reflected on the usefulness of adopting a solution-oriented way of thinking to this research. Drawing on work by

O'Hanlon, I used the concepts of problem-free talk, miracle question and scaling with the focus groups (O'Hanlon, 2010).

Solution-oriented approaches come from the discipline of family therapy, and differ from Steve de Shazer's and Insoo Kim Berg's solution-focused brief therapy model, in that they consider the problem as a potentially important part of the change process, whereas solution-focused models believe that change can be built entirely on competence (Rees, 2008).

Initially used in therapy, solution-focused practice is used across a range of disciplines (education, nursing, mental health), anywhere where there is 'interaction'. In solution-oriented approaches, listening to and acknowledging experiences are a major first step (O'Hanlon, 2010). The same author explains:

'Combining the best of Carl Rogers' use of acknowledgement and validation, as well as the directive approaches of Milton Erickson and strategic therapies, Solution-Oriented Therapy considers clients experts on their concerns, problems, goals and responses to therapy'.

In this study, I considered 'partners' as experts in their field, and through this project hoped that they would share concerns and goals regarding how EPs could support children with SLCN from their unique experiences.

O'Hanlon acknowledged that therapists bring their own experiences, beliefs and knowledge to the therapy relationship and subscribed to Berger and Luckmann's view that reality can be shaped by culture, language, background, gender and other ways of knowing (Nuekrug, 2015). The solution-oriented idea builds on social constructionist thinking and incorporates key features of problem-free talk, scaling, miracle question, exception-seeking questions and coping questions.

The first three of these features were drawn upon in the focus group questions. In line with solution-oriented theory, I wondered whether small adjustments to EP practice may have an impact on outcomes of support.

2.5 Summary

This research was carried out from a social constructionist perspective. It draws on role theory and solution-oriented theory in keeping with this. It was hoped that by using this lens to consider the questions posed in this study an insight into the unique

perspectives of partners could be gained. Do EPs have a defined role in the way they can work to support children with SLCN, and how important is inter-role and intra-role congruence?

Chapter 3. Literature Review

This study looks at how an EP, as a multi-agency partner in the area of children with speech, language and communication difficulties, can be understood. In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined the local context to make clear the opportunities and challenges relevant to this research, given its case study way of thinking.

This chapter will outline the main areas of research considered relevant to this study. In planning a literature review of quality I was aware of the necessity to ensure breadth, depth, rigour, consistency, effective analysis and synthesis in order to use the ideas in the literature to justify my approach to the topic of EPs work to support children with SLCN, the selection of my methods and to show that my research was contributing something new (Hart, 1998). I was also aware of the need to adopt a critical approach to reading in order to assess the value of the work (Wallace & Wray, 2011).

The national context relevant to the area of supporting children with speech, language and communication needs will first of all be considered before moving on briefly to describe what is meant by SLCN and the associated challenges faced by children and young people. The role of the EP will next be considered, first in general and then with particular reference to SLCN. The review will outline the importance of working with others in general and with specific reference to SLCN. It will end by considering work-based research.

3.1 National Context

Since this project has spanned what seems like a great deal of economic, political and educational change, it is important to consider the context over time. In this section, I will outline what I consider to be the most relevant documentation when thinking about meeting children's SLCN at a national level.

As indicated in the rationale, the report by John Bercow MP in 2008 was the key document that set out the support needed for children and young people with SLCN aged 0 to 19. The review that led to the report began in 2007, and was the first major review for seven years for people with SLCN, and gathered evidence from a wide range of sources. It was regarded as an independent review into speech and language provision, and was requested by Ed Balls, the then Children, Schools and Families Secretary and Alan Johnson, then Health Secretary of the New Labour

government. The review consisted of a questionnaire which received over 2000 responses, meeting with groups of parents and visits to Children's Centres and nurseries, and primary and secondary schools across England. The report set out 40 recommendations to the government on the steps needed to transform provision for children and young people with SLCN from 0 to19, and included:

- To improve understanding that communication is crucial: the creation of a communication council, appointment of a Communication Champion and commissioning of a National Year of Speech, Language and Communication. Regarding support for families: to have information emphasising the importance of speech, language and communication and to have access to a range of information, advice and support, particularly at key stages and transition points, and for the government to consider funding national, regional and support services for families.

- To ensure that early identification and intervention are recognised as essential: a robust system for early identification of SLCN was suggested, with primary care trusts and LAs working together, and that, when SLCN was identified, appropriate provision should be available to intervene promptly.

- To design a continuum of services around the family: in order to support the workforce to deliver, professionals should undertake pre-qualification training in collaborative and multidisciplinary working and the government should ensure that good-quality training such as that provided through the IDP was available to everyone, to develop their skills in SLCN.

- To promote more and better joint working: all services should work together in support of all children and young people with SLCN, recognising that operating in separate silos produces misunderstandings, causes divisions and could be confusing to parents. Each Children's Trust should appoint an appropriate senior member of its governing board to lead on SLCN in the local area and that this leadership role should include oversight of the drive to improve outcomes.

- To ensure greater consistency and equity for families: a 'postcode' lottery was described in relation to access to speech and language therapy services. It was proposed that there should be a national indicator specifically for SLCN

from 2011 and as much data as possible should be available on the educational attainment of children and young people with SLCN.

References to a senior member on the governing board of the Children's Trust and joint commissioning are interesting in that, as a senior psychologist, I was unaware at the start of this study, and throughout, who were the key people in the LA to drive the SLCN agenda forward.

The report mentioned EPs a number of times, though not specifically how they could use their specific skills to work to support children with SLCN:

- It was suggested that research was required in order to identify children with SLCN, and highlighted inconsistent practices (some areas had clear and detailed guidelines for identifying children, whereas others left it to the clinical judgements of professionals who were involved, such as teachers, SALTs and EPs).

- EPs were highlighted as one of the specialist targeted services that children with SEN may access.

- Variation in how education and speech and language therapy services work together was highlighted (in some areas, there were teams of SALTs, EPs and specialist teachers working across groups of schools, whereas in others there was a culture of separate working).

- In a case study, an EP was working as part of a communication aid steering committee.

The government's response to the report was 'Better Communication: An action plan to improve services for children and young people with SLCN' (Department for Children Schools and Families & Department of Health, 2008). Accepting many of the review's recommendations, the plan contained a range of initiatives to improve services for children and young people with SLCN and to support understanding across the children's workforce in the importance of speech, language and communication. Jean Gross was appointed as communication champion in 2009 to raise awareness of speech, language and communication issues and work with partners to coordinate initiatives and organise a National Year of Speech, language and communication in 2011 (named the 'Hello' campaign).

In order to pull together policy, practice and research, the 'Better Communication' programme was commissioned as part of the action plan. This was a programme of research to enhance the evidence base and inform delivery of better outcomes for children and young people. Notable in the reports that formed part of the programme was the rider that the reports were commissioned before the Coalition government took up office in May 2010 and, as a result, might not reflect current government policy, making reference to the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) rather than the Department for Education (DfE). Furthermore, views expressed in the report were indicated to be the authors', not necessarily reflective of the Department for Education.

Jean Gross, Communication Champion (with a background in educational psychology), was in office for two years. In her final report (Gross, 2011), she indicated that there was a great deal of work going on across the country to promote the centrality of good communication skills to children's learning, well-being and life chances. As a result, it was suggested that awareness had increased, although 82% of parents believed that more information on how children develop speech, language and communication would be helpful.

The report welcomed the government's proposals for a single plan in order to bring together health education and social care provision for children with the most severe special educational needs and disabilities, but indicated less confidence in planning for children whose needs were less severe, because of significant cuts to frontline SALT services and specialist advisory teachers. Concern was also highlighted about the provision that might be available to children with SLCN if assessed for an EHCP or if their needs were identified early, as a result of a two-year progress check. She added that services for children with SLCN came from a low base and that further reduction would neither be fair nor cost-effective, in the longer term. In a report by the BBC in January 2102, there was a quote from Jean Gross indicating that she had personally seen cuts of over 15% in 10 services that she had visited (more cuts due in April) and that the cuts coincided with a rising incidence of SLCN, and a 58% growth over the previous five years in numbers of school-age children with SLCN as their primary special need (BBC, 2012).

EPs were included in Jean Gross' report in examples of practice across the country. There was mention of an LA and a Primary Care Trust working closely together to commission services where EPs were part of an early intervention team, alongside

SALTs and specialist teachers. In another area, an EP had dedicated time for SLCN, and in another EPs had been reduced by 25%.

Despite a new government being in power (the budget had already been arranged), 2011 saw the year of 'Hello', the National Year of Communication, intended to increase understanding of the importance of developing the speech, language and communication skills of children and young people. Run by the Communication Trust, a coalition of voluntary and not-for-profit organisations with expertise in speech, language and communication (including I CAN and Afasic) working in partnership with Jean Gross, monthly themes were planned from January to December 2011. There was a 'Hello' e-communication toolkit that provided information on 'Hello', as well as access to information via Twitter, Facebook and a blog. A range of resources was also produced to support the campaign (e.g. *Don't Get Me Wrong* and *SLI Handbook*).

Following the final report from Jean Gross, the Communication Trust indicated a five-year strategy which would focus on supporting primary and secondary schools regarding SLCN (Communication Trust, 2012). The Communication Trust continues to produce regular newsletters. In addition, a number of publications to support schools in meeting the needs of children and young people with speech, language and communication skills have been made available, for instance *Short Guide for Secondary Schools*.

Before moving onto relevant guidance from the Coalition government, it is useful to reflect on the support that was provided through the National Strategies (Department of Children, Schools and Families). The programmes consisted of resources and services that supported improvements in the quality of teaching and learning in schools, colleges and early year's settings, with the aim of raising standards of attainment and improve life chances. Of note, in relation to supporting children and young people with SLCN, were:

- Every Child a Talker (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008b): with a focus on early language development for children from birth to four, working through early years settings in consultation with other agencies e.g. SALT. As a result, it is suggested that expertise was significantly enhanced in LAs and settings (Department for Education, 2011b). My own experience,

working in an LA, is that much of this 'expertise' may have been lost through austerity measures and people moving on.

- Communication, Language and Literacy Development (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008a): with a focus on the development of systematic synthetic phonics following recommendations in the Rose Review (Rose, 2009), with the majority of settings using the Letters and Sounds programme. As a result, it is suggested that expectations of what a five-year-old can achieve have been significantly raised (Department for Education, 2011b).

- Inclusion Development Programme 'Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs' (SLCN) (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008c), which, it is suggested, improved the confidence and skills of teachers (Department for Education, 2011b). Produced in booklet, CD/DVD format, as well as e-learning.

The Coalition government (the government at the time of carrying out this research) continued to support the development of speech, language and communication skills through a number of initiatives. In December 2011, there was a press release from the Communication Trust that speech and language were to become part of the National Curriculum in 2014, detailed in a report which was part of the National Curriculum review (Department for Education, 2011a). The 'Importance of Teaching' (Department for Education, 2010) had already laid out the government's plans for 'whole system reform in England'. Although SLCN was not mentioned as such, synthetic phonics was (as the best method for teaching reading; support would be available in every school). The National Curriculum report (Department for Education, 2011a) made recommendations for embedding SLCN across all subjects, not just English, from 2014. It also referred to a resource developed by the Communication Trust and Pearson Assessment, 'Universally Speaking', a set of three booklets that outlined the ages and stages of children's communication from birth to 18 years.

A press release from the Communication Trust at the time of the report described the inclusion of communication across the curriculum as a big step forward and that it had followed news that communication was being included in the Ofsted framework. (Communication Trust, 2011a). The body of evidence connecting oral development, cognitive development and educational attainment was also highlighted, as was the

view that oracy, although particular to English in the National Curriculum, should be promoted more widely, as integral to all subjects. Changes in the curriculum and assessment continued, with the introduction of a phonics check for children in Year 1 and the scrapping of National Curriculum levels to 'numbers', where 100 is average. The new English Curriculum for KS1 and KS2 has spoken language threaded through it, with teachers being responsible for explicitly teaching spoken language skills.

The new English programmes of study for Key Stages 1 and 2 include, as statutory requirements, that pupils should be taught to:

- ask relevant questions to extend their understanding and knowledge

- use relevant strategies to build their vocabulary

- articulate and justify answers, arguments and opinions

- give well-structured descriptions, explanations and narratives for different purposes

- use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, hypothesising, imagining and exploring ideas

- speak audibly and fluently with an increasing command of Standard English

- participate in discussions, presentations, performances, role play, improvisations and debates. (Department for Education, 2013)

For children with SLCN, the new National Curriculum would appear to represent some significant challenges and, as a professional who supports children with barriers to learning, I do have concerns about the pressure that this may place on children to achieve, as well as on teachers in supporting them to achieve and reporting on the results that their management may be keen for them to show.

In addition to this, there have also been changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework (Department for Education, 2014a), which covers children from 0 to 5 years and is mandatory for all Ofsted-registered early years providers, including childminders, preschools, nurseries and school reception classes. The framework had previously been updated in 2012 (Department for Education, 2012) from the original of 2008 (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008d), to

reflect the recommendations of Dame Claire Tickell's review (Tickell, 2011). This had looked at the impact of the EYFS on children's outcomes and on those working in the early years. In the updated version, no changes had been made to the areas of learning and development, including the early learning goals. The framework describes seven areas of learning that should shape the curriculum; 'Communication and language' is one of three highlighted as 'prime', through which children will build their curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, as well as form relationships and 'thrive'.

The government also targeted early years though the Early Language Development Programme, a three-year DfE-funded programme led by I CAN, focusing on the development of speech, language and communication skills and delivered through Children's Centres using a cascade model. In a press release dated November 2011, the director of the Communication Trust indicated that the programme would begin to address some of the issues highlighted in the reviews carried out by Graham Allen MP (Allen, 2011) and Frank Field MP (Field, 2010) in supporting outcomes for children with SEN. Given the suggestion that early language is one of the biggest predictors of future earnings and that more than half of children in some areas arrive at school with significant language delay, it was suggested that investment would help to address 'this growing public health issue' (Communication Trust, 2011b).

In 2011, the government outlined its proposals for another overhaul, this time of the SEN system (Department for Education, 2011c). Several references were made to SLCN, including that the cooperation between health and education was often not adequate, resulting in children not receiving the support that they need. A need for joined-up commissioning was called for, as was training to enable to children's workforce to identify SEN and SLCN.

In 2014, the Children and Families Act set in law changes to the special educational needs system, replacing statements of special educational needs with an EHCP. A new code of practice for children with special educational needs and disabilities was introduced (Department for Education, 2014b) and subsequently revised (Department for Education, 2015). The new system for categorising needs included, as one of four, 'Communication and Interaction'. EPs are mentioned a number of times in the code of practice in relation to specialist support, and providing psychological advice, early identification and training. The latter suggestion refers to EPs providing training on mental health issues, and it names SALTs as professionals who can provide training in SLCN. This suggests to me a narrow view of EPs and

possibly neglects the possible wider issues of SLCN and the fact that SLCN can masquerade as behaviour, for example. The youth justice system is an area that has highlighted the role that SLCN can play in life choices, with 35% of offenders being reported as having only basic-level speaking and listening skills (Centre for Social Justice, 2013).

Overarching all of the above is the Children Act (2004). Set up to amend the Children Act 1989, following the Victoria Climbie inquiry, the act requires professionals in all children's services to work towards structural mechanisms to support collaboration between agencies. Professional groups were required to examine the functions of their role boundaries to make sure that good-quality services were provided for children and young people. My concern, as will be outlined below, is that the workforce is continually being reviewed and restructured, making it very difficult for professionals to set up structures for collaboration. I was keen to explore, through this research, the role boundaries that partners considered EPs to have when working to support children with SLCN.

3.2 What are Speech, Language and Communication Needs?

The Bercow Report uses the term 'speech, language and communication needs' (SLCN) to encompass a wide range of difficulties, relating to all aspects of communication in children and young people. The report indicates that this can include 'difficulties with fluency, forming sounds and words, formulating sentences, understanding what others say, and using language socially' (Bercow, 2008).

The Bercow Report indicated that approximately half of children and young people in some socio-economically disadvantaged populations have speech and language skills that are significantly lower than those of other children of the same age. It was suggested that access to early years provision that is specifically designed to meet their language learning needs was required and that specific targeted intervention to support their development may be needed. The report suggested that around 7% of five-year-olds entering school in England had significant difficulties with speech and/or language, with around 1% entering school with severe and complex SLCN. SLCN may be a child's primary need, with no obvious cause, or be associated with other difficulties. However, the report itself indicated variations in approaches and provision for children with SLCN and 'considerable differences between the approach to criteria and definitions of SLCN', highlighted through case studies. It is therefore

possible that the term SLCN may not be useful, given that it represents such a wide area of need and can be understood differently. In terms of this research, I wondered whether partners involved may interpret the term differently.

Reilly et al. (2014) pointed out that the term SLCN is widely used in education, and is a broader term than language impairment (SLI), as it incorporates a wide range of problems that have different causes and intervention needs, such as stuttering and voice disorders, and secondary problems associated with conditions such as autism, cerebral palsy and hearing loss (Reilly, Bishop, & Tomblin, 2014).

With regard to the SLI label (commonly used to describe children with language impairment whose cognitive skills are within 'normal limits'), Reilly et al. suggest that there is limited evidence as to whether this term has provided any real benefits for children (Reilly, Tomblin et al., 2014) and that the term may be disadvantageous to some because of the criteria stipulated for them to access speech and language therapy services. Removal of the word 'specific' is recommended, along with setting up an international panel to agree a definition and set of criteria for language impairment.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists has also highlighted concerns over 'inconsistent and unclear terminology' (RCSLT, 2014), as has Bishop. She reported that a survey of labels in current use had revealed 132 different terms ('specific language impairment' was the most commonly used), and suggested that many were too general to be useful (Bishop, 2014). Bishop described the 'mayhem in diagnostic labels' as being confusing, impeding access to appropriate services. She pointed out that, in areas other than language, there were fairly consistent diagnostic criteria, but that there is no agreed label for children with unexplained language problems.

Concerns around speech, language and communication needs as a category on the school census have also been raised, with the suggestion that it should be reviewed (Lindsay, Dockrell, Law, & Roulstone, 2012). It is suggested that commissioning of services between health and education should ensure that a continuum of services collaborates effectively, designed around the needs of the family, as well as consider how research can further develop practice.

Given the suggestion that 'speech, language and communication are crucial to every child's ability to access and get the most out of education and life' and that children

with SLCN can be the most vulnerable children, needing effective support in order to reach their potential (Department for Children Schools and Families & Department of Health, 2008), it would seem sensible to work towards a consensus. Communication between partners in this respect is called for (Reilly, Bishop et al., 2014).

There have been a number of papers written on roles and responsibilities in meeting the needs of children with SLCN, and the importance of working with others, and this will be addressed in sections that follow. Prior to thinking about roles, it is perhaps important to consider, first of all, the difficulties and poor outcomes that can be associated with SLCN, and these will be outlined next.

3.3 Difficulties and Poor Outcomes Associated with SLCN

The Bercow Report (2008) indicated that all children and young people with SLCN are 'at risk', with difficulties commonly related to reading and writing and accessing the curriculum, poor behaviour and difficulty socialising with their peers. Difficulties in emotional and psychological well-being (Botting, 2006), employment prospects (All Parliamentary Group on Speech and Language Difficulties, 2013), mental health (Clegg, Hollis, & Rutter, 1999) and the risk of offending (Davies et al., 2004) have also been highlighted.

It has been suggested that the impact of SLCN is strongest in literacy and numeracy (Stothard, Snowling, Bishop, Chipchase, & Kaplan, 1998), with those children who experience persistent difficulties achieving lower academically (Aram, Ekelman, & Nation, 1984). In looking at the educational attainments of school leavers with a preschool history of speech and language impairments, it was found that GCSE grades for children whose language impairments had resolved by the age of five and a half was still below that of age-matched controls but was significantly higher than those with persistent difficulties (Snowling, Adams, Bishop, & Stothard, 2001).

As well as 'persistence' of difficulty, another key factor in how well children can achieve academically is the level of support provided. Studies have found that those with little support achieve lower exam pass rates (Rutter, Mawhood, Howlin 1992), but what form this support should take or who should provide it, and to what extent is unclear. Experience suggests that schools would take a lead on this and involve other professionals as appropriate but, given that language impairments can be 'hidden' (Nation, Clarke, Marshall, & Durand, 2004), it can be supposed that children in need of help may be missed. Nation, Clarke, Marshall and Durand (2004)

proposed that serious reading and language impairments are not always obvious in children with good phonological ability, who appear to read well, superficially. Working as an EP, I can relate to this. Children with a strong visual memory, for example, may be able to recognise and read a high proportion of words on sight, yet fail to understand what they are reading and struggle to decode less-familiar words, based on their limited phonic knowledge.

As phonological processing is said to be strongly linked with reading and spelling ability, the literature suggests that children with SLCN will be at an increased risk of having phonological difficulties and therefore literacy. Within the SLCN 'umbrella', however, there will be some variation in the severity of impact. In studies that have considered phonological difficulties in different groups of language-impaired children ('speech', 'language' and 'speech and language'), though all are considered to be 'at risk', those with speech and language difficulties appear to be most affected (Leitao, Hogben, & Fletcher, 1997).

In terms of children with speech impairment, experience suggests that the pattern and severity of difficulty can have an impact on how much a child is affected. Although children can overcome such difficulties, it is said that any fault in the speech processing system will affect a child's spoken language development as well as literacy, as the child will be unable to develop the phonological awareness and skills needed to move from the spoken to the written word (Stackhouse, 2000).

As an EP, I am aware that children will draw upon a range of strategies when reading and do not depend entirely on their phonological skills. In their study, which looked at the effects of phonological difficulties on reading, Webster and Plante (1992) found no significant differences between phonically 'normal' children and children with persistent phonological impairment for word recognition. A focus on this method of reading might therefore be the way forward for children with SLCN in terms of developing their reading skills, though experience suggests that without good phonological skills the progress can be limited.

Interestingly, Stackhouse found that developmental signs of literacy problems changed over time and that performance at 4:06 was not predictive of reading and spelling performance at age 6:06. This perhaps reflects the pattern of reading development as described by Snowling (2000), which supports understanding of both the complexities of reading and how children with SLCN may be affected. Snowling

pointed out that reading is considered to be the interaction between phonological and semantic processes, and as learning to read involves understanding how letter strings (orthography) and speech sounds (phonology) link together, children with phonological difficulties have problems making this connection. She goes on to say that later in development, word meanings come into play and, as these are vital for reading fluency and reading irregular words, children with semantic impairments have problems then. In addition, as a support for reading , children also use context to support semantic knowledge, but that children with grammatical or pragmatic difficulties benefit less from contextual supports and as a consequence have poor comprehension of text.

Snowling (2000) suggests that a complexity of factors impact on reading and that the home environment and the teaching that the child has received need to be considered. Early intervention that targets phonological awareness and follows highly structured reading programmes is suggested, alongside considering the child's motivation and regular reading practice (vital for sight vocabulary). Advice such as this could be provided by an EP and, in my experience, often is but, reflecting on the apparently complex link between literacy problems and speech, language and communication difficulties, I do wonder if enough consideration is given to this.

One possible reason why not enough consideration may be given to the literacy– SLCN link could be the wide range of needs covered by the SLCN 'umbrella'. In addition, experience suggests that each different type of difficulty will have varying levels of need within it. Studies of literacy outcomes associated with speech sound disorders, for example, have highlighted conflicting findings of outcomes, and suggested that this may be due to the heterogeneity within this type of difficulty (Riatano, Pennington, Tunick, & Broada, 2004).

Mroz (2014) found that skills in speech, language and communication are not routinely considered for pupils with literacy difficulties, and that no explicit link is made between literacy development, and speech, language and communication skills. It is suggested that a focus on phonic knowledge fails to acknowledge the wider language skills that are required for literacy development.

In terms of impact on progress in subjects other than literacy, studies have found that children with language difficulties perform poorly in relation to national expectations across all tests at Key Stage 2 (Conti-Ramsden, Knox, Botting, & Simkin, 2003). This

is not surprising, as experience suggests that SLCN can pose problems in terms of accessing the wide range of curriculum subjects on offer in schools. Some children, for example, require individual instructions and pre-teaching of subject-specific vocabulary to support their development. Studies support this. Difficulties with vocabulary and concepts, for example, have been shown to impact on mathematical ability (Snowling, Adams, Bishop, & Stothard, 2001).

As children move on from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3, the increasing language demands can be problematic (Dockrell, Lindsay, Palikara, & Cullen, 2007). Transition from primary school into secondary school has therefore been highlighted as a crucial time for assessment and evaluation of needs and required levels of support (Conti-Ramsden, Durkin, Simkin, & Knox, 2009). In considering this, EPs are often asked to carry out work with pupils prior to transition, thus taking a developmental history from parents seems ever more important. This might be considered good practice, but I wonder how much this might be an integral part of the assessment process for all EPs.

Longitudinal studies are useful in highlighting possible outcomes and the importance of ensuring appropriate support. Studies have shown, for example, that when followed up at age 15 to 16, children with a preschool history of speech and language impairment who had language difficulties at age 5:6 ('persistent') had significant impairments in all aspects of spoken and written language in secondary school, and that children fell further and further behind their peers in vocabulary growth over time (Stothard, Snowling, Bishop, Chipchase, & Kaplan, 1998). It has been suggested that three-quarters of children with a history of speech and language difficulties had access to some sort of special education in secondary school and that, although attainment varied, it was significantly lower than typically developing peers (Durkin, Simkin, Knox, & Conti-Ramsden 2009).

When young people with a history of SLCN leave school, it is suggested that outcomes and educational/training pathways can also be affected. Adolescents with a background of speech and language problems, for example, were found to be more likely to follow vocational and training courses than A levels, with 50% of young people remaining in full-time education post-16, compared to 75% of those developing typically (Snowling, Adams, Bishop, & Stothard, 2001). Of note, however, is the indication that in the 2000s young people appear to have more opportunities post-16 than in the 1990s (Durkin, Simkin, Knox, & Conti-Ramsden, 2009).

Early intervention, therefore, would appear to be crucial, with the suggestion that competence in oral language is a crucial protective factor in ensuring academic success, positive self-esteem and improved life chances (Snow & Powell, 2004). The need to take some care has been highlighted, with the suggestion that the prediction of long-term outcomes for children with language delay at age 2 is difficult, and that there may be ethical implications that need to be considered (Paul, 2000). Paul outlines parent training as the intervention of choice alongside monitoring of progress ('watch and see'), for children with language delays and no other risk factors (from stable, relatively advantaged families). She also points out that within the context of multiple intelligences (Gardner, 2011), by concentrating on development of language ability, attention could be shifted from other areas of development, which could result in better school performance in the future. In reflecting on the role that EPs play in school, children's areas of strength are often highlighted alongside areas of need, the importance of which is highlighted within this context.

As well as impacting on educational attainments, poor language skills have been linked to social cognition (Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 2008). With studies suggesting that children with SLCN are less well accepted than their peers (Fujuki, Brinton, Hart, & Fitzgerald, 1999), are at increased risk of loneliness (Asher and Gazelle, 1999) and at higher risk of being bullied (Knox & Conti-Ramsden, 2003), this is another area of development which requires support, and one in which experience suggests EPs might typically be involved, though not necessarily with a language focus. Research studies carried out into access rituals are interesting (Corsaro, 1979; Craig, & Washington, 1993) and highlight the difficulties that children with SLCN can have in gaining access to other children's interactions. With the assertion that children with SLCN are delayed in their ability to understand the impact of displaying emotions on relationships relative to their peers (Brinton, Spackman, Fujuki, & Ricks, 2007), and that friends provide social and cognitive scaffolding for one another (Hartup, 1996), some of the far-reaching effects of SLCN can be understood.

In turn, social difficulties have been found to lead to low self-esteem in language-related areas; social acceptance, behavioural competence and academic (Jerome, Fujuki, Brinton, & James, 2002), but that, despite experiencing shyness, children with SLCN want to interact socially (Wadman, Durkin, & Conti-Ramsden, 2008). Age may play a part in this; Lindsay and Dockrell (2000) found that behavioural, but not self-esteem, difficulties are common in children aged 7 to 8 with specific speech and

language difficulties. Jerome et al.'s findings were consistent with this, in that no differences in self-perception was found between a group of younger children, whilst in the older group children perceived themselves more negatively in terms of scholastic competence, social acceptance and behavioural conduct (Jerome, Fujuki, Brinton, & James, 2002). The notion of early intervention would appear to be an important consideration in this respect.

A link which has been well documented is that of SLCN and social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Whilst it has been suggested that it is important to distinguish between the different types of SLCN and also between different domains of behavioural difficulties (so, not straightforward), the research suggests that pupils with ASD and SLCN are more likely to have significant peer problems and impaired prosocial behaviour than their peers (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2012). Careful analysis to consider provision and how to meet individuals' needs is called for.

Some studies suggest that children with an early diagnosis of language/communication difficulties are more likely to develop associated behavioural difficulties than their peers (Davison & Howlin, 1997), but others suggest that if language difficulties have been resolved by the age of five and a half, the children have good outcomes (Snowling, Bishop, Stothard, Chipchase, & Kaplan, 2006).

Botting and Conti-Ramsden (2000) pointed out that children with the most complex expressive and receptive language difficulties were most likely to score above the clinical threshold in terms of behaviour and that their social difficulties were more marked than those of children with mainly expressive difficulties.

In terms of outcomes into adulthood, Clegg et al. found that 40% of a group of adults with a history of language disorder continued living in the family home and struggled with independent living (Clegg, Hollis, & Rutter, 1999). However, whilst some suggest that mild to moderate difficulties may not have significant long-term effects on mental health (Beitchman, Browlie, & Bao, 2014), others highlight variation and the need for consideration on a case-by-case basis (Whitehouse, Watt, Line, & Bishop, 2009).

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists suggests that young people with SLCN are over-represented in the justice pathway, with reports of 65% of offenders having a language difficulty (Gregory & Bryan, 2011). It is suggested that poor communication skills make it difficult for young people to engage with court

processes and struggle to understand the requirements of conditions. Also highlighted as a concern are verbally mediated interventions such as restorative justice, particularly as around 35% of offenders are indicated to have speaking and listening skills at a basic level (Davies et al., 2004). Worryingly, in a study which looked at the prevalence of SLCN on children attending a youth offending service, approximately 90% of the sample displayed some form of language difficulty and staff had little understanding of difficulties presented by the children on their caseload (Games, Curran, & Porter, 2012 (EPIP)). The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists recommends having intermediaries for young people with SLCN yet, given the indication that language problems can go undetected (Cohen, 2005), this may be difficult.

3.4 Role of Educational Psychologists

In 2010, the Association of Educational Psychologists produced a paper (Association of Educational Psychologists, 2010) which outlined areas of work such as early years identification and intervention, improving well-being, development and learning for all children, narrowing the gap, working with parents and ensuring the promotion of child views. It suggested that EPs were well positioned to identify trends across localities and implement strategies to address local need effectively. The often-narrow view of the EP role was highlighted (statutory work). EPs were described as a highly skilled part of the children's workforce, trained in scientific methods with a thorough understanding of child development. This paper, I thought, was useful as it summarised EPs' main areas of work in an accessible way to demonstrate the contribution that they can make to the delivery of local services. As lead EP for a LA, though not when this was produced in 2010, I do wonder who this was shared with and if it had an impact locally, as my experience has been one of services being shuffled (to traded/co-located) and reduced, which has made a wider role difficult.

An earlier paper (Farrell et al., 2006), focused on the views of stakeholders as to the distinctive role that EPs could make in the then newly established Children's Services. Key findings were reported as: a contribution to the promotion of the five ECM outcomes, that statutory work had prevented EPs from expanding their work into other areas (where the impact of their psychological skills and knowledge could be maximised), that EPs could work effectively in multi-agency contexts, and that their academic background and training enabled a distinctive contribution.

Another key finding from 'a significant proportion of stakeholders' was that an alternative provider might have been able to carry out some of the work that an EP did. This latter point is interesting and not surprising at all, as in my experience EPs are frequently asked to carry out work which might be termed 'low level'. It does concern me that LAs do not, in general, fully utilise the skills and knowledge that an EP may have. Although now outdated, this paper offered some recommendations for EP services, including providing greater clarity to the contribution that EPs can make, EPs being clear about the psychological contribution that they can make to a piece of work and EPs working with other agencies to see how they can enhance and develop effective multi-agency working.

Interestingly, the last point in this paper referred to EPs becoming more community based, with a reduced emphasis on school work. Unfortunately, with traded services being introduced in recent years and thinking about the LA in which I work, there remains a very heavy emphasis on delivering school-based work, which takes away capacity for early intervention/community-based opportunities. This is frustrating, as there seem to be many missed opportunities to work with children and families because of funding constraints. One of the reasons for the current study was to raise the profile of EPs within the locality, working on a common theme as, in some ways, I feel that EPs have been lost into the world of traded services and statutory work and contribution to locality services is in fact limited because of funding constraints. This seems to go against what Farrell et al. (2006) considered to be the future for EPs as a result of ECM.

Fallon et al. (2010) suggest that the development of the social and political context of public services presents a challenge to EPS delivery and professional identity (Fallon, Woods, & Rooney, 2010). Relating to reviews of the role of EPs, a consistent theme of reconstruction, reformulation and refocusing is suggested. I can relate to this, as the landscape seems to be changing all the time. I was interested to read a paper (Love, 2009) which outlined the role of EPs from a historical perspective, from psychometricians to gatekeepers and then on to a more supportive role for children teachers and parents. This highlights the change in role across the years and it continues at the present time.

In a paper intended to warn that the future of educational psychology was not automatically assured (Gersch, 2009), it was suggested that there were challenges to be faced and it was the way EPs met those challenges that would determine the

outcomes. Again, I can relate to this. In my current working context, I feel that a raised EP profile is needed to highlight the potential contribution that EPs can make to meeting the needs of children and their families. The paper concludes by suggesting that the environment in which EPs are operating is one of rapid change and that EPs should go with the flow that is driving the changes.

Whilst I agree that EPs have the ability to respond flexibly to the context (Fallon et al., 2010) and, within this, to be aware of their own strengths and difficulties to deploy themselves to the best effect (Stobie, 2002b), experience suggests that within a new multidisciplinary team, roles are not as clear as they could be . In carrying out this study, in some ways I am looking for clarity on their role and ways that EPs can work with others to the benefit of children. I find it frustrating when reading papers from 18 years ago at the time of writing (Thomson, 1996) as, in some ways EPs are in the same position, trying to redefine the role.

Ashton and Roberts (2006) looked at what was valuable about the EP role from the perspective of EPs and SENCos. A gap in perception between the two groups was noted and it was suggested that the challenge was to make the EPs' contribution clear not only to schools, families and other professionals, but also to EPs themselves. There was some question from EPs about how their contribution was unique. A decrease in role clarity, it was said, was a consequence of role expansion as a result of changes in delivery. SENCos involved in this study were from primary schools and it was suggested that it would be helpful to elicit perceptions of the EP role from other school types in order to help EPs to tailor their services accordingly (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). Thinking about my research, I was interested in gaining similar perceptions but around meeting the needs of children with SLCN with a wider range of partners.

Looking from the perspective of parents, it has been suggested that the EP's contribution is valued highly and considered to result in improved outcomes for their children (Squires et al., 2007). Thinking specifically about how this might relate to my research, 'language disorder' was mentioned as one of a range of conditions that EPs may be called upon to assess. This was in relation to the Every Child Matters agenda and carried out as part of the DfES funded review into the role of EPs (Farrell et al., 2006). Proactive work by EPs that was highlighted by parents included parent workshops, explaining procedures and provision for SEN, and running training courses. This paper was useful in outlining what parents found useful and what their

experiences were, but did not really provide any clear suggestions as to how services might be improved. It did, however, suggest that EPs could support and empower parents and help them to make a contribution that is valued. Is it really that simple, though? Experience suggests that parents can feel disempowered when liaising with professionals about their child, and how support in that respect could be successful may be down to their relationship with the EP.

Cameron (2006) proposed a number of distinctive dimensions that EPs bring, including using research evidence and theory in psychology to recommend evidence-based strategies for change/allow clients to see opportunities for change (Cameron, 2006). Through this study, I wanted to open up the world of EPs to partners and let them know that any contribution that they could make would be valuable. There was the suggestion that an increase in specialisation could be linked to perceptions of EP effectiveness and their distinctive contribution within multidisciplinary teams, and that non-EP professionals could identify core psychological functions in work where an EP had made a significant contribution to the outcomes of children and young people (Farrell et al., 2006). For this reason, I felt it useful to engage in discussions around EPs and their work to support children with SLCN and, in doing so, raise the EP profile in this area of work.

I was interested in partners' experiences of EPs and their thoughts on how they felt that EPs might usefully work in the future, for the purpose of this study with children with SLCN. It seems that EPs have an ever-developing role in these times of political and educational change and, in a way, I was searching for a professional identity in the area of SLCN with partner support.

It is perhaps useful to end this section with reference to the guidelines for professional practice as laid out by the British Psychological Society (British Psychological Society, 2008) and standards of proficiency for EPs by the Health Care Professions Council (Health and Care Professions Council, 2012). The ability to support the learning of others in the application of psychological skills, knowledge, practices and procedures is highlighted, as well as the need to work in partnership with others, commit to joint working, build and sustain professional relationships and respect the professional standing and views of colleagues. The next section will consider the importance of working with others and issues around collaborative working.

3.5 Importance of Working with Others

Collaborative working has been a key part of government policy to support the well-being of children for a number of years (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2003), with a duty being placed on local bodies to work together through local partnership arrangements. Despite multi-agency working now being central to policy and practice in Children's Services, there is the suggestion that it remains problematic (Todd, 2007).

There is much written on the importance of collaboration among different agencies in order to meet the needs of children with SLCN and impact on outcomes (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2004). The concept of collaboration is a difficult one, however, as this can mean different things to different people. In addition, there are different models of working together. Transdisciplinary (using the concept of team around the child), as opposed to multidisciplinary, is considered best for collaborative working (Gascoigne, 2006). Jones and Cornish suggest that it is not what you know but who you know (Jones & Cornish, 2012), and looked at the importance of networks, which when restricted can result in disadvantages such as restricted knowledge about what is going on in their organisations and difficulty forming alliances. In carrying out this research, I wanted to strengthen networks.

In accepting that collaboration is the orientation towards common and shared values (Costley et al., 2010), I wondered how professionals could develop more of a shared understanding to meet children's needs and, as professionals working within a multi-agency team, I wondered whether EPs could learn from partners in terms of their own practice. Experience suggests that trust is an important aspect of multi-agency working and this is supported by Hardy et al. (Hardy, Hudson, & Waddington, 2003). I consider this idea to be at the heart of this study. In carrying it out, I am conveying my trust in participants to comment on my role and that of other EPs. In turn, I am trusting them to draw on their own experiences and understandings to provide ideas on how EPs might work to support children with SLCN in line with their perceptions and their view of the world.

Despite work in a multi-agency way having been a focus for a number of years now, experience suggests that there is still a long way to go 'on the ground'. I was interested to attend a launch day for the directorate's plan in the LA and to have a speaker from a company called Collaborate who has been working with the council.

This made me think about my research and how work may be going on at a higher level around working collaboratively, but what about frontline workers? As they have been organised into locality teams, it struck me that no one tells you how you can collaborate more efficiently to work towards better outcomes for children. Just by being situated together, the idea is that services may work more closely and collaborate.

With the suggestion that interprofessional and interagency collaboration is an effective way to drive up the standard of care (Community Care, 2009), it is suggested that consideration must also be given to collaboration between organisations, rather than the professionals within them. In the case of children with SLCN for example, this would be between the LA and health services, rather than the EP and the SALT. It is argued that there should be an awareness of the different cultures and working practices within the organisations and that investigations should be carried out into how resourcing and priorities affect the staff. I can relate to this suggestion, as professionals can become overloaded as the workforce reduces and demands grow. In my experience, multi-agency working can take longer than single-agency working, and building new relationships can take effort. This is the reason for not making the push to link and find out from other professionals in everyday practice.

In terms of supporting children with SLCN, the rationale for collaboration between SALT and EPs is strong, but experience suggests that it is not always carried out as well as it might be. Education and health can remain quite separate services and, as a result, important information may not be shared (Botting & Resling, 2007). Lack of clarity between roles has been highlighted as an issue for parents, evidenced by contradiction or duplication in reports (Band et al., 2002). Interestingly, in Farrell et al.'s study (2006), over half of EPs reported not collaborating with SALT services. SALTs requested assessment of ability from EPs in order to clarify a general delay in learning or difficulty specific to language. This is very much my own experience. In her study of practical and conceptual issues arising from collaboration between EPs and SALTs, McConnellogue (2011) highlighted a number of key issues, including mechanisms for exchange of information, and did not find a difference in conceptualisation as a barrier to collaboration. The need for commissioning of protocols and procedures for interagency working was suggested, particularly around information sharing.

Given the drive towards multi-agency working as the most effective way to work to support children and their families, I do wonder how much thought and planning goes into how a proposed model will work and be evaluated. Todd suggested that problems in multi-agency working have been conceptualised in a way that does not make it easy for improvements to be made (Todd, 2011). She argues that multi-agency working, in terms of what works, has considered systems and communication rather than professional roles or relationships, and proposed an understanding focused on the latter with practitioners, young people and families working together. Todd (2011) further suggested that, in this way, all the various knowledge will have agency. In the case of the LA represented in this study, I was unsure how the new locality set up was being evaluated.

Dyson et al. (2009) described multi-agency working as being fraught with difficulties and suggested that roles and responsibilities evolve over time (Dyson, Farrell, Kerr, & Mearns, 2009). Despite Every Child Matters, ad hoc working was suggested, with different set ups and working practices described. With suggestions that the complexities of teamwork is not sufficiently considered (Dennison, McBay, & Shaldon, 2006) and that problems, issues and difficulties are the result of a complex web of perceptions (Monsen & Frederickson, 2008), there seems to be much to consider within what seems to be a very complex concept.

Todd wrote about a jigsaw model of multi-agency working, with each professional bringing their own skill set and knowledge to supporting the child and young person (Todd, 2011). Whilst acknowledging the face validity of what she termed 'composite expertise', Todd suggested that complexities and ambiguities in relationships between agencies and between agencies and 'clients' are obscured when multi-agency working is conceptualised in this way. I agree with Todd in that, whilst there may be value in a jigsaw model, there should be more of a focus on the relationship between partners and experience suggests that this is the part that is missed by managers when planning for working in a multi-agency way. This study had the intention of building relationships with partners by involving them in an evaluation of EP support in a particular area of difficulty for children.

In reflecting further on the jigsaw model, I wondered who decided what goes for each jigsaw piece. Does this depend on professional training, experience, skills, opportunity? Are boundaries so clear? Should there even be professional boundaries? I do not think it is as simple as jigsaw pieces coming together. Is it not

about supporting children and young people together, as professional partners? Does this make boundaries (or jigsaw edges) more blurred? In order to move away from silo working, my view is that professionals need to be more flexible in their role and take account of the views of others in order to be informed about them. I saw this project as opening up EP practice to partners and, drawing on the notion of relational agency, to build relationships and enhance multi-agency working.

Described as the 'capacity to recognize and use the support of others to transform the object' and 'an ability to seek out and use others as resources for action' (Edwards & D'Arcy, 2004), it is suggested that relational agency works by engaging with the disposition of others. I was interested in Edward's indication that relational agency involves being attuned to each other's purposes and ways of working (Edwards, 2010), as this is what I was trying to achieve through this project in bringing partners together to contribute towards a common concern. I wondered how this happens in practice. What could partners contribute to another partners' practice, if given the time and the space? Can partners learn from each other in terms of their own role? Can practice be improved by listening to one another?

Whittington suggested that identity, in terms of a sense of one's self, is constructed through participation in relationships and group membership (Whittington, 2003). I have already mentioned the pull on identity for EPs in terms of being part of an EPS and a multi-agency team, and I wonder how much this may impact on an individual's willingness to engage in what could be regarded as different cultures.

Interestingly, in a study which considered EPs' professional identity as part of an EPS and as part of a multi-agency team, the latter was described more positively and indicated to enhance feelings of professional identity (Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009). In terms of the EPs in the present study, this seemed to be the opposite case, given the request for EPs to move back to a central base. Gaskell and Leadbetter reported that participants found that their own skills were clarified and developed, and they were allowed the opportunity for more creative working, with individuals working to their strengths. This is interesting and may add weight to the argument that planning for how services will work together is essential. Management has been highlighted as an important factor for successful multi-agency working (Hardy et al., 2003). Todd suggested that professionals should engage with practice as a social and identity forming achievement and that it is the professional's responsibility to create a space where all knowledges have agency (Todd, 2011).

52

Whittington (2003) suggested that there are sets of understandings that professionals bring and implications that they face in the collaborative process (Whittington, 2003). He described effective interprofessional collaboration as requiring practitioners to learn, negotiate and apply. He went on to highlight the need to sustain professional identity but to remain flexible and unfinished. In carrying out this research, I could relate to this. My view is that professional identity is never finished; collaboration viewed in this way could be regarded as continuing professional development.

In a report organised by the Home Office to improve understanding of different multi-agency models, it was indicated that, in the case of co-located services, a better understanding of partners' roles and responsibilities could result in an improved working relationship (Home Office, 2013). Taking time with colleagues to discuss roles is an important 'brick' in building a solid wall to support inclusion (Todd, 2007). Interestingly, it is suggested that just one committed professional can make all the difference to the lives of children and their families (Goodley, 2007).

Experience suggests that, at times of heavy work load and stress, this can lead to a decrease in multi-agency working rather than more. A more joined-up approach is needed, but there are a number of constraints evident, mainly in terms of resources and finances. How can children's needs be met effectively in this case? Within school, does this then fall more to teachers? As an EP working in schools, I am aware that not all teachers feel confident in supporting children with SLCN and welcome support from outside agencies.

Mroz suggested that a key obstacle to supporting children is the availability of appropriate expertise (Mroz, 2012). With regard to my own thoughts on this, the beginning of traded services marked the beginning of a very different way of working with schools and provisions for EPs. In a study that looked at EPs' perceptions of traded service delivery, EPs suggested that this way of working could have implications on the type of partnerships that they can and cannot develop, even closing down partnerships with some services (Islam, 2013). Job insecurity, not knowing budgets and increased workloads were highlighted as difficulties arising from a traded service.

Todd suggested that, in order to avoid another thirty years of professionals struggling to work together effectively with parents to secure services, there needs to be a change in direction (Todd, 2011). She went on to say that there should be a focus on

the 'relational' between professionals, parents and children. In considering the suggestion that parents generally struggle to come to terms more with fragmented service provision than the disability of their child, and that when parents lose trust in a service it is difficult for other services to rebuild that trust (Goodley, 2007), Bercow's key theme of a continuum of services around the family is ever more pressing.

3.6 Support for Children with SLCN

It is suggested that two of the key professional groups that work with children with speech, language and communication difficulties are EPs and SALTs. Dunsmuir et al. (2007) explored barriers and opportunities for EPs and SALTs and suggested that, through greater professional understanding and communication, collaborative approaches could be enhanced. It was proposed that roles needed to be clarified through the identification of complementary and distinctive areas of practice (Dunsmuir, Clifford, & Took, 2007). Within my own working context, I realised that collaboration with SALTs could be closer. Although on the face of it there were close working links, I was unsure how these were being carried through in practice.

It has been interesting to note that research studies into support for children with SLCN in school highlight the need to work closely with SALT services rather than EP services. This is understandable, given that SALTs may be regarded as the 'experts' in the field but, to me, suggests a lack of awareness from the teaching profession of the impact that SLCN can have on a child and that can often present as another type of difficulty, for instance behaviour. Dockrell and Lindsay (2000) argue that best practice for children with SLCN must consider the impact of difficulties on access to the curriculum and on their social and behavioural needs (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2000)

In a study to support the Bercow review, Lindsay et al. highlighted the varied provision of support for children with SLCN (Lindsay et al., 2008). EPs were described as carrying out a range of tasks in the six LAs that took part in a survey, including support in schools and at a strategic level. It was suggested that SALTs were a scarce resource and that careful thought needed to be given to their role to ensure optimal use of their skills. Interestingly, one LA highlighted difficulties in recruiting EPs, but there appeared to be no mention of ensuring optimal use of EP skills. EPs were indicated to work in cooperation with SALTs to deliver training, and involvement in research was mentioned by one LA.

Despite the broad nature of SLCN, the report indicated that it was unclear whether EP posts for SLCN existed in all LAs. I was interested in the suggestion that the role of EP services in support of children and young people with SLCN should be investigated further. This would certainly seem sensible, given the central importance of the development of speech, language and communication skills as indicated by Bercow, but would need to be considered alongside difficulties in EP recruitment. In view of the current shortage of EPs, and how not all of them feel that they have the skills necessary to take on a specialist role (Cameron, 2006), it would seem sensible to identify the unique skills that they can bring to this area of need to use those skills to best effect.

The idea that SALTs are a scarce resource seems to be well documented. 'Talking Point', 'the first stop for information on children's communication', is a website (www.talkingpoint.org.uk) that offers support and advice for parents and professionals. In reviewing the site, I noted the reference to EPs as professionals who understand how communication and behaviour interact and that advice may be sought from EPs in the absence of support from SALTs in schools. I found this suggestion interesting, as it appears to indicate that SALTs are in shorter supply than EPs, which in my experience does not seem to be the case. Advice from EPs could also be interpreted as 'secondary', and only useful in the absence of SALT advice.

A report by Kelly and Gray (2000) suggested that health professionals are strong advocates of EPs developing specialisms, and it was thought that more joint training to facilitate a better understanding of roles could help to develop closer working relationships between health and education (Kelly & Gray, 2000). Given the suggestion made above, this would be useful.

The apparent close working relationship between EPs and SALTs in meeting the needs of children with SLCN was pointed out in a paper by Farrell et al (2006). Speaking about EPs, a SALT was quoted as follows:

> The assessments they [EPs] carry out complement ours and help fill in the missing bits of the jigsaw to help decide if a child has a general learning difficulty, specific speech and language impairment or autistic spectrum disorder. At the same time, they provide information on differentiating the curriculum across all areas and behavioural management. There is no one else within the health or education system that provides this information or advice. (p.44)

There was also reference to EPs and a 'tendency' to drift away from cognitive assessment as being a barrier to good multi-agency working (Farrell et al., 2006). This comment was made in relation to the diagnosis of SLI, and a search on the website of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists for 'educational psychologist' brings up references to EPs in terms of intelligence quotient. Whilst experience suggests that SALTs do welcome this information for diagnostic purposes, it should be acknowledged that some EPs choose not to use cognitive assessments in their practice. Would it pose problems, therefore, to suggest that this is a unique skill or function of the EP in the area of children with SLCN? A professional debate, perhaps?

In terms of 'what works' for children with SLCN, a study carried out as part of the 'Better Research' programme makes one mention of EPs (Law et al., 2012). This paper looked at interventions for children and young people, providing information on programmes including delivery and level of evidence. Many programmes, as would be expected, were to be delivered by SALTs, although there was some mention of teachers.

In a study which looked at profiles of need and provision for children with language impairments and autism spectrum disorders in mainstream schools, it was reported that, compared to learning support assistants and SALTs, there was little direct involvement with pupils by SENCos and very little contact with EPs (Dockrell, Ricketts, Palikara, Charman, & Lindsay, 2012). Time from an EP in one school was reported be typically one hour to two hours per term for 17 pupils, of whom 13 were in the language-impaired cohort and four with Autism Spectrum Disorder. According to their parents, children with ASD were significantly more likely to receive EP support. However, the parents' comments indicated that the reality was of even less involvement with EPs, as most of those parents who answered 'yes' to EP involvement clarified that this was for an assessment or an annual review.

Regarding supporting children with the curriculum, a joint assessment by EPs and SALTs of children with literacy difficulties is suggested (McConnellogue, 2011), given that provision for children with speech and language needs should be embedded in the curriculum (Law et al., 2001). But how can EPs work with teachers to support children with SLCN? With the suggestion that what a teacher knows is one of the most important influences on what is done in the classroom (Fennema & Kranke, 1992), training for teachers in SLCN would seem useful.

Mroz and Hall (2003) reported on a study carried out to look at the assessment and identification abilities of early years professionals in relation to children with SLCN. It was indicated that practitioners are aware of the need for early identification of children's communication needs, but lacked the tools to do so. Access to post-qualification training to support the assessment process was suggested. In view of the already-highlighted suggestion of scarce SALT support, such training would be better organised through strategic channels, which would involve commissioners along with health and education managers.

In terms of EPs responding to initiatives within the early years sector, it is suggested that there remains a high level of dissatisfaction (Shannon & Posada, 2007), as a result partly of lack of time for organisational and multi-agency work and high caseloads. The need to look carefully about what they can offer to a multi-agency approach, different from that of other professionals, is highlighted.

3.7 Work-based Research

Work-based research or learning is a field of study in itself, an approach to knowledge within the context of practice. In carrying out this research, I recognised the value of furthering my understanding of the support that was available for children with speech, language and communication needs within the local context, of what was going on in 'real time', seeking the views of partners and then taking 'reflective, practitioner-led action' (Costley et al., 2010). Also referred to as a scientist practitioner model, it is suggested that this framework allows for research, design, delivery and evaluation of contexts, and that an EP's identity as a scientist practitioner comes from the ability to manage the complexities of epistemology, science and practice within the context of multiple social systems (Lane & Corrie, 2006). In day-to-day practice, experience suggests that such a framework is not as apparent as this would suggest. This project was therefore an opportunity to engage more formally with this framework.

Lane and Corrie (2006) described four themes in a modern scientist's framework:

1. Think effectively, problem solve and make decisions using frames of reference from a variety of traditions

2. Use the information that we have to formulate a story grounded in psychological concepts

3. Act effectively, using theoretical constructs and design interventions according to individual needs

4. Critique our work, and evaluate ourselves and our actions.

Although this project did not allow the opportunity to put into practice and evaluate the ideas that emerged as to how EPs could work to support children with SLCN, it is useful to keep this framework in mind in the search for knowledge from partners within the local context.

This links with models of organisational learning which suggests that knowledge should be 'actionable' and 'usable' for practitioners and policy makers (Argyris, 1999). As already indicated, this is what I was hoping for, through this research, by identifying possible small changes to practice (solution-oriented approach) based on partners' 'knowledge'. The concept of knowledge is an interesting one. I considered partners to have their own knowledge, and through this project was seeking for them to share this knowledge and, in turn, to add to both their knowledge and my knowledge towards a common aim.

In carrying out this research, I was particularly interested in the notion of knowledge growing and at the same time becoming obsolete as 'reality' changes, and that understanding involves both learning new knowledge and discarding this obsolete knowledge (Hedberg, 1991). It is suggested that the activity of discarding or 'unlearning' is as important to understanding as adding new knowledge. In my approach to this research with the various partners, I wanted not only find out the knowledge that they held of EPs working with children with SLCN, but to add to their knowledge by providing them with an outline of how EPs work in general. I hoped that this would support both ideas that they had had previous to the session and new ideas based on the information I had provided about EPs, as well as discussion within the session. I consider this 'unlearning' to represent a shift in perception.

The whole concept of knowledge is interesting, with the suggestion that 'individual knowledge' is based on each person's cognitive abilities and 'organisational knowledge' based on such as interaction between employees and the sharing of ideas and information (Lucas, 2010). I hoped that this project would capture the knowledge that partners held on the whole area of SLCN, as well of EPs in general and their work in supporting children with SLCN, informed by their individual values, experiences and knowledge. I was interested in what they considered the role of an

EP to be, exploring their current understanding of what EPs do and what they might usefully do. This is consistent with the notion of 'role congruence' in role theory, which I consider to be central to this study, and I was seeking to improve the congruity.

I can recall at the beginning of this project attending a session when a representative from human resources was speaking about cultural change. It was suggested that 'if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got', and that workers within the council should be working in a different way. How do we know, though, what is good and effective practice? The need to consider the nature of appropriate evidence is highlighted (McConachie, 1999), but experience suggests that the difficulty with this, as in other areas of care and support, is that there is little evidence to suggest that one approach is better than another.

It has been suggested that services are under pressure to evaluate what they provide (McConachie, 1999), but this was not the main impetus of this study. I saw this project as a type of audit of the work carried out by EPs in supporting children with SLCN – 'audit' as defined by Crombie et al. as the process of reviewing the delivery of health care to identify deficiencies so that they may be remediated (Crombie, Davies, Abraham, & Florey, 1993). NHS England indicates that clinical audit allows providers and 'patients' to know where the service is doing well and where there could be improvements. Whilst within the EP work context, there are no 'patients', this perspective would be similar to that taken by children, young people and their families, schools and other professionals: in other words, 'partners'.

Schön suggested that professional education should incorporate learning by doing, or reflection-in-action, where professionals continue to learn through their career (Schön, 1987), with professional competence being based on the developing knowledge of what to do in new situations and how to behave effectively in the practitioner client relationship (Schön, 1974). When evaluating services, it is suggested that the hardest link to make is that between service aims, and structures and resources (McConachie, 1999). Reflecting on this latter point, I was mindful that any suggestions made by partners regarding the EP's role in working to support children with SLCN might not be possible, due to resourcing constraints. The need to be discuss barriers/other considerations with partners as part of this study was therefore deemed necessary.

Given the continuing degree of uncertainty about the distinctive contribution that EPs can make in supporting children, young people and their families, including how their work overlaps with other professionals (Farrell, 2009), it is suggested that there is a need to stop, work out what is happening, and apply appropriate psychology to our own situation. To develop this "helicopter view" or meta-perspective, we need to develop self-reflexive processes as EPs and as services (Wagner, 2000). In order to overcome what is suggested as one of the key challenges for EPs to overcome – feelings of insecurity and self-doubt – the profession needs to be clear about the distinctive contribution that it can make (Farrell, 2009). In carrying out this study, I was hoping to find some clarity, through partners' views regarding the EP role, including what they considered unique, about children who have speech, language and communication needs.

3.8 My Research Study and Thesis Question

My approach throughout this study has been that of a reflective practitioner. I was interested in how the role of the EP could be widened within the local context, but I was not sure how. I was also unsure whether other EPs working in the local area shared my interest in looking at ways of enhancing practice.

A review of the literature suggested a great deal of information on multi-agency and collaborative working, but little specifically on how EPs could work to support children with SLCN. I was unable to locate any studies which used perceptions from a range of partners to inform and enhance EP practice and support multi-agency working in this area. The importance of including 'parent voice' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009) and 'child voice' (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008) is well documented and I wondered about using the concept of 'partner voice'. This was the gap in literature that I was hoping to fill.

This study considered the question:

> How can the role of the EP as a multi-agency partner, in the area of children with SLCN, be understood?

Understanding of role was highlighted as an important factor for successful multi-agency working, but I wondered how partners could contribute to the role. I was interested in their views and did not feel 'precious' about the EP role. I was keen to explore together the role of the EP, and to learn from each other.

Chapter 4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This study adopted a qualitative approach to research, considered to be the most appropriate due to its real-world nature and my aim to understand phenomena in a context-specific setting (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is described as typically focused on making sense of a situation, providing rich descriptions to develop theory from data (Weathington, Cunningham, & Pittenger, 2010). It contrasts with quantitative research, which is designed to measure the presence or extent of difference between individuals or groups, or to test predetermined hypotheses that are based on existing theory.

I am aware that there are criticisms of qualitative research. These relate to the samples being small and not necessarily representative of the broader population, therefore it is difficult to know how far results can be generalised. It has also been suggested that findings lack rigour and that it can be difficult to tell how far the findings are biased by the researcher's own opinions. However, qualitative research has been highlighted as a complex and varied field of enquiry and a specialist area of expertise, and is not to be taken as easy research (Greig et al., 2007). It has been acknowledged that, in real-world research, work must be undertaken in complex, messy, poorly controlled field settings (Robson, 2002).

Given that I wanted to explore the research question within a real situation, this project adopted a case study way of thinking. This approach seemed appropriate as it acknowledged the importance of the context, without being constrained by the requirements suggested for successful 'case study' research (Yin, 2014). Yin highlights the overall challenges of case study research which he suggests, despite being considered as a 'soft' form of research, make it 'hard'.

This study met some of the criteria for case study research, as described by Yin (2014), but not all. In keeping with case study research, it sought to answer a 'how' question by investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real world context, acknowledging multiple realities. The general format for case study research was also useful to follow as a guide to the project (to determine the research question,

select the participants and data collection/analysis techniques, prepare for and collect data, evaluate and analyse the data, and report the results).

This study did not, however, seek to specifically address the five traditional concerns associated with case studies, or follow all of the principles considered necessary for high quality case study research (Yin, 2014). Yin, for example, emphasises the importance of using multiple sources of evidence (e.g. documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, physical artifacts), for triangulation of data, and suggests that individual sources of data (e.g. interviews) are not recommended when doing case study research . In carrying out this research I sought the views of partners only, and did not take account of wider data sources.

Yin also indicates that the 'case' should be a concrete phenomenon and not an 'abstraction'; this led to further consideration of the 'case' in this project. I had thought of the locality as the 'case', but was interested to read that the term 'case study' should be reserved for research in which the focus of interest is the 'case' itself (Bryman, 2008). The focus of interest in this study was the role of EPs in their work to support children with SLCN, and the locality / the city were more the backdrop. However, participants had been selected to represent the locality and the context of working for EPs was considered integral to the project. For these reasons and those outlined above, a 'case study way of thinking' was considered a more appropriate term than 'case study' to describe the approach adopted.

A variety of methods was employed to gather data.

Focus group interviews were arranged with partners from three different agencies working within the locality:

- SALTs (3 participants)
- Special educational needs coordinators (4 participants)
- Children's Centre staff (3 participants).

Questionnaires were distributed to EPs working in the LA (7 returned). Questionnaires were also completed by six parents attending a parent's group for children with SLCN and minutes from the meeting were taken by a SENCo.

This chapter will outline and critically justify the methodology used in carrying out this research project, which was designed to explore the role of the EP within a local context. The research questions will first be revisited before moving on to consider

the research paradigm, which will make reference to the ontological and epistemological approaches taken and the importance of reflexivity in research.

The research sample, including the rationale for choice of partners who were involved in this study, will then be outlined before describing the process of data collection, along with an explanation for choice of data collection techniques. The process of data analysis will next be described before reflecting on the issues of validity and reliability.

The final section of this chapter will outline ethical considerations related to this study.

4.2 Research Questions

Willig suggested that the research question should identify the phenomena of interest without making too many assumptions about it (Willig, 2008).

The main question in this study was:

> How can the role of the educational psychologist, as a multi-agency partner, in the area of children with speech, language and communication needs, be understood?

Supplementary questions were:

1. How do other professionals perceive the role of the educational psychologist in supporting children with SLCN and how does this compare to how EPs would like to work and what parents want?

2. What might impact on EPs supporting children with SLCN within the local context?

3. Do professionals consider EPs to have a unique role in supporting children with SLCN and can the current role be widened in the local context, based on partners' perceptions?

Participants were asked:

> How can educational psychologists work to support children with speech, language and communication skills (in schools)?

The 'in schools' wording was included initially, but as the focus groups progressed it became apparent that partners considered the role of the EP working with children with SLCN to be wider than schools, so suggestions were taken as to ways of working in line with this.

4.3 Research Paradigm

4.3.1 *Ontology and epistemology*

Guba and Lincoln (1994) highlighted the importance of paradigm questions when carrying out research. They defined paradigm as a world view or belief system that guides the researcher, not only in the methods they choose but also in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Having already outlined the social constructionist perspective upon which this study was based in Chapter 2, this section will highlight some of what seems to have been a very long journey through the maze of various definitions, explanations and interpretations in terms of establishing my own 'paradigm'.

Epistemology asks 'How can we know?'' (Willig, 2008). Gergen suggested that social constructionist enquiry is concerned with analysing the processes by which people come to describe, explain and otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live (Gergen, 1985). He went on to say that the terms in which the world is understood are social artefacts (products of interchanges between people). He pointed out that, from a constructionist position, understanding is not driven by the forces of nature but comes from people's active, cooperative relationships.

Articulating epistemology allows the expression of ideas about what constitutes reliable knowledge (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). By being clear on how valid knowledge might be obtained, therefore, clarity is allowed on the nature of any claims about knowledge that are made. In carrying out this research, I hoped to make a knowledge claim about partners' perception of the EP role within the local context and, in turn, comment on the usefulness of listening to partners' voice in relation to role.

O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) defined ontology as the study of being or reality, how we view reality, and explain that in the most basic sense this means whether the world is seen as objective or subjective (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). They described an objective perspective as regarding reality as being made up of objects that can be measured and tested, and that exist even when we are not directly experiencing them. A subjective perspective, by contrast, is described as looking at reality as being made up of perceptions and interactions of living subjects, with each

individual experiencing their time and place in the world in a different way. I subscribe more to a subjective perspective.

In explaining ontology, O'Gorman and MacIntosh (2015) pointed out that uncertainty as to which way of studying reality is the most appropriate, even towards the end of your research (which I can relate to, given the journey already indicated), is a healthy sign. This is because ontological questions require continuous answering and there will always be a valid argument against whatever stance is selected (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). They went on to say that in order to show that a study has appropriate depth, considerations of how the researcher and the way the research is carried out might impact on that being researched must be expressed.

Willig outlined ontological positions as 'realist' and 'relativist' (Willig, 2008). Realists believe that a reality exists independent of the observer, that this reality can be discovered and understood exactly as it is and that it can be experienced by everyone in exactly the same way (Campbell, 1998). This idea of reality does not fit comfortably with my views of the world. Relativists, on the other hand, emphasise the 'diversity of interpretations' that can be made of the world (Willig, 2008). They believe that knowledge is social reality, is value laden, and it only comes to light through individual interpretation. I subscribe to a relativist way of thinking.

Speed talked about 'realism' and 'constructivism' as two views of reality (Speed, 1991). In terms of the latter, Phillips suggested that constructivism as a term has been used extensively and, as a result, there is little consensus on its meaning (Phillips, 1995). This is unhelpful to researchers such as myself, who are trying hard to understand the various terminologies and determining our own individual standpoints. I realise that I am not alone in this confusion. Hoffman indicated that for a long time she thought that constructivism was synonymous with social constructionism (Hoffman, 1990); both deny the idea of an objectively knowable truth. She highlighted, however, that after reading an overview of social constructionism by Gergen, she realised that social constructionists place more emphasis on social interpretation and the intersubjective influence of language, family and culture, and less so on the operations of the nervous system (Gergen, 1985). Hoffman explained that constructivism implies that interaction only takes place between 'informationally closed' nervous systems that influence one another in indirect ways. She points out that, in contrast, social constructionism bypasses 'the fixivity of the model of

biologically based cognition' and views the development of concepts as fluid and socially derived.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009) also highlight issues relating to terminology. Within social constructionism, variations are described in terms of it representing a critical perspective, a sociological theory, a theory of knowledge (epistemological) and a theory of reality (ontological). It is explained that the critical perspective calls into question the natural and showing this to be socially constructed; the social perspective suggests that society has been produced and reproduced by shared meanings and so is socially constructed; the epistemological perspective relates to knowledge being socially constructed; the ontological perspective means reality itself is a social construction. They went on to suggest that, if everything is socially constructed, then social construction is, too, and therefore there is no reason to believe it (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). This view seems extreme.

My journey through the maze has been both interesting and frustrating. The epistemological and ontological positions that I thought I started out with have shifted throughout the course of the study and write up, as I have attempted to clarify my understanding of reality and truth. I can relate to all of the standpoints described above and acknowledge their impact on the way that I set about and conducted this study, as well as the method chosen for analysis and the way that the data have been interpreted. The next section will deal with the importance of reflexivity.

4.3.2 Importance of reflexivity

As an EP working within the local area, I had a professional role with all the partners who were included in this research; I was also, in some ways, researching myself as well as being the researcher. I therefore considered myself to be in the privileged position of having an insider perspective that was not likely to be known to any other researcher, as they would not be working in my position. However, I understood the dangers within this, from the researcher perspective, and therefore acknowledged the need to be very aware of trying to take a critical approach so that I did not read into the data what I wanted to see. I was also aware, in carrying out this research, that participants might not be as open to me as they might to an unknown researcher.

Costley et al. (2010) outlined the following challenges for a work-based researcher:

- Negotiating access to the work situation for the area being researched and gaining consent for the research to take place
- Promising confidentiality and anonymity to work colleagues
- Possibly giving challenge to the value system of the organisation or professional field
- Interviewing colleagues
- Managing power implications and positioning myself as a researcher and a practitioner within the research project. (Costley et al., 2010)

I acknowledged the importance of keeping a research diary in order to ensure reflexivity (see Appendix A for extracts). Reflexivity is defined as 'an active process of systematically developing insight into your work to guide future actions' (Birks & Mills, 2011) and, in order to support this, a diary was maintained throughout the study which included my thoughts, feelings, insights and ideas, reflections on the research, decision making and free writing. Bearing in mind the suggestion that it is impossible to have complete knowledge of yourself and that too much emphasis on reflexivity can inhibit intellectual entrepreneurship (Cutcliffe, 2003), I sought to maintain as much of an awareness as possible of the impact of my experience, knowledge, views and perceptions on the research process.

I acknowledge that I have 'multiple selves' that impact on how I think about the world. This includes the various roles that I held during the project –senior EP, team leader and part of locality management team, work colleague and manager to EPs, service provider to schools, mother, grandmother and wife. All of these 'selves' will have impacted on how I proceeded in the research and influenced the methodology.

4.4 Research Sample

This research was carried out in one locality within the city and a case study way of thinking used to explore the research question. This project grew as it progressed. Given the new way of working in the locality set up, as already explained, I wanted to explore ways of working more collaboratively with other professionals to meet the needs of children and families. I therefore started out by involving who I considered to be the key professional partners for EPs in their work to support children with SLCN, as follows:

Children's Centre staff: Two early years teachers and one senior early years practitioner.

Having just moved into the locality as part of the 'team', I was aware that work was going on in the Children's Centres to support children with SLCN and that EPs were not part of that work. I was also aware of the recommendations made following the reviews carried out by Graham Allen (Allen, 2011) and Frank Field (Field, 2010) and the highlighted importance of early intervention. Within the locality, I was unsure whether there were any links between the two Children's Centres and schools, and was keen to explore perceptions from colleagues from the early years workforce on how EPs could work to support children with SLCN through their work in schools. I also saw this as an opportunity to build bridges with new colleagues and find out more about what was going on in their area of work. Children's Centre staff from both centres were offered the opportunity to take part in the research through the Children's Centre manager. Those who offered their time took part in the focus group.

SENCos: Two secondary school SENCos, One primary school SENCo/language provision teacher and one nursery SENCo.

Given the relatively new arrangement whereby schools were expected to pay for EP support through an SLA, as a 'seller' of services I thought it important to highlight the role that EPs could take in their work to support children with SLCN. I was also interested in finding out about the perspectives across age groups (nursery, primary and secondary) and allowing the SENCos the space to share their views with each other. All schools in the locality were offered the opportunity to take part in the research. SENCos who responded to the offer all took part.

Speech and language therapists: Two specialist speech and language therapists (for children with specific language impairment (SLI)), one of whom was also working as a community SALT within the locality and city wide, and one community SALT who worked locally.

Given that speech, language and communication comprise the area that SALTs have been trained to support, it was considered important to include them in the research. Although SALTs were not part of the multi-agency team in the locality, the EPS maintained close links though liaison to meet the needs of individual children. The offer to take part in this project was made through a manager of the SLI team with whom I had contact. All SALTs who responded to the invitation took part.

As information from the focus groups had indicated varying experiences with EPs, I took the decision to involve EPs as providers of the 'work' or 'service'. I had initially thought about interviewing the other EP working with me in the locality, so that there was a wider EP perspective than just my own, and had also wondered about setting up a focus group for EPs, but had been aware of time pressures on the team.

Rather than restrict EP involvement to the small number working in the locality, as a manager I saw the value of including all of the team in this project, both in terms of encouraging them to think about their practice and sharing possible alternative ways of working to support children with SLCN. I wanted to check out the degree to which my own perceptions were in tune with others in the team. Although my own perception was that EPs could potentially widen their role in terms of their work to support children with SLCN, I was unsure how far this view was shared across the team.

I also considered it important for the whole team to have some sense of ownership in the project from the outset. All EPs were aware through discussion at team meetings that I was carrying out the research and the usefulness of it had been agreed with the principal EP in post at the beginning of the study. Another reason was that I was keen to give all team members the same message with regard to supporting children with SLCN, which in turn I thought might result in increased consistency in terms of educational psychology support (whilst acknowledging, of course, the variety of individual working styles within the team and different ways of working within each of the five localities across the city).

My thoughts had returned periodically to parents and how they might be involved, particularly as responses from EPs in their questionnaires had made little mention of parents. I wondered about the possibility of a case study with a parent, but was unsure how a parent might be selected, given that SLCN seems to be such an umbrella term. However, the opportunity to involve parents arose through my work as EP for the language provisions, as I was invited to a parents' group to speak about the role of the EP. It was a group that had been organised by the SENCo of the primary language provision (for children with specific language impairment) based in my locality, but was described as a group for parents of children with any language need, including those on the autistic spectrum.

By involving parents, albeit a small number, I saw this research project as more complete, involving professional partners, EP as 'providers' of the service and parents as 'receivers'. Bercow had indicated that 'a continuum of services designed around the family' is needed, and I was interested in the suggestion in the Bercow Report that families wanted to see effective joint working both between health and education and between professionals and families (Bercow, 2008). I considered this research to be a step towards demonstrating this.

4.5 Process of Data Collection

The selected data-gathering methods were used, as I wanted to find out partners' perceptions of the EP role in their work to support children with SLCN in what I considered to be a supportive and unintrusive way, mindful of factors such as time and trust. Prior to arranging data collection I did consider the appropriateness of piloting the data collection methods: the focus group questioning route, EPs' questionnaire and parent questionnaire. I decided that this would not be appropriate in this study, as I was seeking to explore the reality of particular partners in a particular locality within the city.

4.5.1 *Focus groups*

I had initially considered carrying out semi-structured interviews with key professionals from the locality, given the suggestion that this method is useful if the researcher is interested in the way that people experience an event (Willig, 2008). I was interested in exploring participants' experiences/perceptions of EPs in their work to support children with SLCN. Focus groups were instead decided upon as a more appropriate method, carried out with what I considered to be three key groups of professionals.

Focus groups are described as small groups who come together to explore attitudes, perceptions, feelings and ideas. They typically last between one and a half and two hours and involve six to nine people, though in small-scale research the numbers are often smaller (Denscombe, 2010). They are also useful when a researcher is trying to understand differences in perspectives between groups or categories of people and wants ideas from the group (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Krueger and Casey (2009) suggest that a group has the capacity to become more than the sum of its parts, to show a 'synergy' that individuals do not possess on their own. This method of data collection was therefore considered appropriate for this research. I wanted to explore

the perceptions of partners on the EP role in relation to supporting children with SLCN, as well as any ideas that they had to build on current EP practice. As shared views can be gauged in a focus group, this has advantages over individual interviews.

The first step to organising the focus groups was to make contact with each group of partners within the locality. This was conducted as follows.

Children's Centre staff and speech and language therapists: An introduction to the project was undertaken verbally with the Children's Centre manager (for the locality) and the manager of the SLI team (city-wide team, a branch of the speech and language therapy service). On agreement that they would take the request for participation back to their teams, an explanatory email was sent (see Appendix B). The managers took the request to their teams and contacted me with interested participants. From the Children's Centre, two teachers and a senior early years practitioner (manager) were interested in taking part in a focus group. From the speech and language therapy service, three SALTs were interested: one community SALT (working in the locality); one community (locality)/SLI (city-wide) SALT; and one SLI (city-wide) SALT who also provided support to secondary aged children (city wide), were interested in taking part in a focus group.

SENCos: I emailed all head teachers and SENCos in the locality (3 secondary schools, 15 primary schools and one nursery school), with a brief explanation of the study, and asked for any interested participants. This followed discussion with the other EP working in the locality (she provided me with contact details for the schools that she covered in the locality). I received no response from head teachers, but four responses from interested SENCos, two from secondary schools, one from a nursery and one from a primary school.

On identification of participants, a letter was sent to each by email outlining the project further and inviting them to a focus group session (see Appendix C). A consent to participate form was also sent. Some participants returned these by post, and some handed them to me on the day of the focus group. All participants completed forms giving their consent to take part.

The order that groups were arranged in was by convenience rather than any other reason. I recognised the need to fit in with partners' commitments in terms of time,

71

and the timing of focus groups was negotiated. Participants involved were all those who offered their time. There was no process of selection.

A questioning route was devised for the focus group sessions (see Appendix D). This questioning route consisted of a series of open-ended questions. Although a questioning route was used for the focus group sessions, I considered the format to be semi-structured. By this, I mean that I recognised the importance of following participants' discussion and welcomed additional contributions to the questions that I was asking. I did not want to stifle any ideas by having to follow a strict questioning route. This route was devised for guidance through the session and in order to ensure some consistency in approach between the groups.

It is suggested that the first impression of a service is the pervasive one (Mashek & Hammer, 2011). I wanted to make the participants as comfortable as possible and refreshments were provided at the beginning of the session and throughout. I thought it important to try to maintain an informal feel to the group in order to help foster trust and provide an environment where participants would hopefully feel comfortable to share their true views. This was important, given that I was exploring their 'reality'.

The sessions were digitally recorded and videoed. The video recordings were a backup to the voice recordings only. The recordings were transcribed after the session. I chose to transcribe the recordings myself, as I wanted to be immersed in the data and relive the experiences of the sessions, which I thought would provide further familiarity with the data and support the process of data analysis.

I wanted to get a feel for the skill/knowledge base of each group with regard to SLCN, their experience of EPs in general and how EPs could work to support children with SLCN. I was aware of the need to listen and learn from the participants during the focus groups, but was conscious that each group might come to the session with differing experiences of working with EPs and of EP work. In order to support partners in commenting on the EP role, I saw value in sharing the EP leaflet for three main reasons. It would act as an introduction to the work of the EP team, ensure that all three groups had at least this basic information and also provide a springboard for further ideas on ways of working.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to organise all three focus groups in the same room of the locality team building. Nevertheless, thought was given to the layout of each room, and this was designed to ensure that I had the necessary resources close to

hand to ensure the smooth running of the session. A flipchart was placed to one side of me within easy reach and in a position where participants had a clear view. Bercow's quotations were placed on the wall behind me, again within clear view of participants and within my easy reach to refer to at the appropriate point in the session (Bercow, 2008). A video camera was placed at the opposite end of the table to where participants were seated. A digital recorder was placed in the middle of the table. Tea, coffee and biscuits were made available throughout the session.

Door
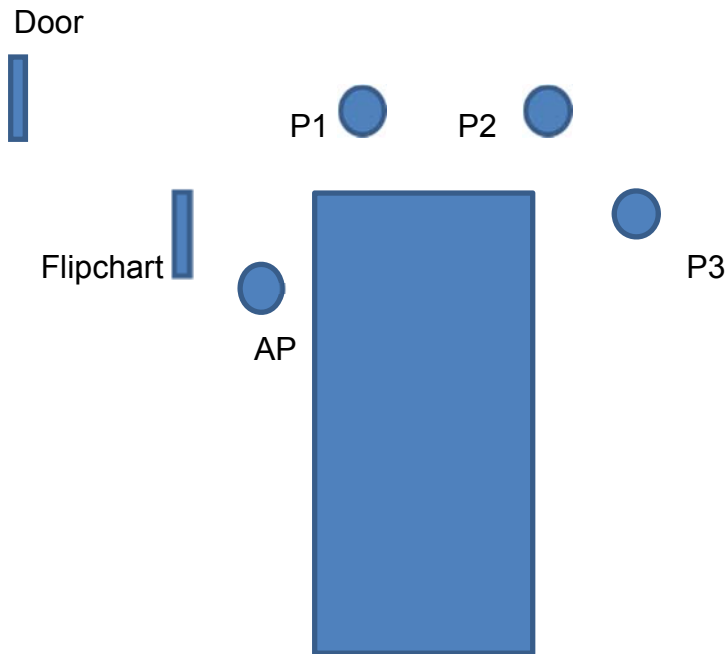
Figure 1 Plan of the room used for the Children's Centre staff focus group

Door
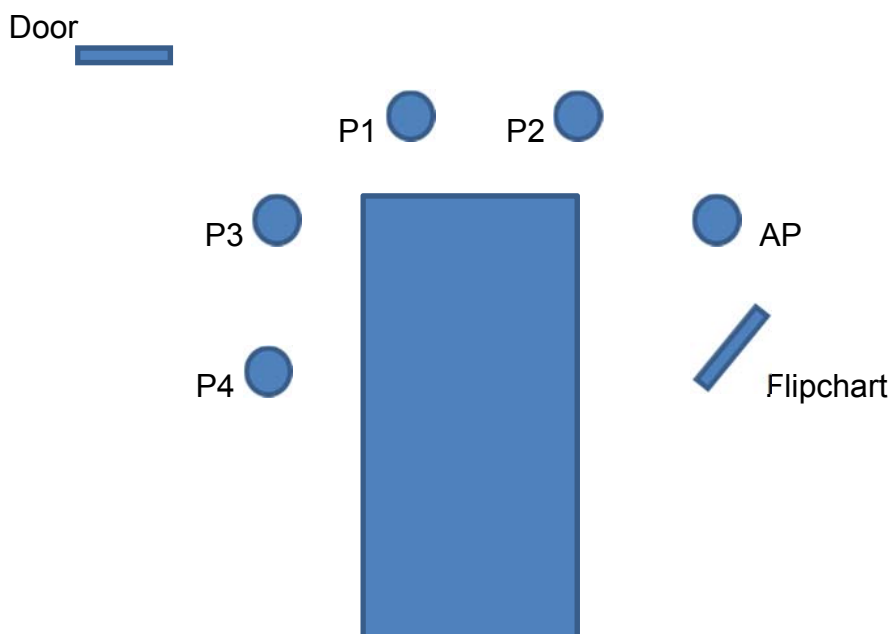
Figure 2 Plan of the room used for SENCo focus group

Door
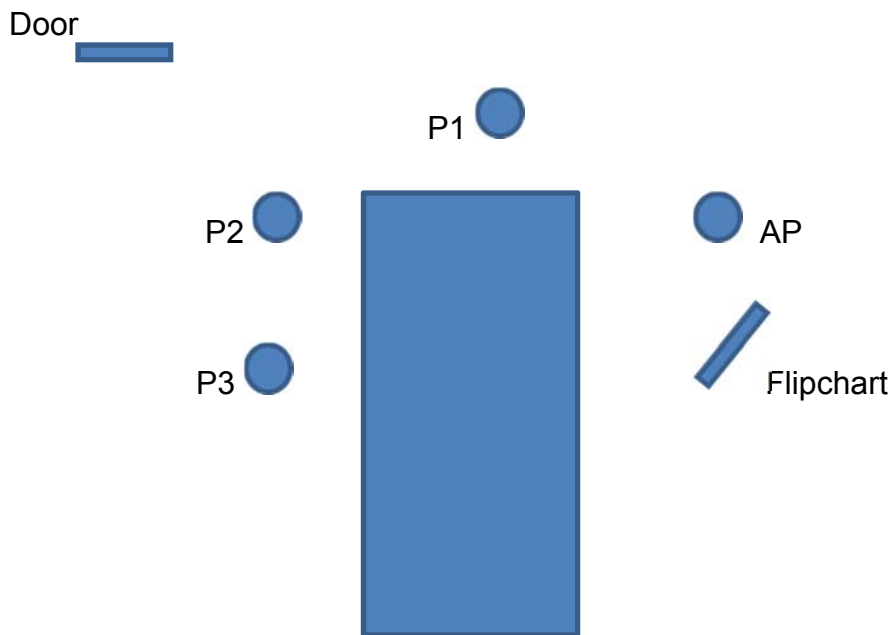
Figure 3 Plan of the room used for speech and language therapists

The format of the session was adapted from that outlined by Kruegar and Casey (2009). Each session began with a welcome and reminder of the aim of the session. After confirmation of permission to record and reassurances about confidentiality, the session took the following structure: opening/introductory questions; transition questions; key questions; and ending questions.

As an opening question, I prompted introductions. I felt it important to begin with a question that would ease the group into the session. Participants were asked to say their name and what their role was. I included myself in this and explained my role of senior EP with responsibility for language provision oversight. I felt it important to include myself, as I saw myself as a partner of the participants as well as a researcher. I explained that the title of my thesis/overall question being asked through this study was a working title and might change slightly. I checked with participants that they understood the purpose of the study and added that I was interested in thinking about how EPs could work to support what they were doing

As introductory questions, participants were asked the following questions:

What comes to mind when you hear the term 'SLCN'? Participants were asked to think about what comes to mind when they hear the term 'SLCN'. In asking this question, I wanted to set the scene and gauge their understanding of the term, which

in my experience covers a range of difficulties. Participants were asked to write down their thoughts on post-it notes and stick them on a piece of flipchart paper under an umbrella labelled SLCN. The flipchart paper was then fixed on the wall to refer to during the session when appropriate as a visual reminder of their understanding of range of difficulties covered by the SLCN umbrella. I was also interested in finding out whether there would be any differences between partners in the way that the term was understood, as I wondered if this might affect how they considered the role of an EP. In asking this question, I had in mind the theme from the Bercow Report (Bercow, 2008),'Communication is crucial'.

'*What is going on within your service/school to support children with SLCN? What are you doing that is helping to move children forward?* This question involved participants writing down on a piece of paper what they were doing within their service/school with regard to supporting children with SLCN. I had initially planned to ask participants to share what they were 'doing well' (as shown in questioning route Appendix D), but changed this wording when I came to it as I was interested in gaining as comprehensive a picture as possible in terms of what was already going on in the locality. This question was also felt useful so that participants would have fresh in their minds what they were doing, so that when they were asked about what EPs could do, they would have their own context in mind and might think of the EP role within the context of what they were already doing. In asking this question, I had in mind the themes from the Bercow Report (Bercow, 2008) that 'Early identification and intervention are essential' and 'Joint working is critical'.

I had planned to ask the participants to share with the group their notes on what they were doing to support children with SLCN, but when I came to this point during the first focus group session I changed my mind as I wondered whether participants may feel uncomfortable doing so. Instead participants were advised that there was no need to share (with the suggestion that they probably knew what they are all doing anyway), and that the information would be useful for me to find out what was going on in the locality from their service/ school in support of children with SLCN.

The final question of this opening section was for participants to think about how the city was doing in terms of meeting the needs of children with SLCN and then how the locality was doing.

What are your thoughts on how the city is doing in meeting the needs of children with SLCN generally? How are things in the local area? This question was intended to encourage participants to begin to think wider than their service/school and therefore considered a good introduction to thinking about EPs. For this question, participants were presented with a rating scale drawn on a large piece of flipchart paper, numbered 0 to 9. They were asked to decide where the city would be in terms of a 0 to 9 rating and where the locality would be. In asking this question I also wanted to highlight to participants that there was the possibility of doing things better (moving up the scale), again a good platform question and introduction to them thinking about how EPs could work to support children with SLCN further or in a different way. Participants' attention was drawn to quotes from the Bercow Report (Bercow, 2008) that were stuck on the wall of the room:

> The ability to communicate is an essential life skill for all children and young people in the twenty-first century. It is at the core of all social interaction. With strong communication skills, children can engage and thrive. Without them, children will struggle to learn, achieve, make friends and interact with the world around them. (2008, p. 16)

and

> The current system for providing support to children and young people with SLCN is routinely described by families as a 'postcode lottery', particularly in the context of their access to speech and language therapy (SLT). Despite the hard work and commitment of many professionals in health and children's services, the needs of many children and young people are still not being met. (2008, p. 11)

These two quotes were selected to highlight the importance to children of developing speech, language and communication skills and that support around the country varied (theme from the Bercow Report (2008): 'The current system is characterised by high variability and a lack of equity'). I then recapped my question, which was also displayed on the wall:

> How can educational psychologists support children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) through their work in schools?

By presenting information in this order, I hoped to place the study within the context of considering support for children with SLCN in the light of the Bercow review.

As transition questions, participants were asked the following:

Thinking about the role of educational psychologists in supporting children with SLCN, what has been your experience in the past?

This question was asked to introduce the notion of EPs working with children with SLCN and to encourage them to begin to think about support, in addition to what they were doing them themselves and everything else that was going on in the city or locality. I had in my mind the point made by the Bercow Report that 'joint working is critical' (Bercow, 2008). I purposely did not ask about joint working outright, as I did not want to pre-empt any responses. I also made a point of saying to participants that I was not precious, as I was aware that they might have some reservations about sharing experiences that were not entirely positive. I therefore hoped that this would serve to put participants at ease and support open discussion.

The educational psychology leaflet was then shared with the participants. *Is there anything in the leaflet that surprised you or were you already well aware of what EPs do?* The leaflet was shared after they had outlined their experiences, to emphasise that EPs may work in other ways to what they may have experienced themselves. This was to help to open up the possibility of EPs working in other ways and, in a way, to give permission for them to express innovative ideas.

The key questions followed. It is suggested that a focus group should have two to five key questions that drive the study, and should be placed about a third of the way through the session; 10 to 20 minutes should be allowed for discussion of each (Krueger & Casey, 2009). The first question was based on the miracle question idea from the solution-oriented approach.

What would an ideal world of EPs supporting children through their work in schools, or anywhere, look like? In asking the question in this way, I wanted to acknowledge that my original question contained the words 'through their work in schools', but that EPs could actually work beyond the school gates, thus to think more widely than this. I also described this as 'blue sky thinking'. Ideas were recorded on a flipchart and left on display to refer to later, as appropriate. This question was asked with the theme from Bercow in mind, 'A continuum of services designed around the family is needed' (Bercow, 2008). Partners had already described what they were doing to support children with SLCN, and I was interested to know where EPs fit in the continuum of services, from their point of view.

Having outlined what would be useful from EPs in an ideal world, the next key question was intended to encourage reality thinking:

Do any barriers/ other considerations exist that might affect the support that EPs can provide for children with SLCN? Again, these were listed on the flipchart, then placed side by side with the 'blue sky thinking' ideas.

What then, in your view, might be a good way forward for EPs supporting children with SLCN? (In asking this question, I had the 'Joint working is critical' theme in mind). Ideas were again recorded on a flipchart. I asked participants to suggest three ways of working for an EP that would make a difference.

A summary of responses from each of the three key questions was given to the participants to check for accuracy and allow the opportunity for any additions.

The ending/final questions were intended to bring closure to the session, and enable reflection on comments that were made as well as ensuring that nothing had been missed:

All things considered, do you think EPs have a unique role to play in supporting children with SLCN and, if so, what? (This question was included to explore participants' perception of the role that EPs can play within the context of everything else that is going on to support children with SLCN (from their particular service, within the city or within the locality – all the aspects that had been covered during the session)).

Have we missed anything? Is there anything we should have talked about but haven't? This last question was included to ensure that participants had said everything that they wanted to say. Flipchart papers on display were referred to again to ensure an accurate reflection of their suggestions.

Questions were kept up on the wall during the focus group sessions as a visual support to help participants to keep them in mind.

Participants were thanked for their time and chocolates were handed out.

4.5.2 *Questionnaires*

As already indicated, I had wondered whether I needed first to pilot the questionnaires and had decided that, as this study was being carried out to explore

the unique views of partners working within a particular locality, this would not be appropriate. I was seeking to explore particular partners' reality, not reality generally. It is suggested instead, in terms of focus groups, that it is important to test the questions orally and, if a question is found not to work with the first focus group, the wording can be changed for the second group (Krueger & Casey, 2009).

All eight EPs working in the city were emailed a questionnaire. This method of data collection was considered to be the most appropriate, as I was aware of time pressures on team members.

Gillam (2007) pointed out that questionnaires are a good method of data collection, as they are an easy way to get information from people quickly, they can complete them in their own time and the questions are standardised (Gillam, 2007). The negatives about using questionnaires were indicated to be the quality of information obtained, having to use short and simple questions, and lack of control over the respondents and how they will answer. Oppenheim (1992) supported these positives and negatives, and suggested that interviews are almost the mirror image: time consuming, with a risk of interviewer bias and potentially expensive (Oppenheim, 1992).

I kept the number of questions to a minimum (four), on a single side of A4, in order to have the best chance of return. Within the overall question of 'How can EPs support children with SLCN through their work in schools', the following questions were included:

1. *How do you currently support children with SLCN (all ages, not just restricted to school)?* This was an introductory question to encourage EPs to think about the range of work that they engaged in to support children of all ages with SLCN. In asking this question as a starter, I had in my mind the words of the EP colleague (the impetus for this project), who had suggested that she would not know what to say if asked how she supported children with SLCN.

2. *Are there any barriers/constraints that you feel affect support you provide/would like to offer?* This question moved EPs on from thinking about their range of work to considering any restrictions on what they did or how they would like to work. In asking this, I was interested in finding out if EPs would like to do more, if conditions were more favourable, or whether they were happy with their current ways of working.

3. *Would you like to work any differently to support children with SLCN?* This question was, in essence, a closed question requiring a yes or no response, which I considered to be the most powerful indicator of whether they were happy with current practice. Also, in asking the question in this way, I was interested in how many of the EPs might enlarge on their response. Any enlargement, I thought, could reflect strength of feeling, though could also reflect lack of time, of course.

4. *Do you think EPs have a unique role to play in supporting children with SLCN?* This question was included as I was interested in establishing how EPs saw their role in relation to others.

Questionnaires were sent to EPs (see Appendix E), with a date for return indicated. A reminder email was sent near to the time. Six were returned by the requested date and a seventh a short time afterwards. I made the decision not to send a further follow-up email to the eighth EP, given their known work pressures.

In terms of data collection from parents, the opportunity to gain their views followed an invitation for me to speak to a group of parents about the role of an EP. The parents could therefore be regarded as a convenience sample. All parents attending the group had children with speech, language and communication difficulties, some of whom had received a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder. Data from parents were obtained by way of minutes taken by the teacher who had organised the parents' group. Parents also completed a questionnaire (see Appendix F).

Parents had been asked prior to the group meeting if they would be willing to take part in my research project, and all had indicated verbally that they would. This was mentioned again to them at the beginning of the parents' group session and a letter handed to them, making clear the purpose of the study and asking them to complete the questionnaire if they were happy to be included (see Appendix G). I explained that the teacher would be taking notes, which would be used as part of my data collection, and that there was a questionnaire for them to complete if they were happy to do so. There was a place at the bottom of the questionnaire to sign, indicating their permission for me to use their responses in my thesis. Confidentiality was assured. The questionnaire did not follow the same format as that for focus groups or EPs, as these were not considered to be appropriate. From parents, I was

interested in gauging their experiences of EPs and exploring whether there was any more that they would like the EPs to have done to support them and their child.

The questionnaire was planned in line with the presentation about the role of EPs (see Appendix H). As it happened, parents were asked to complete the questionnaire at the end of the session as it felt more comfortable to do it this way. Had I stopped to ask parents to complete a part of the questionnaire at planned times, this would have affected the flow of the presentation and may have stifled the questions that were being asked by parents. I therefore took the decision to leave the questionnaire until the end, once the presentation was underway. I kept the number of questions on the questionnaire to the minimum required to gain the information I was seeking. I also included open and closed questions. I was conscious of parents' time and did not want completion of the questionnaire to dominate the parents' group session.

A mixture of open and closed questions were included. The parental questionnaire was supported by the presentation. 'Giving and getting information'. I considered the questions through a social constructionist lens.

The first question on the questionnaire (closed): '*Has your child been seen by an educational psychologist?'* This was felt to be a useful opener to beginning to think about EPs working with them and their child. Also, I could not assume that all the children had been seen by an EP.

Question 2 (open): '*If so, could you please give details (how many times, over what length of time, work carried out etc.)'* was included to encourage parents to recall the EPs' work in terms of frequency and content.

Question 3 (closed): *Have you had contact with an educational psychologist as part of the work carried out with your child?* was included, as again I did not want to assume that the EP had contacted or met with parents. This was something I was interested in exploring, given the lack of mention of work with parents in EP questionnaires.

Question 4 (open): *If so, could you please give details (telephone contact, face to face, individual meeting, review meeting, frequency/timing etc.)* was intended to build on the previous question to explore further the nature of contact with the parents, if there had been any.

Question 5 (intended as open, though could be answered in a closed way if desired): *Is there anything that you would have liked to have seen done differently?* This was included to explore parents' views on whether they were satisfied with the EP involvement or if something else could have been done to support them or their child.

Question 6 (intended as open, though could be answered in a closed way if desired): *Having heard a bit more about how an educational psychologist works, is there anything else you would have liked to have seen done differently?* This question was intended to be asked after sharing information on the range of work carried out by EPs, to explore whether, by being better informed, they would expect different things.

Question 7 (intended as open, though could be answered in a closed way if desired): *Is there anything else you feel an EP could do to support your child both within current constraints and in an ideal world?* This was the last question on the questionnaire and was included to gauge parents' understanding of barriers to working for EPs, but also the same 'blue sky thinking' opportunity that was presented to the focus groups.

Six questionnaires were completed and returned. I was aware that some of the parents were together, or had brought another family member along, so am not able to say whether all of the children were represented by returned questionnaires.

The teacher/SENCo running the parents' group took notes throughout the session. These notes were also used as data.

4.6 Process of Data Analysis

As this project aimed to find out how a range of partners perceived the role of the EP in their work to support children with SLCN, I wanted to keep the groups separate in terms of analysis of data. This way, any differences in perceptions could be considered. I also wanted to highlight any overall themes.

In setting out on this research, I considered using grounded theory as a general approach, as I was keen to feel my way through the data and add to it, as I felt was needed to address the research question. I recognised that there were variations to this approach based on the researcher's particular epistemological stance. Strauss and Corbin adopt a realist approach to reflecting participants' accounts and generating new theory, but are more interpretive than earlier versions of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2008).

In reflecting on what might be considered limitations of this study in terms of time, linked to it representing practitioner research, the 'lite' (abbreviated) version was then considered. Willig, however, suggested that this version should not be a researcher's first choice but used when there are other constraints (Willig, 2008), and went on to point out that the epistemological roots of grounded theory have raised wide criticism, with arguments that a positivist epistemology is subscribed to and that it 'sidesteps' reflexivity. I wondered about the reality of coming to a study without prior knowledge, and was interested in Cutcliffe's view that no potential researcher is an empty vessel, a person with no history or background (Cutcliffe, 2000). I was also aware of, but not persuaded by, others who disagreed with this, suggesting that researchers can be self-aware and not impose previous knowledge on the data (Urquart, 2007).

Taking into account my concerns about grounded theory as outlined above, thematic analysis was instead selected, despite the suggestion in some of the literature that this approach to data analysis was not sophisticated enough for a doctoral project. I was interested in the counter argument, that it offers a theoretically flexible method for analysing qualitative data, and is a useful and flexible method for qualitative research. The approach outlined by Braun and Clarke was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

1. Familiarisation with the data (initial 'noticings')

2. Coding according to relevance to broad research question (bricks and tiles)

3. Searching for themes (roof)

4. Revisiting/renaming themes

5. Defining

6. Writing up.

As I was interested in exploring the perceptions of key partners on the role of the EP in their work to support children with SLCN, I decided to keep the groups separate in terms of analysis of data. Themes were derived for individual partners from data collected, then accumulated into overall themes for all partners.

In deciding on categories (or codes), it has been suggested that characteristics should relate to the research setting and to the problem under investigation, and that

they bring together parts of the data in a purposeful way (Costley et al., 2010). Codes, themes and overall themes featured in the data analysis.

4.6.1 *Focus groups*

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data as follows:

Stage 1 – Familiarisation with the data. I listened to recordings of each focus group session and jotted down 'noticings' about each down the right-hand side of the page. I also put notes down the left-hand side that highlighted the structure of the session. This was part of the familiarisation stage. I then read the scripts that had been transcribed from the recordings and added further 'noticings'. During the reading, I picked up information that I had not noticed in listening, so it was good to do both.

Stage 2 – Coding according to relevance to broad research question. I read through the scripts again and highlighted parts pertaining to the role of the EP or potential role of the EP, and what I considered useful in terms of the research questions (barriers, ways that EPs could work), based on participants' actual words and my 'noticings'. These highlighted parts were coded. Scripts were therefore not coded line by line but by sentence/idea. Different coloured highlighter pens were used for each group (pink for Children's Centre staff, yellow for SALTs and green for SENCos), so that when group data were accumulated under questions, I could see which group the information had come from. I read through the scripts again to make sure that nothing had been missed.

Stage 3 – Searching for themes. A great deal of thought was given to as to how to organise the next steps of data analysis. For the key questions, 'What would an ideal world of EPs supporting children through their work in schools, or anywhere, look like' and 'Do any barriers/ other considerations exist that might affect the support that EPs can provide for children with SLCN?', coded responses for each group were organised under themes.

I compared themes against lists that had been captured on the flipchart during the focus group sessions. This was considered useful to check that no main points had been missed. I also recognised that, in analysing the scripts, some of the context was lost. The flipchart lists had been drawn up within the focus group and main points noted within the context of discussion. This resulted in the shifting of some coded quotes placed under themes. I had, for example, placed 'an understanding of actual

need' under 'others not following recommendations' (SENCos), which on reflection are different. Another example is that I had placed 'there could be a specialist EP for children like that or I know all EPs… but it's that foundation stage age group' under the theme of 'specialist EP' (SALTs). In the focus group session, I had captured this on the chart as 'early intervention in the early years'. I therefore created two themes from this data and placed the quotation under each. 'Early years/early intervention' may have been missed as a theme had I not compared the flipchart with data.

Looking at the themes, I wondered if I had labelled them appropriately. In organising them, I had wanted to separate focus group suggestions (semantic) from my ideas based on what they said (latent). I tried coding by numbers to indicate the sources (1 for participant, 2 for my idea based on what participant said, and 3 overall occurrences/ideas as a result of discussion), but this did not work. I therefore decided to keep codings under quotations and 'noticings'. Quotes were moved between themes that I thought were more appropriate. Some quotations were sorted under more than one sub-theme.

The next step involved bringing data from all focus groups together. I had wondered about doing this for the key questions only, but decided that it would be useful to sort information for all questions, as responses could have a bearing on key questions in a way that I had not really anticipated. In order to do this, I took nine large sheets of paper and wrote each of the questions posed to the focus groups at the top. Quotes taken from the three focus groups transcripts and my 'noticings' were sorted under appropriate questions. Some of the data had arisen in direct response to that particular question, whilst other relevant information pertaining to the question emerged in other parts of the session. For the key questions, data had already been organised under themes separately for each of the focus groups. This data was put together and organised under overall themes.

Stage 4/5/ 6 – Revisiting/renaming themes, defining and writing up.

4.6.2 *Questionnaires*

Questionnaires from seven EPs were analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as follows:

Stage 1 – Familiarisation was the first stage of data analysis. I read through each of the seven questionnaires and made notes down the side which represented my initial

'noticings'. Next, I highlighted responses in each of the questionnaires which represented what I considered to be the main points (for semantic codes) and jotted further notes down the side. I then picked out the main noticings (for latent codes) from each questionnaire and made a bulleted list on a post-it note that was attached to the questionnaire. This helped to highlight the main points that were coming from each questionnaire and keep 'familiar' the responses of individual EPs.

Stage 2/3 – Coding according to relevance to broad research question and searching for themes. I had highlighted each of the seven questionnaires in a different colour, as the next step of analysis involved cutting up the individual questionnaires to accumulate all the EPs' responses and my 'noticings' under each of the four questions. I thought it useful to be able to see at a glance the pattern of responses from individual EPs. Again, I took large pieces of paper and wrote each question at the top. The highlighted pieces were then sorted under themes for each of the questions. The bulleted lists were also compared with themes to ensure that main themes and ideas had been captured

Stage 4/5/6 – Revisiting/renaming themes, defining/writing up.

Questionnaires from six parents were also analysed using a thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Stage 1 – As with the EP questionnaires, familiarisation was the first stage of data analysis. I read through each of the six questionnaires and made notes down the side to represent my initial 'noticings'. Next, I highlighted responses in each of the questionnaires which represented what I considered to be the main points (for semantic codes) and jotted further notes down the side. As with the EP questionnaires, I then picked out the main 'noticings' (for latent codes) from each questionnaire and made a bulleted list on a post-it note attached to the questionnaire.

Stage 2/3 – I had highlighted each questionnaire in a different colour, as the next step of analysis involved cutting up the individual parental questionnaires to accumulate responses and my noticings under each of the seven questions. As with the EP data, coded information was sorted under themes. The bulleted lists were also compared with themes to ensure that main themes and ideas had been captured.

Notes from the teacher/SENCo were analysed in the same way. I read through the notes and jotted down the side my initial 'noticings'. I then read through again and highlighted sections that related to the role of the EP and how an EP might work to support.

Stages 4 to 6 – as with the EP analysis.

4.6.3 *Analysis across partners*

In order to answer the first of the supplementary questions, 'How do other professionals perceive the role of the educational psychologist in supporting children with SLCN and how does this compare to how EPs would like to work and what parents want?', I wanted to compare data across all partners. I did this by first of all typing up themed data from the focus group data, ensuring that the colour coding remained the same (SALTs yellow, Children's Centre staff pink, and SENCos green). I then produced a visual representation for each overall theme, which made it easier see patterns among professional partners (see photographs in Appendix I).

In order to think about how the perceptions of professional partners compared to EPs' and parents', I set out mapping themes from both groups onto the visual representation produced from the focus group data. In doing this, I felt that I was losing the richness of the data, so decided instead to keep the parents' data in terms of the ways that EPs could work to support children with SLCN together (as they were ultimately potential beneficiaries of support) and the EP data together (as they were the providers of EP support).

In order to answer the second supplementary question 'What might impact on EPs supporting children with SLCN within the local context?', I followed the same procedure as for the first question in terms of sorting themes from the focus groups under overall themes and producing a visual representation. I then added themes from the EPs' data to see how they matched (see Appendix J).

To help to answer the third question, 'Do professionals consider EPs to have a unique role in supporting children with SLCN and can the current role be widened in the local context based on partners' perceptions?, I mapped the 'blue sky thinking' suggestions from focus groups onto the barriers. I then added the EP data and what parents would like from an EP. I also placed an asterisk on the three things that each focus group had indicated as the way of working for EPs, within the current

constraints, that would make a difference. Some ways of working were mapped to more than one barrier (see Appendix K).

Analysing data across partners to address the three questions outlined above and writing up the results allowed for further reflection on the data and resulted in further refinement of both themes and overall themes. This represented the final stage of data analysis. Themes such as 'Awareness of children with SLCN' as a barrier for EPs, for example, was changed to 'Lack of awareness of children with SLCN' and 'Explaining the focus of EP work' in the SALTs 'blue sky thinking' was changed to 'Explaining EP assessment'. In terms of examples of changes to overall themes, 'Understanding of EP role' was changed to 'Lack of understanding of EP role' in the write up of the barriers, and 'Time and money' was changed to 'Constraints on time and money'.

4.7 Validity and Reliability

Cho and Trent (2006) suggested that validity in qualitative research is linked to what the researcher has observed and what is true in reality and propose two perspectives: transactional validity and transformational validity (Cho & Trent, 2006). The former is described as an interactive process between the researcher and the data, aimed at achieving a higher level of accuracy and consensus by revisiting the facts, feelings, experiences and values collected and interpreted. 'Truth' in this case is regarded as an understanding of a participant's perception of reality (Koelsch, 2013), which was, of course, what I wanted to represent through this research.

I was aware of the need to ensure that my research could achieve a high level of 'transactional' validity and employed one of the techniques used to enhance this type of validity: member checking. This was carried out during the focus group by regularly recapping participants' suggestions and summing up at the end of the session. This was felt to be a more appropriate way of member checking than going back to participants at a later stage to check the accuracy of their words. The main reason for this was that I was very aware that participants had given up their valuable time to take part in a focus group and I felt it would be asking too much to take up more of their time by checking afterwards. This may be a wrong assumption on my part and participants may have been very willing to validate their words, and in saying this I acknowledge that I could be too sensitive towards the time constraints that I consider

others to be experiencing. This is based on my own experience and may not hold true for everyone.

Koelsch points out that, whilst the member check has been regarded as an important component of validation in qualitative research in order to assess the accuracy with which a researcher has represented a participant's subjectivity, researchers should not expect participants' subjectivities to remain static throughout the research process (Koelsch, 2013). She explains that although it is accepted that a researcher's subjectivity may change, there is the suggestion that participants' accounts of lived experiences remain fixed. She argues that a participant's truth can be created during the interview process. This resonates well with me and I feel that it highlights the value of carrying out focus groups above individual interviews. Participants had the opportunity to hear one another's views, which in turn may have helped them to clarify/shape their reality/truths.

Koelsch explained that some theorists argue that change, rather than representation, should be the primary goal of qualitative research. This research project aims at both. I was interested in gaining an insight into perceptions and, through the data, to represent their realities, as well as hopefully move participants on in their thinking on how EPs can and do work to support children with SLCN as a multi-agency partner.

Koelsch described the transactional/transformational divide as the difference between using representation or change as a marker of validity, and suggested that the member check can be used to span this divide in order to support a holistic view of validity. She cited Lather in highlighting one specific type of transformational validity, catalytic validity, explaining that to achieve a high degree of catalytic validity, the research project must support participants in knowing reality in order to transform it (Lather, 1986). For this reason, the focus group sessions included the sharing of the EPS leaflet and the opportunity to reflect on current EP working practices before moving on to thinking about how EPs might work. The parent group session also started off with a presentation on how EPs worked and allowed time for questions, prior to asking them to complete questionnaires on the role.

Transformational validity is the second type of validity described by Cho and Trent which, they explained, is a progressive process that leads towards social change, achieved by the research itself. Although unsure about exactly what constitutes 'social change', I would argue that the experience of taking part in this research, as

an EP, other professional or a parent, represented change in itself. Taking part represented an opportunity to make suggestions on how EPs could work (hearing information, asking questions, answering questions, debating with others); experience suggests that this type of opportunity is a change and, in my view, a step up on usual ways of working together to meet the needs of children. That said, it is acknowledged that a real test of transformational validity may have come from follow-up work. By this I mean that suggestions for ways of working for EPs in supporting children with SLCN were put into practice and reviewed with those partners who had made the suggestions.

Cho and Trent pointed out, however, that there is no way to guarantee that the outcomes will be valid conclusions.

In terms of reliability, concern has been expressed about qualitative studies and how reliable they can claim to be, given difficulties in replication of the design (Morse, 1999). I do acknowledge the importance of being clear in terms of what I did, but as this study looked at a range of views in order to understand their reality, I am unsure how the study could be replicated exactly. Different participants even from within the same partner group may have different realties. Also, the purpose of the study was not to generalise results but to consider the role of the EP in the local area.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethics is generally about acting in the right way, and this can depend on an individual's position within a group. As a practitioner–researcher, I was concerned with a number of ethical considerations. I recognised the need to consider carefully my professional position and how this might impact on my approach to research, as well as participants' responses to participation.

A good starting point in considering ethical concerns is the British Psychological Society's (BPS) *Code of Human Research Ethics* (BPS, 2010), which indicates that practice in psychological research should be based on a set of moral principles. In common with the Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2009), four general principles are outlined:

Respect for Autonomy and Dignity of Persons: 'Psychologists value the dignity and worth of all persons equally, with sensitivity to the dynamic of perceived authority or influence over others and with particular regard to people's right including those of

privacy and self-determination' (value statement from the Code of Ethics and Conduct, 2009, p.10). This principle calls for a clear duty to the participants of the research, respecting their knowledge, experience and insight. They should also respect their age, education, gender, religion, family and socio-economic status. In showing this respect, psychologists should explain the nature of the research being carried out as well as avoid any unfair or prejudiced practice. In this study, I acknowledged the need to provide necessary information to all participants in order for them to make a decision on whether to take part. At the beginning of the focus group and parents' session, I checked their understanding of the purpose of the research. In line with the principle, participants provided their consent to take part, and confidentiality was assured. The data collected was anonymised, so that it could not to be traced back to anyone taking part. I was mindful of the need to be respectful to all participants at every stage of the research and to ensure that their rights were respected and protected.

Scientific Value: this considers the standard of the research in terms of its design and the way it was conducted. The principle states that research should be of sufficient quality, with transparent aims, making clear what the research is intended to achieve. This research was very carefully designed in order to achieve its aim of exploring partners' perceptions of the role of EPs in their work to support children with SLCN. This was stated throughout. Clarity of the project's aims and objectives was also considered when 'Approval of the Project' was submitted to the University prior to starting.

Social Responsibility: when carrying out research, a duty for the welfare of others must be acknowledged; the knowledge generated should be beneficial to the purpose. This principal calls for psychologists to work with in partnership with others, to be self-reflective and aware of their personal and professional responsibilities. It is also indicated that they should be mindful of the consequences of unexpected and predicted outcomes, as well as acknowledging the problems associated with the interpretation of research findings. Within the context of the study, I considered the welfare of others to be paramount. This included not only the participants, but also the managers who were approached initially about the research and others who contributed to its completion.

I have been mindful of both my personal and professional responsibilities in carrying out this research, reflected in my approach to the study and stance throughout. Prior

to working with each set of partners, careful thought was given to ensuring that their experience was as comfortable as possible. I reflected long and hard on the research questions in terms of what I wanted to find out and the potential impact on participants. Focus groups, for example, were planned in a way so as to put participants at ease, with refreshments available throughout the session. I adopted a solution-oriented approach, using 'problem-free talk' as a way of putting participants at their ease. Participants at times steered away from the questions I posed, but I thought it important to allow freedom of expression, respecting all contributions.

Maximising Benefit and Minimising Harm: The BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) indicates that all psychologists should consider research from the participants' viewpoint. In carrying out research, psychologists should be aware of the potential impact of their interventions, and harm should be no greater than that which the participants would normally be exposed to. Sensitivity to power differentials between researcher and participants is indicated as essential. During the course of this study, I was ever-mindful of not causing harm to participants. I confirmed, for example, that focus groups were happy to be recorded and videoed. I also tried to ensure that any potential perceptions of power were minimised through the approach that I took to the research and in my interactions with participants.

Professional guidelines are also important to consider when carrying out research; the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) standards of proficiency include:

1a.1 be able to practise within the legal and ethical boundaries of their profession

- understand the need to act in the best interests of service users at all times
- understand the need to respect, and so far as possible uphold, the rights, dignity, values and autonomy of every service user including their role in the diagnostic and therapeutic process and in maintaining health and well-being
- understand the power imbalance between practitioners and service users and how this can be managed appropriately.

1a.3 understand the importance of and be able to maintain confidentiality

Costley et al. suggest that a particular issue in work-based research is the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Costley et al., 2010). This was considered to be particularly important, given that I was an EP asking about EPs. I needed to be sensitive as to how this might make participants feel and the

possible impact on any data obtained. I was also aware of my position as a senior manager of an EP in asking EPs about their role. I was, however, mindful of the need to emphasise the research as being carried out 'with' rather than 'on' (Doyle, 2007) participants as an active part of the research process.

The research project was discussed with EP colleagues during the course of planning and, in a more structured way, during team meetings. EP colleagues, for example, were involved in validating the questioning route for the focus groups. This was discussed first with the EP who worked with me in the locality and then sent to all other EPs by email for comment or change. To ensure that all views had been taken into account, this was raised as an item at a team meeting. Plans for the meeting with parents were also shared. In including EP colleagues in this way, I intended to keep them informed of the progress of the study and encourage joint ownership, given that the research was being carried out to support an understanding of the EP role.

Throughout the course of the research I was mindful of the context in which it was being carried out, and realised that what might be appropriate in one context might not be appropriate in another (Campbell & Groundwater-Smith, 2007). I was aware that, as a practitioner–researcher, I was in a privileged position in terms of understanding the context and any sensitivities around it. The ethical principles outlined above were informed by this knowledge. (Further ethical reflections are highlighted in Chapter 7.)

This research met the ethical standards required by Newcastle University. An application for 'Approval of the Research Project and Supervisory Team' was submitted prior to starting the research, which required the completion of a section on ethical issues. Although it was indicated that the research involved human subjects, none of the other considerations were applicable (for example, does the study involve vulnerable groups such as children; will it be necessary for participants to take part in the study without their knowledge or consent; will the study involve sensitive topics, ranging from sexual activity to drugs). Had the research involved any of the other factors, I should have needed separate University ethical approval. Discussion with my supervisor and clarification with the University confirmed that this was not required in my case (see Appendix L for a copy of the email confirmation from Newcastle University relating to 'Approval of research project and supervisory team').

Chapter 5. Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the results from each of the five groups of partners. Overall themes in terms of 'blue sky thinking' ideas from the three focus groups will be presented first. 'Blue sky thinking' relates to what partners thought an ideal world of EPs supporting children with SLCN would look like. Overall themes for the potential barriers to 'blue sky thinking' are presented next, incorporating themes from the three focus groups and EPs, before moving on to show how 'blue sky thinking' can be mapped to the barriers for all five groups of partners.

Results from each group of partners involved in this project are then outlined in turn – Children's Centre staff, SENCos, SALTs, EPs and parents – before finally considering data in terms of the research questions.

5.2 Overall Themes

5.2.1 *'Blue sky thinking'*

Themes from the three focus groups (Children's Centre staff, SENCos and SALTs) were sorted into four overall themes. These emerged from the data and were not pre-set. The four overall themes were:

- Trainer
- Supporter of children and families
- Assessor
- Supporter of other professionals

Each of these overall themes is shown in Table 1, with contributing themes from each of the focus groups.

Table 1 Overall 'blue sky thinking' themes and focus groups' contributory themes

	Trainer	Supporter of children and families	Assessor	Supporter of other professionals
Children's Centre staff	Training for other professionals on SLCN Training for themselves on SLCN Delivering joint training Training on the role of EPs re SLCN		Supporting government guidance/initiatives Advising on child development/SLC Supporting early intervention/early years	Providing professional consultation Partnership working
SENCos	Raising the profile of oracy Training for teachers	Capturing the child's views Signposting for children Organising youth groups Supporting/training/signposting for parents	Contributing to assessment Explaining EP assessment	Developing resources Supporting schools to share practice EP being part of the school team Modelling use of strategies Supporting project work/research Sharing knowledge about provisions and LA protocols
SALTs	Linking SLCN to literacy development in schools Training on the role of EPs and SALT	Informing and supporting parents	Having clearer follow up policies A specialist EP for speech and language Supporting early intervention/early years Giving advice on child development	Acting as a bridge between SALT and schools Seeing everyone's priorities Supporting diagnosis Providing professional consultation Supporting classroom strategies linked to SALT advice Clarifying the EP role Clarifying protocols to schools

The themes from all three focus groups highlight the 'Trainer' role for EPs in their 'blue sky thinking'. There are a number of points of agreement. Children's Centre staff and SENCos both contributed 'Training for themselves', and Children's Centre staff and SALTs contributed 'Training for other professionals' and 'Training on the role of the EP'. In addition to training on SLCN in general, specific training/advice may be identified in the themes from all three focus groups. Children's Centre staff saw a role for EPs in terms of 'Advising on child development / SLC'. SALTs contributed the theme 'Linking SLCN to literacy' and SENCos 'Raising the profile of oracy'. Training together was highlighted by both Children's Centre staff ('Delivering joint training') and SALTs ('Training on the role of EPs and SALTs').

In terms of the overall theme of 'Supporter of children and families', two focus groups contributed to this theme in their 'blue sky thinking'. SENCo themes related to support for both children and parents. SALT highlighted specific support for parents only. In terms of the overall theme of 'Assessor', all three focus groups contributed themes. Children's Centre staff and SALTs both contributed 'Supporting early intervention/ early years' and 'Advising on child development', yet the other themes differed. Children's Centre staff were the only group to highlight an 'Assessor' role linked to government initiatives. SALTs' themes linked to procedural aspects of work, 'Having clearer follow up' and 'A specialist EP for speech and language'. SENCos saw an 'Assessor' role for EPs in terms contributing to assessments of children with SLCN and explaining the focus of EP assessments.

The fourth overall theme, 'Supporter of other professionals', included themes for 'blue sky thinking' from all three focus groups, which included support for themselves and other professionals. SALT and Children's Centre staff data both produced the theme of 'Providing professional consultation'. SENCo themes reflected work of a more practical nature 'Developing resources', 'Modelling use of strategies' and 'Supporting schools to share practice'.

5.2.2 *Barriers*

In terms of barriers to 'blue sky thinking', themes from the three focus groups (Children's Centre staff, SENCos and SALTs) were sorted into seven overall barrier themes. These were:

- Not being valued by schools
- Constraints on time and money

- EPs as individuals

- Changing landscapes

- Lack of understanding of EP role

- Agencies not working together

- Lack of enthusiasm

EP barrier themes were then mapped on to the above overall themes

Each of these overall themes is shown in Table 2, with contributing themes from the four groups of partners.

Table 2 Overall barrier themes, and contributory themes from focus groups and EPs

	Not being valued by schools	Constraints on time and money	EPs as individuals	Changing landscapes	Lack of understanding of EP role	Agencies not working together	Lack of enthusiasm
Children's Centre staff	EP unaware of individual school data	EP capacity		Keeping up with members of teams and their roles EP unaware of city-wide strategies EP may lack in familiarity with relevant government initiatives	Understanding of roles		
SENCos	Others not following recommendations Restricted knowledge /Understanding of need	Time/ money (SLA)		Lack of support from managers	Focus on SALT support for children with SLCN	Lack of multi-agency working	Lack of enthusiasm from all involved
SALTs	Being valued by schools	EP staffing/ budget Staffing in schools Unclear follow up	Individuality of EPs Unclear follow up	Referral process Changing LA landscape SLA/ traded services Changing EP landscape	Understanding roles		Lack of enthusiasm
EPs	Lack of awareness of children with SLCN	Time		EPS organisation/ service delivery		Lack of opportunity to work with/ liaise with SALT Difference in/ confusion over SLI classification	

Themes from all four groups of partners contributed to the overall theme of 'Not being valued by schools' as a barrier to 'blue sky thinking'. SENCos' 'Understanding of need' and EPs' 'Lack of awareness of children with SLCN' were similar in that they referred to schools' lack of understanding of SLCN and associated needs, which potentially EPs could help with. The Children's Centre staff's theme related to schools not sharing information with EPs ('EP unaware of school data') and SALTs' and SENCos' themes related more to schools not taking into account EP recommendations ('Others not following recommendations' and 'Being valued by schools').

Themes from all four groups of partners contributed to the overall theme of 'Constraints on time and money' as a barrier to 'blue sky thinking'. Themes from Children's Centre staff and SALTs were similar in their reference to EP staffing and capacity ('EP capacity' and 'EP staffing/ budget'). EPs and SENCos both contributed themes relating to time ('Time' and 'Time and money/ SLA'), the latter referring to the constraints in EP time as a result of the new SLAs in place and school budgets.

In terms of the overall theme of 'EPs as individuals', only one partner contributed (SALTs). SALTs contributed two themes, 'Individuality of EP's and 'Unclear follow up'. The latter was placed under this overall theme as responses to the EP questionnaire had indicated varying practices in terms of how children with SLCN were supported.

Themes from all four groups of partners contributed to the overall theme of 'Changing landscapes', relating to changes in terms of government, local authority, locality and EP team landscapes. EPs' theme, 'EPS organisation/ service delivery', focused on the changes that had taken place within the EP team and was supported by SALTs' 'SLA/ traded services' and 'Changing EP landscape'. SALTs themes reflected changes at a locality level 'Referral process' and 'Changing LA landscape', as did Children's Centre staff with themes of 'Keeping up with members of teams and their roles' and 'EP unaware of city-wide strategies'. SENCos' theme of 'Support of managers' also related to the locality/ local authority.

Themes from all three focus group partners contributed to the overall theme of 'Lack of understanding of EP role'. Children's Centre staff and SALTs both contributed themes of 'Understanding roles'. SENCos 'Focus on SALT support for children with

SLCN' was placed under this overall theme, as it could reflect a lack of understanding of the EP role.

Two groups of professional partners, EPs and SENCos, contributed to the overall theme of 'Agencies not working together'. EPs' themes of 'Lack of opportunity to work with/ liaise with SALT' and 'Difference in/ confusion over SLI classification' focused on work with SALT, whereas SENCos' 'Lack of multi-agency working' suggested a wider view than EPs/ SALTs.

Themes from two of the focus groups, SENCos and SALTs, contributed to the overall theme of 'Lack of enthusiasm' ('Enthusiasm from all involved' and 'Lack of enthusiasm').

5.2.3 *'Blue sky thinking' and barriers*

'Blue sky thinking' themes from all five groups of partners, Children's Centre staff, SENCos, SALTs, EPs and parents were mapped to each of the seven potential barriers. Themes that are shown in the following tables with an asterisk are those identified by focus group participants as those that would make a difference in terms of EPs working to support children with SLCN within the current constraints.

Table 3 'Blue sky thinking' themes mapped onto the barrier 'Not being valued by schools'

Children's Centre staff	SENCos	SALTs	EPs	Parents
Supporting government guidance/ initiatives* Providing professional consultation Advising on child development/ SLC Delivering joint training	EP being part of the school team Contributing to assessment Modelling use of strategies*	Giving advice on child development Having clearer follow-up policies* Training on literacy link* Linking SLCN to literacy development in schools Acting as a bridge between SALT and schools Supporting diagnosis	More time to implement and monitor interventions Support children and schools to manage the LA set up for children with SLI	To be available for future support

Table 4 'Blue sky thinking' themes mapped onto the barrier 'Constraints on time and money'

Children's Centre staff	SENCos	SALTs	EPs	Parents
Training for themselves on SLCN Supporting government guidance/ initiatives Training for other professionals on SLCN Partnership working* Training on the role of EPs re SLCN* Providing professional consultation Supporting early intervention/ early years* Advising on child development Delivering joint training	Modelling use of strategies* Capturing the child's view EP being part of the school team Developing resources Training for teachers* Raising the profile of oracy Contributing to assessment Supporting project work/ research Organising youth groups Supporting schools to share practice Supporting/ training/ signposting for parents* Explaining EP assessment*	Supporting classroom strategies linked to SALT advice Training on the role of EPs and SALT Supporting early intervention/ early years Having clearer follow-up policies* Providing professional consultation* Training on literacy link* Informing and supporting parents A specialist EP for speech and language Acting as a bridge between SALT and schools Seeing everyone's priorities Supporting diagnosis	Clear process of work More time to implement and monitor interventions More time to work with and liaise with other professionals Support children and schools to manage LA set up for children with SLI Refresh knowledge Collaboration/ liaison with others	Regular review by an EP Follow up on recommendations to schools Provide and share advice with parents Be available for future support Provide direction/ signpost to other agencies A more detailed report that addresses important aspects More detailed EP report Increased EP knowledge Support parents as partners Make clearer the role of the EP Consider EP assessments – relevance and sharing with parents Speedier process More communication with parents Time for EP to get to know the child Meeting with parents

Table 5 'Blue sky thinking' themes mapped onto the barrier 'EPs as individuals'

Children's Centre staff	SENCos	SALTs	EPs	Parents
Delivering joint training

Advising on child development

Training for other professionals on SLCN

Training on the role of EPs re SLCN*

Partnership working * | Developing resources

Supporting project work/ research

Raising the profile of oracy

Sharing knowledge about provision and LA protocols

Organising youth groups

Training for teachers*

Signposting for children*

Supporting/ training/ signposting for parents*

Modelling use of strategies*

Explaining EP assessment * | Having clearer follow-up policies*

Providing professional consultation*

Linking SLCN to literacy development in schools

Training on the literacy link*

Acting as a bridge between SALT and schools

Informing and supporting parents | Would not work differently

Clear process of work

Collaboration/ liaison with others

Work with parents to develop confidence

Assessment

Intervention

More time to implement and monitor interventions

Refresh knowledge

More to time to work with and liaise with other professionals | Provide and share advice with parents

Consider EP assessments – relevance and sharing with parents

Make clearer the EP role

Support parents as partners

Provide direction/ signpost to other agencies

Greater contribution to review meeting

Increased EP knowledge

A more detailed report which addresses important aspects

More communication with parents

Meeting with parents

Time for EP to get to know the child

More detailed EP report |

Table 6 'Blue sky thinking' themes mapped onto the barrier 'Changing landscapes'

Children's Centre staff	SENCos	SALTs	EPs	Parents
Delivering joint training Supporting early intervention/ early years* Advising on child development Supporting government guidance/ initiatives Providing professional consultation Partnership working* Training for other professionals on SLCN	Developing resources EP being part of the school team Supporting project work/ research Contributing to assessment Raising the profile of oracy Sharing knowledge about provisions and LA protocols Training for teachers* Organising youth groups	Supporting early intervention/ early years Having clearer follow-up policies* A specialist EP for speech and language Acting as a bridge between SALT and schools Seeing everyone's priorities Clarifying protocols to schools Training on the role of EPs and SALT	More time to work and liaise with other professionals Refresh knowledge Collaboration/ liaison with others	Regular review by an EP Be available for future support Regular review by an EP Increased EP knowledge

Table 7 'Blue sky thinking' themes mapped onto the barrier 'Lack of understanding of EP role'

Children's Centre staff	SENCos	SALTs	EPs	Parents
Training Children's Centre staff on SLCN Partnership working* Supporting government guidance/ initiatives* Providing professional consultation Training on the role of EPs re SLCN* Advising on child development Supporting early intervention/ early years* Delivering joint training	Developing resources EP being part of the school team Contributing to assessment Capturing the child's view Supporting project work/ research Raising the profile of oracy	Training on the literacy link* Having clearer follow-up policies* Linking SLCN to literacy development in school Training on the role of EPs and SALT	SLCN overlooked by schools?	No further suggestions Happy with support

Table 8 'Blue sky thinking' themes mapped onto the barrier 'Agencies not working together'

Children's Centre staff	SENCos	SALTs	EPs	Parents
Training on the role of EPs re SLCN Supporting early intervention/ early years* Training on the role of EPs re SLCN * Advising on child development Delivering joint training	Developing resources EP being part of the school team Raising the profile of oracy Training for teachers* Supporting project work/ research Contributing to assessment Sharing knowledge about provision and LA protocols	Acting as a bridge between SALT and schools Clarifying protocols to schools Supporting diagnosis Training on the role of EPs and SALT Training on literacy link*	Collaboration/ liaison with others	Provide and share advice with parents Meeting with parents Support parents as partners

Table 9 'Blue sky thinking' themes mapped onto the barrier 'Lack of enthusiasm'

Children's Centre staff	SENCos	SALTs	EPs	Parents
Training on the role of EPs re SLCN* Partnership working * Delivering joint training Providing professional consultation Training for other professionals on SLCN Advising on child development	Supporting project work/ research	Having clearer follow-up policies * Training on literacy link * Providing professional consultation * Acting as a bridge between SALT and schools Linking SLCN to literacy development in schools Informing and supporting parents		

'Blue sky thinking' themes from all five groups of partners were mapped onto all seven barriers, with the exception of the barrier 'Lack of enthusiasm', which was considered to be a barrier to focus group 'blue sky thinking' only.

The following sections will describe in more detail the data gathered from each of the focus groups, the EPs and the parents.

5.3 Children's Centre Staff

In terms of what 'EPs supporting children through their work in schools, or anywhere, would look like' in an ideal world ('blue sky thinking'), Children's Centre staff responses were coded and organised under the themes of 'Supporting government initiatives', 'Advising on child development/ SLC', 'Training for themselves on SLCN', 'Training for other professionals on SLCN', 'Partnership working', 'Providing professional consultation', 'Training on the role of EPs re SLCN' , 'Supporting early intervention/ early years' and 'Delivering joint training'.

'Blue sky thinking' ideas taken from coded data, relating to each theme, are shown in Table 10 below. Table 11 shows the barrier themes and ideas from Children's Centre staff (see Appendix M for examples of coded data relating to these themes and ideas).

Table 10 'Blue sky thinking' themes and contributory ideas: Children's Centre focus group

Theme	'Blue sky thinking' ideas from Children's Centre staff focus group session
Supporting government initiatives	Support children whose needs are highlighted through the EYFS prime area 'Communication and Language'
	Support the cascade of the Early Language Development Programme to settings
Advising on child development/ SLC	Provide advice to childcare settings on age related norms re speech, language and communication
	Provide a broader overview of a child's development (seeing 'the whole child')
Training for themselves on SLCN	Support their understanding of language difficulties as they regard themselves as inexperienced in severe language delay
Training for other professionals on SLCN	Support writers of Common Assessment Framework referrals to understand that requesting nursery places for children with speech and language issues may not be the 'solution'
	Train childminders on speech and language development
	Support understanding in settings that children need to build their self-esteem and language as a basis for learning
Partnership working	Support in the early identification of speech and language issues by providing another point of view
	Provide a surgery for Children's Centre staff to talk about their work
	Support other professional's opinions (make messages stronger)
Providing professional consultation	Be available to Children's Centre staff in person/ through email to provide advice on children they have observed and are concerned about
Training on the role of EPs re SLCN	Train health visitors on the role of EPs and speech and language development
Supporting early intervention/early years	Be involved in children's 2 year developmental check alongside childcare providers
Delivering joint training	Carry out joint training with Children's Centre staff to settings, given their thought that EPs probably have more first-hand knowledge of what SLCN looks like in children

Table 11 Barriers to 'blue sky thinking': Children's Centre focus group

Theme	Ideas about potential barriers from Children's Centre focus group
EP unaware of city-wide strategies	EPs unaware of the I CAN Early Talk accredited settings in the city/ locality (this is an accreditation which is awarded to settings who show good practice in supporting children's speech, language and communication skills)
Keeping up with members of teams and their roles	EPs unaware that the focus of work for teachers in the Children's Centre had changed
	EPs unaware that staffing had been reduced in the Children's Centre
EP unaware of individual school data	EPs unaware of a school in the locality where the results for communication language and thinking are low
EP capacity	Time and resources
	Access to EPs for early years work
EP may lack familiarity with relevant government initiatives	EPs lack of familiarity with the EYFS framework
Understanding of roles	Parents may be worried about an EP seeing their child
	Lack of understanding by some settings as how to access EPs for work in the early years

Taking into account the barriers, Children's Centre staff indicated the following three things that would make a difference in terms of EPs working to support children with SLCN:

- Training professionals on how EPs can support children with SLCN

- Involvement in two-year developmental check (including child minders), linked to early intervention

- Partnership working (giving the same messages together).

Children's Centre staff thought that EPs had a unique role in terms of working to support children with SLCN as follows:

- A broader overview compared to the more focused work that a SALT may do:

    Yeah, 'cos I suppose an educational psychologist has more of a, a kinda broader overview, whereas speech and language therapists, often and this is no disrespect to them, their work is often focused, it's very specific things, erm, to do with just the language, whereas you would say, ok they have got this language issue, but actually its affecting all of it. So you see the child as a whole child.

- A holistic approach to the child/ seeing the whole child (behaviour and learning) as often speech and language is seen as something separate and it needs to be linked to learning and the development of the child:

    Well, I think we don't know that, we don't know although I think it it if we think about the whole child, the whole child, behaviour and learning, because I think very often we see speech and language, as you know, that is something separate and it needs to be linked to the learning and development of the child

- EPs know how one type of difficulty can impact on another

    you know, how things impact on other things

Children's Centre staff thought that support for children with SLCN was better in the local area than in the city as a whole (on a scale of 0 to 10, they thought that the local area was at 7.5 compared to 6.5 in the city).

Children's Centre staff provided information about their previous experience of working with EPs. One of the participants had had no experience of working with an EP in her previous role as nursery manager. Her current experience was limited to sitting on an early intervention panel with a senior EP. Questions were asked about the age band that EPs covered, what the referral process to EP was, how day care in

schools was covered (does the educational psychologist for a school also cover the day care?). The two other participants had had experience of EPs, but not in their current role.

> I've got no experience in day care or, erm, in the role I'm in now, the first time I've ever would be the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) panel that we've sat round and the only reason is that I attend the CAF now is because of my role changing, so in far, so far as if I was still in an old role, I don't think our paths would particularly cross, to be honest.
>
> I mean, in terms of this job, I can't think of a time when I have had any contact.
>
> Yes I have, but not, but not in this role, although I did want to speak to you actually about somebody else.

See Appendix N for details of responses by the Children's Centre staff focus group.

5.4 SENCos

In terms of what 'EPs supporting children through their work in schools, or anywhere, would look like' in an ideal world ('blue sky thinking'), SENCo responses were coded and organised under the themes of 'Signposting for children', 'Capturing the child's view', 'Raising the profile of oracy', 'Developing resources', 'Organising youth groups', 'Supporting/ training/ signposting for parents', 'Explaining EP assessment', 'EP being part of the school team', 'Supporting schools to share practice', 'Sharing knowledge about provision and LA protocols', 'Supporting project work/ research', 'Modelling use of strategies', 'Training for teachers' and 'Contributing to assessment'.

'Blue sky thinking' ideas taken from coded data, relating to each theme, are shown in Table 12. Table 13 shows the barrier themes (see Appendix O for examples of coded data).

Table 12 'Blue sky thinking' themes and contributory ideas: SENCo focus group

Theme	'Blue sky thinking' ideas from SENCo focus group session
Signposting for children	Signpost young people with SLCN to sources of support (eg youth groups) through such as Twitter and Facebook
Capturing the child's view	Include in reports how the child feels about their SLCN eg how it feels walking into a classroom
Raising the profile of oracy	Highlight the importance of teaching oracy (participants suggested that secondary provision is creating children with social communication problems)
Developing resources	Develop resources to use with children and be involved in reviewing how they have worked
Organising youth groups	Organise a locality youth group which parents and children can access (suggested that school can be intimidating, teachers can be too busy to speak to parents when they get in touch, some parents work)
Supporting/ training/ signposting for parents	Model to parents, emphasising the importance of communication, highlighting the importance of talking to their children
Explaining EP assessment	Make clear to teachers what EP assessments are about and what they are looking for in using them
	Work with teachers to understand that EPs do not provide a cure but are just the first step to supporting a child's development
EP being part of the school team	Be considered part of the school team rather than staff being told that EP is coming in
	Share research programmes with staff
	Follow children through school

Supporting schools to share practice	Support schools across the locality to share resources
	Support primary and secondary schools in working together including highlighting the useful of this to managers as currently staff do not feel they are given the time or resources
	Support the sharing of expertise across the locality, of which one of the primary language provisions is part
Sharing knowledge about provision and LA protocols	Keep staff up to date with what is going on in the LA/ facilities available in the LA to support children with SLCN
	Provide training to teachers on LA support for children with SLCN
Supporting project work/ research	Support a locality project to support children with SLCN (SENCos highlighted need to be critical based on previous experience)
Modelling use of strategies	Model strategies (eg lowering language levels) or use of resources to teachers as an EP may approach something in a different way to a teacher or from a different angle/ at a different level
	EPs and teachers 'team teaching'
Training for teachers	Train on such as how executive functioning can impact on children's speech and language
	Train teachers on the importance of teaching oracy
	Train teachers on aspects of language eg semantics
Contributing to assessment	Highlight speech and language difficulties in children who may have behaviour problems/ communication problems
	Support understanding of the link between SLCN and medical conditions/ historical issues
	Emphasise the importance of developing speech, language and communication skills for reading

Table 13 Barriers to 'blue sky thinking': SENCo focus group

Themes	Potential barrier ideas from SENCo focus group
Time/ money (SLA)	Time and money
Others not following recommendations	Teachers taking on board what EPs are asking them to do
	Teachers not doing what they have been asked to do to support a child
	Getting everyone on board so that they know what to do to support the child
Lack of support from managers	Backing of powers that be
Lack of multi-agency working	Multi-agency working
Lack of enthusiasm from all involved	Everyone being enthusiastic, the right people doing it, committed
Focus on SALT support for children with SLCN	Focus on SALT support for children with SLCN
Restricted knowledge/ understanding of need	An understanding of the child's actual needs
	People's knowledge of speech, language and communication

Taking into account the barriers, SENCos indicated the following three things that would make a difference in terms of EPs working to support children with SLCN:

- explaining assessment /modelling

- training on how other difficulties can affect SLCN-vice versa

- signposting parents/teachers/students

SENCos thought that EPs had a unique role in terms of working to support children with SLCN as follows:

- to support multi-agency approaches

- to provide a report for SEN panel

  > or could it be you're almost I almost feel it's the when it comes to… so if you're going for FSA for example or assessment, like if I did an assessment in school, would the SEN panel look at my assessment or would they look at yours?

  > and I think there's an element there's an element of power being an EP in terms of I mean I couldn't go to the SEN panel and say well I think

- To provide a 'global viewpoint' – able to comment across health and education

- To look 'across the board'

  > as SENCo I just get an overview of people's views and ideas and that and then you now you come in and then you look at it across the board

- To support what teachers think

- To give support and advice

  > I mean it's about support in school really and advice I'm always asking you for advice you know to point me in the right direction erm and I agree with what you're saying about going to the panel

- To look at the facts and bring different aspects of the child's development together (people might only see the behaviour)

  > and then and I would agree with you that some people can have a lot of information about a kiddie then you've got to sometimes it's a case of well how can I say this well some people might go all they can see is the behaviour can't deal with it so and I think that you keep sort of a neutral you don't and you look at the facts and bring things together

SENCos thought that support for children with SLCN was at an equal level across the city, including the locality. They thought that support for children at secondary level

was not as good as at primary (on a scale of 0 to 10, support at secondary school was indicated as a 3 and at primary a 7).

SENCos provided information about previous experience of working with EPs. Participants all had had experience of EPs. Comments were made with regard to usefulness of EP support:

> I think… when we say we are not sure if it's this difficulty or its speech, language and communication. It's good to be able to rule that out but I think... I... this assessment that would be useful. I think staff don't always know what to do with a report advice and I think some of the things that are in a report are already in place and it's that thing where a therapist comes in and works once a week with a child or and I wonder if staff think oh they are coming to do that with the child...so what... the assessment so what happens now and I know we've talked about that in the past

> it's resources, seeing you work with a child, possibly sometimes, just to see how you might approach it because actually you might approach things differently to a class teacher from a different level or a different angle. I think if they saw that, I think sometimes when they see speech and language work with a child they go – ah – I know what you mean by lowering your language levels

> I think sometimes staff just want to see it… in action

See Appendix P for details of responses during the focus group with the SENCos.

5.5 Speech and Language Therapists (SALTs)

In terms of what 'EPs supporting children through their work in schools, or anywhere, would look like' in an ideal world ('blue sky thinking'), SALTs' responses were coded and organised into themes.

'Blue sky thinking' ideas taken from coded data, relating to each theme, are shown in Table 14, while Table 15 shows the barrier themes (see Appendix Q for examples of coded data).

Table 14 'Blue sky thinking' themes and contributory ideas: SALT focus group

Theme	'Blue sky thinking' ideas from SALT focus groups session
Linking SLCN to literacy development in schools	Link speech and or language problems or the underlying disorder causing that, to literacy development Train teachers in the SLCN – literacy link
Clarifying protocols to schools	Emphasise that the speech and language therapy service and the language and learning team (an LA support service) are different and offer different services Support schools to refer to SALT when appropriate and follow advice provided
Giving advice on child development	Support schools in understanding the stages of speech and language development so that they can raise children who may be showing delays
Informing and supporting parents	Support parents to engage positively with SALT
Acting as a bridge between SALT and schools	Have a greater role with children who don't meet SALT criteria as language and learning are both low (a suggested 'gap'), provide support strategies Support schools to ensure that SLI contract is maintained – a support assistant is present during SALT session each week
Providing professional consultation	Be available to discuss children SALTs consider 'tricky'/ giving another professional opinion
Supporting classroom strategies linked to SALT advice	Provide classroom support strategies (suggestion that schools take more notice of EPs than SALT) Support schools to include SALT targets on a child's IEP
Seeing everyone's priorities	Liaise with schools regarding children that are priorities for EP time from a SALT point of view
A specialist EP for speech and language	Have a specialism in SLCN (specialist EP in the service)
Supporting diagnosis	Help schools and other professionals to disentangle a child's needs Work with others to find out what may be behind speech and language issues

Supporting early intervention/ early years	Work with children in the foundation stage
	For EPs to have a specialism in SLCN. Concern particularly expressed about foundation stage children
Clarifiying the EP role	Ensure that the EP leaflet is available to other services to share with parents
	Emphasise to schools the ongoing nature of EP support, rather than one off assessment (suggestion that schools do not think of EPs as people who can provide updating and ongoing advice and support)
Training on the role of EPs and SALT	Provide joint training to schools on the role of the EP and role of SALT
	Tell schools what a SALT does and vice versa
	Support teachers' understanding of SALT role re children with low language and learning who don't meet SALT criteria
Having clearer follow-up policies	Follow up on those children who showed attention and listening difficulties during assessment (difficult to ascertain if findings are completely reliable)
	Provide recommendations and advice to schools in follow up – monitor and update advice on a termly basis or on request from school

Table 15 Barriers to 'blue sky thinking': SALT focus group

Themes	Potential barrier ideas from SALT focus group
Referral process	Access to EPs through the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process (lengthy referral form)
EP staffing/ budget	Money and staffing (EPs)
	Traded services/ SLAs impact on training opportunities in school
Understanding of roles	Understanding roles and responsibility
Individuality of EPs	EPs can give a variable service (quality of reports and information in the reports)
Being valued by schools	School cooperation
	How much schools value what they think EPs can offer
	What schools think an EP role should be
Staffing in schools	Money and staffing in school (to support the targets EPs set and to meet SALTs more often)
SLA/ traded services	EPs now being bought in (schools may not choose to use their time for training)
	EPs not seeing SALTs' priorities and EPs priorities(and therefore in multi-agency working)
Changing EP landscape	Private EPs may not provide pre-discussion and follow up
Lack of enthusiasm	Enthusiasm as a result of an 'exhausted and disillusioned' workforce
Unclear follow up	Unclear follow up, EPs need to make clear in reports if the child is to be seen again
Changing LA landscape	Not all schools buy in a service from the LA so who do SALTs speak to if not a LA EP?
	Changes in the LA – referral processes, opportunities for support

Taking into account the barriers, SALTs indicated the following three things that would make a difference in terms of EPs working to support children with SLCN:

- Look at the follow up

- Good communication with SALT

- Training on the impact of SLCN on literacy

SALTs thought that EPs had a unique role in terms of working to support children with SLCN as follows:

- Linking language skills to children's learning, development and academic progress

- Ascertaining the child's potential for learning

- Setting targets linked to language and literacy skills

  > Harnessing that to their speech and language and their literacy, and then setting really appropriate SMART targets

- Advice to school on how improvements in speech, language and communication skills can impact on their learning

  > I mean even if we are able to really improve a child's communication skills we haven't got the expertise to say right well how that gets reflected in their learning, we just hope it will….. Advice for schools in that particular light

- Breadth of EP knowledge and how it can be related to the classroom

SALTs thought that support for children with SLCN was better across the city than in the local area (on a scale of 0 to 10 they thought that the local area was at 4.5 compared to 6 in the city).

SALTs provided information about previous experience of working with EPs, highlighting that EP support can vary. Comment was made with regard to EP reports, difficulties associated with traded services and referral processes:

> very variable with psychologists

> and I can certainly understand why some schools were reluctant to buy into the service when they don't know who they are going to get

> and the quality of the reports and the information in the reports is very variable across

yes and I think when the schools realise that that will be a huge advantage because you know I am sure some of them refer to speech and language therapy rather than educational psychology, erm because of that form

See Appendix R for details of responses during the focus group with the SALTs.

5.6 Educational Psychologists

In terms of how EPs themselves currently work, data was organised under five themes, as shown in Table 16 (see Appendix S for examples of coded data).

Table 16 Themes on current ways of working from EP questionnaires

Theme	Current way of working for EPs
Collaboration/ liaison with others	Check previous involvement with SALT Recommend referrals to SALT when necessary Liaison with SALT Liaison with Language and Learning (an education support service) Liaison with the SENCo Work with families to look at strategies to develop speech, language and communication (ASD) Joint work with SALT (ASD) Working together including parents may reflect experience
Assessment	To clarify needs Carry out assessment using a range of different tools including PIP, BPVS, BAS, play based assessment Observation in whole class and small groups compared to one to one Consultation with family, staff and other professionals to help gain a clearer understanding of the SLCN and how this relates to other patterns of strength and difficulties Early language screening interventions – discussion/ checklists with nursery Carry out verbal/ non-verbal assessment at the request of SALT Assessing their SEN when asked to do so Looking at expressive and receptive language skills
Intervention	Make recommendations to develop their skills and to access the curriculum based on assessment Support through casework, training and consultation Training for staff on interventions Give advice to parents, teachers etc Write reports to support statutory assessment or language provision placements Set targets with schools and SALT to monitor speech and language progress
Clear process of work	Gather information about children, carry out assessment and make recommendations (not all EPs demonstrated this)
SLCN overlooked by schools?	Speech and language difficulties may sometimes be overlooked by schools (suggested that many issues seem to be around social interaction and communication needs)

Six EPs mentioned linking with and working with SALT (6 out of 7). One EP mentioned another agency. One EP mentioned working with families. The main partner to liaise with was considered to be a SALT. Two EPs mentioned SENCos. The responses seemed to reflect more an emphasis on assessment and intervention than liaison with others.

There was little mention of work with parents. There was a feeling of a general will to do better. Some EPs answered questions more fully than others. Some EPs named interventions that they used; some saw themselves as the expert, giving rather than negotiating. There were differing views about the usefulness of cognitive assessments when working with children with SLCN. The term 'SLCN' was not generally queried; one EP wondered whether I was including autistic spectrum disorder in the term, and included the information anyway.

Data from EPs highlighted barriers to work as shown in Table 17 (see Appendix S for examples of coded data).

Table 17 Themes on barriers to ways of working from EP questionnaires

Themes	Potential barrier ideas from EPs
Time	Time constraints impact on working with SALT /ensuring that school and parents are not give too many conflicting targets
	Time as a primary barrier to providing the best support in terms of working with individual children, settings, colleagues and in terms of research to ensure that EPs are up to date with the latest developments and recommendations
EPs organisation/ service delivery	SLAs and new ways of working (may impact on children with SLCN being prioritised)
	Ways of working may reflect experience of EPs (SALT as main contact, EP as expert, lack of reference to parents by most EPs, some not looking wider than the EP service for support)
Lack of opportunity to work with/ liaise with SALT	Cuts to other services (SALT) impact on liaison and intervention
Lack of awareness of children with SLCN	Children with SLCN not being prioritised by schools to see an EP
Difference in /confusion over SLI clarification	Perceived importance of cognitive scores
No barriers/ constraints	Happy with current support?

Four of the seven EPs highlighted time as a barrier to providing the support that they would like. Four of the seven indicated work with SALT as a barrier – not enough time/opportunity. Two of the seven EPs indicated that the way of working (SLAs) was a constraint and, perhaps linked to this, having the right children prioritised by schools. One highlighted SLI categorisation as a difficulty. One EP identified no barriers at all, a possible indication that they were happy with the support that they provided. SALT being the perceived main contact, EP as the expert, lack of reference to parents and some EPs not looking wider than the EP service in terms of support were also barriers 'noticed' in the questionnaires.

In terms of how EPs would like to work differently ('blue sky thinking'), data was organised under the themes in Table 18 (see Appendix S for examples of coded data):

.

Table 18 Themes on ideas for ways of working from EP questionnaires

Themes	'Blue sky thinking' ideas
More time to work with and liaise with other professionals	More joint work with SALT to get a better understanding of the work they do and how we can fit into this to ensure effective support
	Work more closely with SALT/ liaise more with SALT
	More time to liaise with colleagues from the Language and Learning team
	Ongoing opportunities for feedback and updates from SALT colleagues
Refresh knowledge	Refresh own knowledge of Makaton
More time to implement and monitor interventions	Involved more in supporting schools to monitor interventions to raise speech and language skills in general, but especially in the early years
	Monitor the effectiveness of interventions over time
	Do things that other regional EPs have been involved in e.g. talk table, explore ICT (information and communication technology)., language through literacy
Support children and schools to manage LA set up for children with SLI	Support mainstream schools with ensuring that children who attend the language provision are included on the day they are there
Work with parents to develop confidence	Work with parents around speech and language issues and to develop their confidence with their babies/ children
Would not work differently	Would not work any differently

More time, generally, and time to liaise with other professionals, were suggested by four of the seven EPs. All four mentioned liaison with SALT, and one mentioned SALT and another professional service. One EP of the seven mentioned working with parents more. Children were mentioned by one EP, but this was in the context of supporting children with SLI to manage the demands of attending a language provision for four days a week and their 'home' school for one day a week. One EP mentioned being involved more in early intervention, particularly early years, and one EP mentioned developing their own skills. One EP compared the work that they did with EPs in other areas and indicated a wish to do the same (eg table talk, ICT and language through literacy). Two of the seven EPs mentioned supporting schools to implement strategies and interventions to support children. In considering the responses on the questionnaires, I noticed that there was little mention of working with parents or mention of direct work with children. All but one EP indicated that they would like to work differently to support children with SLCN.

All seven EPs thought that they had a unique role in supporting children with SLCN and ideas fell under the themes of 'Consider the whole child', 'Assessment of cognitive skills and overview of development over time', 'Relate SLCN to learning', 'Close and sustained relationships with schools and SENCos for effective support', 'Providing practical strategies and recommendations', 'Knowledge of teaching and learning', 'Support/ follow-up work from other professionals', 'Knowledge of LA provision', 'Early intervention', 'Support decision making on meeting child's needs', 'Cover a broad age range' and 'Lack of reference to work with parents' (see Appendix S for examples of coded data).

Knowledge of the whole child, child development and SEN were highlighted by four of the seven EPs, and one mentioned the broad age range that EPs cover:

> Our training and experience we look at the 'whole child' rather than concentrating solely on their speech and language needs.

> Particularly because we look at the overall development and can see SLCN in the context of the broader development and disorder.

> In terms of identifying if the difficulty is specific to language.

Providing support in terms of strategies and interventions was suggested by three of the seven and support/follow on from other professionals was highlighted by two:

> I also believe given our school experiences that we can suggest recommendations that can realistically be implemented.

> Supporting them (children) to access the curriculum despite their difficulties as opposed to giving them specific targets to develop their own skills.

> I am working with a pupil at the moment… about to be discharged from the (SALT) team…. her speech and language skills are still an issue in terms of confidence, self-esteem and effects of her having historic salt difficulties.

Supporting decision making was mentioned by one EP, as was knowledge of LA provision. Two EPs mentioned assessment (specifically cognitive) and two of the seven relationships with schools:

> We can also test IQ and compare verbal and non-verbal skills which helps SALT decide whether there is a specific language impairment.

> I think our role in schools, our relationship with SENCos in schools over time means we can have insight into school systems, dynamics and can support staff more effectively.

It was noted that none of the seven EPs mentioned work specifically with parents or direct work with children as a unique role.

5.7 Parents

A range of experiences across parents /carers (the adult representing the child, hereto referred to as 'parent') was evident in their responses. All had had some involvement with an EP. LA EPs and independent EPs were not thought of any differently. Even though the session was focused on the role of the EP, parents seemed not to see EPs separately, but as part of a process for statutory assessment with SALT, based on their experiences.

Parents' responses on how EPs have worked to support their children with SLCN were organised under the themes of 'Children seen by EPs in different authorities', 'Lack of consistency of EP over time', 'Children seen at home and at school', 'Parents recalled names of psychologist' and 'No differentiation made of type of psychologist' (see Appendix T for themes and examples of coded data related to questions).

All children represented at the meeting had been seen by an EP. Two parents named the EP who had supported their child. One parent named an independent EP and two the LA EPs. One parent named a LA EP and a clinical psychologist. Parents seemed to make no distinction or show any awareness of differences between psychologists. One parent indicated that their child had been seen in another LA.

Five parents commented on how many times their child had been seen: once a year three or four times, five times in all, three times being seen by a LA EP and twice by

an independent EP, three times twice in primary and once in Year 7, twice in one month, three times in two years. Parents, therefore, indicated that children had generally been seen more than once and over time.

In terms of where the work was done, parents indicated that it was carried out at school and at home. The EP named for the home visits was an independent EP. In my experience, this might reflect a way of working for this particular EP.

One parent indicated that their child had been seen in another authority and did not indicate follow up when they moved. Inconsistency of EP was evident, with some children being seen by a number of different EPs.

Five of six parents indicated that they had had contact with an EP as part of work carried out with their child. The one parent who indicated that they had not had contact with an EP had been provided with details of EP work.

Details of how EPs had carried out work with their child were organised under the themes of 'EP attended a review meeting', 'Name of EP provided', 'EP made telephone contact', 'Made comment on the quality of EP work', 'Met individually with EP' and 'EP carried out a home visit'.

Three parents named EPs (LA, independent, other LA). One indicated telephone contact. Two indicated that they had had individual meetings and three that they had seen the EP at a meeting. Two indicated that an EP had carried out home visits. There was one positive comment about an EP and one parent gave details of the date work was carried out.

The parent who had indicated no contact indicated later in the questionnaire that they had had contact with an EP at review meetings to discuss long-term plans for their child. Whilst their response suggests that they had not met the EP prior to the review meeting, they had, in fact, had contact. This had been the case for another parent (met EP at a review meeting). Parents may therefore have interpreted questions in different ways.

Parents expressed come concerns. One parent commented that the report that they received from the EP was too brief and did not seem to emphasise important aspects. One parent commented about the timeframe in which they thought that work by an EP should have been done (but acknowledged that things take time and was pleased with the outcome). Another indicated that appointments had not been offered

quickly enough. One parent was unhappy about an EP who made no contribution in a meeting. One expressed concern at the lack of knowledge of an EP (did not know about dyspraxia). One said that they would have liked more communication with an EP. One indicated that they would have welcomed a personal meeting with the EP before an official meeting and one indicated that they would have liked a home visit by the EP before seeing their child. Another indicated that they were happy with the support that they had received from an EP.

In terms of how EPs could work better to support children with SLCN ('blue sky thinking'), responses from questions on whether parents would have liked anything done differently and whether there was anything more they felt an EP could do to support their child were drawn upon (see Appendix F for Questions 5 and 6 of the questionnaire). Themes were 'Happy with support', 'A more detailed report which addresses important aspects', 'Increased EP knowledge', 'Greater contribution to review meeting', 'More communication with parents', 'Speedier process', 'More detailed EP report', 'Meeting with parents', 'Time for EP to get to know the child' and 'No further suggestions'.

Parents' responses indicated a variety of views on what they would like EP support to look like. Some parents were happy with the support that they had received and could think of nothing that they would like done differently:

> No I can honestly say that the EP was a great support and would have been lost without her support

Other parents responded with suggestions about reports – there should be a minimum wording to reports:

> First two times she was seen it was a very brief report that did not seem to emphasise important aspects.

> I think there should be a minimum amount of wording/ page used. This is because I have had one EP report that was only a half of an A4 piece of paper, but I've also had a report of 11 pages long. Obviously I want a report that delves into my child's difficulties

(The EP named as providing the longer report was an independent EP).

Parents had suggestions about meeting with parents: more face to face, having a personal meeting or a summary prior to a meeting in school, and more than one meeting with parents. Parents suggested that EPs should come to know their child:

> Remember once a quarter meeting will never ever let you know a child. You learn little from the reports. Get to know the child.

In my experience, all of these suggestions could be affected by time constraints.

Regarding anything else that EPs could do, two parents left this section of the questionnaires blank. One suggested regular reviews of their child. Other responses suggested the following as useful: explaining assessments (scoring, relevance, are they outdated), a focus on schools (they play a big part, insist on recommendations being carried out), explaining reports (negative focus for FSA, supporting parents) and to direct parents and signpost.

The final question posed to parents asked them to consider how EPs could support their children, both within current constraints and in an ideal world. Coded data was organised under the themes of 'No suggestions', 'Regular review by an EP', 'Consider EP assessments – relevance and sharing with parents', 'Follow up on recommendations to schools', 'Make clearer the role of the EP', 'Provide direction/ signpost to other agencies', 'Provide and share advice with parents', 'Be available for future support' and 'Support parents as partners (see Appendix T).

Two parents left this section (Question 7) blank. One parent suggested that schools played a big part:

> No, I think school plays a huge part.

One parent wanted regular reviews of their child and another wanted EPs to be forthcoming with advice. One parent wanted an EP to be there in the future for their child (if things changed) and another wanted EPs to insist that schools carry out recommendations made:

> Insist and revisit advice/ recommendations to schools, penalise schools not doing recommendations. Not helping (child).

Notes taken by the SENCo at the parent meeting provided a valuable insight into parents' perceptions relating to their experiences and were coded as 'noticings'. Parents expressed frustration in terms of lack of available information for them about SLCN and commented on not knowing where to get information from. One parent suggested than an EP could 'Advise best places to help'. One parent talked about how it had felt as if they had won the lottery when they had an 'answer' (referring to a diagnosis).

Parents spoke about being daunted at a review meeting by the number of professionals attending and feeling vulnerable at meetings. One explained how scary and hard it had been to hear that the EP was to see their child, and there seemed to

be a general lack of understanding as to why an EP might be involved. The role of an EP in the FSA process was queried, including whether EPs helped parents to look at draft statements. Parents highlighted difficulties in hearing negative comments about their child:

> It's hard to not hear the advice from professionals.

One parent indicated how out of her depth she would have felt, without support.

5.8 Summary

This chapter has outlined the results from the three focus groups – Children's Centre staff, SENCos and SALTs – questionnaires from EPs and from parents, and notes from a parents meeting.

In order to answer the main question in this study, '*How can the role of the educational psychologist, as a multi-agency partner, in the area of children with speech, language and communication needs, be understood?*', information was sought from participants in relation to three supplementary questions.

> 1. How do other professionals perceive the role of the educational psychologist in supporting children with SLCN and how does this compare to how EPs would like to work and what parents want?
>
> 2. What might impact on EPs supporting children with SLCN within the local context?
>
> 3. Do professionals consider EPs to have a unique role in supporting children with SLCN and can the current role be widened in the local context based on partners' perceptions?

Results outlined in this section allow each of these three supplementary questions to be answered as follows:

In terms of how other professional's perceive the role of the EP in supporting children with SLCN, information was gained through the three focus groups. Discussion with Children's Centre staff, SENCo and SALTs resulted in a number of roles for EPs being identified in terms of 'blue sky thinking' (in an ideal world), from their unique perspectives. EPs indicated through questionnaires how they currently work in the city and how they should like to work. Parents indicated through questionnaires and discussion what they would like EPs to do.

Regarding what might impact on EPs supporting children with SLCN within the local context (Question 2), barriers to 'blue sky thinking' were identified through focus

group discussion and EP questionnaires. All partners were all able to acknowledge that there were barriers to EPs working in the ways that they had indicated.

In considering the third question, EPs and other professionals were all able to highlight a unique role for EPs in their work to support children with SLCN through the focus groups and questionnaires. In terms of the second part of the question, 'blue sky thinking' themes were mapped to the barriers in order to consider possible challenges. In addition, focus groups were able to suggest the three most useful ways that EPs could work to support children with SLCN that, in their view, would make a difference, taking into account the barriers that had been identified within the local context. They also provided information on their views of support for children with SLCN locally and previous experience of working with EPs. Information from EPs regarding how they work and should like to work to support children with SLCN and what parents want from EPs also contributed to answering this question.

The following section will consider in more detail each of the three supplementary questions in this study, drawing on the results outlined above in order to reach a greater understanding of the EP as a multi-agency partner within the area of SLCN.

Chapter 6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to explore partners' perceptions of the role of the EP in their work to support children with SLCN, from their unique perspective, and, by creating an opportunity for dialogue, gauge the value of using 'partner voice' to inform and enhance EP practice.

This section will first consider each of the three supplementary questions used in order to support this enquiry, drawing on data obtained from partners as outlined in the previous section. The main research question will then be addressed before evaluating and reflecting on the study as a whole

6.2 Research Questions

6.2.1 Research Question 1

> How do other professionals perceive the role of the educational
> psychologist in supporting children with SLCN and how does this
> compare to how EPs would like to work and what parents want?

This was considered an important first question.

In starting out on this study, I had wondered whether a wider role was possible both in my work as an EP supporting a number of schools and also as a member of a multi-agency locality team. I was aware of the changing landscape in terms of increased autonomy for schools, traded services and the reorganisation of services. I was interested in how EPs were perceived by a range of partners in terms of professional identity, who are EPs, what they do and whether their role is changing. I was also interested to explore this question in terms of self-preservation, to see what EPs can offer that is considered useful in their work to support children and families.

Biddle suggested that people have expectations for their own behaviour and of others (Biddle, 1986) and, whilst I would hasten to say that partners had 'expectations' as such, they were certainly able to make some suggestions, drawing on their own constructions of meaning in terms of the EP role (Cresswell, 2003).

Thematic analysis of data from the focus groups indicated four roles for EPs in supporting children with SLCN:

- 'Trainer'

- 'Supporter of children and families'

- 'Assessor'

- 'Supporter of other professionals'.

Interestingly, though not surprisingly perhaps, given findings outlined by Bercow (Bercow, 2008), partner themes contributing to the overall theme of 'Supporter of children and families' were fewest. The main contributors were SENCos, whose themes related to 'Capturing the child's view', 'Signposting for children', 'Informing/supporting parents' and 'Organising youth groups'. The theme of 'Signposting for children' was reassuring, given the suggested impact that SLCN can have on a child's emotional and psychological well-being (Botting, 2006) and long-term outcomes (Gregory & Bryan, 2011).

The theme of 'Informing/supporting parents' was also supported by SALTs and fitted with what parents wanted themselves. Of note was that Children's Centre staff made no suggestions for this area of work. I was surprised at this, given that they worked closely with parents themselves, and I wondered if the previous lack of contact between EPs and Children's Centres in the local area may have supported this perception. This could link with the notion that partners' understanding of the EP role may impact on how they collaborate and that a better understanding of partners' roles and responsibilities could result in an improved working relationship (Home Office, 2013).

Children's Centre staff made more contributions to the overall theme of 'Assessor', with the themes of 'Supporting government guidance', 'Supporting early intervention/early years' (with provisions) (which links with the indication by Kelly and Gray (2000) that EPs want more emphasis on early intervention and an increased role with early years providers), and 'Advice on child development/speech, language and communication development' (for practitioners). This importance of early intervention for children with SLCN is well documented, (Snowling et al., 2009), and the suggestion of EPs being involved in the two-year developmental check was interesting (and useful). One of the participants was particularly keen on emphasising the inclusion of childminders as an early years 'provision', and not being forgotten in any discussions about support for children ('we need to see childminders as much of the early years profession as nurseries and schools'). Her comments during the

session suggested that personal experiences had impacted on her views. This adds weight to the view that personal experiences shape a person's view of the world (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) and, as evidenced here, can impact on how partners work together.

SALTs contributed equally to the overall themes of 'Assessor', with themes of 'Supporting early intervention/early years' as well as having 'Clearer follow up', 'A specialist EP for speech and language', which could link to Cameron's suggestion that an increase in specialisation can be linked to EP effectiveness (Cameron, 2006) and 'Supporting diagnosis'. This seemed to be in line with Farrell et al.'s indication that SALTs wanted assessment of ability from EPs in order to clarify a general delay in learning or difficulty specific to language (Farrell et al., 2006). 'Clearer follow up' and 'Supporting diagnosis' would seem important given Nation, Clarke, Marshall and Durand's suggestion that language impairments can be hidden (2004).

SENCos contributed the least to the overall theme of 'Assessor', with themes of 'Contributing to assessment' and 'Explaining the focus of EP work'. I was surprised at these themes, as they seemed to suggest that SENCos feel that EPs carry out assessments without always explaining what they are looking for. This is something that EPs need to consider.

'Supporter of other professionals' was the overall theme that incorporated the most themes from partners, and is reassuring in terms of Bercow's theme, 'Joint working is critical' (Bercow, 2008). Speech and language therapists themes were mainly linked to work in schools ('Clarifying the EP role', Clarifying protocols to schools' 'Acting as a bridge between SALT and schools' and 'Seeing everyone's priorities'). In terms of 'Providing professional consultation', SALTs indicated that they valued discussion with an EP, which research suggests can aid the exchange of information and avoid any issues (McConnellogue, 2011). This may fit with Farrell et al.'s report from a SALT that EP assessment can complement theirs (Farrell et al., 2006). Interestingly, SALTs did not suggest joint assessment of children with literacy difficulties (McConnellogue, 2011), particularly given their keenness for EPs to support teachers in understanding the link between literacy and SLCN and the suggestion that provision for children with speech and language needs should be embedded in the curriculum (Law et al., 2001).

Children's Centre staff contributed least to the overall theme of 'Supporter of other professionals', again perhaps reflecting their own experiences. Given this possibility, it was reassuring that they also contributed to the theme of 'Providing professional consultation', as well as 'Partnership working', and perhaps adds weight to the suggestion that practitioners are aware of the need for early identification but lack the tools to do so (Mroz & Hall, 2003).

SENCos, who arguably work most closely with EPs in the local area, indicated that they would welcome practical support through the themes of 'Modelling use of strategies', 'Developing resources' and 'Supporting project work/research'. 'Being part of the school team', 'Supporting schools to share practice' and 'Sharing knowledge about provisions and LA protocols' suggested an EP role within school and beyond.

I was interested in whether any of the suggestions that came out of the discussion with partners about how EPs could work to support children with SLCN fit with what the partners from focus groups were already doing. This did not seem to be the case. Their ideas appeared to have few links to what they were doing already, and this was a surprise. This would suggest to me that partners may not see EPs in a supporting role to the work that they are doing themselves, and it is evident that there is perhaps much to do before the collaborative working that was hoped for in setting up locality teams can be established.

The fourth overall theme for ways of working was 'Trainer', and again all three professional partners identified a role in this area for EPs. SALTs had 'Linking SLCN to literacy development in schools' and 'Training on the literacy link', which is not surprising perhaps, given the well documented link between SLCN and literacy development (Stothard et al., 1998). This also reminded me of the discussion that I had had with the SALT prior to beginning the research. Dockrell and Lindsay had suggested that best practice for children must consider the impact of difficulties on access to the curriculum (Dockrell & Lindsay, 2000) and this seemed to be an important area for EPs and SALTs to collaborate on.

SALTs also contributed the theme 'Giving advice on child development'. This was linked to schools not referring children with SLCN at appropriate times. Children's Centre staff contributed four themes to training: 'Training for themselves to support children with SLCN' 'Delivering joint training', Training on the role of EP re SLCN' and

Training on SLCN for other professionals'. I had found it interesting that, when discussing support for children with SLCN in the locality, the Children's Centre staff had looked to what they were doing themselves. This contrasted with SENCos and SALTs, who both thought only about SALT support. I wondered about SALT support and links with Children's Centres, and thought that it would have been useful to check this out.

SENCos contributed the themes of 'Support, training and signposting for parents', 'Training for teachers' and 'Raising the profile of oracy'. The latter was a cause for concern, for one SENCo in particular. The new National Curriculum for KS1 and KS2 should help towards this, as it has spoken language threaded through (Department for Education, 2013). The 'Training for teachers' theme was useful, given the suggestion that what a teacher knows is one of the most important influences on what is done in the classroom (Fennema & Kranke, 1992), and that SLCN are not routinely considered for children with literacy difficulties (Mroz, 2014). Snow and Powell (2004) also suggested language as a crucial protective factor in ensuring academic success, positive self-esteem and life chances (Snow & Powell 2004), and therefore an appropriate concern perhaps, for SENCos.

EPs in the city were able to provide information on how they work currently to support children with SLCN and how they would like to work. Currently work was indicated as being focused on assessment, intervention and collaboration/liaison with others (SENCo and SALT). There was a suggestion that SLCN can be overlooked by schools and there was evidence of a clear process of work. The latter was interesting, given the wish for clearer follow up by SALT. In terms of working differently, EPs would like more time to work with and liaise with other professionals (SALT and an education support team were identified). This was reassuring, given the wish for closer working by SALT.

More time to implement and monitor interventions, work to develop parents' confidence, and support for children and schools to manage the set up for children with SLI in the LA was hoped for by some EPs. One EP also indicated that they would like to refresh their knowledge, and one EP did not want to work differently. Perhaps linked to the latter indication, SALTs had indicated a wide variation in the way that EPs work with the same type of need across the same team. In comparing EPs' perceptions and professional partners' perceptions of the EP role, the latter is much wider. This, of course, represented the blue sky thinking of partners and, whilst

the same was requested of EPs, it is possible that EPs were more mindful of the reality.

Parental responses suggested a hope of practical support from EPs. Parents would like detailed reports which address the important aspects, time for the EP to get to know their child, meetings with the EP, and for EPs to follow up on recommendations to schools and to provide and share advice with them. In addition, parents would like EPs to be available for future support, provide regular review and direct/signpost to other agencies. 'Support parents as partners' as a theme came from a 'noticing' that some parents can feel daunted in meetings. These hopes, in terms of support from EPs, are entirely appropriate and appear to me to represent good EP practice. It would have been useful to have shared suggestions from professional partners with parents, to obtain their comments on their usefulness.

I was surprised how many of the parental responses/questions reflected Bercow's findings, including the fight for support. This led me to reflect on the position of parents as partners. Questions asked of me during the session suggested that parents may feel daunted and vulnerable when liaising with others around meeting the needs of their children. Responses to questionnaires and comments made by parents during the session highlighted further possibilities for EP support, though not specifically in terms of supporting SLCN. These were the possibilities of looking at draft statements with parents, supporting parents to ensure that recommendations made by professionals are followed up and providing information to parents regarding the support available.

Given the suggestion that a lack of role clarity can be an issue for parents (Band et al., 2002), placing them at the heart of this study is important. Hardy highlighted 'trust' as an essential feature of multi-agency working (Hardy et al., 2003) and, given parents' comments about feeling daunted, this is something that requires a high level of attention from all professionals.

Costley et al. suggested that collaboration is an orientation towards common and shared values (Costley et al., 2010), and this is what I was aiming for in this study. Despite problems associated with multi-agency working (Todd, 2007), the importance of collaboration to meet children's needs in SLCN is clear (Lindsay & Dockrell, 2004).

Having considered partners' perceptions of how EPs can work with children with SLCN, the next section will consider barriers to support.

6.2.2 *Research Question 2*

> What might impact on EPs supporting children with SLCN within the local context?

Barriers identified by professional partners and EPs were organised under seven themes:

- 'Constraints on time and money'
- 'Lack of enthusiasm'
- 'Agencies not working together'
- 'Lack of understanding of EP role'
- 'Changing landscapes'
- 'EPs as individuals'
- 'Not being valued by schools'.

'Constraints on time and money' was identified as a theme by all four groups of professionals. This was in terms of time, resources and staffing. The general feeling I had, as a manager working within the EPS, was that EPs were doing what they could to support children with SLCN within the constraints of time and context of working. This fits with Stobie's suggestion that EPs employ themselves to best effect (Stobie, 2002b). Cuts to frontline services being a major challenge to the support of children with SLCN had been highlighted (Gross, 2011), as had the availability of resources to support a wider role and difficulties in recruiting EPs (Kelly & Gray, 2000). Mroz had also pointed out that a key obstacle in supporting children is the availability of experts (Mroz, 2012).

'Lack of enthusiasm' was identified as a barrier by SALTs and SENCos and related to EPs ('you need the right people doing it') and other professionals. An 'exhausted and disillusioned' workforce was suggested. The latter could be linked to another of the themes, 'Changing landscapes', which was highlighted by all four groups. Changes to teams, the world of private EPs, traded services and restructure of services were all identified. Fallon et al. (2010) noted that the developing social and political context of public services presented a challenge to EPs and to service delivery (Fallon et al., 2010), and this perception was evident in the results.

'Agencies not working together' was a barrier highlighted by SENCos, and was suggested alongside 'Supporting multi-agency approaches' as a unique role for EPs. This suggests that, whilst SENCos acknowledge the value of multi-agency working,

they understand that within the context of the LA this can be difficult. Todd suggested that multi-agency working considered systems rather than professional roles and relationships (Todd, 2011), and this could provide an explanation of this perceived barrier. EPs also contributed to the barrier of 'Agencies not working together' in their indication of lack of opportunity to work with and liaise with SALT and differences in/ confusion over SLI clarification. Interestingly SALTs did not raise concerns over differences in terminology, which perhaps supports the notion that education and health can remain quite separate services (Botting & Resling, 2007), despite the governments drive to encourage otherwise. It is also of concern that studies have shown a high proportion of EPs not collaborating with SALT services (Farrell et al, 2006).

'Lack of understanding of EP role' was a theme from Children's Centre staff, SENCos and SALTs. SALTs indicated the usefulness of communicating each other's role more effectively. This had also been highlighted by Kelly and Gray, who suggested this as a way of helping a closer working relationship (Kelly & Gray, 2000). Dunsmuir et al. also pointed out that roles need to be identified through the identification of complementary and distinctive area of practice (Dunsmuir et al., 2007). SENCos contributed towards this theme in terms of their focus on SALT support for children with SLCN.

'EPs as individuals' was identified as a theme by SALTs only. They commented on the quality of reports and unclear follow up by some. McConachie pointed out the need to consider appropriate evidence for good and effective practice (McConachie, 1999) and, given concerns expressed by SALTs, a consideration of EP practice in this area is useful.

The 'Not valued by schools' theme was also from SALT ('Maybe school cooperation, to a degree'), but also contributed towards by the other three professionals. SENCos referred to teachers not taking recommendations on board or not having an understanding of a child's needs. This latter point was also highlighted by EPs and, given the suggestion that knowledge should be actionable and usable (Argyris, 1999), this barrier needs be addressed on a practical level, in conjunction with teachers during the EP's work in school. Experience suggests that, after seeing a child, not all EPs work as closely with classroom teachers as would be considered best practice. This could be due to time pressures and the fact that the SENCo is the main link in school. Information in schools may not always be cascaded. The

Children's Centre staff theme arose from a 'noticing' of a suggestion that schools may not understand that children need to build their self-esteem and language skills as a foundation for other learning.

The barriers suggested by partners in terms of how EPs might work to support children with SLCN highlight a number of challenges. Some reflect the changing face of LAs and others are more personal to EPs. Whilst acknowledging that change can represent learning (Stobie et al., 2002a) and that EPs can respond flexibly to the context (Fallon et al., 2010), 'getting it right' (Gersch, 2009) does not seem easy.

Having considered partners' perceptions of what might impact on the EPs supporting children with SLCN in the local context, the next section will consider whether the role can be widened and whether EPs have a unique role.

6.2.3 Research Question 3

> Do professionals consider EPs to have a unique role in supporting children with SLCN and can the current role be widened in the local context based on partners' perceptions?

As stated at the beginning of this thesis, as an EP working with a range of partners I wanted to make sense of the EP role in supporting children with SLCN within a multi-agency context, and it seemed sensible to explore this question with partners. I am, however, mindful that not all EPs working in the city wanted a wider role in supporting children within the local area with SLCN, as they were happy with the work that they were already doing. With this in mind, it is important to say at this point that to have a wider role with children with SLCN may not be a better way of working for some EPs working locally. That said, the main question in this study was about trying to understand the EP role as a multi-agency partner (addressed further in the next section), and the indication that EPs will work in different ways is an important consideration.

In terms of having a unique role to play in supporting children with SLCN, all four groups of professionals made suggestions. Given the suggestion that EPs themselves can question their unique role (Ashton & Roberts, 2006), partners' suggestions were useful. SENCos highlighted a number of unique roles for EPs in their work to support children with SLCN, including supporting multi-agency approaches, providing support and advice to staff in school (including backing up what teachers thought) as well providing a global viewpoint (looking 'across the

board' and looking at facts and bringing things' together)'.SENCos also suggested that EPs have 'an element of power' in providing a report for the SEN panel (the panel which considers requests for an education health care needs assessment).

Children's Centre staff highlighted the 'broader overview' (compared to SALT) that EPs take: a 'holistic approach to the child' and having knowledge on how one type of difficulty can impact on another. SALTs indicated a unique role for EPs as linking language skills to learning, development and academic progress, ascertaining a child's potential for learning and setting SMART targets linked to language and literacy. SALTs also highlighted the EPs breadth of knowledge and the ability to give advice to schools on how improvements in speech, language and communication skills can impact on children's learning.

Considering the whole child was also highlighted by EPs, along with assessment of cognitive skills and overview of development over time and relating SLCN to learning. This latter role is encouraging given documented links (Stothard et al., 1998). EPs also thought that they had a unique role in providing practical support and follow up work for other professionals, establishing close relationships with schools (to ensure effective support), knowledge of teaching and learning and LA provision, as well as early intervention. Supporting decision making around a child's needs and covering a broad age band were also considered unique. There was a lack of reference to parents in terms of a unique role. Interestingly, these unique roles identified by EPs for themselves are in common with roles identified for EPs by partners.

As indicated in the literature review, a great deal has been written about the unique contribution of the EP (Cameron, 2006). Can a role really be defined? Taking into account the perceptions of partners, it would appear that EPs have a standard role associated with their position (Solomon et al., 1985), possibly mirroring those identified by partners (trainer, assessor, supporter). Are those roles identified by partners as unique to EPs really the case? None of the partners made specific reference to the 'application of psychology' in EPs' work as a unique role, and this was a surprise.

In order to help consider whether a wider role was possible, themes relating to partners' perceptions of how EPs can work to support children with SLCN were mapped to barriers. This, I thought, would represent the reality.

'Constraints on time and money' was the biggest barrier, followed closely by 'EPs as individuals'. It is also worth highlighting that parents' hopes for support from EPs fell mainly into these. Given the suggestion that parents value the EP contribution (Squires et al., 2007), this is a concern. 'Not being valued by schools' and 'Lack of enthusiasm' were the smallest', followed closely by 'Agencies not working together'. 'Changing landscapes' and 'Lack of understanding of EP role' were roughly equal.

Partners had identified the three most useful ways of working for EPs, taking into account the barriers that may be faced. 'Constraints on time and money' was again the biggest barrier to these. All three ways of working highlighted by professional partners were included:

- SALT: Look at follow up, good communication with SALT and training on the impact of SLCN on literacy
- SENCos: explaining assessment/ modelling, training on how other difficulties can affect SLCN – vice versa and signposting for parents/teachers/students
- Children's Centre staff: partnership working, training professionals on how EPs can support children with SLCN , and involvement in two-year developmental check (including child minders), linked to early intervention

'Lack of enthusiasm' saw the three SALT key ways of working affected, as well as Children's Centre staff's partnership working.

'Agencies not working together' impacted on Children's Centre staff's training professionals, supporting early intervention, training for teachers from SENCos and training on the literacy link for SALTs.

'Lack of understanding of EP role' impacted on SALTs having clearer follow-up policies and training on the literacy link, as well as training professionals and partnership working from the Children's Centre staff.

'Changing landscapes' appeared to affect SALTs' clearer follow-up policies and training on the literacy link again, as well as all three of the Children's Centre staff's key ways of working. Training for teachers was considered to be affected by this barrier.

'EPs as individuals' impacted again on all three professional partners' key ways of working, apart from the Children's Centre staff's early intervention.

'Not being valued by schools impacted on SALTs' training on the literacy link and SENCos' modelling use of strategies.

In considering whether the EP role in supporting children with SLCN can be widened from the local context, it was shown that there are a number of potential barriers that need to be taken into account. Acknowledging the notion of EPs being well positioned to implement strategies to address local need effectively (Association of Educational Psychologists, 2010), there would appear to be a number of considerations for EPs if they are to highlight effectively the distinctive contribution that they can make (Cameron, 2006). When working in a multi-agency context, the importance of clarifying roles within it would seem important (Dunsmuir et al., 2007).

Whittington (2003) suggested that professionals face implications in the collaborative process, with the indication that for effective interprofessional collaboration, practitioners are required to learn, negotiate and apply (Whittington, 2003). In carrying out this research, I recognised the importance of taking into account partners' views in order to support understanding of the role of the EP, as a multi-agency partner within the area of SLCN. The main research question will next be addressed.

6.2.4 *Main research question*

> How can the role of the educational psychologist, as a multi-agency partner in the area of children with speech, language and communication needs, be understood?

In starting out on this project, I had wondered whether there was an improved way of multi-agency working in SLCN, as within the current model there was a tendency to work separately. In order to help to answer this main question, it is perhaps useful to refer back to the themes highlighted by Bercow and consider this study within that context (Bercow, 2008).

In terms of working as a multi-agency partner, I was interested in the themes of 'Joint working is critical' and 'A continuum of services designed around the needs of the family is essential'.

At the start of this study, I considered that the push for collaborative working should be a top-down process, with management providing the opportunities, time and encouragement for frontline workers to work together more efficiently around the needs of the child/young person and family. My view on this has changed in carrying

out this study. Although management does have a part to play in supporting opportunities, the push for successful collaborative working practices at the front face needs to come from the partners themselves, yet this should be explicitly encouraged and facilitated by managers. There should be a structure in place for this within the LA.

Through carrying out this study I have come to realise that collaboration is everyone's responsibility and that collaborating with partners can support an understanding of role. Solomon et al. (1985) talked about the concepts of intra-role congruence and inter-role congruence, and these are relevant to understanding the role of the EP as a multi-agency partner within the local context.

Intra-role congruence would relate to the congruence within the LA and the EPS. With so many changes, this has proven difficult and, as a result of pressure on time and money, EPs in the local area have felt pulled in different directions, with some giving priority to some areas over others. At the start of this project, EPs had a statutory role for the LA. They were also supporting a traded service, as well as linking with their new locality teams. There were changes in terms of management both at a service and locality level. Taking all of this into account, it could be argued that intra-role congruence was not strong.

Inter-role congruence would relate to EPs with partners. To establish strong congruence there would need to be a mutual understanding of roles, the prerequisite for a satisfying service experience (Solomon et al., 1985). Being part of two teams, the EPS serves schools plus supports statutory work and the locality team. This may have affected inter-role congruence. EPs commented on questionnaires about difficulties in not knowing who to contact because of changes to teams. Although EPs may have had strong relationships with schools, partners within the locality teams were less familiar and, because of time constraints and some lack of opportunity, there was not a clear understanding of roles. Taking all of this into account, neither may inter-role congruence be regarded as strong.

Todd talked about a jigsaw approach to multi-agency working (Todd, 2011) and, whilst the notions of inter- and intra-role congruence could be applied to this, the local authority being the jigsaw and partners and parents/children being the pieces, there may be a more useful way of considering multi-agency working.

Taking into consideration that interprofessional and interagency collaboration is an effective way to drive up care (Community Care, 2009), a suitable model would need to represent agencies as well as children and their families as partners. This brings to mind a system of cogs, relating to various partners involved with the family, which turn smoothly when role congruence is strong (both intra- and inter-role). However, the cogs need oil to turn smoothly. I understand this oiling of wheels to be partners talking to each other. The more partners talk, the more the wheels will be oiled and therefore turn more smoothly. Discussions on role and how partners fit together in terms of role are part of this oiling process. McConachie pointed out that the hardest link to make is between service aims to structures and resources (McConachie, 1999). The oiling of cogs might help one to support the other.

Parents' role in supporting their children in the above model would be an all-encompassing one, with professionals working together with parents to meet children's needs. Parents would represent the main cog (empowered and with ownership), with professionals being smaller ones. I do recognise that such a model assumes parental confidence to 'orchestrate', perhaps another role for the EP would be empowering parents to assume this role.

Edwards indicated that relational agency works by engaging with the disposition of others (Edwards, 2010). Through this study I had hoped to demonstrate the value of relational agency and this notion would fit the cogs model. Why shouldn't other professionals seek the views of partners on their role in order to inform and enhance it? As Todd suggested, all knowledges have agency (Todd, 2011).

In terms of understanding the role of the EP as a multi-agency partner, role theory can be a useful 'lens'. In order to work towards strengthening role, inter-role and intra-role congruence can be explored. Drawing on a social constructionist perspective, this study was an attempt at strengthening inter-role congruence.

In carrying out this research, I realise that partners have a great deal of the power themselves and cannot wait for guidance regarding collaboration. Despite management being regarded as an important factor (Hardy et al., 2003), partners need to get on with it. They need to take responsibility and make the effort to link in – it won't just happen. Partners need to be proactive. This is what I have learnt from the project.

In terms of how to understand the role of the EP in the area of children with SLCN, the context is very important. Barriers highlighted by partners were interesting, but weighting to each perhaps serve to support the notion that meaning is constructed based on previous experience (Cresswell, 2003). There appeared to be a number of competing agendas within the local area that made working conditions difficult. The introduction of a traded service delivery model within the city at the same time as moving EPs out into a multi-agency early intervention team might appear challenge enough. When coupled with a quick succession of budget cuts and reducing team members, increased expectations and shifting sands in terms of policy and procedures, EPs within the city have had to work hard to get on with the job in hand, namely supporting children with a range of special and additional needs.

This study aimed to create an opportunity to give partners a voice in how EPs could work to support children with SLCN. Involvement in the project would provide the space and time for key partners to contemplate the EP role within the context of work that they were carrying out themselves and the government's drive to develop children's speech, language and communication skills. I wondered whether, by listening to partners' views on the EP role, their unique perspectives could be captured and used to inform and enhance EP practice within the local area. The usefulness of using 'partner voice' as an aid to understanding the role was the gap in literature I was hoping to fill. The new knowledge generated through this study suggests that 'partner voice' can be a useful aid to understanding where roles fit and support a wider role for EPs within the area of SLCN. This represents my 'unique contribution' to research.

EPs need to be more proactive in gathering up intelligence such as this and are in an ideal position to look at what is happening and bring relevant knowledge together. Partners need the confidence to ask others about their own role and how, from their perspective, they think that they should usefully work. This takes confidence and is a sign of strength, not weakness: a step further towards working 'multi-agency'.

The following chapter will provide an evaluation of the research project in terms of ethical reflections and implications for practice.

Chapter 7. Evaluation and Reflection

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will focus on an evaluation of and reflection on the research, highlighted by Birks and Mills as important (Birks & Mills, 2011). Issues relating to sensitivity to context will first be presented, moving onto commitment and rigour. Implications in terms of EP practice will be considered before drawing some final conclusions.

7.2 Sensitivity to Context

As a practitioner, I was aware in carrying out this study of the need to be very sensitive to the context, and issues of power and status cannot be ignored. As a senior manager within the EPS and an EP team leader within a locality, I was aware that I had some status within the LA. On reflection, this is probably one of the reasons why I was so concerned about putting participants of focus group members at ease, both in my personal approach and in the planning of the session (refreshments freely available and chocolates at the end).

I was aware that my position may have had an influence in a number of ways. First, in terms of recruitment of participants, it could be suggested that those partners who were approached for this study may not have wanted to decline in case they caused offence or strained a professional relationship. I was sensitive to this and made it clear to those approached that it was entirely voluntary, and I put no pressure on receiving responses to my initial approaches.

I was sensitive to ensuring that participants were not put in a position that might make them feel uncomfortable or awkward in any way. This is why I changed my mind during the opening questions of the focus group and suggested to participants that they did not need to share their notes about what their particular service was doing to support children with SLCN. This may have been the wrong decision, and I did reflect on this afterwards. By not asking them to share, I wondered whether participants may have thought I was not giving value to their contributions. I did not receive this impression from any of the participants, but I acknowledge that some may have preferred to tell the group what they were doing.

Reflecting on how I presented myself during the focus group sessions, I realise that I adjusted myself/adapted to the particular group mainly on the basis of how well I

knew the participants, and possibly how comfortable I felt in their company. I had not anticipated this. It was not planned and I did what came naturally at the time to be sensitive to the context, despite my best efforts to ensure that groups were all conducted in the same way (which could have led to insensitivity to context). Thinking about this, had I been a stranger to the participants I would likely have presented in the same way to all three groups, as there would have been no previous relationship to draw on. Also, reflecting on participants' responses, had I been a stranger I am not sure that participants would have been as open as they seemed to be. On the other hand, I need to acknowledge that, in knowing me, the participants may have been more guarded.

I am aware that within this study I made a number of assumptions which impacted on the way that it was carried out. I made the assumption that EPs would be pressured in terms of time to take part in a focus group, which was why questionnaires were decided upon as a data collection method. I am aware that this was not checked with the EPs themselves and was based on my experiences as a manager within the service, and discussions with individuals and the team as a whole regarding the pressure of work and shortage of time. On reflection, I should have checked this with the EPs themselves.

I feel that it was probably a good idea to have kept the phrase 'through their work in schools' in the question to the focus groups, as this actually served to highlight its inappropriateness. The first focus group carried out was the Children's Centre staff and, when it came to it, I felt quite uncomfortable in reading out the question at the beginning of the session, as I felt that it in some ways it was suggesting that the EP role was limited to work in schools (in terms of supporting children with SLCN), although this was certainly not the case. As it happened, the Children's Centre staff were focused on early years support anyway, which was reflected in their suggestions for EP work. Interestingly, the other two groups were more school focused, despite my saying that, although the 'through their work in schools' was included in the question, I was interested in their ideas of work anywhere. It should be acknowledged, however, that by keeping the question on display this may have served to reinforce the 'within schools' notion and impacted on the groups' suggestions.

In reflecting on the focus group key questions, I did wonder about the appropriateness of encouraging 'blue sky thinking' first and then reality thinking,

based on participants' identification of barriers to what would be ideal. It could be argued that by asking questions in this way I was setting participants up for a fall. I do not consider this to be the case, and it was not the impression that I received from participants. I was concerned that partners might view this study in some way as me making promises. The literature on making and keeping promises suggests that service relationships are achieved by 'mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises' (Grönroos, 2006).

Typing up lists of SLCN led me to reflect on whether I had spent enough time on this with the participants. The task was carried out as an introduction to the topic, so that participants had the breadth of difficulties (that they had listed) in their mind when thinking about how EPs might support it. Post-it notes were stuck on the wall so that they were in view of the participants for the session but, on reflection, I think it may have been useful to have verbalised them more. Did I miss an opportunity for members of the focus group to learn from each other?

Sorting post-it notes for each focus group, I wondered whether it may have been helpful for each participant in a group to have had a different colour post-it pad, but then I was aware that this would show up if some made more of a contribution than others and this may have made them uncomfortable. What was important was getting the range of views from the group. I did not really need to know the responses of separate participants anyway, as they were working on tasks as a group.

SALTs took a long time to write their lists of what they do to support children with SLCN. I made clear to participants that they did not need to share the information with each other, but wondered afterwards whether I should have gone over what they had written. Also, I did not ask EPs and parents what they thought were SLCN, for good reasons at the time. In hindsight, this may have been useful.

Regarding the size of focus group, I am aware that it may have been better to have had more participants involved, yet all partners who indicated an interest in taking part did so. I was very grateful to those who were able to give their time, and understood that everyone was busy and that time is precious. I was surprised that I had no responses from any of the head teachers in the locality but, again, this may be a reflection of time pressure. All but one of the SENCos who took part were from schools that I covered as an EP, and I did wonder whether they would have given up their time if it had not been me who was conducting the research. This may be a

presumption on my part, of course; even if they did not have a good working relationship with me, their motivation for involvement could have been a great interest in considering how EPs could work to support children with SLCN. By having smaller focus groups, it could be argued that there was a greater opportunity for all participants to have a say and to feel more comfortable in expressing their views than they may have done in a larger group.

The session with the Children's Centre staff was useful in terms of building bridges, finding out from their perspective what they were doing to support children with SLCN, sharing how EPs work generally and encouraging them to make suggestions as to how EPs could work from the unique perspective. The session had seemed difficult at times, yet not uncomfortable, as participants tried to provide me with useful suggestions based on what seemed to be their limited experience of working with EPs. As a result, the group was able to provide what I would regard as useful ideas for ways in which EPs could work to support children with SLCN. There was also some good discussion between participants as they checked out information and ideas with each other and negotiated responses (on the scaling).

I did not anticipate that the session would feel so difficult with the Children's Centre staff. It seemed at times that I was asking the participants for information on a subject that they knew little about, though they presented as very keen to help. I noticed that there was some avoidance of questions ('blue sky thinking'), due possibly to the lack of familiarity with EPs. I asked the question in a number of different ways. To refocus, I regularly returned to the question.

I acknowledge that SENCos may have felt some discomfort in being asked the question about their experience of EPs, given that I was the EP providing support for three out of the four schools represented, although all those present will have worked with EPs other than me. SENCos for the schools in which I worked did respond by referring to me when commenting on EP support and this caused me to reflect on difficulties associated with being a practitioner–researcher. It is acknowledged that comments by SENCos relating to their experience of working with EPs may have been impacted upon and, for this reason, it may have been better to have included SENCos from schools that I was not covering as an EP. All SENCos in the locality were invited to take part and four accepted, all of whom participated. Had I omitted schools that I supported, I would have had only one SENCo for the focus group. It could also be argued that SENCos of schools I worked in who took part may have felt

152

pressured or obliged to do so. I was very careful not to place any pressure and there was equal contact about the project with all schools.

The SENCo focus group started off with myself and participants relating to each other in terms of training, which seemed to help towards a feeling of common goals and a sense of working together. When asked to write down what came to mind when they heard the term 'SLCN', it required regular rewording and prompts to encourage the SENCos to add to their lists. The term, it seemed, did not conjure up an easy list for the participants, yet I felt it was important to allow time in order to ensure as comprehensive a list as possible. Although the SENCos did come up with quite a comprehensive list of needs associated with SLCN, it is perhaps important to remember that the list did not come easily. The SENCos also explained some of the terms to each other.

There were differences in how the different focus groups and the members of each understood, or were familiar with, the term 'SLCN'. I wonder therefore whether it may have been better for me to have explained the term myself as the term used by Bercow (Bercow, 2008). What I had attempted to do was to clarify the term, from their point of view, and for them to have the spectrum of need in mind when they thought about how EPs might work to support. I could have given participants more guidance, but this would not have allowed me an insight into their understanding, which I considered important for the purpose of this study.

There were differences in perceptions between and within focus groups. Participants within each focus group took part in discussion and debate, and in this respect the data is considered more useful than if participants had taken part in individual interviews. Comments made suggested that they were able to learn from one another.

In thinking how partners perceive the EP role within the continuum of services they are offered, I did not ask this question specifically. On reflection, this may have been useful. Neither did I draw attention to what other services were doing to support children with SLCN and ask how EPs could give support with that in mind. I did nothing to prompt thinking about collaborative working, as I was interested to see what participants came up with themselves.

I did wonder whether participants may have felt uncomfortable about commenting on the EP role. To me it was an 'olive branch', a way of giving their perceptions, ideas

and opinions value, and I tried to encourage openness by indicating that I was not 'precious'. I was aware, however, of sensitivities around professional boundaries and unsaid rules.

Participants in the focus groups were asked about the unique role of an EP in supporting children with SLCN. I included this question, given what seems to be the changing nature of the EP role, but did feel a little uncomfortable in asking this as I was keen not to suggest that I felt that EPs had a definite role. All participants highlighted a unique role for EPs, but it should be acknowledged that they may have felt pressured to suggest a unique role even if they did not think this to be the case, simply because this question was asked.

Whilst coding the EP questionnaires, I was very aware of knowing the individual EPs. This could be regarded as helpful in that I recognised them by their responses, so might therefore be regarded as an accurate reflection of how they work. EPs questionnaires were completed in a limited time. Some were more detailed than others, but I was aware of the relatively quick turnaround time and pressures on EP time. I therefore wonder how much thought EPs had given to their responses. Did they include only what was foremost in their mind and, if they had had more time, perhaps they could have included more?

In terms of the parents' group, I had indicated to parents that completion of the questionnaire was their choice, but I do wonder if parents may have felt pressured to complete the questionnaire if other parents in the group were completing theirs. On reflection, parents may have felt uncomfortable about indicating that they did not wish to take part in completing the questionnaire. It may have been better to have handed out a questionnaire to parents to take away and return it if they so wished.

I did not check responses/data with partners after the results had been analysed. I had already spent time summarising during the session and again at the end of the session, and it did not seem appropriate to take up more of their time.

7.3 Commitment and Rigour

Within this study, I was interested in exploring Bercow's theme of multi-agency working (Bercow, 2008), involving who I considered to be the three main professional partners for EPs working to support children with SLCN. Committed to ensuring as

clear picture as possible with key partners, consideration should be given to whether they were the right partners.

I chose partners who I thought had a range of experiences working with EPs and were useful partners in terms of work with children with SLCN. In saying this, I acknowledge that my perception of role will have impacted on who I selected as key partners to include in the study. I could, of course, have taken the perspective of managers. This would have presented more of a balanced view, but I was keen through this study to consider perceptions of the EP role through the eyes of frontline workers.

In considering which partners to include in the study, I was aware of the importance of involving parents and also children/young people. As the focus was on how EPs could work to support children with SLCN, I wondered how such a study could be conducted without involving those central to it. I was aware that speech, language and communication is an enormous area of need and, access difficulties aside, was unsure how children might be approached for involvement.

After carrying out the study, I would acknowledge that a broader range of partners would have been useful. However, given the limitations in terms of time and access, those partners that were selected, I feel, represented a good cross-section of those currently working to support children with SLCN.

Children's Centre staff had historically not worked a great deal with EPs and their experiences were limited, so in that respect it was useful to explore their perceptions. Although EP support for children in the early years within the LA was free, EPs had tended to see children in nurseries and not particularly to link in with Children's Centres. On reflection, this seems surprising, particularly as Children's Centres are set up to support development of children in the early years and speech, language and communication is a particular area of focus.

In contrast, SENCos had had considerable experience of working with EPs. The recent introduction of traded services meant that schools were paying for EP support and in reality SENCos were being asked to consider what work they might wish to pay for, in some respects. SENCos were therefore a useful partner to include, as they represented a 'paying customer' for the EPS, as well as a collaborative partner.

SALTs represent the bridge across the age ranges as far as SLCN support is concerned, and therefore are good partners to have included in the focus groups. SALTs have historically linked with EPs in supporting children with SLCN, and it was felt that the good practice already taking place within the LA could be built upon.

It could be argued that it would have been useful to pilot the questioning route and the questionnaires. I acknowledge that I could have selected different partners to 'test' the questions and I could have changed the questioning route/questionnaires based on their responses. However, I was of the view that any changes made as a result of doing this could lead to unhelpful changes, based on the fact that I wanted to explore the perceptions of particular partners. I could have also carried out a pilot with the same partners but in a different locality. Again, this was not considered to be appropriate, as I wanted to explore the perceptions of the partners whom I was working with in one of the localities, and anyway was aware that not all localities worked in the same way, thus any feedback gained might not have been relevant to the context of the locality in the study.

In order to ensure commitment and rigour, I have reflected on questions used, such as the inclusion of the phrase 'through their work in schools' These were dropped naturally as the project progressed, and suggested to me at the time that this area of work cannot be restricted to work in schools. I was aware that by including these words within the thesis question in the EP questionnaire that I may have limited the EP responses. However, Question 1 of the questionnaire did encourage them to think more widely than just school.

I asked participants about their understanding of the term SLCN as an opener to the focus groups so that participants could have the whole umbrella in their heads when thinking about how EPs might work to support, but asking the question was more useful than this. I had the post-it up for the whole of the session as a reminder and referred to it regularly.

There appeared to be some confusion initially as to what I was asking participants to do regarding the SLCN question, and it is interesting to note that their list contained types of language difficulty and the impact of language difficulties. I had made the assumption that partners would write down the type of language difficulty, but of course what came to mind for some was the impact (e.g. 'reflects on behaviour'). This understanding of my question was surprising to me at first, as it was not what I

was expecting. On reflection, my question should have been, 'What types of difficulty/need would come under the SLCN umbrella'. It was interesting to compare responses to this question across partners.

I was concerned that I may have dismissed too quickly the lists that the participants drew up around what they were doing to support children with SLCN. This was not my intention and, on reflection, it may have been better to acknowledge what they were doing already, particularly as I wanted them to consider the EP within the context of what was already going on.

I had thought that partners may have differing perceptions on what constitutes 'SLCN' and, whilst this may have been true of individual participants, in carrying out the SLCN umbrella activity as a group the breadth of the term was covered by all of the focus groups, and this surprised me. I had wrongly assumed that there would be a noticeable difference in how the three focus groups understood the term. SALTs' list was longer, as might be expected, but as a group the SENCos and Children's Centre staff were able to provide a comprehensive list. It is noted, however, that lists were produced in collaboration with each other; if individual lists had been drawn up, then they would not have been so lengthy. Individual perceptions were pooled and built upon, which highlights the greater utility of focus groups over individual interviews.

Whilst it has been useful to explore the perception of partners with regard to the work that EPs can do to support children with SLCN, I am of the view that more could have emerged from the focus group sessions had I been able to step out of the researcher role and into the senior EP role. By this, I mean more open debate and discussion could have taken place around the various ideas. There would have been the opportunity for more checking out and planning in a collaborative way to support children with SLCN.

When the session with SENCos moved on to how EPs could work to support children with SLCN, I was surprised at the useful suggestions made by participants, given that discussion on the scaling question had suggested a view that support for children with SLCN was the responsibility of SALTs. I wondered whether the problem had been in the wording of my questions (How are we doing in the city/in the locality, regarding meeting the needs of children with SLCN), but on reflection I did provide additional prompts that the responsibility for support lay wider than with SALTs.

Perhaps SENCos did not see themselves/support in school as part of support in the locality/in the city. In hindsight, it would have been useful to check this with them.

In discussing possible support from an EP for children with SLCN in schools, it was useful to hear SENCos' experiences across the age ranges. Having a SENCo from one of the primary language provisions as part of the group was useful, as she was able to provide a balanced view of the support available for children in the city/locality and support the discussion/bring it back to the topic of SLCN.

When discussion moved on to barriers to working, the SENCos at first did not appear to realise that I meant in terms of EPs, as was evident in their initial suggestions. Repeating the question seemed to help and to encourage their thinking about the barriers/considerations that may be relevant to EPs and their work to support children with SLCN. Throughout the session, I checked my understanding of what the participants were saying.

The last question in the focus group session was to ask if anything had been missed. I did feel that I perhaps overdid going over the suggestions/ideas on the flipchart but, as one question supported the next, this seemed useful at the time. Also, at the end, I wanted to ensure that what I had recorded was an accurate reflection of what had been said.

The focus group sessions were a useful opportunity for two-way sharing of information. Children's Centre staff, for example, shared that practice in the most deprived areas was probably the best practice. When asking the Children's Centre staff about the EP role in an ideal world, I wondered whether this may have been a difficult question to answer for them, as discussion had indicated that they had less experience of working with EPs than partners in the other focus groups. I also noticed that they gave much information about themselves at this point in the focus group session and I wondered whether this was diversionary or a play for time. To support them, I read through the list of SLCN that had been drawn up, emphasising the range, and asked again how EPs might work to give support. This did seem a difficult task for them. Many points/ideas came through discussion, rather than from Children's Centre staff being very clear of ways an EP could work to support children with SLCN.

The parents' questionnaire was completed as part of a session with parents about the role of the EP. Thinking about it, the information shared with parents was about

EP training and current ways of working. It may have been useful to explore possibilities for EP work with parents in a more open way, as was done with the focus groups, so that they could have worked together to make suggestions.

For the parents' questionnaire, initial 'noticings' and latent codes proved more difficult to extrapolate than in the EP questionnaires. I coded in a way which made sense to me.

In order to analyse the data, I jotted initial 'noticings' and picked out data which I thought of as important and relevant to highlight and to code. I acknowledge that what I considered as important and relevant may have been viewed very differently by another person. My experience, background and personal views will all have played a part. It is not possible for a researcher to stand entirely apart from who they are and what they bring. Every researcher brings something different to their research, and it is important to reflect on what this might mean for the outcomes. In terms of this study, I was committed to exploring a range of partners' views that had been obtained, and carried out what I considered to be rigorous interpretation of the data, acknowledging that I was coming to it from a social constructionist perspective.

In terms of analysing the data, I was committed to ensuring rigour. Recordings were listened to and focus groups transcribed. Scripts were read and re-read. I put notes down the left-hand side that highlighted the structure of the session and jotted 'noticings' down the right-hand side of the page. During the reading, I picked things up that I had not noticed while listening, so it was useful to do both. I wondered about colour coding each participant, but decided that this was not necessary as I was colour coding by group.

It was useful to compare themes with lists that had been captured on the flipchart to ensure, as far as possible, that no information was missed. 'Seeing the whole child', for example was listed on the flipchart for Children's Centre staff under the question 'How can EPs work with support children with SLCN', but it had not been captured as a 'blue sky thinking' idea in terms of how can EPs give support.

I experimented with the names of themes. I was surprised that what I was left with was what I could have predicted. Had my preconceptions impacted on my analysis? I recognise that someone else may have sorted data differently. I did not worry about this too much, as it was about the sense that I could make of the data, based on my understanding and experience, which I have been very clear about. My view was

that, although the theme name was important, the most relevant information lay under the theme. Questionnaires completed by EPs and parents were given the same rigorous attention as the focus group scripts.

In terms of the research as a whole, although this study was carried out to explore partners' perceptions, it should be acknowledged that my assumption that by speaking to partners a better understanding of how EPs can support children with SLCN may not be entirely correct. There is nothing to say definitely that partners were entirely open and honest in what they shared.

7.4 Implications for Practice

Gersch (2009) warned that the future of educational psychology was not automatically assured and suggested that the way EPs faced challenges would determine the outcomes (Gersch, 2009). Whilst the ability of EPs to respond flexibly to change has been highlighted (Fallon et al., 2010), experience suggests that this is not always easy. This section will first of all consider the impact and importance of some of the ideas from partners involved in this project in terms of how they think EPs could work to support children with SLCN, before moving on to offer personal reflections and ideas for future research.

7.4.1 *Impact and importance*

In terms of the local area, the impact and importance of this study are unclear. It was carried out as practitioner research in the hope that results may be interesting to managers and provide a platform for debate. As the context of working for EPs has changed during the course of this research, it is perhaps useful to think about the project in a wider sense.

Each partner who took part in this project had their own unique perspective on how EPs could work to support children with SLCN, and these are important to consider in order to inform and enhance practice. Four roles were identified for EPs: 'Assessor', Supporter of other professionals', 'Supporter of children and families' and 'Trainer'. The range of ideas gained through information from the partners involved were extremely useful and have implications for practice. However, the practicalities/ potential barriers to these ideas need also to be considered.

In starting out on this project, I was interested in the five main themes for supporting children with SLCN indicated in the Bercow Report (Bercow, 2008). It is perhaps

useful to consider the EP role, as perceived by the range of partners included in this study, within each of these themes.

First, partners identified a number of roles for EPs that could relate to Bercow's theme of 'Communication is crucial'. Ideally, as suggested by SALTs, there would be an EP at the EPS with a specialism in SLCN who could maintain an overview of this area of need within the city, as well as to keep EP colleagues up to date with new guidance and so on. This would be useful, since one of the barriers identified was that EPs may not be up to date with government guidance and what was going on in the Children's Centres.

The Children's Centre staff talked about the cascade of the Early Language Development Programme, which EPs had not really been made aware of. Closer working with Children's Centre staff would seem useful, therefore, in terms of giving the same messages around the importance of developing children's SLCN and EPs possibly supporting attendance at Children's Centre sessions. The barriers to this, of course, would be time and staffing, as well as lack of opportunity for EPs and Children's Centre staff to get together as part of a wider locality team. This calls for consideration by managers.

Good communication forms a solid basis on which children can learn basic skills, and the support in this area needs to start from birth. EPs could model the use of language with children, through play sessions. In my current role, working independently as an EP, I have had the opportunity to be part of a working group supporting children with SLCN in a primary school. One of the ideas that has been suggested for supporting parents in school, given that past experience by school staff had suggested that 'training' for parents had not been successful, was the setting up of 'stay and play' sessions. Such opportunities would help to highlight the importance of communication with young children, particularly given my experience of seeing some very young children playing on mobile phones and tablets. Strategies such as using reduced language and providing 'time to talk' could be offered. EP could also work to support an understanding that self-esteem and language are a basis for learning, as suggested by the Children's Centre staff.

EPs could work with schools towards being 'communication friendly'. This is one of my hopes in working with the primary school. However, within this I am mindful of not being viewed as 'the expert', as any changes and ways forward need to be planned

together with staff in order for them to maintain ownership and enthusiasm for support. Thinking about children as they grow older and move through school and onto secondary school, the importance of supporting children in terms of SLCN continues. Discussions with the SENCos highlighted the need for training for teachers in the importance of oracy.

SALTs were very clear that EPs could usefully support understanding of the impact of SLCN on literacy. Given the volume of literature highlighting this very important link (Stothard et al., 1998; Snowling, 2000; Stackhouse, 2000), this should be a major focus of EP work. EPs should routinely check SLC skills when asked by schools to work with a child with literacy difficulties and, in turn, should indicate to school staff how SLCN can impact on literacy development. Teachers could be trained in this link, as suggested by SALTs, as well as the link emphasised through casework. The same could be done for children with behavioural difficulties, again given the documented links.

Second, partners identified a number of roles for EPs which could relate to Bercow's theme of 'Early identification and intervention are essential'. Children's Centre staff suggested that EPs could be involved in the two-year developmental check for children and this would be extremely useful in helping to identify difficulties early and provide support. My concern with this is the EP resources that would be needed to support this. The key might possibly be for EPs to work more closely with childcare providers and encourage them to raise any children of concern. Within the locality this did happen in some cases, but not all, and I feel that this might have been due to not all nurseries understanding how to refer to an EP, or actually doing so. It would have been useful for all nurseries in the locality and, indeed, across the city to be alerted to the possibility of EP ensuring fair access, despite implications for EPs in terms of time and staffing.

Working more closely with health visitors was a useful idea put forward by Children's Centre staff. EPs in the city did work with health visitors if they had children in common, but I was unaware of any specific attempt to work together on specific areas of need. This would have been helpful, given the indication by Children's Centre staff that health visitors often submitted a CAF referral requesting a nursery placement to support language development. Reflecting on this, more joint working between health visitors and Children's Centre staff might be useful, and EPs could support this by being available for professional consultation.

Early intervention relates to an early stage in a child's difficulty, as well as at an early age. Experience suggests that this can be a challenge when working to a traded services model, as schools will often highlight the children who are at crisis point or whom they would like to move forward for an education healthcare plan. Training for teachers and other professionals in the importance of developing children's SLCN would therefore appear to be vital. My concern is who would offer such training in the context of decreasing support services, including educational psychology.

Third, partners identified a number of roles for EPs which could relate to Bercow's theme of 'A continuum of services designed around the family is needed'. Parents described what seemed like a fight for support at times, and feeling intimidated in meetings attended by a range of professionals. As an EP, I recognise the importance of keeping families at the heart of any support and regard this as an important role. EPs could ensure that parents are supported and empowered to take an active and confident part in supporting their child's needs, highlighting strengths as well as areas of difficulty and signposting where necessary. I am mindful of one parent's comment in terms of it being difficult to hear negatives about their child, but also of another parent in terms of capturing the full extent of their child's needs in a report. EPs therefore need to ensure that a careful balance is established.

I was interested in the SENCos' suggestion of EPs organising a locality youth group that parents and children could access. Their point in making this suggestion related to parents not always being able or willing to come into school. Such an alternative venue would be useful to consider as it could offer a more relaxed informal approach for parents, which could be less intimidating. Meetings might also be held in this 'youth group', which could represent more neutral territory.

Parents would like EPs to follow their children through school. As an EP, I have had the privilege of working in this way and it has proven useful in terms of getting to know a child's needs well and building a relationship with parents. There might be difficulties associated with this though, not only in terms of EPs moving on, or EPs changing localities, but also in terms of individual EPs. SALTs highlighted the variety in ways of working for EPs, and not all ways of working are suited to all parents. Also, another EP being introduced to the family could result in different ways of support being identified, given the varying experiences and knowledge of EPs within the team.

SENCos suggested EPs signposting young people to sources of support through such as Twitter and Facebook. As an EP I would be reluctant to suggest this to children, given safeguarding concerns, but could alert parents to possibilities in order for them to check prior to speaking to their children. SENCos were also interested in the idea of EPs, including how children feel about their SLCN. Of course, the challenge with this would be that not all children may be aware of their SLCN and, even if they are, they may have difficulties in explaining their feelings. It is a useful suggestion, nonetheless.

Parents at the meeting had questions on the EP role, as well as making suggestions. The EP service did have an EP leaflet that outlines the support, but I was aware that this was not well used or distributed. EPs should therefore usefully ensure that parents and families are well informed about EPs prior to them starting work with their child. There should also perhaps be updated and consistent information about EPs available on the council websites. This is something for managers to address.

Fourth, partners identified a number of roles for EPs which could relate to Bercow's theme of 'Joint working is critical'. All partners saw a role for EPs in terms of working with them and supporting their particular 'area'. If EP resources were unlimited, it would appear that their role in terms of joint working would be wider. Professional partners were keen to have time with an EP in terms of liaison and professional consultation. A surgery-type approach was suggested by Children's Centre staff. This in theory sounds a good idea, but I am mindful that not all EPs may be comfortable in providing such as service. They may question their own knowledge, for example. Closer working with SALT/ joint training around EP and SALT roles could be a way forward. One EP indicated a wish to build on their own skills. This was in relation to Makaton. However, given the requirement for EPs to engage in regular CPD, regular training on such as SLCN may be useful. As an EP, I am aware of the usefulness of revisiting knowledge and strategies around the range of children's difficulties that EPs may come across during the course of their work. SALTs could help with this.

SALTs were clear in their view of the usefulness of EPs being explicit about their follow up of children. They suggested that this was not always made clear in an EP report, and also that schools may not see EPs as providing ongoing advice and support. In order to ensure that the next steps are clear in terms of ongoing involvement, this should be made explicit in EP reports. I would regard this as good

practice and something that EPs should do, as it reduces uncertainty and supports multi-agency working through clarity of involvement.

SENCos suggested that EPs could work more closely with teachers, developing resources, modelling strategies and team teaching. Again, in an ideal world this would seem to be useful, but with traded services I am aware that schools think carefully on how they spend the time that they purchase; to carry out work such as this might regarded as a luxury. As an EP working independently, I am more than ever aware of schools using their time to see individual children who are causing the most concern. SALTs would like EPs to see all priorities and, although this would be useful as it allows other professionals to gain perhaps the valuable insight they require to inform their own work (an identified discrepancy between non-verbal and verbal ability in the case of SALT), with budgets in mind this is not always possible for schools to organise. One of the ideas put forward by partners on how EPs could work to support children with SLCN was to consider SLCN within the context of a child's wider needs. This was considered one of the unique roles for EPs.

As a senior EP working in the city, I was unsure how much awareness other EPs had in terms of the impact of SLCN on other difficulties and the extent to which SLCN can masquerade as other difficulties. As a starting point to moving forward with this project this would have been useful to establish.

It would be useful for EPs to consider how they can work in a more strategic way, alongside supporting the needs of individual children. Within the locality for example there was a primary language provision that not all of the SENCos attending the focus group were aware of. Although a possible role for EPs was highlighted in terms of keeping schools informed of what was going on in the LA, a clear role, had this project progressed, would have been to raise awareness and enable closer working between all schools within the locality.

Fifth, partners identified a number of roles for EPs that could relate to Bercow's theme of 'The current system is characterised by high variability and a lack of equity'. In carrying out this research, I was made aware by partners that provision for children with SLCN across the city varied. Within the locality, SENCos seemed to consider SALTs as the main providers of support for children with SLCN, yet were able to identify ways of working themselves within schools. EPs could therefore work with schools to support their understanding of SLCN within a multi-agency context, with

each partner contributing and having some ownership. A locality project to support children with SLCN could have usefully been set up, ensuring that key professionals work together towards a common aim in a planned and coordinated way.

Within the context of the locality, all three groups of professionals were able to suggest the three most useful ways of working for EPs, taking into account identified barriers, and perhaps these would have been a starting point to planning EP support based on partners' perceptions. SENCos would like EPs to explain assessment and modelling strategies. They would also like to have training on how other difficulties impact on SLCN and vice versa, as well as signposting for parents, teachers and children. All of these suggestions could be easily taken forward, assuming that these would be allowed priority over seeing individual children. Discussions between head teachers and SENCos in terms of such ways of working would be useful.

Children's Centre staff would like to see involvement of EPs in the two-year developmental check for children, as well as training for professionals on how EPs can support children with SLCN. They would also welcome partnership working in terms of giving the same messages together. Again, such ways of working would be extremely useful in terms of supporting early intervention and taking a more active role with preschool children. As an independent EP, I do not have the opportunity to support young children in the way that I did as a LA EP. Acknowledging that the way EPs work across the country is ever changing, it is perhaps incumbent on individual EPs to ensure that they continue to have experience of working across the age ranges (0–25), unless of course they decide to provide a specialist service targeting a particular age group. My personal view is that in potentially losing the breadth of age range, the EP role might become restricted.

A number of barriers to working were also highlighted by partners. These perhaps reflect the changing nature of LA services, but cannot be ignored when reflecting on implications for practice. Barriers relating to changing landscapes could be difficult to overcome, particularly those relating to time and money and service delivery (traded services). EPs could, however, strive to do more in terms of keeping up to date with changes to teams and city-wide strategies. I am mindful of the pressures on EP time and lack of opportunity perhaps to find these out.

The barriers relating to lack of enthusiasm and EPs as individuals could be a matter of consideration for the EP team manager. Training, as previously mentioned, might

usefully feature in plans, as might team building. It would have been useful to think about how to move forward as a team, based on the results of this research. Unfortunately, this cannot be the case in this particular context.

This research has highlighted a way of working with partners that could work towards better outcomes for children. It considered partners' perceptions of the EP role regarding support for children with SLCN, but it could be applied to any area of difficulty, such as mental health and working with child and adolescent mental health services, for example. It was 'real collaboration' – not simply letting partners know what EPs do, but asking them what, from their unique perspective, EPs could usefully do.

In considering the main question from this research, I would suggest that taking account of partners' views of a role can support an understanding of multi-agency working. This seems apparent in a number of ways. First, it seemed to give participants ownership, in some respects, and if ideas were taken forward it would be useful to seek support from the group of partners from which the suggestion came. Second, partners were able to make suggestions for the EP role that had perhaps not been considered by EPs. I cannot be certain in saying this, as individual EPs may well have, but certainly, in planning work for the team and discussing support for children, some of the suggestions had never been aired by any members of the team.

Regarding the EP role in general, I was surprised that none of the partners mentioned the application of psychology specifically. This is interesting. Perhaps an aspect of the EP role that requires attention within a multi-agency context, therefore, is to make clear how EPs apply 'psychological theory, research and techniques to support children, young people, their families and schools to promote the emotional and social well-being of young people' (as well as) 'those with learning difficulties to achieve their full potential through the use of assessment, monitoring and evaluation' (Association of Educational Psychologists, 2016).

7.4.2 *Personal reflection*

Throughout this study, I have been interested in my roles as researcher and as a senior manager within the EPS and the council. In some ways, I feel that the balance I have had to maintain reflects my working life as an EP, which requires an

awareness of the needs of others, sensitivity to context, and management of situations in a confident, measured and reflective way.

Prior to carrying out this research, I did debate my position as practitioner–researcher and wondered whether it might have been more prudent to carry out a study completely separate to my job. I was actually advised to do this by another researcher. I was, however, keen to embark on a project that I considered useful to me in my role, particularly as the context of EP work seemed to be shifting in the sea of political and educational change.

When I set out on the journey of this thesis, I could not have contemplated that on its completion I would not be part of the LA in which the research was carried out. This reflects the changing nature of EP work and support for children and families through the LA. The journey of this thesis has been a challenge. I have tried hard to make sense of terminology, which has not been easy particularly as there seemed to be some lack of consensus over meanings. However, this has resulted in a great deal of searching and reflection on what I really mean by 'truth' and 'reality'. I think that I have come out of it a stronger and more confident EP.

In terms of this study, I have come to realise more than ever the importance of partners making the push to work together, keeping children and families at the heart of everything that they do. Working together with parents, no professionals can be 'precious' about role boundaries, as together they should be shaped in a collaborative way. By listening to the views of partners, roles can hopefully be shaped to meet children's needs better.

I am mindful that the Bercow Report (Bercow, 2008) has now been archived, as governments move on. Despite this, a great deal has been written about the importance of support for children with SLCN and, hopefully, through studies such as this one, the central focus that is required can be continued. In this respect, this research is important.

7.4.3 *Future research*

This study looked at the value of using partner voice in order to help to understand the role of the EP as a multi-agency partner. Future research might usefully focus on exploring with partners how they came to arrive at their reality. This may highlight

gaps in multi-agency working that could be addressed. This represents what I referred to in Chapter 1 as the 'bottom-up' perspective.

Given that partners expressed views about other partners, it may be useful to explore this further (SALTs speaking about SENCos: 'there's a massive dichotomy – there are some of the schools that just don't engage, don't refer, there's nobody in there that we need to see and there's other schools who are amazing, fantastic SENCos who do everything you ask, get everyone to the right meetings, you can set them targets and they actually do them'). It may have been useful, for example, to have each group of partners comment on support from other services and share perceptions in that way. In making this suggestion, however, I am conscious that not all services may consider it appropriate and could feel uncomfortable about the idea. It would likely call for a great deal of trust between groups and an agreement to work together in this way with a shared aim. This may help to move services further away from 'silo' working and further towards collaboration.

Another area to consider may be to explore perceptions of senior managers in the LA, thus considering the 'top-down' perspective. It would be useful to know the value that is placed on EPs in their work to support children with SLCN, from their perspective. Government documentation does mention EPs in terms of supporting children with SLCN and, although examples of what EPs are doing are provided, there does not seem to be anything that outlines the range of skills that EPs bring and how these are recognised as being useful for supporting children with SLCN. If such information was documented at a higher level, then it may serve to raise the profile of EPs in terms of the contribution that they can make and also to ensure appropriate funding to do so. Future useful research could be to gauge perceptions of senior managers within the LA and, in the process, highlight the skills that EPs can bring.

I am very aware that children were not included in this study as partners. This was considered beyond the scope of the project, but would be a useful topic for future research. What sort of service would young people want?

This study was able to explore some parents' views, but SLCN represents a wide area of need. It may be useful to look at parents' views in terms of the different needs covered by SLCN. Whilst this may be a useful area to explore further, I am mindful of the current climate in terms of the shortage of EPs and complications brought about

by changes in the way services work/commissioning of services. This concern may also apply to the other research suggestions above.

7.5 Conclusion

7.5.1 *Summary*

I was interested in the five main themes in the Bercow Report (Bercow, 2008):

- Communication is crucial

- Early identification and intervention are essential

- A continuum of services designed around the family is needed

- Joint working is critical

- The current system is characterised by high variability and a lack of equity.

The results of this study suggest that, in creating space for dialogue, ideas from partners can be useful and could serve to broaden EPs' role with regard to how they work to support children with SLCN in the local context. Although it is acknowledged that this study provides no evidence to indicate that this would lead to better outcomes for children, it has raised some important areas for consideration.

SALTs, as the main professional involved with supporting children with SLCN, consider themselves to deliver an effective service and are very clear about how EPs could work to support children with such needs. They are also clear in their indication that practice between EPs can differ, and this was backed up by information gained from the EPs themselves. Some EPs clearly wanted to alter or add to their practice in terms of working to support children with SLCN, whereas others were happy in their work as it was. Although respecting the fact that not all EPs work in the same way, I do find this latter difficult to understand, as a reflective practitioner. My personal view is that there is always something new to learn and, as our knowledge and experience grows, we shift our views and practice accordingly.

I may not be saying anything surprising in this research, that by taking a range of partners' views, a comprehensive role for EPs in supporting children with SLCN can be described. It is the information gained from the process that is useful. SENCos, who EPs may regard as the professionals with whom they work most closely, seemed to have the narrowest view of how EPs could work to support children with

SLCN. Children's Centre staff, who work with EPs the least of the three focus groups of professionals, could make innovative suggestions, possibly as they were less exposed to a stereotypical way of working. Can professionals who know EPs least support EPs in thinking out of the box? SALTs had very clear views on how EPs could work. There was a sense of frustration that EPs could be doing much more to support children with SLCN, based on their experiences.

This study has shown that partners' perceptions of roles can be used to inform (and hopefully enhance) ways of working. Opportunities to explore partners' perceptions, however, may need to be set up specifically for that purpose. Each partner's perspective is valuable, as it adds a unique dimension, and a partner's perception will impact on the way that they themselves work as a collaborative partner.

In some ways, this study is about collaborating to collaborate. Although there were differences apparent between partners in terms of responses, it seems important and useful to pull together views on how to support children with SLCN.

7.5.2 *Final note*

In starting out on this thesis, I was of the view that collaboration should be supported from the top down. This was based on the LA's drive for more joined-up services through a locality model in which services were co-located. As a frontline practitioner, I felt some frustration that collaboration was not happening on the scale that had been imagined, and I realised that it would not just happen. This study has been useful on a number of levels. It allowed me to make contact with partners and provide them with further information about EPs. It provided a forum for discussion around the EP role and a unique opportunity to gain partners' perceptions on how EPs can work to support children with SLCN. Furthermore, it has provided a further understanding of EPs as a multi-agency partner.

This study has shown that partners can have a role in shaping how other professionals carry out their work. 'Partner voice' would therefore appear to be a valuable tool in partners working together, understanding where roles fit with each other, which in turn can inform and enhance practice. As previously stated, I do not think that it is enough to share information about each other's roles; collaboration needs to go one step further. My view is that partners cannot be sensitive about their role at these times of working together to meet needs. Each will, of course, have their own skill set, but it is only by communicating with partners that these skills can be

used to the best effect to support children, young people, their families and each other. EPs need to be constantly adapting their practice within the context of apparent changes, maintaining flexibility to ensure high quality support and delivery of service.

References

All Party Parliamentary Group on Speech and Language Difficulties. (2013). *The Links between Speech, Language and Communication Needs and Disadvantage.* Retrieved from https://www.rcslt.org/governments/docs/all_party_parliamentary_group_on_slcn_inquiry_report

Allen, G. (2011). *Early Intervention: The next steps*. London: Cabinet Office.

Alvesson, M., & Sköldberg, K. (2009). *Reflexive Methodology*. London: Sage.

Aram, D. M., Ekelman, B. L., & Nation, J. E. (1984). Preschoolers with language disorders: 10 years later. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 27,* 232–244.

Argyris, C. (1999). *On Organizational Learning* (2nd edn.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Asher, S. R., & Gazelle, H. (1999). Loneliness, peer relations, and language disorder in childhood. *Topics in Language Disorders, 19*(2), 16–33.

Ashton, R., & Roberts, E. (2006). What is valuable and unique about the educational psychologist? *Educational Psychology in Practice, 22*(2), 111–124.

Association of Educational Psychologists. (2010). *The Contribution of Educational Psychologists to the Delivery of Local Services for Children*. Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/8500718/The_Contribution_of_Educational_Psychologists_to_the_Delivery_of_Local_Services_for_Children_0

Association of Educational Psychologists. (2016). *Thinking of a Career in Educational Psychology?* Retrieved from http://www.aep.org.uk/careers/

Band, S., Lindsay, G., Law, J., Soloff, N., Peacey, N., Gascoigne, M., & Radford, J. (2002). Are health and education talking to each other? Perceptions of children with speech and language needs. *European Journal of Special Educational Needs Education, 17*(3), 211–227.

Barclay, C. (1997). Culture: The prime differentiator. In P. Murley (Ed.), *Gower Handbook of Customer Service*: Aldershot: Gower.

BBC. (2012). Speech services cuts 'leave children struggling'. Retrieved from http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-16548559

Beitchman, J. H., Browlie, E. B., & Bao, L. B. (2014). Age 31 mental health outcomes of childhood language and speech disorders. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, 53*(10), 1102–1110.

Bercow, J. (2008). *The Bercow Report. A review of services for children and young people (0–19) with speech, language and communication needs*. Nottingham: Crown.

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Anchor.

Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1991). *The Social Construction of Reality*. London: Penguin.

Berry, L. L. (1995). Relationship Marketing of Services – Growing interest, emerging perspectives. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 23*(4), 236–245.

Biddle, B. J. (1979). *Role Theory: Expectations, Identities, and Behaviors*. New York: Academic Press.

Biddle, B. J. (1986). Recent developments in role theory. *Annual Review of Sociology, 12*, 67–92.

Birks, M., & Mills, J. (2011). *Grounded Theory: A practical guide*. London: Sage.

Bishop, D. V. M. (2014). Ten questions about terminology for children with unexplained language problems. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 49*(4), 381-415.

Botting,N. (2006). *Long-term Wellbeing of Children with Language Disorders.* I CAN conference papers.

Botting, N., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2000). Social and behavioural difficulties in children with language impairment. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 16*(2), 105–120.

Botting, N., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2008). The role of language, social cognition, and social skill in the functional social outcomes of young adolescents with and without a history of SLI. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 26*(2), 281–300.

Botting, N., & Resling, C. (2007). Language impairments: Their impact on educational progress. *Educational and Child Psychology, 24*(4), 6–8.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*, 77–101.

Brinton, B., Spackman, M. P., Fujuki, M., & Ricks, J. (2007). What should Chris say? The ability of children with specific language impairment to recognize the need to dissemble emotions in social situations. *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research, 50,* 798–811.

British Psychological Society. (2008). *Generic Professional Practice Guideline*. Retrieved from British Psychological Society. (2009). *Code of Ethics and Conduct*. Leicester: BPS.

British Psychological Society. (2009).*Code of Ethics and Conduct.* Leicester: BPS.

British Psychological Society. (2010). *Code of Human Research Ethics*. Leicester: BPS.

Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods.* (3rd edn.). Oxford: New York.

Cameron, R. J. (2006). Educational psychology: The distinctive contribution. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 22*(4), 289–304.

Campbell, A. (1998). Realism versus constructivism: What is a more appropriate theory for addressing the natture of science in science education? *Electronic Journal of Science Education, 3*(1).

Campbell, A., & Groundwater-Smith, S. (Eds). (2007). *An Ethical Approach to Practitioner Research. Dealing with issues and dilemmas in action research.* Oxford: Routledge.

Centre for Social Justice. (2013). *Requires Improvement. The causes of educational failure.* Retrieved from Centre for Social Justice: http://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk/UserStorage/pdf/Pdf%20reports/ requires.pdf

Children Act (2004) London: The Stationery Office.

Children and Families Act (2014) London: The Stationery Office.

Cho, J., & Trent, A. (2006). Validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research, 6*(3), 319–340.

Churchill, G. A., & Surprenant, C. (1982). An investigation into the determinants of customer satisfaction. *Journal of Marketing Research, 19*, 491–504.

Clegg, J., Hollis, C., & Rutter, M. (1999). Life Sentence: *What happens to children with developmental language disorders in later Life?* RCSLT Bulletin.

Cohen, N. (2005). The impact of language development on the psychosocial and emotional development of young children. *Language Development and Literacy.* Retrieved from: http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/language-development-and-literacy/according-experts/impact-language-development-psychosocial-and

Communication Trust. (2011a). Speech, language and communication primed to become key part of National Curriculum from 2014 [Press release].

Communication Trust. (2011b). Voluntary sector coalition responds to early language development programme announcement [Press release].

Communication Trust. (2012). Leading communication coalition welcomes final report of the communication champion for children [Press release].

Community Care. (2009). Interprofessional and inter-agency collaboration. Retrieved from http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2009/08/03/interprofessional-and-inter-agency-collaboration/

Conti-Ramsden, G., Durkin, D., Simkin, Z., & Knox, E. (2009). Specific language impairment and school outcomes. I: Identifying and explaining variability at the end of compusory education. *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders, 44*(1), 15–35.

Conti-Ramsden, G., Knox, E., Botting, N., & Simkin, Z. (2003). Educational placements and National Curriculum Key Stage 2 test outcomes of children with a history of specific language impairment. *British Journal of Special Education, 29*(2), 76–82.

Corsaro, W. A. (1979). 'We're friends, right?': Children's use of access rituals in a nursery school. *Language in Society, 8*(3)*,* 315–336*.*

Costley, C., Elliott, G., & Gibbs, P. (2010). *Doing Work Based Research. Approaches to enquiry for insider–researchers.* London: Sage.

Craig, H. K., & Washington, J. A. (1993). Access behaviors of children with specific language impairment. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research, 36*, 322–337*.*

Cresswell, J. W. (2003). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approaches* (2nd edn.). London: Sage.

Crombie, I. K., Davies, H. T. O., Abraham, S. C. S., & Florey, C. du V. (1993). *The Audit Handbook: Improving Health Care Through Clinical Audit.* Chichester: Wiley.

Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research.* London: Sage.

Cutcliffe, J. R. (2000). Methodological issues in grounded theory. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 31*(6), 1474–1484.

Cutcliffe, J. R. (2003). Reconsidering reflexivity: Introducing the case for intellectual entrepreneurship. *Qualitative Health Research, 13*(1), 136-148.

Davies, K., Lewis, J., Byatt, J., Purvis, E., & Cole, B. (2004). *An Evaluation of the Literacy Demands of General Offending Behaviour Programmes.* Home Office Findings 233.

Davison, F. M. & Howlin, P. (1997). A follow-up study of children attending a primary age language unit. *European Journal of Disorder of Communication, 32*(1), 19–36.

Dennison, A., McBay, C., & Shaldon, C. (2006). Every team matters: The contribution educational psychology can make to effective teamwork. *Educational and Child Psychology, 23*(4), 80–90.

Denscombe, M. (2010). *The Good Research Guide for Small-scale Social Research Projects*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2003). *Every Child Matters.* https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/ 272064/5860.pdf

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2008). *Working Together: Listening to the voices of children and young people*. London: DCSF.

Department for Children, Schools and Families. (2008a). Communication, Language and Literacy Development programme. London: DCSF.

Department for Children Schools and Families. (2008b). *Every Child a Talker: Guidance for Early Language Lead Practitioners*. http://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/ecat_guidance_for_practitioners_12.pdf

Department for Children, Schools and Families (2009). *Lamb Inquiry: Special Educational Needs and Parental Confidence*. http://www.dyslexiaaction.org.uk/files/dyslexiaaction/the_lamb_inquiry.pdf

Department for Children Schools and Families. (2008c). Inclusion Development Programme: Supporting children with speech, language and communication needs: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Retrieved from http://www.idponline.org.uk/eyslcn/launch.html

Department for Children Schools and Families. (2008d). *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage*. Retrieved from: http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/nursery/pdf/statutoryframework.pdf

Department for Children Schools and Families, & Department of Health. (2008). *Better Communication: An action plan to improve services for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs*. http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.educat ion.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/Better_Communication.pdf

Department for Education. (2010). *The Importance of Teaching. The Schools White Paper 2010.*
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175429/CM-7980.pdf

Department for Education. (2011a). *Framework for the National Curriculum: A report by the expert panel for the national curriculum review.*
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175439/NCR-Expert_Panel_Report.pdf

Department for Education. (2011b). *The National Strategies 1997–2011. A brief summary of the impact and effectiveness of the National Strategies.*
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175408/DFE-00032-2011.pdf

Department for Education. (2011c). *Support and aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability.*
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/cm%208027

Department for Education. (2012). *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage 2012.*
http://www.lse.ac.uk/intranet/LSEServices/nursery/pdf/statutoryframework.pdf

Department for Education. (2013). *English Programmes of study: Key Stages 1 and 2.* Retrieved from
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335186/PRIMARY_national_curriculum_-_English_220714.pdf

Department for Education. (2014a). *Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage.* Retrieved from:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/335504/EYFS_framework_from_1_September_2014__with_clarification_note.pdf

Department for Education. (2014b). *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0–25 years.* Retrieved from:
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25

Department for Education. (2015). *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0–25 years.* Retrieved from:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398815/SEND_Code_of_Practice_January_2015.pdf

Dockrell, J., & Lindsay, G. (2000). Meeting the needs of children with specific speech and language difficulties. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 15*(1), 24–41.

Dockrell, J., Lindsay, G., Palikara, O., Cullen, M. (2007). *Raising the Achievements of Children and Young People with Specific Language Difficulties and other Special Educational Needs through School to Work and College.* DFES. Research Report no 837.

Dockrell, J., Ricketts, J., Palikara, O., Charman, T., & Lindsay, G. (2012). *Profiles of Need and Provision for Children with Language Impairments and Autism Spectrum Disorders in Mainstream Schools: A Prospective Study.* Retrieved from Department for Education: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/219635/DFE-RR247-BCRP9.pdf

Doyle, D. (2007). Transdisciplinary Enquiry: Researching *with* rather than *on.* In A Campbell & S. Groundwater-Smith (Eds), *An Ethical Approach to Practitioner Research. Dealing with issues and dilemmas in action research.* Oxford: Routledge.

Dunsmuir, S., Clifford, V., & Took, S. (2007). Collaboration between educational psychologists and speech and language therapists: Barriers and opportunities. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 22*(2), 125–140.

Durkin, K., Simkin, Z., Knox, E., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2009). Specific language impairment and school outcomes. II: Educational Context, Student Satisfaction, and Post-Compulsory Progress. *International Journal of Communication & Language Disorders, 44*(1), 36–55.

Dyson, A., Farrell, P., Kerr, K., & Mearns, N. (2009). Swing, swing together: Multi-agency work in the new children's services. In C. Chapman & H. Gunter (Eds), *Radical Reforms: Perspectives on an Era of Educational Cchange.* London: Routledge.

Edwards, A. (2010). *Being an Expert Professional Practitioner.* London: Springer

Edwards, A., & D'Arcy, C. (2004). Relational agency and disposition in sociocultural accounts of learning to teach. *Educational Review, 56*(2), 147–155.

Elder-Vass, D. (2012). Towards a realist social construction. *Sociologia, Problemas e Practicas, 70*, 9–24.

Fallon, K., Woods, K., & Rooney, S. (2010). A discussion of the developing role of educational psychologists within children's services. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 26*(1), 1–23.

Farrell, P. (2009). The developing role of school and educational psychologists in supporting children, schools and families. *Papeles del Psicologo, 30*(1), 74–85.

Farrell, P., Woods, K., Lewis, S., Rooney, S., Squires, G., & O'Connor, M. (2006). *A Review of the Functions and Contribution of Educational Psychologists in England and Wales in Light of the "Every Child Matters: Children for Change"* London: Department for Education and Skills.

Fennema, E., & Kranke, M. L. (1992). Teachers' knowledge and its impact. In D. A. Grouws (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Mathematics Teaching and Learning: A project of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics* (pp. 147–164). Macmillan.

Field, F. (2010). *The Foundation Years: Preventing poor children becoming poor adults. The Report of the Independent Review on Poverty and Life Chances* London: Cabinet Office.

Fox, M. (2015). 'What sort of person ought I to be?' – Repositioning EPs in light of the Children and Families Bill (2013). *Educational Psychology in Practice, 31*(4), 382–396.

Fujuki, M., Brinton, B., Hart, C., & Fitzgerald, A. H. (1999). Peer acceptance and friendship in children with specific language impairment. *Topics in Language Disorders, 19*(2), 34–48.

Games, F., Curran, P., & Porter, S. (2012). A small-scale pilot study into language difficulties in children who offend. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 28*(2), 127–140.

Gardner, H. (2011). *Frames of Mind: The theory of multiple intelligences.* Basic Books.

Gascoigne, M. (2006). *Supporting Children with Speech, Language and Communciation Needs.* Retrieved from London: RCSLT. Available from https://www.mgaconsulting.org.uk/Supporting_children-website.pdf

Gaskell, S., & Leadbetter, J. (2009). Educational psychologists and multi-agency working: Exploring professional identity. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 25*(2), 97–111.

Gergen, K. J. (1978). Toward generative theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 16*(11), 1344 -1360.

Gergen, K. J. (1985). The social constructionist movement in modern psychology. *American Psychologist, 40*, 266–275.

Gersch, I. (2009). A positive future for educational psychologists – if the profession gets it right. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 25*(1), 9–19.

Gillam, B. (2007). *Developing a Questionnaire.* London. Bloomsbury.

Goodley, D. (2007). *Parents, Professionals and Disabled Babies: Identifying Enabling Care: Non-Technical Summary. ESRC End of Award Report, RES-000-23-0129.* Retrieved from Swindon: ESRC

Greig, A. D., Taylor, J., & Mackay, T. (2007). *Doing Research with Children.* London: Sage.

Grönroos, C. (2006). On defining marketing: Finding a new roadmap for marketing. *Marketing Theory, 6*(4), 395–417.

Gross, J. (2011). *Two Years On: Final Report of the Communication Champion for Children.* Retrieved from https://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/media/9683/nwm_final_jean_gross_two_years_on_report.pdf

Gregory, J., & Bryan, K. (2011). Speech and language therapy intervention with a group of persistent and prolific young offenders in a non-custodial setting with previously undiagnosed speech, language and communication difficulties. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 46*(2), 202–215.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* California: Sage.

Hardy, B., Hudson, B., & Waddington, E. (2003). *Assessing Strategic Partnerships.* Retrieved from Leeds and London: Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Hart, C. (1998). *Doing a Literature Review.* London: Sage.

Hartup, W. W. (1996). The company they keep: Friendships and their developmental significance. *Child Development, 67*(1), 1–13.

Health and Care Professions Council. (2012). *Standards of Proficiency. Practitioner Psychologists.* Retrieved from http://www.hpc-uk.org/assets/documents/10002963sop_practitioner_psychologists.pdf

Hedberg, B. (1991). How organizations learn and unlearn. In P. C. Nystrom & W. H. Starbuck (Eds), *Handbook of Organizational Design* (pp. 3–27). New York: Oxford University Press.

Hoffman, L. (1990). Constructing realities: An art of lenses. *Family Process, 29*(1), 1–12.

Home Office. (2013). *Multi-Agency Working and Information Sharing Project: Early Findings.* Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/225012/MASH_Product.pdf

Islam, S. N. (2013). An investigation into educational psychologists' perceptions of traded service delivery, using soft systems methodology. (Applied Child and Educational Psychology doctorate), University of Birmingham. Retrieved from http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/4540/1/Islam13AppEdChildPsy_1.pdf

Jenson, A., Malcolm, L., Phelps, F., & Stoker, R. (2002). Changing patterns of thinking: Individuals and organisations. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 18*(1), 35–45.

Jerome, A. C., Fujuki, M., Brinton, B. & James, S.L. (2002). Self-esteem in children with specific language impairment. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 45,* 700–714.

Jones, P., & Cornish, T. (2012). 'It's not what you know, it's who you know': The importance of networks. *Assessment and Development Matters, 4*(2), 2–5.

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). *Organizational Stress: Studies in Role Conflict and Ambiguity.* New York: Wiley.

Kelly, D., & Gray, C. (2000). *Educational Psychology Services (England): Current role, good practice and future directions.* Retrieved from Department for Education and Employment:

Koelsch, L. E. (2013). Reconceptualizing the Member Check Interview. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 12,* 168–179.

Knox, E., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2003). Bullying risks of 11-year-old children with specific language impairment (SLI): Does school placement matter? *International Journal of Language and Communication Disorders, 38*(1), 1–12.

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus Groups: A practical guide for applied research.* California: Sage.

Lane, D. A., & Corrie, S. (2006). *The Modern Scientist Practitioner: A guide to practice in psychology.* Hove: Routledge.

Lather, P. (1986). Issues of validity in openly ideological research: Between a rock and a soft place. *Interchange, 17*(4), 63–84.

Law, J., Lee, W., Roulstone, S., Wren, Y., Zeng, B., & Lindsay, G. (2012). *'What Works': Interventions for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs: Technical Annex.* Retrieved from Department for Education:

Law, J., Lindsay, G., Peacey, N., Gascoigne, M., Soloff, N., Radford, J., & Band, S. (2001). Facilitating communication between education and health services: The provision for children with speech and language needs. *British Journal of Special Education, 28*(3), 133–137.

Leitao, S., Hogben, J. & Fletcher, J. (1997). Phonological processing skills in speech and language impaired children. *European Journal of Language and Communication Disorders, 32*(2), 91–111.

Lindsay, G., Desforges, M., Dockrell, J., Law, J., Peacey, N., & Beecham, J. (2008). *Effective and Efficient Use of Resources in Services for Children and Young People with Speech, Language and Communication Needs* (DCSF-RW053). Retrieved from http://eresearch.qmu.ac.uk/1753/1/eResearch_1753.pdf

Lindsay, G., & Dockrell, J. (2000). The behaviour and self esteem of children with specific language impairment. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 70*(4), 583–601.

Lindsay, G., & Dockrell, J. (2004). 'Whose job is it?' Parents' concerns about the needs of their children with language problems. *Journal of Special Education, 37*(4), 225–235.

Lindsay, G., & Dockrell, J. (2012). *The Relationship between Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD).* Department for Education.

Lindsay, G., Dockrell, J., Law, J., & Roulstone, S. (2012). *Better Communication Research Programme: Improving provision for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs.* Retrieved from Department for Education:

Linsday, G., Dockrell, J., Desforges, M., Laws, J., & Peacey, N. (2010). Meeting the needs of children and young people with speech, language and

communciation difficulties. *International Journal of Language Communication Disability*, 448-460.

Love, P. (2009). Educational psychologists: The search for an identity. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 25*(1), 3–8.

Lucas, L. M. (2010). The evolution of organizations and the development of appropriate knowledge structures. *Journal of Knowledge Management, 14*(2), 190–201.

Mashek, D., & Hammer, E. Y. (Eds). (2011). *Empirical Research in Teaching and Learning: Contributions from Social Psychology*: Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

McConachie, H. R. (1999). Conceptual frameworks in evaluation of mulitdisciplinary services for children with disabilities. *Child: Care, Health and Development, 25*(2), 101–113.

McConnellogue, S. (2011). Professional roles and responsibilities in meeting the needs of children with speech, language and communication needs: joint working between educational psychologists and speech and language therapists. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 27*(1), 53–64.

Monsen, J. J., & Frederickson, N. (Eds). (2008). *The Monson et al. Problem-solving Model Ten Years on*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Morse, J. M. (1999). Myth 93: Reliability and validity are not relevant to qualitative enquiry. *Qualitative Health Research, 9*, 717–718.

Mroz, M. (2012). Meeting the recommendations of the Bercow Report: The challenges and the potential within initial teacher education. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 28*(3), 309–324.

Mroz. M. (2014). 'Off the radar:' The framing of speech, language and communication in the description of children with special educational needs in literacy. *Journal of Education and Training Studies, 2*(3), 88–103.

Mroz, M., & Hall, E. (2003). Not yet indentified: The knowledge, skills and training needs of early years professionals in relation to children's speech and language development. *Early Years, 23*(2), 117–130.

Nation, K., Clarke, P., Marshall, C. M. & Durand, M. (2004). Hidden Impairments in Children. Parallels between poor reading comprehension and specific language impairment? *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 47,* 199–211.

Nuekrug, E. S. (2015). *The Sage Encyclopedia of Theory in Counseling and Psychotherapy*. London: Sage.

O'Gorman, K., & MacIntosh, R. (2015). *Research Methods for Business Management* (2nd edn.). Oxford: Goodfellow.

O'Hanlon, B. (2010). *Frequently Asked Questions about Possibility Therapy.* Retrieved from http://www.billohanlon.com/FAQS/questionsaboutpossibilitytherapy/billohanlon .html

Oppenheim, A. N. (1992). *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement.* London: Pinter.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). Q*ualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (3rd edn.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Paul, R. (2000). Predicting outcomes of early expressive language delay: Ethical implications. In D. V. M. Bishop & L. B. Leonard (Eds.) *Speech and Language Impairments in Children. Causes, characteristics, intervention and outcome.* Hove: Psychology Press.

Phillips, D. C. (1995). The good, the bad, and the ugly: The many faces of constructivism. *Educational Researcher, 24*(7), 5–12.

Ratner, C. (2006). Epistemological, social, and political conundrums in social constructionism. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 7*(1), Artb4.

RCSLT. (2014). IJLCD Discussion Board. Retrieved from http://www.rcslt.org/news/news/2014_news_archive/ijlcd_discussion_forum

Raitano, N. A., Pennington, B. F., Tunick, R. A., Boada, R. (2004). Pre-literacy skills of subgroups of children with speech sound disorders. *Journal of Child Psychologyand Psychiatry, 45*(4), 821–835.

Rees, I. (2008). A systematic solution-oriented model. In B. Kelly, L. Woolfson, & J. Boyle (Eds), *Frameworks for Practice in Educational Psychology*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Reilly, S., Bishop, D. V. M., & Tomblin, B. (2014). Terminological debate over language impairment in children: Forward movement and sticking points. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 49*(4), 452–462.

Reilly, S., Tomblin, B., Law, J., McKean, C., Mensah, F. K., Morgan, A., Wake, M. (2014). Specific language impairment: aconvenient label for whom? *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 49*(4), 416–451.

Robson, C. (2002). *Real World Research.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Rose, J. (2009). *Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum: Final Report.* Department of Children Schools and Families.

Rutter, M., Mawhood, L., & Howlin, P. (1992). Language delay and social development. In P. Fletcher & D. Hall (Eds.), *Specific Speech and Language Disorders in Children.* London: Whurr.

Schön, D. (1974). *Theory in practice: Increasing professional effectiveness.* Oxford: Jossey-Bass.

Schön, D. (1987). *Educating the Reflective Practitioner.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Shannon, D., & Posada, S. (2007). The educational psychologist in the early years: Current practice and future directions. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 23*(3), 257–272.

Snow, P. C., & Powell, M. B. (2004). Developmental language disorders and adolescent risk: A public-health advocacy role for speech pathologists? *Advances in Speech Language Pathology, 6*(4), 221–229.

Snowling, M. J. (2000). Language and literacy skills: Who is at risk and why? In D. V. M. Bishop & L. B. Leonard (Eds.) *Speech and Language Impairments in Children. Causes, Characteristics, Intervention and Outcome.* Hove: Psychology Press.

Snowling, M. J., Adams, J.W., Bishop, D. V. M., & Stothard, S. E. (2001). Educational attainments of school leavers with a preschool history of speech-language impairments. *International Journal of Language and Communication and Language Disorders, 36* (2), 173–183.

Snowling, M. J., Bishop, D. V. M., Stothard, S. E., Chipchase, B., & Kaplan, C. (2006). Psychosocial outcomes at 15 years of children with a preschool history of speech-language impairment. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 47*(8), 759-765.

Solomon, M. R., Surprenant, C., Czepiel, J. A., & Gutman, E. G. (1985). A role theory perspective on dydactic interactions: The service encounter. *Journal of Marketing, 49,* 99–111.

Speed, B. (1991). Reality exists O.K.? An argument against constructivism and social constructionism. *Family Therapy, 13*, 395–409.

Squires, G., Farrell, P., Woods, K., Lewis, S., Rooney, S., O'Connor, M. (2007). Educational psychologists' contribution to the Every Child Matters Agenda: The parents' view. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 23*(4), 343–361.

Stackhouse , J. (2000). Barriers to literacy development for children with speech and language difficulties. In D. V. M. Bishop & L. B. Leonard (Eds.) *Speech and Language Impairments in Children. Causes, Characteristics, Intervention and Outcome.* Psychology Press Ltd: Hove.

Stobie, I. (2002a). Processes of 'change' and 'continuity' in educational psychology – Part I. *Educational Psychology in Practice,* 18(3), 203–212.

Stobie, I. (2002b). Processes of 'Change' and 'continuity' in educational psychology – Part II. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 18*(3), 213–237.

Stothard, S. E., Snowling, M. J., Bishop, D. V. M., Chipchase, B. B., & Kaplan, C. A. (1998). *Language Impaired Pre-Schoolers: A follow up into adolescence. Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research,* 41, 407–418.

Strauss, A. I., & Corbin, J. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd edn). Los Angeles: Sage.

Thomson, L. (1996). Searching for a niche. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 12*(2), 99–106.

Tickell, C. (2011). *The Early Years: Foundations for Life, Health and Learning. An independent report on the early years foundation stage to Her Majesty's Government.* Department of Education. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-early-years-foundations-for-life-health-and-learning-an-independent-report-on-the-early-years-foundation-stage-to-her-majestys-government

Todd, L. (2007). *Partrnships for Inclusive Education. A critical approach to collaborative working.* Oxford: Routledge.

Todd, L. (2011). Multi-agency working and disabled children and young people with disabilities: From 'what works' to 'active becoming'. In D. Ruebain & S. Haines (Eds), *Education, Disability and Social Policy.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Urquart, C. (2007). The evolving nature of grounded theory method: The case of the information systems discipline. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory* (pp. 339–360). London: Sage.

Wagner, P. (2000). Consultation: Developing a comprehensive approach to service delivery. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 16*(1), 9–18.

Wadman, R., Durkin, K., & Conti-Ramsden, G. (2008). Self-esteem, shyness and sociability in adolescents with specific language impairment (SLI). *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research, 51*(4), 938–952.

Wallace, M., & Wray, A. (2011). *Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduates* London: Sage.

Weathington, B. L., Cunningham, C. J. L., & Pittenger, D. J. (2010). *Research Methods for the Behavioural and Social Sciences.* New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.

Webster, P. E., & Plante, A. S. (1992). Effects of phonological impairment on word, syllable, and phoneme segmentation and reading. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 23,* 176–182.

Whitehouse, A. J. O., Watt, H. J., Line, E. A., & Bishop, D. V. M. (2009). Adult psychosocial outcomes of children with specific language impairment, pragmatic language impairment and autism. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders, 44*(4), 511–528.

Whittington, C. (2003). A model of collaboration. In J. Weinstein, C. Whittington, & T. Leiba (Eds), *Collaboration in Social Work Practice*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Willig, C. (2008). *Introducing Qualitative Research in Psychology* (2nd edn.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and methods* (3rd edn.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (2014) *Case Study Research: Design and methods* (5th edn.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Zielke, B. (2006). Not 'anything goes'. A critical assessment of constructionism and its misinterpretation. A comment on Carl Ratner's 'Epistemological, social and political constructionism. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 7*(1), Art. 27.

Appendix A Extracts from reflexive diary

31.1.11 – I met with a Head of Service within the council, and his assistant to discuss useful areas of research. This followed the principal EP discussing the potential for research at a Senior Management Meeting. As 'Communication' was an area of focus for the council it was thought that this would be a useful area for me to consider. The senior manager wondered about looking at the importance of early language skills for literacy. Following the meeting I reflected upon this further, in terms of what would be a useful area of research for the council, but which also what would be interesting and useful to me in my as an EP. I wondered about looking at the confidence of early years teachers in developing children's language skills, or perhaps how there might be a collaborative approach to supporting and developing children's language skills within the locality (possibly including one secondary school, four primary schools and one nursery in the study). I wondered about questions such as 'What skills and knowledge do teachers have to support and develop children's speech, language and communication skills?', 'Are teachers now more equipped to support and develop children's speech, language and communication skills following the Bercow Report?', 'Despite the government's focus on the development of children's speech, language and communication needs, are teachers really now more equipped?' or 'Is the government's drive to skill up teachers to support children with SLCN succeeding?'. I also had in mind the viewpoint of the Head of Service and reflected on looking at 'The impact of language difficulties on phonological skills for reading', 'How confident are secondary school teachers in supporting children with low literacy skills?' or 'Does the foundation stage profile sufficiently highlight difficulties with speech, language and communication so that teachers can be alerted to these to support literacy development'.

My thinking then moved to collaborative working between schools given the government's drive for schools to support each other (Department for Education, 2010). I wondered about carrying out an action research project beginning with a questionnaire for teachers to complete to establish a baseline of skills, and then working with schools to encourage collaborative working including sharing of knowledge skills and expertise. Two of my schools were to become a federation and as one was the host of a primary language provision I wondered about the possibility and usefulness of carrying such a project out with them. Questions such as 'How best can skills in speech, language and communication be developed across the

federation?', 'What are teachers responses to the government drive to developing their skills in SLCN and how has government information/training impacted on teachers' practice'. I was interested in empowering change, acknowledging that in times of challenge schools were being encouraged to look within themselves to develop skills.

I was aware through my work with the language provisions and work within the locality that expertise within the primary language provision based within the locality was not being shared locally. I wondered about an action research project involving questionnaires to all teachers across the federation, individual interviews and focus groups.

31.10.11 – I met with the SENCo and foundation stage leader to discuss the project. We agreed the usefulness of a questionnaire to establish a baseline of skills of knowledge across the staff within the federation, then to select a cross-section to interview and develop an intervention to raise skills and knowledge in meeting the needs of children with SLCN. I reflected on the meeting afterwards and felt uncomfortable that both teachers had looked to me to take the lead when I had hoped that the project could be more collaborative. I also later came to realise that the head teacher had had a different understanding to myself of 'intervention'. My idea was in relation to addressing staff needs and building their skills, his idea was around the teachers using interventions with the children and monitoring the effectiveness of those. At a later meeting with the head teacher it became clear that his ideas and my own were far apart. He talked about me interviewing a cross-section of staff, including himself, and seemed to have a clear view of how he wanted the project to progress, which was very different to my original idea. Whilst I could have discussed this with him and possibly reached an agreement, I made the decision to change direction and consider how EPs could support schools in meeting the needs of children with SLCN. I recognised the importance of maintaining control over the project and felt that under the circumstances this may be difficult. The experience of meeting with staff in the federation had resulted in me reflecting on what may be useful in my own role. The resulting idea was felt to be more useful in terms of my position as a senior manager and timely given the changes that were taking place within the EP profession/ways of working. I thought about questions such as 'Can EPs support teachers' skills development through collaboration' and 'how can EPs support schools in meeting the needs of children with SLCN?'

18.11.15 – I met with the SENCo of the Federation. I explained my thoughts regarding change in direction, and reasons for it. She was supportive and indicated that she understood the reasons behind it. We agreed to draw up a questionnaire together for staff to complete which explored their knowledge and skills in working with children who have SLCN so that we could plan the intervention from responses. In changing the focus to EP this had allowed me to steer the project towards building teachers skills, my original plan rather than considering interventions with children, the head teachers plan. I was reassured by the SENCos parting comment when we met, that the project seemed more manageable. She agreed that the head teacher could be drawn in other directions and that it would be better if just the two of us were taking the lead. We both came away from the meeting with tasks to do. In reflecting on the discussion I realised how conscious I was in maintaining a comfortable relationship. Although the SENCo was supportive I had felt a little uncomfortable about having changed the focus to EPs.

21.11.11- Questionnaire for staff emailed to the SENCo for comment/ checking/change and distribution (joint effort). The SENCo responded by asking if she needed an official version of the questionnaire before distributing. This surprised me and gave me the impression that the SENCo was of the view that I was leading the project. I was keen to ensure that school maintained ownership and saw myself more of a facilitator. I wondered whether the SENCo was confused given that I initially proposed the project (though never intended to lead on). I was very conscious that this should be a joint venture. I emailed back asking the SENCo to finalise, run it by the head teacher and distribute. I suggested that staff may need an introductory paragraph and left it to her though was conscious that she may think she was doing more work on the project that she had initially anticipated.

24.11.11 – Working on this project has made me realise the need to be very clear on roles. I had thought I had been clear but an email exchange with the SENCo suggested not. This made me realise how easy it can be to misunderstand according to one's individual stance.

12.1.12 – Discussion with SALT working in the language provision (in the federation). She made the comment that she had done lots of training in the school and this made me think about professional barriers and sensitivity. This SALT had not contacted me as her team leader had suggested she might when I had spoken to her about the project.

6/10.2.12 – discussion with tutors and colleagues – I was reminded to keep the project manageable.

15.2.12 – Email to SENCo following receipt of the completed questionnaires. I felt that I needed more background of SLC in the school, given the SALTs comment and was aware that I was trying to work in the dark in some respects.

19.2.12- I met with the SENCo and foundation stage leader to draw up an action plan based on questionnaire responses. I was of the view that a clear baseline of skills was important to establish, including what training had already been delivered, and what staff had already had access to (IDP). This information felt difficult to clarify and as a result I made the decision to shift my focus again to how EPs could work to support children with SLCN. Work on this project so far had made me reflect on the importance of establishing and being clear on roles as well as the pressures of time on individual roles and how this can affect liaison and how a role is carried out. I also wondered how partners actually viewed EPs in their role to support children with SLCN, given my experience with the federation staff.

My meetings with the SENCo continued in my role of school EP up to a point where the SENCo took complete ownership and moved the project forward in line with other 'bespoke' training going on already in school.

27.2.12 – I attended a training session for the new locality team. Each team presented. I spoke about my research into support for children with SLCN. One of the teachers from the Children's Centre spoke to me and let me know about the work going on in the Centres to support SLC. We agreed that it would be useful to link up.

5.3.12 –met with the manager of the SLI team and another SALT. We discussed my research and both were keen to be involved. This led me to think about having focus groups of partners – Children's Centre staff, SALTs and SENCos. I also wondered about parents, key partners. Up till now I had been thinking about carrying out individual interviews with partners but SALTs suggested that they may be able to organise a few of them to speak to me. Not wanting to miss out on such an offer I began to think about focus groups, which could provide a broader view that just one person. This led me on to thinking about size of focus groups and how I might approach participation. I also wondered about EP participation. I recognised the usefulness of keeping the research to within the locality but as the research was pertinent to all EPs, thought that information from across the team would be useful.

14.3.12 – SALT presentation to the EP team led me to reflect on SALT work in broader terms (the presentation was on chewing and feeding) and how EPs can support children in broader terms. Times were changing regarding working practices and I wondered whether EPs should be 'casting their nets' broader than schools. This felt in contrast to the direction we as a team were being 'pushed', in terms of offering traded services. Reflecting on my own role in terms of working to support children with SLCN, I felt that this was restricted to individual work with children (as prioritised by school), liaison with SALTs and attendance at the language provision panel. I recognised that the area of language was very broad and that EP assessments did not always highlight difficulties that may be present (depending on assessment choices/ what aspect of language was being explored). I felt that there may be much more EPs could be doing in terms of work to support children with SLCN and that historically EPs in the city (and in other LAs I had worked in) had been directed to work in a very limited way. I wondered how EPs might be able to make a greater impact regarding their work to support children with SLCN. I began to think about using the locality in which I was working as a 'case study', particularly as the principal EP was at that time also locality manager and could therefore maintain a span of interest across both of her teams (EP team and locality team).

19.3.12 – Discussion with manager of the Children's Centre regarding involvement in the project.

2.4.12 – Email from manager of the Children's Centre advising that she had asked the teachers on the team if they would like to be involved. Although I considered it very useful for the teachers to be part of the focus group given their links with schools and nurseries in the locality, I had hoped that other staff working in the Children's Centre might be involved. I had thought that I had made this clear to the manager in our discussions but perhaps not. I had talked about staff in general assuming this meant all staff. In asking only teachers, this may have been an assumption on the part of the manager, given my focus on SLCN support in schools. On reflection I should have made myself clearer perhaps through written communication as in face to face discussion, experience suggests that detail can be lost. I was, however, keen to keep arrangements informal and engage in a 'working together' capacity rather than presenting myself as the researcher wanting to encroach on their time for what might be regarded as my own benefit. As it happened the focus group turned out to

involve a practitioner from the Children's Centre who was not a teacher, which was useful.

10.4.12 – In planning the focus groups I reflected on whether to include a questionnaire to EPs. This study was intended to focus on the perceptions of other professionals and how they saw the EP in relation to supporting children with SLCN.

14.5.12/18.5.12 – I received direct contact from two SALTs who were interested in taking part in a focus group.

17.5.12 – A comment by a SALT about inappropriate use of assessments for speech and language by a senior LA manager highlighted the importance of SALT – EP working to together.

25.5.12- Met with SENCo and foundation stage leader of the federation schools. The point I raised was that the profile of communication was to be raised as SLC was to become part of the National Curriculum (NC) from 2014. A NC review had called for SLC to form part of the curriculum for all subjects from 2014 rather than being focused in NC for English. I also highlighted the Jean Gross report (Communication Champion) which made reference to a three-wave approach to SLCN including classroom approaches for all children and evidence-based intervention for children needing help (the 3-wave approach was not a new concept). The KS2 School Talk DVD was shared (noted that EPs were not listed as one of the agencies who can help children with SLC). SENCo reported that a parents' group was being organised for July in conjunction with Afasic. A workshop for parents to observe had also been planned. We discussed training for teachers in school, including SLCN being included as an additional 'bespoke CPD' group for staff (groups for other areas of development were already going on in school). This felt sensible to me in order to raise the importance of SLC as an area of need within school and also encourage the school to take ownership of it (rather than rely on me as an outside agent to take it forward on what felt like an unclear picture of exactly what was going on within the federation already). The SENCo suggested that I might be best placed to suggest this to the head teacher.

26.5.12 – I sent an email to the head teacher, SENCo and foundation stage leader advising that I was struggling to understand the baseline skills of teachers in school and query myself as the best person to lead on the training. I felt frustrated as I wanted to support the school staff in developing their skills but recognised that

everyone was so busy that a clear picture within school was proving difficult to grasp. I also sensed that the SENCo was frustrated. My view was that the school should be taking the lead on identifying their own needs and discussing with me if I was to support them in any way and the position I felt in was difficult. I wanted to do a good job in supporting the school but needed to be honest about my position. I also emailed the SENCo separately. The foundation stage leader replied with information about foundation stage and replied by asking about the school as a whole. This reinforced my feelings of the school not taking ownership and wanting me to put the pieces together. The head teacher was sent another email the following week.

1.6.12 – I reflected on the three-wave approach and wondered whether this might be something that could be adopted by EPs in supporting children through schools: wave 1 – individual children, wave 2 – whole school, wave 3 – strategic? In carrying out focus groups I wanted to find out if EPs could learn from partners (how to work to support children with SLCN) based on their unique perspective. What do EPs do? Are there other ways of supporting children? Has anyone ever asked partners for their perspective on this?

1.6.12 – Read about SLCN and social inclusion (ICAN) and reflected on the locality area in which I worked (one of social disadvantage). I recognised the need for everyone to work together to raise the skills of children in speech, language and communication and wondered whether work carried out as part of this study could contribute towards a strategy for the locality in terms of supporting children with SLCN. What was going on? Who was doing what? What more could be done and by whom? Could there be an action plan? In asking these questions, however, I was mindful of the financial landscape and the move to traded services for the EPS which because of demands from paying schools meant limited time for preventative work at a locality level. This felt frustrating.

4.6.12 – Read ICAN 8 – Skills for work, skills for life which highlighted to me the need to think about the EP role in supporting children and young people from 0 to 25. Should EPs in the LA be linking more with Connexions and Youth Offending Services? Probably yes, but given the limited EP resources in the LA this was difficult. What would partners think? I wondered about questions such as 'How can EPs support children with SLCN within a multi-agency context?' Should I include partners such as Connexions and Youth Offending Service (YOS) in the focus groups? I decided to stay with my initial plan of three groups. I reflected on the whole

area of SLCN – enormous. Why aren't EPs involved more? With a remit for supporting children 0 to 25 it would seem to me that EPs are ideally placed to support children with SLCN in terms of impact of such difficulties and liaising with other professionals in support of the 'whole child'.

7.6.12 – read an article in the Guardian (2008) which suggested that communication skills should be at the heart of the curriculum and that schools have neglected the issue.

15.6.12 – Meeting with my supervisors. We agreed that there was no need to do a pilot.

19.6.12 – Email to SALTs who had contacted me to express an interest in taking part in the focus group to confirm the date and time of the session. SALTs had provided me with their availability. Four SALTs had expressed an interest but because of the different availabilities a best fit meant that only three were able to take part. Email to Children's Centre staff to suggest dates for their session.

20.6.12 – Email to head teachers and SENCos about the focus group. Four replies from SENCos interested in taking part.

22.6.12 – Email to SENCos with suggested date for focus group session.

30.6.12- I thought about how much information participants would need prior to the focus group. I was conscious of people's time and did not want to put any extra burden on them. I therefore decided to send what was necessary and then spend time at the beginning of the session 'setting the scene' so that each group has the same starting point. I realise of course that everyone will bring their own experiences but if I can ensure the basics are covered then this will proved a springboard for the session. I thought about the structure of the sessions and how best to incorporate activities.

5.7.12 – I thought about questions for the focus groups and recognised the need not to reflect assumptions.

7.7.12 – I thought about my research question and the inclusion of 'through their work in schools' in the wording. The lead EP at the time (new to role, following the departure of the principal EP through the severance scheme the council had introduced to save money following budget cuts) expressed particular interest in

Children's Centre staff responses given the very limited role of EPs in Children's Centres within the LA. By including 'through their work in schools', was this not in itself an assumption? I did feel pulled though as the majority of funding for the EP team came through traded services to schools, yet I could not ignore the importance of early intervention, particularly in area such as speech, language and communication when skills are developed from birth. I therefore thought about taking out the schools wording but after great debate decided to leave it in as this had been my initial question and felt that responses to it might also shed some light on partner's perceptions of the EP role.

11.7.12 – Focus group with the Children's Centre staff. This felt really positive and I felt build some bridges, and resulted in a clearer understanding of each other's work. I was concerned at the beginning of the session that too much time may have been spent on the early questions but thought that it had run smoothly – questions flowed. The main difficulty I felt was that the Children's Centre staff lacked understanding of how EPs worked (seems to have limited experience of working with EPs), which suggests that there should possibly be a greater focus by EPs on the early years and linking in with key staff. I was interested to find out what differences there might be between the three groups. In terms of what went well – the session felt comfortable, there was laughter, there was feeling that we had the same agendas, the participants said that they had learnt a lot. In terms of what did not go so well – I wondered whether I was clear /specific enough on my questions as participants sought to clarify at times (e.g. in terms of what?). I had not anticipated this. Perhaps if I had run a pilot such difficulties may have been highlighted, but then a different person or group may not have needed clarification.

The SLCN umbrella activity was felt useful to do as I referred to their suggestions through the session (how could EPs work to support children with SLCN), so a good point of reference and visual reminder of the breadth of need that SLCN covers. The 'in schools' wording in the question was lost somewhat as the focus of the Children's Centre staff was on the early years. It was useful to have an early years practitioner taking part in the focus group alongside the two teachers as she provided another perspective. She made the interesting point that as a practitioner working in a nursery she had not been aware that referrals could have been made to an EP.

I wondered whether I had said too much (as the researcher), asking and answering questions as they arose, but in situ this felt comfortable and appropriate. I went with

the flow of the session, at times letting the participants take the lead, which again felt right and supported the collaborative process. I also changed a few of the plans I had during the session. I had for example planned on using post-it notes for the scaling session. Participants wrote on the flipchart paper instead as this felt more appropriate when the time came. When the time came to suggest the three most useful ways an EP could work to support children with SLCN, this was done as a group rather than individually as I had first planned. Involvement in the two-year developmental check was not anticipated- I was not aware of this happening so it was useful information and a good example of the usefulness of EPs linking up with partners to work in innovative ways.

17.7.12 – Focus group for SENCos. I resisted the temptation to add to the list myself of SLCN (to help demonstrate the broadness of the term) as it was important to understand the SENCo's perceptions as this could impact on how they considered that EPs could usefully work. I was surprised by how much of a challenge the SENCos seemed to find the SLCN umbrella activity. Also I think it was a mistake saying to participants that they did not need to share their support plans/strategies with the group. I had taken this decision as I had not wanted to put them on the spot, but am concerned that in not doing so I robbed them of the chance to highlight how they approached SLCN. At the time I felt like I was 'brushing them under the carpet', for me to retrieve later, but had been done with the best intentions. By trying to be sensitive I may have been insensitive.

I also missed out on reinforcing how EPs work (which was in the plan, but lost during the flow of the session) but in terms of SENCos this was probably information they knew already. I came away from the session feeling as though I was pushing the EP role to support children with SLCN (which feels uncomfortable) but on reflection this may have been because the main message that seemed to come from the SENCos was that meeting the needs of children with SLCN were very much the remit of SALTs, rather than themselves or other professionals, which I was very surprised about. SENCos seemed to regard themselves as having little responsibility for meeting SLCN even though they had written lists themselves on what they were doing to support SLCN. I also noticed that discussion veered off the topic of SLCN at times and I wondered whether this was because of SENCos experiences of working with EPs to support children with a range of difficulties. In this respect, previous experience of EPs would appear to impact on how partners, or SENCos in this case,

think about the role that EPs can take and perhaps only through discussion and collaborative working can perceptions be shifted.

It was interesting to note that the EP as gatekeeper was one of the unique roles identified, also to check out /confirm teachers' concerns.

I have been thinking again about how to involve EPs and will take ideas from partners to the team to explore their feasibility. There may be other things that the EP team may need to consider i.e. perceptions that schools hold of the EP role, do schools fully understand what support EPs can offer?

When the SENCos were asked how they thought support for children with SLCN was going in the locality, again they did not seem to consider how well they themselves were meeting the needs of children/look critically at themselves and it seemed that they did not think of themselves in terms of being part of the locality.

In comparing the SENCo and Children's Centre sessions, I feel that more came out the latter session in terms of ideas for ways EPs could work to support children with SLCN which is very surprising considering that EP have worked much less, historically, in the LA with Children's Centres and SENCos are the main contact point for EPs working into schools. This could represent, as already suggested, quite a fixed view of how EPs can work to support. Perhaps keeping the wording 'through their work in schools' may have been useful after all – to begin to encourage stereotypical ways of working.

21.7.12 – Thinking about the three focus groups, I have come to the conclusion that it is not possible to run them all exactly the same as discussion can go in a variety of directions and influence what is said, even with a questioning route to guide it. I feel, however, that this is appropriate as we are dealing with a real life experience and participants necessarily need to feel comfortable to express views as they have them and not feel stifled in any way. I do, however, acknowledge the balance that needs to be ensured between maintaining structure and being sensitive to participants' contributions.

23.7.12 – Focus group for SALTs. I felt the session went very well. As might have been anticipated for SALTs (as it is their area of expertise), there were lots of suggestions to place under the SLCN umbrella. There were also some good suggestions on how EPs can work to support children with SLCN. I got the

impression that the SALTs were pleased to be involved. At one point they got very excited about making suggestions as to how EPs could work to support children with SLCN and had to remind themselves that it was not 'real'. I had a real sense of SALTs wanting to work together and came away with a better picture in SALT support in the city. Having carried out all three focus groups I feel that time spent has been very worthwhile. It has brought me closer to colleagues with a common aim – a desire to support children with SLCN. It has felt more useful than I had anticipated and some of the ideas that have been suggested by partners fit with ideas I already had in my mind, though not all, which is positive.

4.8.12 – Reflecting again on the questioning route for the focus groups – I think it is more difficult to stick firmly to a questioning route when participants are known to the researcher. I tended to 'go with the flow', which felt right at the time, and had to restrain myself/pull myself back at times as I wanted the ideas to come from the participants themselves without any direction from me.

28.9.12 – Transcribing the Children's Centre focus group session. I was able to reflect on the session as I transcribed which was felt useful as it provided another opportunity to listen to what was said and to get a feel for how the session went. I learnt some information myself. Communication and language is one of three new areas of focus in the EYFS; the Children's Centre teachers work with children on commissioned places, supporting them in early years settings. It was useful to get a feel for SLCN from others' points of view and a chance to get to know other practitioners working in the locality and discuss a common goal. The information I got regarding what was happening already to support children with SLCN (from their particular area) was really useful as it helped me to understand what was already going on, and which could form part of the context of EP work also. I acknowledged the usefulness of recording the list of work going on already somewhere in the thesis write up, but as this was not a particular focus of one of my questions this would need further thought. Perhaps in the Appendix?

In discussing ways EPs can work to support children with SLCN it was interesting to note the 'said' and 'unsaid'. It was useful to hear about the lack of experience staff had had of EPs and an unsaid way of supporting could be the training other professionals in how EPs can support. The session I felt had provided at a least a first step to sharing the role of EPs with Children's Centre staff. Because of the lack of experience of staff in working with EPs I found it useful to return to their SLCN

umbrella to ask the questions – so how could EPs work to support that type of difficulty, or that type of difficulty? The session felt very positive in terms of moving my thinking on and the participants' thinking on in terms of how EPs may be able to work to support children with SLCN.

I thought about problems that had arisen during and from the session. I realised that ideas suggested by participants though useful, may be difficult because of financial constraints within the LA. A widening of the EP role just might not be possible and in some ways I felt that I may be giving participants 'false hope' if their suggestions were not brought to fruition.

27.10.12 – Transcribing Children's Centre focus group continued. As I transcribe I can see two layers of information emerging. Firstly the suggestions put forward by participants and secondly opportunities that I might identify for EPs based on what the participants have said. This is one of the reasons why transcribing the recordings myself are useful. I think that these would fit into the 'semantic' and 'latent' aspects of data analysis. I reflected on the research question again and wondered about such as 'How can discussion with key groups in a locality contribute towards the EP role in supporting children with SLCN', or 'What can discussion with key groups of professionals in a locality tell us about a possible EP role' or 'Can discussion with partners widen the EP role in their work to support children with SLCN?' or 'Can discussions with key groups of professionals highlight further opportunities for EPs work in supporting children with SLCN'. This led me onto thinking again about exploring EP views on their role in working to support children with SLCN to incorporate in this study.

10.11.12 – Transcribing SENCo focus group. I found it interesting how this session turned out to be structured slightly different from the Children's Centre staff. When introducing ourselves I went first with the Children's Centre staff, with the SENCos I went last. On reflection, this was likely based on how the fact that I did not know the Children's Centre staff as well as the SENCos. It seemed more appropriate to go first with the Children's Centre staff, and this was probably because I saw myself needing to taking more of a lead, at least initially, perhaps even a tighter hold of the session from the start, because I did not know the participants so well. I went last with the SENCos, because, again, this is what felt comfortable at the time. I wonder whether I was making the assumption that the SENCos would be more comfortable than the Children's Centre staff to go first, as they knew me better.

Reflection on the way the data recordings were transcribed. I could have gone for the method that captures the main points of the discussion but I opted for a fuller analysis as I did not want to miss anything. Reflection also on the focus group – I cannot be sure that they are a representative group. I also wondered whether I had spent enough time/given enough acknowledgement to what the participants viewed as SLCN as I ran quickly over their suggestions. I did, however, put their 'visual' up on display (post-its under the SLCN umbrella), and perhaps this is why. I also wondered whether I should have given the participants more time to look at the information they had on how they currently supported children with SLCN. I thought that there may a sensitivity around this and realise that this was an assumption on my part. I did not want the participants to feel uncomfortable. In hindsight this may not have been the case and they may have learnt from each other. Valuable opportunity missed?

Challenge in transcribing – listening carefully for who was who in order to attribute comments to the appropriate participant.

Reflecting again on the introduction to the session. Why did I include this, particularly as I already knew the names of the participants and all but the SENCos knew each other? Thinking about it, I structured the session in this way because I wanted to get it off to quite a formal start, possibly to highlight right at the beginning that we were there for a purpose other than work. Tea and coffee were available to help put participants at their ease. I thought very carefully about how to structure the focus group sessions and wanted to ensure that some rapport was built before asking key questions.

SENCos gave some interesting information about what other local authorities have done to support children with SLCN. The session though was dominated by one SENCo in particular and I felt I needed to maintain a careful balance between ensuring participants had time and space to say what they wanted to say but equally to support all to express their views, though not in a way so as to put them on the spot or make them feel uncomfortable in any way.

I was surprised that a clear message was coming through from the SENCos that SLC support is down to SALTs and it was difficult to get the SENCos past this view. Thinking back to the Children's Centre session, they saw SLCN support as part of their role; the SENCos not so much. I wondered why this might be. It could be

because speech, language and communication is a basic skill and one that early years practitioner support daily. Teachers 'teach' (narrow view) and for some, support for speech, language and communication difficulties may fall to other professionals.

Locality case study approach – would the lists of what is already being done to support children with SLCN by focus groups be part of the context? I think a case study approach is appropriate for this research. I want to get more of a feel for the need in terms of support for children with SLCN within the locality (from the locality manager) as well as the approach that different professionals are taking in meeting need. I would then like to consider through the perceptions of professionals how EPs might work to support children with SLCN.

Did I ask the right questions? It was difficult asking about blue sky thinking if participants already view EPs in a narrow role. This is why I decided to use the EP leaflet as a starter to emphasise that EPs have a wider role.

Lots of interesting discussion from the SENCos. Lots unrelated, but felt useful to let it flow.

11.11.12 – Transcribing SALT focus group. It took SALTs a long time to write down their lists of how they currently support children, longer than the other two groups, but then this is not surprising given that SLC is SALTs area of expertise. 'blue sky thinking' included EPs linking language problems to literacy, EPs making recommendations and having regular follow up, seeing children again if an assessment is affected by attention/listening etc. Reflecting on this latter point, in my experience, an EP may not follow up again if the child is not prioritised to be seen by a school (particularly with the constraints that traded services can bring) and whilst schools may have thought they have done their bit by having a child seen by an EP, there may be other professionals (SALTs) wanting the child to be seen again. Other 'blue sky thinking' ideas were opportunities to discuss tricky children, being clear about follow up of children, communicating roles more (script for SALTs about EPs). In terms of a unique role for EPs SALTs suggested ascertaining potential and highlighting the importance of language for learning/development.

5.12.12 – Reflecting on the focus group sessions made me wonder on how much joined-up working was actually going on and what could be done to work better to meet children's SLCN. I was struck, though not surprised by the indication form SALTs that EPs work in different ways which highlighted the usefulness of gaining

the EPs views on what was happening/what was being done to support children with SLCN. I therefore email to lead EP to update her on the research project so far and seeking permission to send questionnaires to EPs. Questionnaires sent to EPs working in the service.

10.12.12 – I received responses from three of the EPs. I had purposely not expanded on the term 'SLCN' as with the focus groups as I wanted to gauge their understanding of the breadth. Responses seemed to confirm my initial starting point that there was not a lot going on in schools regarding early intervention/ specific support to develop SLCN despite the Bercow Report.

19.12.12 – Reminder to EPs sent. I felt reluctant to do this as I was aware that everyone was so busy but was keen to get responses back before the Christmas break and wanted to ensure that I had a wider EP perspective than my own as other EPs may perceive support for children with SLCN differently. Three more returned.

19.12.12 – Locality meeting. Children's Centre manager commented on one of the Primary Schools not scoring on NI72, which she suggested meant that the children could not speak! She explained that this may reflect on the Children's Centres. Hearing this again made me think about how EPs could support what was already going on. Question – how can talking to other professionals enhance the role of the EP in their work to support children with SLCN?

11.1.13 – Contact from a SALT asking if I could speak about the EP role to a group of parents (of children with SLI). After seeking permission from the lead EP to do I wondered whether this opportunity may provide me with parental views to include as part of my research on how EPs can work to support children with SLCN. I recognised the usefulness of involving parents as partners but my dilemma at the beginning of the study was how to select parents to approach, particularly given the breadth of difficulties covered by the SLCN umbrella.

14.1.13 – Email to SALT to agree to speak to the group and to ask about the possibility of parents being involved in the research.

12.4.13 – Parents' group. Did not go as planned. I had planned to present on the role of the EP and stop at intervals to refer to the questionnaire. It did not feel appropriate to do it this way when the time came. It would have interrupted the flow of the

session and perhaps made my questionnaire feel more important than giving the parents the information they had asked for.

17.4.14 – The focus of this study is to explore the understandings and perceptions that a range of partners have in relation to EPs supporting children with SLCN. How do partners construct meaning? Socially constructed. Social constructionism. Do we construct our understandings and meanings through interactions with others? Looked at symbolic interactionism – this constructed meaning is the lived reality that guides actions/behaviour. This study set out to explore partners lived reality working within a LA as they carry out their particular role. I wanted to explore the reality of the situation. The study is about exploring participants' constructions of reality – the 'congruence between'.

18.4.14 – looking at examples/descriptions of theoretical framework – theoretical framework and conceptual framework are used interchangeably.

20.4.14 – confused again! I have read that the theoretical framework (TF) develops with the research in qualitative research – 'emergent' – is this in relation to grounded theory? Yin (2003) talks about pattern matching and explanation building – I need a visual representation of my TF. Read about the limitations of TF – initial and ongoing bias. This can be true. I feel as though I have been encouraged to look at theory when really I had planned not to, if using grounded theory. Yin – useful to take a case study approach to this study.

21.4.14 – read about social rule theory. Interesting. Need to follow up on references. Idea of EP as social actor solving complex problems. Social rule, not stepping on toes/need to work together. What are the social rules at play that hinder/help EP support for children with SLCN? Is the role culturally defined and can it be changed? Thinking about the social work model of collaborative working – if we are all governed by social rules how does this impact on interactions/collaborative working? What are our unsaid rules? A formal rule is the Code of Practice.

I am interested in social rule system theory and how this impacts on changing working conditions and in turn expectations. Who helps people to adapt what in the process? Just expected to mould to meet expectations? I realise my own world view/EP stance affects what I consider important in my reading and selection of material. I used my knowledge of LA norms/rules/procedures to guide my actions/research.

22.4.14 –read about role theory (RT) – George Herbert Mead – the mind and the self – Wikipedia – I can relate to some of it. Reference to 'actors' and theatre. Appropriate and permitted behaviours associated with roles. Changed conditions can render a social role outdated. I am looking to update in new conditions – locality, new Code of Practice.

Reading about role theory – the concept of people being social actors. EPs have a role. What is that role? Who determines that role? EPs? The LA? Others' expectations? Schools? Where does constructionism fit? Socially defined positions. Where does critical realism fit? People have lived experiences that is their reality.

25.4.14 – should I be looking at conceptualisation rather than perception of role? Is there a difference? When work context changes does this create opportunities? Concerns in carrying out the role. Am I searching for increased inter-role congruency?

EPs find their own way – do we need stronger management to direct support/help prioritise work demands?

27.4.14 – read about service scripts. How do partners' expectations of scripts affect collaborative work with EPs? Do different EPs work to different scripts? EPs have a script as EP/as EP supporting children with SLCN. Partners have their own script and that of EP. I am looking to inform the scripts by listening to partners.

30.4.14 – read about listening to customers – components of listening are sensing, evaluating and responding. This is what I feel I am doing through this research. This made me reflect on the importance of listening to partners in a traded services world?

1.5.14 – listening to customers – customer 'voice'. I can apply this to partners – 'partner voice'.

4.6.14 – read about multi-agency working – a detailed study. This made me reflect on whether I should have done something sooner to build bridges with partners. I have been so wrapped up in doing the job with little direction form managers. Reading about multi-agency working – treating social problems in a holistic fashion. Reflected on how EPs find it hard to fit in the early intervention locality work with the statutory role.

6.6.14 – reflecting of the 'in schools' not being in my title. This shifts the focus to one of early intervention which is where it should be.

Read about roles and responsibilities and the three levels – initiative, interagency, individual. When I was asking EPs about their role with children with SLCN did I have anything in my mind about what might be said? I don't think I did – I was just interested in what they thought – their 'reality'.

13.6.14 – read the Frith and Gleeson paper on thematic analysis. Questionnaires were used. Is this a good tool for me to use for data analysis?

17.6.14 – Ethics – I was an EP asking about EPs – how did this make participants feel and did I get honest answers?

21.6.14 – read about contextual constructionism – context links to case study idea. A sphere of social discourse (in relation to self-concept), which made me think of the social work model. Everyone is in 'discourse' based on their own reality. This made me think about the information (written) that the different partners hold/distribute about EPs –how have EPs come to be constructed to be the way they are?

2.7.14 – Theories and methods in family intervention – read about how lives are multistoried. Fits with role theory. People have lots of different roles in their lives. Each story will affect how they view, interpret and respond to the world. Narrative theory? Does this fit anywhere? I am asking participants to tell their story – feels a bit like therapeutic conversation.

8.7.14 – What is social construction – the locality is a social construction. The more we interact affects how we construct beliefs/ideas etc. Why might partners have different perceptions? The EP role is socially constructed and can be constraining? EPs work in certain ways – schools seem to be seen in the LA as the client.

15.7.14 – Thinking about grounded theory and thematic analysis. I have concerns about grounded theory. Is it really possible to suspend your knowledge of theory?

Appendix B Email sent to service managers (Children's Centre and SALTs)

Thank you so much for your support re my research project, and for indicating that you would take information to members of your team.

As already explained, I had initially planned on carrying out individual interviews with key people in the locality in order to answer my research question, but after speaking to.... and realising that focus groups might be a possibility, I have decided to plan for that.

I thought it may be useful to send you an outline of my plans so that you have it to hand when you speak to your 'people'. Ideally I would like 4 to 8 people but am happy with whatever can be arranged. I realise I am asking for peoples time and it is very precious. I can, however, offer refreshments and chocolates in return for participation!

I plan to email schools after Easter to ask SENCos (in the north) if they would be interested in taking part in a focus group.

Please find below, my plan of work:

Research question (which may change slightly)**: How can educational psychologists support children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) through their work in schools**

Supplementary questions:

·   What are the possibilities for support and what are considerations/constraints

·   How do perceptions regarding possible EP support differ between partners?

·   Do EPs have a unique role to play?

Rationale/ why is this area of interest?

- Speech, language and communication is central to all learning. This is highlighted in a range of government documentation/reports. How can EPs best support children with SLCN?

- I am aware that SALT services may change and I wonder how this might impact on support for children with SLCN in schools. How can EPs help?

- The way EPs support children/schools is changing from 1.4.12 (schools will buy in EP support – only statutory work will be covered by the LA) so it would be useful to know what schools find useful from EPs re supporting children with SLCN and what else they would welcome (the government has indicated that EPs are well placed to support the development of teachers skills in meeting children's needs). On the flip side, it would be useful to schools/SENCos to know what EPs can offer.

- There is a big focus on developing SLC in the early years. I am aware that a lot is organised through Children's Centres. It would be useful to know what is going on and how EPs could link in.

- EPs are now part of locality teams (five in the city). It is early days for this new way of working and team members are just getting to know about the roles of others/looking at how to work together to better meet the needs of children, young people and their families within the locality.

A case study approach (locality) will be used.

From this research it is hoped that recommendations will be made for supporting children with SLCN through new and innovative ways.

Data collection

Three focus groups: SALTs/SENCos/Children's Centre staff.

…. (SALT manager) as this is about the locality it would be good if therapists in the north could be involved. If this is not possible then of course cross city SALTs would be fab!

…. (Children's Centre manager) – not sure if it would be possible, but it would be good to have a range of workers (different roles?) from the CCs as they might all have different ideas.

Please let me know if you have any more questions.

I really appreciate this, can't thank you both enough.

Angela

Appendix C Letter to participants

Educational Psychology Service

Dear…………………………..

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research project which will look at how educational psychologists (EPs) can support children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) through their work in schools.

You will be aware of the government focus on this very important area of development for children, and following the Bercow Report (2008), the work that has gone on in recent years, including the appointment of the Communication Champion, Jean Gross, whose term of office ended in December 2011, and the year of communication in 2011 (Hello campaign).

The project will look at perceptions of other professionals on the role that EPs can take in supporting children with speech, language and communication needs. I consider this important to do given the local authority emphasis on locality working/services working together to meet the needs of children and families. I am interested in finding out what is currently going on within your service regarding support for children with SLCN and explore with you how EPs might support this. I am hoping that from the project, new and innovative ideas will emerge, which can be shared with senior managers within the local authority.

Three focus groups are being arranged: SALTs, Children's Centre staff and SENCos from schools within the locality. It is anticipated that sessions will last for an hour to an hour and a half and will be videotaped so that the discussion can be transcribed and analysed. All information shared will be confidential. Video tapes will only be seen by myself and stored in a locked cupboard, to which only I will have access.

I would like to invite you to the session for
………(service)……………………………….
on……(date)………………………at…(time)…….(venue). It would be useful if you could let me know in advance if you are unable to attend.

I attach a consent to participate form. This can be sent to me in advance or handed to me at the beginning of the session.

Once again, thank you so much for your support with this project.

Angela Price

Educational psychology team leader (N   locality)

Consent to participate in research project

'How can educational psychologists support children with speech, language and communication skills through their work in schools?'

I agree to take part in a focus group for the above research project. I am aware that the session will be video recorded, and that material will be seen only by Angela Price and stored in a locked cupboard, to which only Angela will have access.

Name…………………………………………..

Service…………………………………………………

Signature……………………………………………………

Date………………..

Appendix D Questioning route for focus groups

'How can educational psychologists support children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) through their work in schools?'

- What are the possibilities for support and how do perceptions differ between partners?

- What are the considerations/constraints

- Do EPs have a unique role to play in supporting children with SLCN in school?

Three focus groups have been organised: SALTs (3 participants), Children's Centre staff (2 teachers and one manager participating) and SENCos (4 participants)

Focus groups – questioning route (questions should be easy to say, clear, usually open ended, evoke discussion, allow free flow of conversation)

NB As a moderator, I must be careful to focus on understanding the perceptions of the participants and not offer personal views – Krueger 2009 – but this needs to be carefully balanced with the notion of collaborative research.

At the beginning of the session I will give a reminder of what the research is about and hopes for it etc.

Opening Questions

- Introductions: Could you just start off by saying who you are (name/job role) and how long you have worked in the city and how long in the north (this is a fact question, easy to answer, which will help to set the scene, get everyone talking).

Introductory Questions

- What comes to mind when you hear the term 'SLCN'? (this is an important introductory question so that participants understanding of the term can be gauged. For this question I will have a large sheet of paper and ask participants to write what comes to mind, on post-it notes to stick them under the SLCN umbrella)

- What is working well now in your service/school with regard to supporting children with SLCN? What are you doing that is helping children to move

213

forward? (This will build on the previous section and help me to find out more about what is happening from each service's point of view – ask participants to spend a couple of minutes jotting information down on a piece of paper, and then share with the group)

- So that's what's happening from your point of view – but what are your thoughts on how the city is doing in meeting the needs of children with SLCN generally (consider LA strategy, Bercow/Better Communication Action Plan/ Jean Gross report/ Better Communication paper 2012), how are things in the locality specifically? (Scaling will be used for this question. Ask participants to write their name on a post-it note and place it on the scale for the city and then one on the scale for the locality. Discuss any differences). (This question should encourage participants to start thinking beyond their service)

Transition Questions (to move the conversation on to the key questions)

- Thinking about the role of educational psychologists in supporting children with SLCN – from your service/school point of view, what has been your experience in the past? (add a word of reassurance here – not precious, want them to be honest – it's about moving forward)

- Can we just look at the EP leaflet – is there anything in there about how EPs work that surprised you – or were you already well aware of how EPs work etc? (emphasise here the range of work that EPs do and levels at which we can work – individual/group/school/local authority)

In asking the above questions I hope to encourage reflection on what support has looked like in the past but begin to open up other possibilities by highlighting 'our range'.

Key Questions (these drive the study – recommended 2 to 5 questions, need to allow full discussion of these questions – 10 to 20 mins each – a third of the way through the session)

- 'Miracle question'– based on what has been said about how EPs can work – what would an ideal world of 'EPs supporting children with SLCN through their work in schools' look like?

- Do any barriers/other considerations exist that might affect the support that EPs can provide for children with SLCN in schools? (Look at barriers first – AP to list on a flipchart)

- What then, in your view, might be a good way forward for EPs in supporting children with SLCN through their work in schools? (ask for a volunteer to record on flipchart). Ask each participant to identify the three most useful /important to them.

Give a short summary of discussion from key questions – check accuracy

Ending Questions (bring closure, enable reflection on previous comments, determine final position, insurance question)

- All things considered, do you think EPs have a unique role to play in supporting children with SLCN, and if so, what?

- Have we missed anything? Is there anything we should have talked about but haven't?

Appendix E Questionnaire to EPs

How can educational psychologists support children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) through their work in schools?

1. How do you currently support children with SLCN (all ages, not just restricted to school)?

2. Are there any barriers/constraints that you feel affect support you provide/would like to offer?

3. Would you like to work any differently to support children with SLCN?

4. Do you think EPs have a unique role to play in supporting children with SLCN?

Appendix F Questionnaire for parents/carers

1. Has your child been seen by an educational psychologist?   Yes/No

2. Is so, could you please give details (how many times seen, over what length of time, work carried out etc)

3. Have you had contact with an educational psychologist as part of the work carried out with your child?   Yes/No

4. Is so, could you please give details (telephone contact, face-to-face individual meeting, review meeting, frequency/timing, etc.)

5. Is there anything that you would have liked to have seen done differently?

6. Having heard a bit more about how an educational psychologist works, is there anything else you would have liked to have seen done differently?

7. Is there anything else you feel an EP could do to support your child both within current constraints and in an ideal world.

I give consent for Angela Price to use the information above for thesis purposes. I understand that my child will not be identified and that all information shared will remain confidential.

Parent/carers' signature……………………………………………………………………

Appendix G Letter to parents

Dear Parent/Carer

I am currently carrying out a research project into how educational psychologists can support children with speech, language and communication needs. As parents/carers of children with speech and language difficulties I would be very interested in including your views/perceptions/experiences of educational psychologists.

The attached questionnaire will be used in this session (parents' group, 12.4.13) to gather information and to aid discussion. If you are happy for me to include your views in my research, please hand the completed questionnaire, signed, to me at the end of the session.

Many thanks

Angela Price

Appendix H Parents' group presentation

- Thanks for the invitation – informal session

- Introduction: name/role (senior EP/ language provisions)

- Aims from the session:

  - Who are educational psychologists?

  - Who do EPs work with?

  - How do EPs work?

- Introduce research project – how EPs can support children with SLCN – perceptions of partners: questionnaire to complete as we go along.

- Who are EPs? Their thoughts first – SALT /SENCo to scribe. First degree in psychology. Doctoral Training/Masters. Substantial experience of working with children. Work for the LA to support children schools and families. Now part of locality teams – 5 in the city. 7 and a bit EPs in the city.

- Questionnaire – Has your child been seen by an EP? Yes/no. If so in what respect (comment on length of time, how many times seen). Discuss.

- Who do EPs work with? Children 0-19 with a range of needs. Schools, other professionals, parents.

- Questionnaire – Have you had contact with an EP as part of work with your child – comment (telephone, face to face individual meeting or in a review meeting). Is there anything you would like to have liked done differently? Discuss.

- How do EPs work? Different bits to our role – EP service and locality. Locality role. EP role – statutory/early years/SLA. Referrals come through school but can originate from a SALT/Paediatrician. Prioritised through planning meeting – what might be useful? Observation, individual assessment, liaison with others. Range of assessment tools – cognitive assessment (brief demo), basic skills assessment, self-esteem, any other area of development – SAL difficulties can affect lots of areas of development – social skills/friendships. Usually children are referred for something related i.e. literacy

difficulties/behaviour – SAL feature in the profile of the child. Time is school is negotiated – individual child, group, whole school. Research.

- Questionnaire – Having heard a bit more about how an EP works is there anything else you would have liked to have seen done differently? Discuss.

- Questionnaire – Is there anything else you feel an EP could do to support your child both within current constraints and in an ideal world?
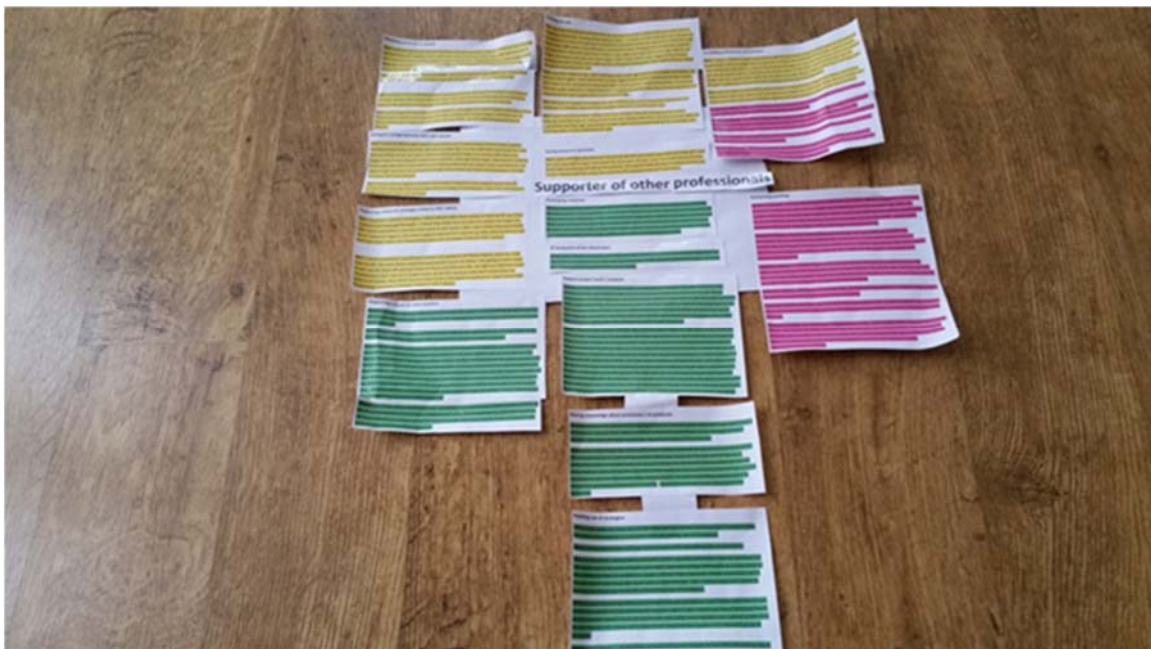
Appendix I Photographs of overall themes: 'blue sky thinking' – how can educational psychologists work to support children with SLCN

Photographs of themes from focus groups relating to blue sky thinking, linked to overall themes
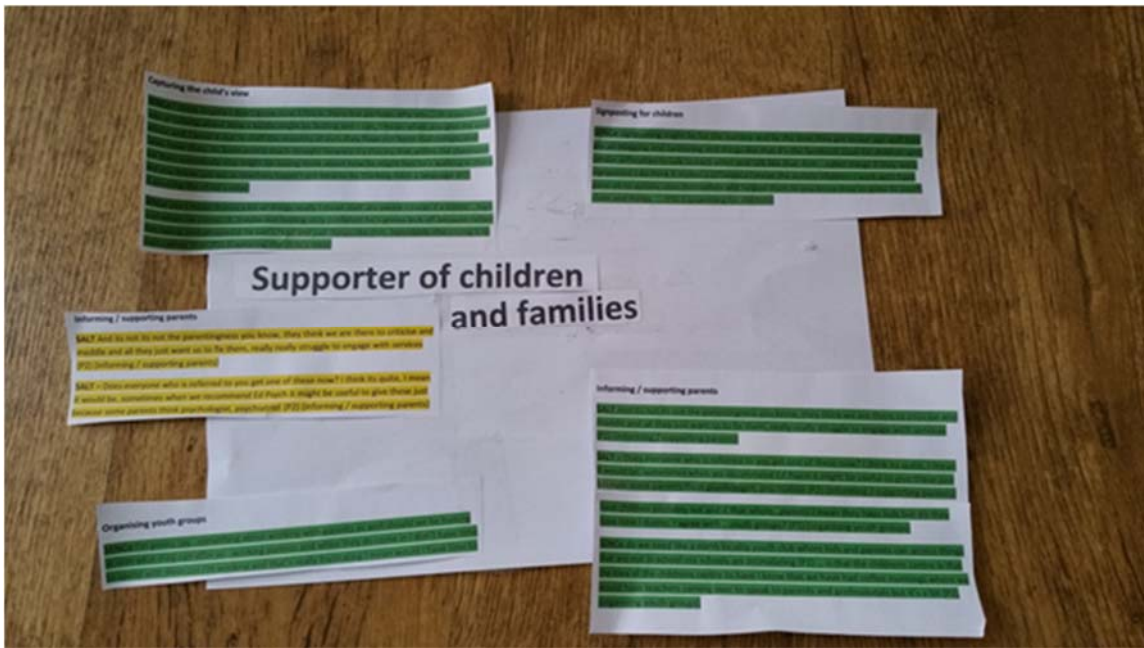
Overall theme of 'Trainer'
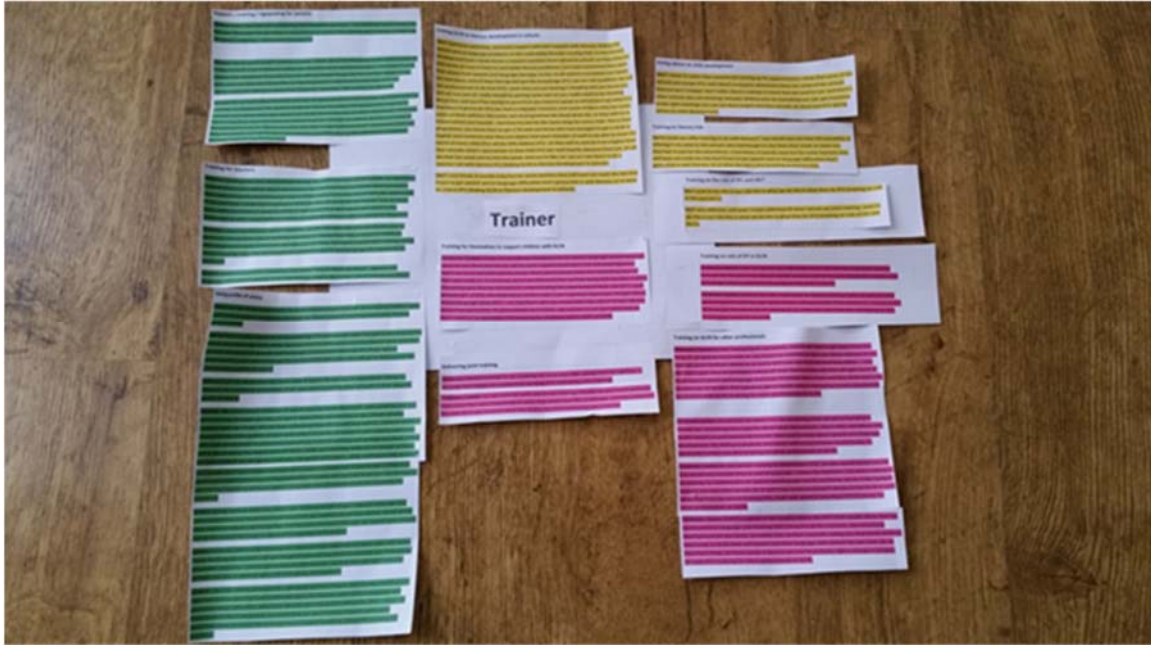
Overall theme of 'Supporter of other professionals'

Overall theme of 'Supporter of children and families'

Overall theme of 'Assessor'
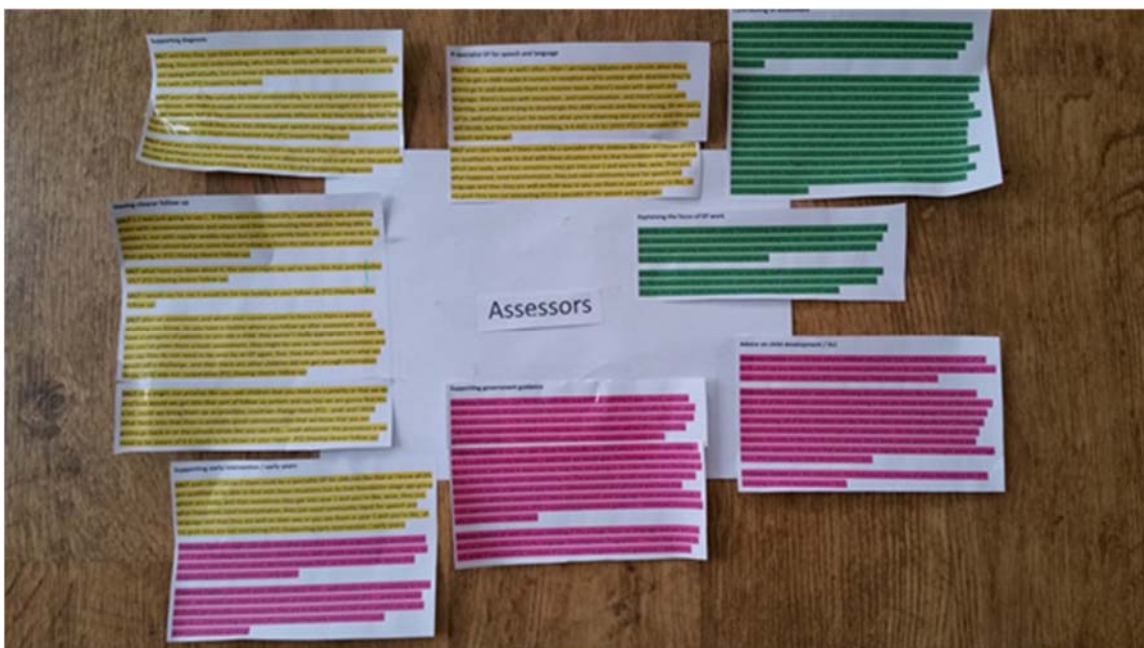
SALT data colour coded yellow

Children's Centre staff data colour coded pink

SENCo data colour coded green

Appendix J Photographs of overall themes: barriers

Photographs of barriers/other considerations showing data from each of the focus groups with EP data added

SALT data colour coded yellow

Children's Centre staff data colour coded pink

SENCo data colour coded green

EP data colour coded blue

Appendix K Photographs of ways of working and barriers

Photograph of barriers/other considerations with SALT 'blue sky thinking' added
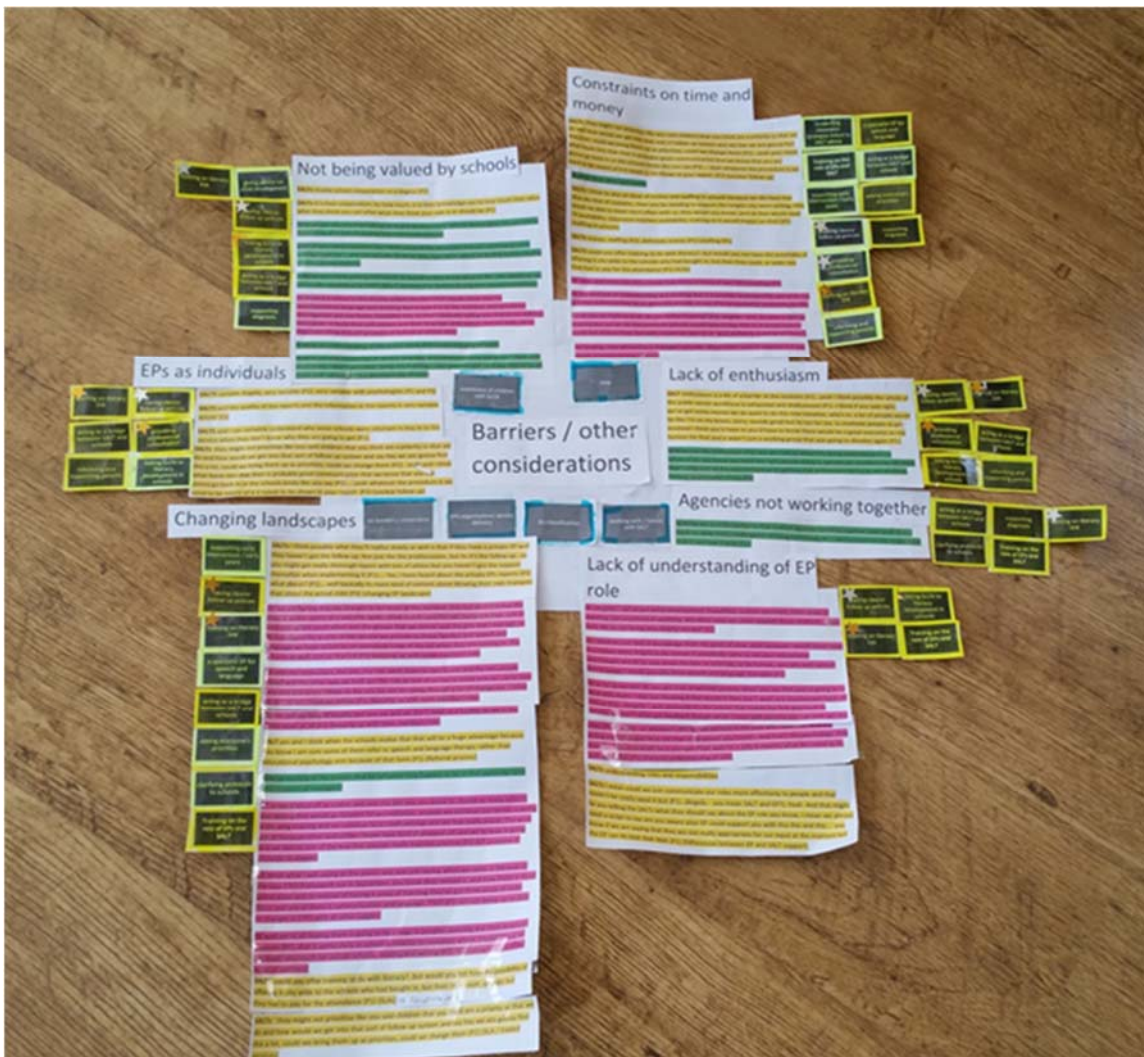
SALT data colour coded yellow

Photograph of barriers/other considerations, with SALT and Children's Centre staff 'blue sky thinking' added
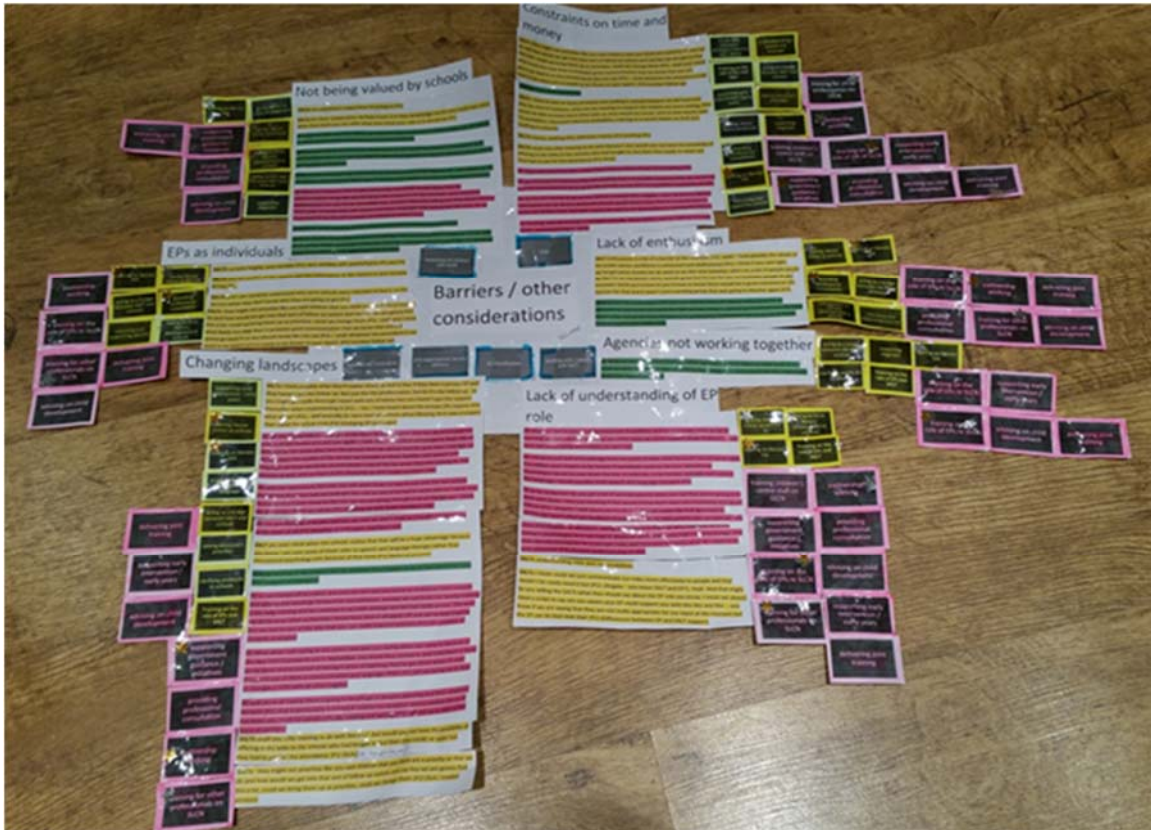
Children's Centre staff data – colour coded pink

Photograph of barriers/other considerations with SALT, Children's Centre staff and SENCo 'blue sky thinking' added
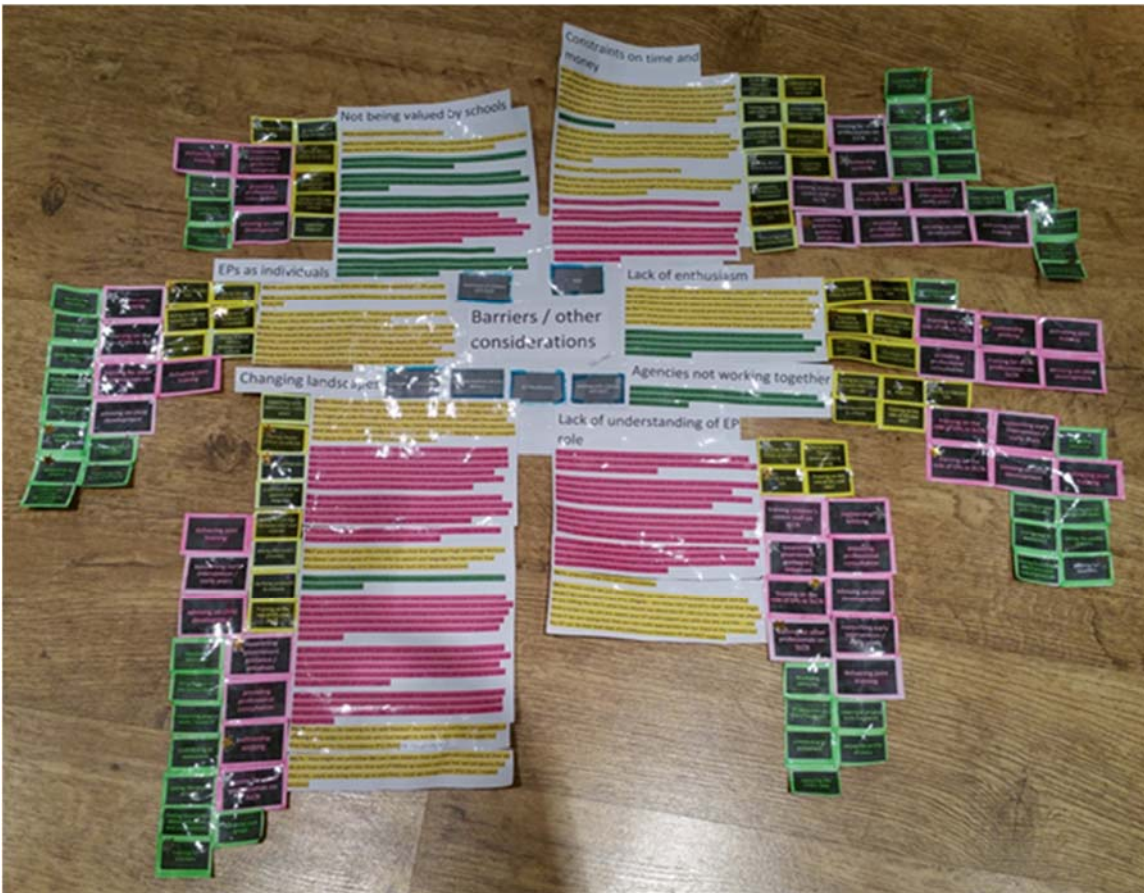
SENCo data colour coded green

Photograph of barriers/other considerations with EP information added on to SALT, Children's Centre staff and SENCo 'blue sky thinking'

EP data colour coded blue

Photograph of barriers/other considerations with parent and EP information added on to SALT, Children's Centre staff and SENCo 'blue sky thinking'

Parent data colour coded purple

Appendix L Approval of research project and supervisory team email

Price, Angela/ 089155680

From: Sarah Rylance on behalf of HSS Grad School

Sent: 08 August 2012 11:11

To: 'Angela Price'; Angela Price

Cc: Billy Peters; Wilma Barrow; Kate McGill

Subject: Approval of Research Project and Supervisory Team: Price, Angela/ 089155680

 Dear Mrs Price,

The Dean of Postgraduate Studies acting on behalf of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, has approved your Research Project and Supervisory Team.

Should you have any queries regarding this, please do not hesitate to contact the Research Student Support Team at hss.gradschool@ncl.ac.uk.

Best wishes,

Sarah Rylance
Senior Research Student Support Assistant
Research Student Support Team

Student Progress Service
Student Services
Newcastle University
King's Gate
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU
United Kingdom

Direct tel: 0191 222 6206 (International +44 191 222 6206)
University Website: www.ncl.ac.uk
SPS Website: www.ncl.ac.uk/student-progress

The Research Student Support Team hold a drop-in session from 10:00-12:00 Monday to Friday on Level 2 of the King's Gate Building. A member of the team will be available in person to speak with postgraduate research students about any queries they might have.

Student Services welcomes feedback from students and other customers. Your views about the service we provide are very important to us and will help us make improvements where required. Please use this form to make any comments about the service you have received from us https://my.ncl.ac.uk/students/feedback.php

Appendix M Children's Centre staff themes and codes

Themes relating to 'blue sky thinking':

supporting government guidance/initiatives	advising on child development/SLC	training for themselves on SLCN
training for other professionals on SLCN	partnership working	providing professional consultation
training on the role of EPs re SLCN	supporting early intervention/early years	delivering joint training

Examples of codes contributing to themes:

Supporting government guidance/initiatives	Advising on child development/SLC	Training for themselves on SLCN
• 'I am just thinking with the new EYFS as well the 2 year check..and how maybe potentially ed psychs could be involved with that, yeah now originally the two year check was supposed to be done erm done jointly with health visitors but surprise surprise that has not happened erm and so nurseries and child minders will be' (P3) • 'if there was a speech and language issue and potentially if it was appropriate could you' (P3) • 'ah well I am just thinking if this is huge focus on language and we are just about to cascade this erm Early Language Development Programme I mean that would be really great if you could be involved' (P2)	• 'more or less where children should be but I still think there's a lot of oh he'll catch up you know so I think sometimes particularly in an area like this they might have expectations that are too low' (P2) • 'just the indication, the indicators you know of what the child is like' (P2 • Yeah cos I suppose an educational psychologist has more of a , a kinda broader overview, whereas speech and language therapists, often and this is no disrespect to them, their work is often focussed its very specific things erm to do with just the language whereas you would see ok they have got this language issue but actually its affecting all of it. So you see the child as a whole child' (P3)	• 'I mean I'm completely inexperienced on severe language severe language delay do you think that we its called the early support level there's an enhanced level but that's far more detailed and you know, that's about severe delay but everything that we deal with really is.. is universal, we're and the work that we'll be doing with families is about interaction and sharing and parents understanding the importance of their role (P2).. yeah general sort of (P3)..the importance of their role..I can't say that I have even thought about severe language delay (P2) … no, but that's why you know that's the nature of our role in a sense that we're (P3).. its preventative isn't it (P2).. yes and we're not specialists and we don't claim to be specialists' (P3)

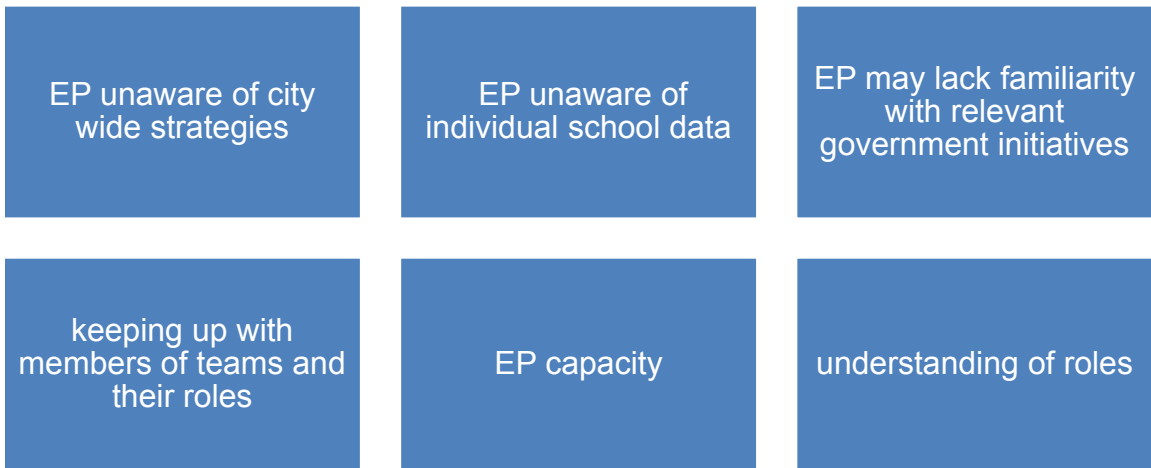| Training for other professionals on SLCN	Partnership working	Providing professional Consultation
• should that CAF report not say something more detailed is that what it should say, something more specific about what the nature is…'this is why, everybody and health visitors as well need to be trained, they need to know about speech and language development. My feeling is anybody who works with young children should know, its absolutely number one' (P2) • 'do you deliver training to childminders (P1) ..so who would would you do that would you consider that as part of your role….I mean for example I, me and a colleague do training for childminders on speech and language and its you know, we do it like twilight sessions erm and other people do as well it has to be you know it obviously has to fit in with times that they can attend training (P2)..Yeah yeah which is Saturdays' (P3) • 'there is a school in this locality where the FFP EYFSP results show that for communication language and thinking that is how it is at the moment, and emotional development are you know, incredibly low, so that's basically telling you that those children need yeah, to build their self esteem and their language skills before the can even, its an important thing…so there needs to be erm yes you're probably right a change in peoples attitude' (P2)	• ' I'm just thinking about this blue sky world. What do you think about this might be a crazy idea, what do you think about having a sort of, you know the idea of a surgery where you actually talk to people about ..yeah just training and just the opportunity for people to talk about their working. Children that they are puzzled with ….yeah, yeah, professionals to talk about their children' (P2) • 'if we are talking 'blue sky thinking', I am just thinking maybe just somebody there as partnership working like come to you. If the girls come to me in a session and say I've got concerns about a little one he's been coming erm like (participant) says, I'm not a language expert I could just say I could just say give it a bit longer' (P1) • 'I think we might need you even more because our work as P1 was explaining is going to be much more about a few children, you know, the children who are the most vulnerable, to see…. so we are going to meet behaviours that we are quite new to, we might need some support' (P2 • 'and I also think we should make you know our messages even stronger cos as P3 was saying earlier if you've got more than one professional' (P2)	• 'we all know that Angela just sits upstairs so I might just nip up and give her a quick erm' (P1) • so I think maybe for us from the girls point of view it might even be just that little I can just give a quick email and say we have a few concerns these are the observations we've made have you got any advice' (P1) • 'if people wanted just to chat can they do that just by phoning you up or' (P2) • 'I was just thinking something like it might be one particular aspect of language, you know so it could be perhaps something like understanding of language cos that's a big one isn't it' (P2)

Training on role of EP re SLCN	Supporting early intervention/early years	Delivering joint training
• 'I was just gonna say that some of the cafs that we have been getting through for the early intervention family workers a lot of the erm. Do health visitors have knowledge of ed pyschs?' (P1) • 'some of the cafs I have read, er theres a lot that refer as well just that general speech and language issues theres nothing specific that's what is is… its just that's what we get and obviously its coming to us, child care, and thats the solution to it'. (P1)	• 'I might add onto the other one that it really is about early identification isn't it and checking that, because I think if you, with speech and language you need to be absolutely sure don't you need, the more people that can be involved the better' (P2) • 'I am just thinking with the new EYFS as well the 2 year check..and how maybe potentially ed psychs could be involved with that, yeah now originally the two year check was supposed to be done erm done jointly with health visitors but surprise surprise that has not happened erm and so nurseries and child minders will be' (P3) • 'erm it says its basically between 2 and 3 (talking about the 2 year check) but we would give the message as close to 2 as you can do it erm..and then it does not say how they are going to do it but those are the kinds of things that they need to be commenting on. The practitioner would need to report on the three prime areas so personal and social, communication and physical and have that conversation with the parents so if there was a speech and language issue and potentially if it was appropriate could you' (P3)	• 'training for us ..training for us or even like ..doing training together …I suppose that makes for partnership working' (P3) • 'so, we could do with you on our training actually cos you would probably have more first hand knowledge of what that would look like in children ..just the indication, the indicators you know of what the child is like' (P2)

Themes relating to barriers:

EP unaware of city wide strategies	EP unaware of individual school data	EP may lack familiarity with relevant government initiatives
keeping up with members of teams and their roles	EP capacity	understanding of roles

Examples of codes contributing to themes:

EP unaware of city wide strategies

- Noticing from comments made by Children's Centre staff 'so we started off as a pilot (I CAN Early Talk), and erm the aim was you know to choose so many schools and settings that would go forward for accreditation, anyway we continue our termly training a day long training and we continue to accredit settings and we feel really proud. The work we do because other authorities I know have kind of dropped off and we've kept it going and we feel its one of the way that you can really improve practice' (P2)

EP unaware of individual school data

- Noticing from comments made by Children's Centre staff 'that is particularly in school in relation to reception where maybes the push has been very much for certain schools, reading and writing' (P3).
- 'there is a school in this locality where the FFP EYFSP results show that for communication language and thinking that is how it is at the moment, and emotional development are you know, incredibly low, so that's basically telling you that those children need yeah, to build their self esteem and their language skills before the can even, its an important thing' (P2)

EP may lack familiarity with relevant government initiatives

- Noticing from comments made by Children's Centre staff eg 'What what I will saying at this point I was was just saying when we came in because of the new EYFS framework out in September, you know they revised it, and now there is three prime areas and so instead of having 6 areas of learning they've got three areas of main focus and one of them is communication and language' (P2)

keeping up with members of teams and their roles

- 'we are having massive changes in our team at the moment. Erm but all of it is that the child is at the centre of it and erm again I think that P1 and P3 had changes in their role as well erm which could affect erm the groups that we deliver and the girls that I manage, so its just about the quality of the service we provide to those families and speech and language we hope would be on everybody's top of the list when they are coming in. The parents as well, erm so that's it' (P1)
- 'with the restructure, the jobs, my role went down to two to one and the two people myself and the other lady we both got the role so one of us had to move erm so I came over here and erm it and I think its like you say we are going through a lot of change erm I think we do I mean I think we will be' (P1)
- 'I'm just thinking of locality and you say and we don't meet as a locality do we in the wider team at all' (P2)

EP capacity

- 'time and resources (P2)..I mean how many of there of you?'
- 'yes and lack of understanding and thinking that it is possible to access (P2)..yes so its not just the understanding bit its generally actually access (P3)'
- Noticing from comments made by Children's Centre staff 'do you do training at all, do you deliver training?' (P2)..Angela – 'erm, it's time to deliver training but yes we do but obviously schools would have to buy that in, it would have to come out of their time, but yeah I mean we used to do local authority training but there's no funding, now all training is managed centrally. When Helen used to organise it it was easier'.

understanding of roles

- Noticing from comments made by Children's Centre staff 'Not sure, we're not being very helpful are we?' (P2)
- Noticing from comments made by Children's Centre staff 'I think its just lack of knowledge from my point of view..yeah because I would never even in a million years Angela to be honest if somebody came to me your educational psychologist would be way down the line, in referrals, to be honest, specially with speech and language I would possibly think speech and language therapist '(P1)
- 'as far as barriers do you get a lot of worried parents when you say that you're going in to work with them. I was just thinking if that would if they don't want any involvement back off a bit or' (P1)

Appendix N Responses by Children's Centre staff during the focus group

What is SLCN?

P1

behaviour problems

impact on social development

effects on the wider family

frustration

delayed speech

communication and understanding

impact on play

P2

hearing can be a cause

understanding

reflects on behaviour

emotional delay-link with SLC

expression of language

isolation of child with SLCN-social implications

speech sounds

P3

autistic spectrum

effecting all other areas of learning and development

linked to emotional and social development and behaviour

expression of language

speech sounds

language comprehension

List of interventions being used by children centre staff

P1

hello campaign

ELDP training

Time for rhyme

music and rhyme

building relationships with parents

rhyme challenge

modelling good practice during play and learn sessions from staff

busybodies sessions, encouraging communication through movements

Jabadaoo

links with libraries

Barnaby Bear

core books offered in sessions

Bookstart

toy library, incentives to have books/stories

P2

key family groups-key worker/person close relationships with children and parents

early talk training for all practitioners-high-quality interaction

language focus groups-each day. Phase 1 and communication skills

8 ECAT trackers used to record and monitor progress with individual children-so planning can be facilitated

communication friendly spaces-developing the environment to enhance opportunities for tall

visual support

interesting open resources

P3

visual timetables

Makaton

early talk tips e.g. adding a word, playing alongside children

smaller groups e.g. key person with their group of children, activity based around PSED (Personal, Social and Emotional Development) and LLL (Language, Literacy and Learning is an interventionfor children with language-based difficulties) especially communication and language and emotional development

importance of books and stories

organisation of environment-'communication friendly spaces'

work with parents

observations of children

ECAT trackers

Barriers to EP support highlighted by Children's Centre staff (recorded on flipchart during discussion)

lack of understanding of roles

Time – access?

Resources

How are we doing in the city

6½

How are we doing in the locality

7½

How can EPs support (recorded on flipchart during discussion)

children's understanding- picking it up

Partnership working-email support

seeing the whole child

training in the role- settings/professionals

closer working/partnership

joint training

surgery – professionals

early identification

involvement in two-year check

childminders

Three things that would make a difference (recorded on flipchart during discussion)
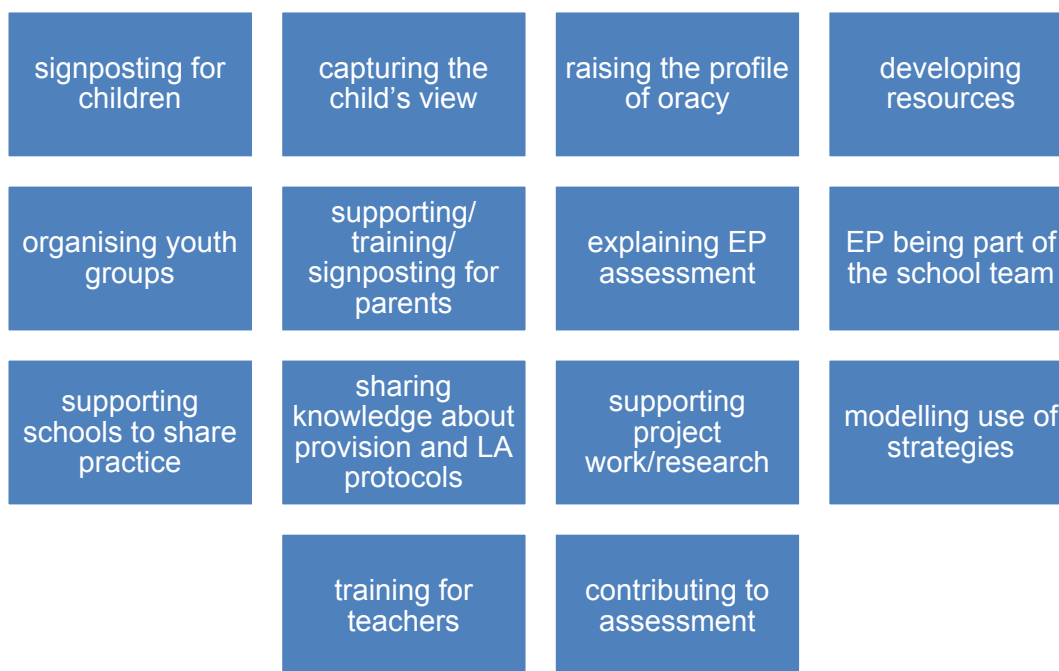
training

involvement in two-year check

partnership working

Appendix O SENCo themes and codes

Themes relating to 'blue sky thinking':

signposting for children	capturing the child's view	raising the profile of oracy	developing resources
organising youth groups	supporting/ training/ signposting for parents	explaining EP assessment	EP being part of the school team
supporting schools to share practice	sharing knowledge about provision and LA protocols	supporting project work/research	modelling use of strategies
	training for teachers	contributing to assessment	

Examples of codes contributing to these themes:

Signposting for children	Capturing the child's view	Raising the profile of oracy
• 'signposting might be for the nursery and by the time they get to our age well they are all blogging and twittering and things like that it's the facebook issue for children with similar difficulties to talk to each other and talk like that. Erm …cyber things if they were signposted I do think it makes a difference I mean the autistic children I work with have gone on to autistic sites themselves and helped them to you know they've gone to youth clubs and things …..'(P4)	• 'when you give me your advice and I send it out to staff the majority of ours they have not been real complicated cases have they, its been pretty much straight forward try this try that within the classroom but then somebody else might be saying think about how he might feel he's walking in there and you know cos we as teachers haven't got time to be thinking from a language' (P2) • ' yes I mean theres a lot of things really I mean staff are aware I mean if a kiddie …high level when he comes in..maybe not feeling very confident he's gonna kick off because rather than being embarrassed if he can't read and just things like that. Somebody else saying it to them rather than' (P2)	• 'but I do think particularly in secondary provision that we are creating children with social communication problems because we have stopped teaching oracy' (P4) • 'and I do think that the oracy side is again I know that in secondary, I know its different for people in secondary, it is , you don't have the time to teach it' (P4). • We don't teach children to speak appropriately any more ..is that something that EPs could help with?.. (P4)

Developing resources	Organising youth groups	Support/ training/ signposting for parents
• 'but working with the schools its not just the training its developing resources that are appropriate for the students …it's the process part of its not not just here's resources off you go because I think that is the issue that you might give staff the resources and then you come back and you see what they've done with them and sometimes you need somebody to come back and say well actually that hasn't worked because you've done it this way and that way and being part of that review process' (P4)	• 'I'm gonna say ..something about working with parents as well should we be looking at erm what they can offer so ..working parents ....I agree with …youth groups?' (P1) • 'do we need like a locality youth club where kids and parents can access things that are not in school cos schools are intimidating (P1) … is that the Children's Centre is that the idea of the Children's Centre to have I know that we have had coffee mornings where we would have teachers coming over to speak to parents and professionals but it's a bit' (P2)	• 'home and they are not getting that at home are they …cos when we were young and not just this area I would think in other areas as well so the parents don't always model' (P2) • 'I think working with parents as well, I think, what are we going to do with parents P3 – I don't think a lot of parents realise the importance of communication ….they don't really realise how important it is that they do talk you know things like its just that.spoke to her baby and she said something like..its like they don't really think its not that they are deliberately not talking to them' (P4) • 'We've had coffee mornings and we've done all sorts to get parents on board and I've said this to Angela and I'll say it to anybody I'm not knocking the parents the majority of parents care about their kids there's no doubt about that the problem they have is they just take a step back and they think you know best you just get on with it. So they just trust in everything that we do and its not that they don't care I just feel that sometimes they just lack confidence and also a lot of our parents actually came to the school' (P2)

Explaining EP assessment	EP being part of the school team	Supporting schools to share practice
• 'and I wonder as well, sorry, I'm thinking, its all going to come out, just exactly what your assessments are about and what you are looking for cos ..can you get the EP and I can remember you saying when I first became SENCo what do you want me to do what am I looking for' (P1)	• 'and I think it would be nice that you had a presence in the school rather than the EPs coming in .,it would be nice that you would be part of the school a part of the team and that sort of thing' (P1)	• 'its about sharing expertise if you need any support in terms of language provision. We are not therapists but yeah call into the language provision' (P1)
• 'I just want you to come in. Can we help staff to understand when you do the assessment that you are not actually going to provide a cure you are just the first step on the way to them developing' (P1)	• 'by doing things like sharing like theres these research programmes going on, If the EPs are putting out as part of their global offer that these are the services of the local authority there is research being done even things like that even the fact that we did not know that you existed (reference to language provision) speaks volumes I think whereas if it was coming from EP lets read it. Just little things that can make a big impact I think…Its about following children ..work in school but you know…a little bit more' (P4)	• 'we've got children coming in with reading and spelling levels of 6 year olds so yes we could be sharing resources' (P4)
		• 'In (G town) we were partners, we were set partners and it was across the locality so it was intensive but it was funded by the local authority so was funded. It was a resource backed but I would still support I would still say P3 because we are not given the time the resources to meet its only (P4)..I was going to say P4 do you think that I mean if something like that was obviously in place in the cluster and do work with the primaries as well cos the earlier it was identified I mean I don't know' (P2)
		• 'but if you did an audit and said …probably say what do you mean cos even if you've got students like that in a primary school they would have small group work time working on those things you'd have all of the time set aside and I don't think it would happen' (P4)

Sharing knowledge about provisions/LA protocols	Support project work/research	Modelling use of strategies
• 'where is the secondary language base so I wasn't aware that there was even (P4) – Its (name of school) (P1)…right, cos that's not information that's come through or been aware of that' (P4) • 'some training to raise awareness I think would be a' (in relation to provision for children with SLCN) (P1)	• 'no it had impact, it had in terms of educational changes and also students who previously may have been at risk .. developed their skills in a way that could communicate their skills more effectively. Er and I think it also raised the profile of speech and language so the staff in those schools had a better understanding a reaction to students who had speech and language problems, certainly they had a better understanding of students who might have semantic difficulties' (P4) • 'I think it also needs a critical approach because I think its very easy to buy into, its kind of why I asked you the question, its very easy to buy into but suddenly you've got to prove its your money or you get people who say or well I'm not doing that next year so I mean sometimes its almost like erm oh we have to prove that this has worked and so you know maybe I think that it is important that if we did do something as a north locality that we are critical, positively critical ..(P1) We have a system..Critical friends…all projects that we did had to have statistical evidence but academic evidence would also come from the students themselves and the parents as well and erm one if it was around what parents perceived as well with the changes. And we got quite a lot of positive feedback from health which was good. Cos I think that that can sometimes happen when the therapist and that's health and that's education we got to do it across' (P4)	• 'yeah yeah, cos they are not EPs they are not speech and language therapists they are teachers they deliver a curriculum' (P1) • 'I think sometimes staff just want to see it' (P1) • 'its resources, seeing you work with a child, possibly sometimes, just to see how you might approach it because actually you might approach things differently to a class teacher from a different level or a different angle. I think if they saw that, I think sometimes when they see speech and language work with a child they go – ah – I know what you mean by lowering your language levels' (P1) • 'it was interesting when you'd been in to see someone I can't remember who it was but the discussion we had afterwards was you said in your report use lower language levels and the teacher came in and she said it was only when she had seen you talking to him that she said she did not realise what that meant how low that meant (P1) • 'team teach ……it would be an interesting one to look at that' (P1)

Training for teachers

- ' Coming into (the city) and you know, the staff that I am working with, no disrespect to them if you are talking about vocabulary I was back to have to explain what semantics were and did not know it whereas where I have come from they would actually understand if you said that a child had a semantic difficulty they knew what you meant. Erm so there was a different level of understanding in the teachers as well which gets back to the classroom as well. It was different ethos, completely different' (P4).
- 'I was just thinking about it and I'm ..its the therapy side of it and I know you've given me information about working memory so I know how that impacts on children, executive functioning difficulties and that sort of thing. Its maybe about staff training about understanding how that can impact on children's speech and language' (P1)
- 'going back to what you said in the early years all of our …speech, language and communication and they can't read therefore we spend a lot of time doing ..small group time and interaction and things like that because the only time we..we spend a lot of time but at the end of the day its back' (P3)
- …but I do think particularly in secondary provision that we are creating children with social communication problems because we have stopped teaching oracy' (P4)

Contributing to assessment

- 'that's really interesting really cos and actually children with speech, language and communication difficulties are the silent victims aren't they so behaviours so obvious and autism generally if you see a child …spectrum so for you you might be getting kids with communication difficulties who are really speech and language' (P1)
- 'writes reasonably, came to do a speaking activity, silence, cried would not speak so I thought oh its just a confidence thing. Tried her in a group tried her one to one nothing and I mean nothing like this girls in pain she can't do it at all and I called mum in and she just said erm oh its because she has a headache she had a head problem when she was little. I said whats the head problem. I don't know she just had a head problem and the doctor I did not know who the doctor was its taken us two years to get information on this little girl eventually when I got the report this girl had a stroke I mean ..all sorts of things and its damaged the frontal lobe of her brain which is affecting her ability to speak so she just doesn't its like a communication breakdown but because this girl is silent no teacher in the secondary school has flagged her up as a problem whatsoever and I've asked her to be prioritised for EP in September cos ..and why have you prioritised her shes no bother she gets on canny little bairn no bother but shes absolutely silent …..at the moment' (P4)

Themes relating to barriers:

time/money (SLA)	others not following recommendations	lack of support from managers
lack of multi-agency working	lack of enthusiasm from all involved	focus on SALT support for children with SLCN
restricted knowledge/ understanding of need		

Time/money SLA

- Time, time and money

others not following recommendations

- and also teachers taking on board do they really take on board what you are asking them to do (P2)
- yes I think tokenism cos I think some of the resources that are used today some staff will just say … and not actually do what they have been asked to do (P4)
- and I think getting everybody on board so they know what to do …cos obviously we are totally committed so that's why it worked (P1)

lack of support from managers

- backing of the powers that be whoever they happen to be at that particular time (P4)

lack of multi-agency working

- yes and the barrier to that is other agencies working together yeah yeah (P4)..I think its really tricky multi-agency working sometimes its ….and sometimes you might have to and see how it goes (P1).

lack of enthusiasm from all involved

- just the enthusiasm (P4) (Angela – are you talking about EPs being enthusiastic?).. or whoever do you know you need the right people doing it…people get involved cos I do think that's a big part of the commitment so its getting that enthusiasm isn't it to any of these. Parents won't come unless (P4)

focus on SALT support for children with SLCN

- noticing when SENCos were asked about support for children with SLCN in the city and in the locality

restricted knowledge/understanding of need

- an understanding of the actual needs (P2)
- peoples knowledge of speech, language and communication needs cos I think with my training I don't remember doing any training ….you seem to pick up if you choose to go down that pathway (P3)

Appendix P Responses by SENCos during the focus group

What is SLCN?

P1

speech sound production errors

topic maintenance

grammatical disorder

speech and language impairment

speech delay

receptive

expressive

communication-interaction

P2

low literacy/vocabulary

low self-esteem

irregularity

AEL

listening skills

P3

understanding of spoken language

'physical'

'bumpy speech'

confidence

verbal/non-verbal (gestures)

speech sound errors

interaction

P4

speech/hearing- sounds

autistic/syndrome communication issues

those who need alternative communication e.g. Makaton

understanding of language

social interaction

semantics

stammering

stuttering

speech difficulties

List of interventions used by SENCos/ in schools

P1

language provision

speech therapy follow-up

colourful semantics

pre-teaching at vocabulary

visual support across a lesson to support SLCN children

Makaton signing

language master

colour cards

sign caused to the IDP materials

P2

literacy interventions

handwriting

reading – one hour a day for Year 9 – very low ability

group discussions

talk partners

speech and language therapy involvement in secondary

cleft lip – one-to-one working school

PSD-encourage development in social/communication skills

P3

speech and language intervention group

small group of children who all need work on hearing/saying the separate parts of
words (syllable clapping, etc)

takes place weekly and more often where possible

information sent home to parents to be working on at home

role models-adults and older children

lots of children with 'bumpy' speech-all staff follow same strategies (time to finish, encouragement, etc)

nursery speech screen

P4

Elklan bespoke tools and activities (Elklan offers training to those working with children with speech and language and communication needs)

one-to-one ELKLAN which follow

with staff e.g. understanding instructions, grids, mind mapping, Clicker 5

nurture groups have circle time, nurture time, bespoke displays to support communication

SCLN resources shared in departments

departments have ASD action planner

prompts, keywords

dyspraxic students

packs of information

COGS programme

Friends programme

Social Talk programme

LEXI's

Accelerated reader

BKSB (online learning to help improve English, maths and ICT skills)

Word Wasp

Toe by Toe

Barriers to EP support (recorded on flipchart during discussion)

time/money

having everyone on board

understanding the need

backing of powers that be

teachers taking it on board

tokenism

people's knowledge of SLCN

enthusing people

lack of working together

How are we doing in the city

Secondary 3/Primary 7

How are we doing in the locality

Secondary 3/Primary 7

How can EPs support (recorded on flipchart during discussion)

explaining assessment/modelling

supporting multi-agency approaches

training on how other difficulties in effect SLCN-vice versa

talking to staff about how children may feel

risk profile of oracy – research/training

work the parents – emphasise the importance of communication

youth clubs/drop-in – parents and or children

signposting parents /teachers /students

resources – developing/reviewing

Three things that would make a difference (recorded on flipchart during discussion)

explaining assessment /modelling

training on how other difficulties can affect SL CN – vice versa

signposting parents/teachers/students

Appendix Q SALT themes and codes

Themes relating to 'blue sky thinking':

linking SLCN to literacy development in schools	clarifying protocols to schools	giving advice on child development	informing and supporting parents
acting as a bridge between SALT and schools	providing professional consultation	supporting classroom strategies linked to SALT advice	seeing everyone's priorities
a specialist EP for speech and language	supporting diagnosis	supporting early intervention/early years	clarifying the EP role
	training on the role of EPs and SALT	having clearer follow up policies	

Examples of codes contributing to these themes:

Linking SLCN to literacy development in schools	Clarifying protocols to schools	Giving advice on child development
• 'Definitely definitely, definitely support with erm support with literacy, linking the speech and or language problems or the underlying disorder causing that..to the literacy development erm I think theres a massive variation from school to school..on how they try and tackle or even if they try and tackle literacy problems…erm and sometimes they want that advice from speech and language therapy, to the, to all extents a purposes our hands are tied there, even if they feel we feel got the knowledge (P1)..we are not qualified, we are not professionals to do that (P2).. yeah they are just leaving it dangling and you know you sort of, you sort of, really should be getting some sort of, you really need to be thinking about this, and you'll be saying to parents er you need to speak to school and see what it is that they're gonna do (P1) (so that's a big gap)..massive, erm some of them they are quite, some of them will buy into some sort of programme like Read Write Inc, or they will try to follow Letters and Sounds …but they try and do the same thing for every child. This is their programme, you know they've got a TA with ...a GCSE in English and numeracy and they just expect that poor member of staff to be able to meet the needs of every child (P1)..all the SEN children (P2).. or they will try and do it at a higher level than actually what's appropriate to that child (P3) yes, well exactly, because they just, oh we did that last week and its this this week. And you're like, no. yes so I see there to be a massive role with literacy' (P1) • 'Could you offer training to do with literacy?...I just know, it sounds crazy but for some teachers they still have not made the link that if you've got speech and or language difficulties that's gonna link in with literacy, or or what the link is' (P1)	• 'and that you know that we feel they can pick up those children where we say language and learning are roughly in line with each other therefore don't meet the criteria to be on our caseload they would be a good support service for those kids, where they maybe need language enrichment and a bit of a nudge or, but not specific therapy' (P1) • 'it does and I think there's probably you know a greater role there, you know when we're not actually saying therapy, is needed' (P1) • 'and that could probably do with revisiting because its very frustrating if you know if and also schools don't know who they are (referring to a school support service for language and learning), they hear the word language and write them down as the speech and language therapist' (P1) • 'and it might be basically a TA has gone in and suggested some targets and school think they've got a speech and language therapist telling them these targets and they see oh we've already got targets and you look and you think, oo' (P1)	• 'I mean its wider than parents not turning up for appointments I think that some of the schools just accept (P1)..well there's a massive dichotomy there are some of the schools that just don't engage, don't refer, there's nobody in there that we need to see and there's other schools who are amazing, fantastic SENCos who do everything you ask, get everyone to the right meetings you can set them targets and they actually do them and' (P2)

Informing/supporting parents

- 'And its not its not the parentingness you know, they think we are there to criticise and meddle and all they just want us to fix them, really really struggle to engage with services' (P2)
- ' Does everyone who is referred to you get one of these now? I think its quite, I mean it would be, sometimes when we recommend Ed Psych it might be useful to give these just because some parents think psychologist, psychiatrist' (P2)

Acting as a bridge between SALT and schools

- 'Could EPs fill the gap? yeah so we would say in mainstream if they've got a global developmental delay and their speech and language is in line with that you know the drill, they're off but there are some children whose global delay is so severe that they then trigger input from a special needs team and then they get some input. And there's children in that gap who just sit and SENCos are tearing their hair out about them and they are not bad enough and they are not good enough and so there are holes' (P2)
- 'they'd send a support assistant once every 3 weeks ....and I was like this is pointless this is a waste of everybody's time' (P1) (SALT talking about work in school, SLI contract is that a member of staff is present each week

Providing professional consultation

- ' I mean I used to really value being able to you know, have a chat with an educational psychologist about a child that's tricky (P1)..If they are available (P3)..yeah, and of course now if they are not, and if it's a school that haven't bought in, can we have that chat? You know, who do we chat to about, because you know, most of the kids, most of the kids we are alright, we are comfortable with, but its when you get those really tricky ones and you sort of, gosh I really don't know' (P1)
- 'and yet even at secondary school there's some of them when you think you would really value that chat, when you can say this is what I've observed, what do you think? You really want that other professionals opinion' (P1)

Supporting classroom strategies linked to SALT advice

- 'classroom support strategies, I think schools take more notice of what an EP says than a speech and language therapist …I think they think that our job is to weave our magic in a little room somewhere, and put them back in with better skills I don't think they necessarily act on what we suggest, classroom support wise but if it marries up with what an EP has said well then that's okay' (P1)
- ' I think sometimes I would say to them I am going to set these targets, does the child have an IEP. Oh yeah, these would be appropriate to put on there. I am going to write them so you can lift them off, and put them on there and they are like, oh right as if like this is just revolutionary, but I can set a target to put on the IEP, because they don't think they can work on it maybe, they think that you have to be a therapist to work on it, I don't know' (P2).

Seeing everyones priorities

- ' yeah well basically they are not on our list this term and I say well how long will I wait and they say well Ive got a few down for next term already..yeah and it will always be that those that are kicking off will be the priority…the passive little kid who is falling further and further behind will then never be a priority; (P1)

A Specialist EP for speech and language

- 'Yeah, I wonder as well I often, often I am having debates with schools when they, they've got a child maybe in nursery or reception and its unclear which direction they're gonna go in and obviously there are massive issues…there's issues with speech and language, there's issues with interaction…and communication…and there's issues with learning…and we are trying to disentangle this child's needs and they're saying, do we put a caf in, well perhaps yes just list exactly what you're observing and put a caf in and the panel will decide, but then I'm kind of thinking, is it ASD, is it SLI' (P2)
- 'and I don't know if there could be a specialist EP for children like that or I know all EPs are qualified to be able to deal with these situations but its that foundation stage age group which are really, and then sometimes they get into year 1 and you're like, wow, they just, what happened, total transformation, they just need community input for speech and language and then they are well on their way or you see them in year 1 and you're like, oh my gosh they are not interacting' (P2)

Supporting diagnosis

- 'and they they just think its speech and languages role, look come on they are not talking, they are not understanding, why this child, surely with appropriate therapy, and we are saying well actually, but you know or like those children might be amazing in a one to one with me' (P2)
- 'and I can be like actually for their understanding, he is using some pretty appropriate sentences, did make a couple of incidences of eye contact and managed to sit down and like topic maintain, but in the classroom its completely different. And they're tearing their hair out because they think they that this child has got speech and language issues and actually you know there is so much more behind that' (P2)
- 'and we are trying to disentangle this child's needs and they're saying, do we put a caf in, well perhaps yes just list exactly what you're observing and put a caf in and the panel will decide, but then I'm kind of thinking, is it ASD, is it SLI' (P2)

Supporting early intervention/early years

- 'and I don't know if there could be a specialist EP for children like that or I know all EPs are qualified to be able to deal with these situations but its that foundation stage age group which are really, and then sometimes they get into year 1 and you're like, wow, they just, what happened, total transformation, they just need community input for speech and language and then they are well on their way or you see them in year 1 and you're like, oh my gosh they are not interacting' (P2)

Clarifying the EP role

- 'and then the school will say how can we take it further, what's the next step, erm so adapting, enhancing, moving advice along a step, ….I mean, so the only time you can get, so sometimes in a (EP) report it says due to attention and listening or the age of the child there are these other difficulties.. it is difficult to ascertain if these findings are completely reliable… and then that's the end…and then I have to say, right well that was a year ago and its not totally conclusive, can you test them again. And I think that is only triggered by another professional who needs, who relies on the ed psych finding and I don't think school, I think school' (P2)
- 'I've ticked that box, yeah yeah (P1) ..I dont' think they see you guys as people who can provide updating and ongoing advice and support' (P2)
- 'the sort of support strategies for the children who don't meet the criteria for our caseload, so whether they do have a global delay' (P1)
- 'that's not so low that's falling into that complex special need group but where language and learning are delayed and nobodys saying yeah their communications skills are appropriate for their age..you know, maybe I don't know would that be the language and learning team, or' (P1
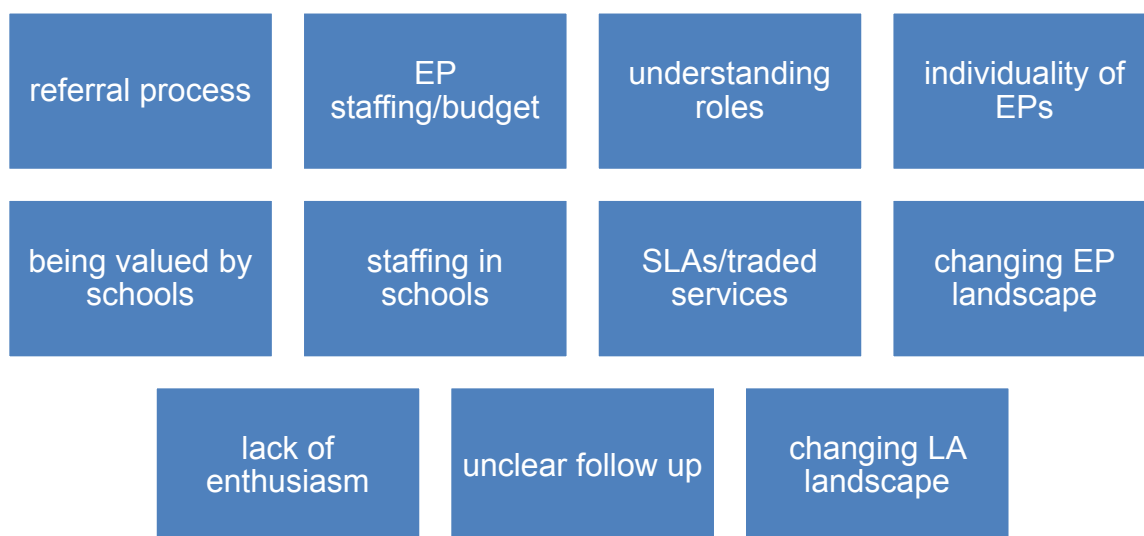
Training on the role of EPs and SALT

- 'very different, and yeah I mean unlimited EP time I would say joint training…yeah to say this is our role this is what we do this is what they do' (P2)

Having clearer follow up policies

- 'I, I was just going to say I, if there were unlimited EPs, I would like to see, providing them with recommendations and advice and then monitoring their advice, being able to update it, not with regular weekly input but just on a termly basis, er you can even do it on request from school but just some kind of follow up from the initial report and advice to then going in' (P2)
- 'what have you done about it, the school might say we've done this that and the other' (P2)
- 'I would say for me it would be for me looking at your follow up' (P2)
- 'after an assessment and whats your current system is there a is there a written or anything you know, do you have a routine where you follow up after assessment, do you have a category of patients so you see a child they weren't really appropriate to be seen by you you've given them a basic assessment, they might be one or two recommendations and you say they do not need to be seen by an EP again, fine. Fine that's classic that's what we would call a discharge, and then there are other children did not get enough information today, child was not cooperative' (P2)

Themes relating to barriers:

referral process	EP staffing/budget	understanding roles	individuality of EPs
being valued by schools	staffing in schools	SLAs/traded services	changing EP landscape
lack of enthusiasm	unclear follow up	changing LA landscape	

Examples of codes contributing to themes:

referral process	EP staffing/budget	understanding of role
• 'yes and I think when the schools realise that that will be a huge advantage because you know I am sure some of them refer to speech and language therapy rather than educational psychology erm because of that form' (P1) (responding to plans for the EP service is to have its own referral form rather than asking schools to complete a CAF)	• 'money, staffing' (P2)..'definitely money' (P1) (staffing EPs) • 'could you offer training to do with literacy?..but would you not have the possibility of offering it city wide to the schools who had bought in, but then they could, or wider but they had to pay for the attendance' (P1) (Schools purchasing SLAs with the LA choose how to use their time. Training may not be considered a priority. Training was previously free)	• 'understanding roles and responsibilities' • 'I mean could we just communicate our roles more effectively to people and that needn't be costly need it but' (P1)..(Angela – you mean SALT and EP?)..'Yeah And that might be you telling the SALTs what they should say about the EP role you know, I mean we almost need a script to say are you aware your EP could support you with this this and this … you know if we are saying that they are not really appropriate for our input at the moment but the EP can do blah blah blah' (P1)

individuality of EPs

- 'variable Angela, very variable' (P1)..'very variable with psychologists '(P1 and P2)
- 'and the quality of the reports and the information in the reports is very variable across' (P3)
- 'and I can certainly understand why some schools were reluctant to buy in to the service when they don't know who they are going to get' (P1).

being valued by schools

- 'maybe school cooperation to a degree' (P2)
- 'It's their cooperation, its how much, it is their knowledge cos its how much they value what they think you can offer what they think your role is or should be' (P1)

staffing in schools

- 'I think its also an issue of money and staffing in schools because we did have that blue sky kind of scenario…then you be needing to support the targets you were setting, they would be able to meet more often with us, they would you know…and so they would need TA availability, classroom teachers availability, training so it would impact on their' (P2)

SLA/traded services

- 'could you offer training to do with literacy?..but would you not have the possibility of offering it city wide to the schools who had bought in, but then they could, or wider but they had to pay for the attendance' (P1) (SLAs)
- 'they might not priorise like you said children that you think are a priority or that we do and how would we get into that sort of follow up system and say hey we are gonna find this a lot, could we bring them up as priorities, could we change them' (P2).

changing EP landscape

- 'I think possibly what they'll realise slowly as well is that if they have a private EP well they haven't got the follow up. Not just the the prediscussion, but its it's the follow up , so you might get really thorough report with lots of advice but you haven't got the support thereafter when implementing it '(P1)…. 'Yes, I have heard about the private EPs reports' (P3) 'what about?' (P2)… 'well basically its more kind of content about blowing their own trumpets than about the actual child' (P3) (discussion about differences in independent and LA EPs)

lack of enthusiasm

- 'enthusiasm is a bit of a barrier at the moment' (P2)…'yeah I think possibly the whole of the public sector workforce is exhausted and disillusioned' (P1)..'I think if you said right, we've got some money we do want to do this new initiative, who's in, a lot of people would be like I'm on my knees, sorry, sounds great but its not for me, to motivate people to get involved I think you'd have to you'd have to know there would be a good outcome on the horizon for that and it wasn't just a working group that was going to dissolve again' (P2).

unclear follow up

- ' they might not prioritise like you said children that you think are a priority or that we do and how would we get into that sort of follow up system and say hey we are gonna find this a lot, could we bring them up as priorities, could we change them (P2).. yeah and I think what feeds into that then is probably good communication that we know that you are gonna go back in or the schools kinda like you say (P3)…. yeah whatever the procedure is we need to be aware of it it needs to be shown in your report' (P2)

changing LA landscape

- 'yes and I think when the schools realise that that will be a huge advantage because you know I am sure some of them refer to speech and language therapy rather than educational psychology erm because of that form' (P1) (referring to changes in the referral process)
- 'could you offer training to do with literacy?..but would you not have the possibility of offering it city wide to the schools who had bought in, but then they could, or wider but they had to pay for the attendance' (P1) (SLAs)

Appendix R Responses by SALTs during the focus group

What is SLCN?

P1

selective mutism

dysfluency

specific problem with speech e.g. dyspraxia/phonological disorder

a specific problem understanding spoken language (therefore expressive delay too)

delays in language development (all-round)

global developmental delay

problems as a result of HI

problems communicating thoughts/opinions because of physical impairment

ASD

complex disorders/genetically identifiable disorders e.g. downs

P2

any problems with intelligibility of speech – dyspraxia/inconsistent phonology disordered speech/delayed speech

auditory processing

difficulties understanding instructions/questions/social 'rules'/boundaries

sound awareness problems – if manifesting in speech/word finding issues

difficulties with communication and interaction – turn taking/topic maintenance/eye contact

SEN kids – downs/LD/ MLD/CP

hearing impaired kids

voice disorders

stammering – overt/covert

pragmatic language difficulties

word finding problems

selective mutism

difficulties with spoken language – conveying a message/speaking in sentences /using correct grammar/' making sense'

difficulties with language socially

P3

Cleft lip and palate

difficulties understanding and using spoken language

speech sounds difficulties

stammering

speech/language/communication difficulties and difficulties accessing education/literacy difficulties

word finding difficulties

phonological awareness difficulties

negative perceptions of people with SLCN

SLCN can affect people's ability to be part of society – access work and training

research shows high proportion of young offenders have SLCN

impact of SLCN on a person's confidence/self-esteem

List of interventions being used by SALTs

P1

regular therapy delivered in blocks supported by a member of school staff (**not** SLI service) where there are exceptional circumstances that mean parents are unable to support

advice re what we see to be pupils difficulties/strategies into schools (including our' individual communication profiles')-works better in some schools than others

demonstration of therapy programmes/provision of resources for work to be carried out by staff. This may or may not follow a block therapy and school

'troubleshooting' discussions with staff to hear what staff find a problem and suggesting strategies to address

liaison and planning with language provision staff (when importance of this is recognised by head teacher and/or language provision staff)

liaison – EPs – but rarer than this used to be since cuts in both services

joint working/whole class support within LP

SLI service delivery – works extremely well when skills fully engage (doesn't when they don't!)

P2

out-of-school

assess monitor and provide blocks of therapy

actively supports parents and children by setting targets, providing advice, demonstrating techniques in play and therapy activities

referring children onto other services and liaising closely with them – audiology, paediatricians, CAMHS and other SALT specialities – dysfluency/voice/ASD/SLI/talk and play/SEN

evaluating outcomes

attending FSA meetings/annual review meeting and providing reports

in school

assess and monitor children during their time with SALT

therapy blocks in exceptional circumstances (if children's difficulties are very severe and parents will not/cannot take to clinic or if therapy targets include/require close liaison and backup work from school staff)

set targets jointly with teachers and provide written record of this – which can be incorporated into individual educationplans (IEPs) Monitor these targets approximately 2/3 times a year

provide client based training specific to targeted work in consultation with the client – sometimes in school/in clinic for teachers

telephone contacts to discuss appropriateness of referrals/provide advice/adopt target/expand targets/fact-finding re impact of difficulties in school

P3

out-of-school

meeting with parents to explain SLI service and feedback from assessment results

supporting parents to discuss making a decision about their children taking place at a language provision

discussing/supporting parents when child no longer benefits from SLI import e.g. have made enough progress, not SLI suitable

in schools

assessing, planning and evaluating therapy for children – offered in schools

using support assistants in sessions – to carry over therapy when salt there – increasing their knowledge and skills

working alongside teachers/sencos, planning targets/IEP targets

attending review meeting/writing reports for the children

supporting referrals e.g. to EPs

supporting FSA process for children, as appropriate

could offer training if asked

meeting with teachers/sencos to discuss the child's SL CN

Barriers to EP support (recorded on flipchart during discussion)

money

staffing

money and staffing in schools

cooperation

skill knowledge – EP role

Time – liaison regularly EP/salt

Enthusiasm

How are we doing in the city

6

How are we doing in the locality

4½

How can EPs support (recorded on flipchart during discussion)

linking speech and language difficulties to literacy development

providing recommendations/advice and monitoring – check with school – next steps

give support strategies for children who don't need therapy

being available to discuss children

early intervention in early years

joint training/EP

Three things that would make a difference (recorded on flipchart during discussion)

Look at the follow up

Good communication with SALT

Training on the impact of SLCN on literacy

Appendix S EP themes and codes

Below is shown each of the four questions and the themes that emerged from analysing them, along with examples of EP responses/'noticings' which represent them (coded data).

1. How do you currently support children with SLCN?

collaboration/liaison with others	assessment	intervention

clear process of work	SLCN overlooked by schools?

collaboration/liaison with others

- 'Check previous involvement with SALT, recommend referrals when necessary and liaise with them and the Language and Learning Team' (EP3);
- 'Usually through liaison with the SENCo, where they have identified some needs and are seeking additional support'(EP5);
- 'I would also be involved in more systemic work with families, looking precisely at strategies to develop SLC but in direct relation to ASD – this involves joint work with SALT' (EP5);
- 'Indicating the need for a referral to SALT if it appears to be required' (EP6);
- Feel of working together including parents – reflects experience? (noticing note from EP5 questionnaire);
- EP as expert (noticing note from EP1 questionnaire);
- Sees SALT as main contact (noticing note from EP2 questionnaire);
- Insular – not thinking wider than the service in terms of support (noticing from EP 4)

assessment

- 'Through assessment using different assessment tools, including PIP, play based assessment, BAS II and BPVS'(EP6);
- 'Early language screening interventions – discussion/checklist with nursery (EP4);
- 'Provision of cognitive assessment information' (EP2);
- I am often asked to carry out assessments by SALT to consider non verbal/verbal reasoning skills' (EP7);
- 'Sometimes the presenting need is less clear and the query may be around global learning – observation, assessment, consultation with family, staff, other professionals can help gain a clearer understanding of the SLCN and how this relates to other patterns of strengths and difficulties' (EP5);
- 'Observation – assess children's language skills in whole class and small group environments compared when working with them in a one to one situation' (EP3);
- By assessing their SEN when asked to do so' (EP1);
- 'Play based assessment – looking at children's language skills eg their receptive and expressive language skills' (EP3);
- Clarification of need (noticing note from EP5 questionnaire);
- Focus on assessment rather than liaising with others (noticing note from EP 6);
- Focus on diagnosis rather than need (noticing note from EP 7).

intervention

- 'Based on assessment, recommendations are made in relation to how to support the child/young person to begin to develop their skills, for example work on naming objects/visual strategies/PECS for the younger ages and explicit teaching methods to help them successfully communicate their needs to adults around them and to approach and to successfully begin to communicate with peers and to access the curriculum despite the difficulties for all ages (EP2);
- 'Support can be through casework, training, consultation (EP5);
- 'Training for staff in the interventions recommended (EP3);
- 'Giving advice to parents, teachers etc'(EP1);
- 'Reports to support statutory assessment for additional mainstream support or to support applications for language provision' ((EP6);
- 'Also involved in target setting with schools and salt to monitor speech and language progress' (EP7).
- Sense of supporting children to move on (noticing from EP 6 questionnaire).

clear process of work

- Clear structure to work – information gathering/ assessment then recommendations/ training for staff (from EP6)
- No detail provided on how EP works (from EP 1)

SLCN overlooked by schools?

- 'Lots of issues seem to be around social interaction and communication needs, and I do wonder if speech and language (rather than social communication) needs are sometimes overlooked by schools' (EP7)

2. Are there any barriers/ constraints that you feel affect the support that you provide/would like to offer?

time	EPS organisation/ service delivery	lack of opportunity to work with/liaise with SALT
lack of awareness of children with SLCN	difference in/ confusion over SLI classification	no barriers/ constraints

time

- 'Time! Time is always the primary barrier to providing the best support both in terms of working with individual children and their education settings, with colleagues and in terms of research to ensure that we are up to date with latest developments and recommendations (EP2);
- Time (EP3, EP5, EP6).

EP organisation / service delivery

- 'New way of working with SLAs' (EP5)
- 'Will they now be prioritised even less with SLA for EPS' (EP4)

lack of opportunity to work with / liaise with SALT

- 'Cuts to other services – availability of SALT for liaison and intervention' (EP5);
- 'Ideally more time for joint work with SALT to get a better understanding of the work they do and how we can fit into this to ensure most effective support' (EP2)

lack of awareness of children with SLCN

- 'That these children are not always prioritised within our service' (EP4)

Difference in /confusion over SLI classification

- I sometimes find it difficult to work with the classification of specific language impairment adopted by SALT (SLI) team. I think it oftern depends on the perception of the progress individual children will make and worry about the perceived emphasis on cognitive scores' (EP7)

no barriers/constraints

- Happy with current support (indication form EP1 questionnaire)

awareness of children with SLCN

- That these children are not always prioritised within our service (EP4)

no barriers/ constraints

- Happy with current support (noticing from EP1 questionnaire)

3. Would you like to work any differently to support children with SLCN?

more time to work with and liaise with other professionals	refresh knowledge	more time to implement and monitor interventions
support children and schools to manage LA set up for children with SLI	work with parents to develop confidence	would not work differently

more time to liaise with other professionals

- 'Ideally more time for joint work with SALT to get a better understanding of the work they do and how we can fit into this to ensure effective support (EP6);
- 'More time to liaise with colleagues from the Language and Learning team (EP3);
- 'Yes I would like to work more closely with SALT (some of my schools have agreed this for SALT work, less keen for SLA)' (EP4);
- 'Would like more time for liaison with SALT. Can be difficult with time constraints to talk with colleagues in SALT and to ensure that schools / parents are not being given too many or possibly conflicting targets. Ongoing opportunities for feedback and updates from SALT colleagues (EP2);

refresh knowledge

- 'I would like to refresh my own knowledge around using Makaton. We did an introductory course at University but I would like to update this' (EP3).

more time to implement and monitor interventions

- 'I would like to be involved more in supporting schools to implement interventions to raise speech and language skills in general (especially in the early years),and to monitor their effectiveness over time' (EP7);
- 'Would love to have the time to do some of the other things other regional EP colleagues have done in the past re Table Talk, to explore ICT and language through literacy' (EP5);

work with parents to develop confidence

- 'I also think that there is a greater need to work with parents around speech and language issues and to develop their confidence with their babies and young children' (EP 7).

support children and schools to manage LA set up for children with SLI

- 'Look at how we support the mainstream school with ensuring children who attend the language provision are included on the day they are there. At the moment the views of these children and some SENCos are that they find this day hard'. (EP4)

would not work differently

- One word response 'No', happy with current way of working (noticing from EP1 questionnaire).

4. Do you think EPs have a unique role to play in supporting children with SLCN?

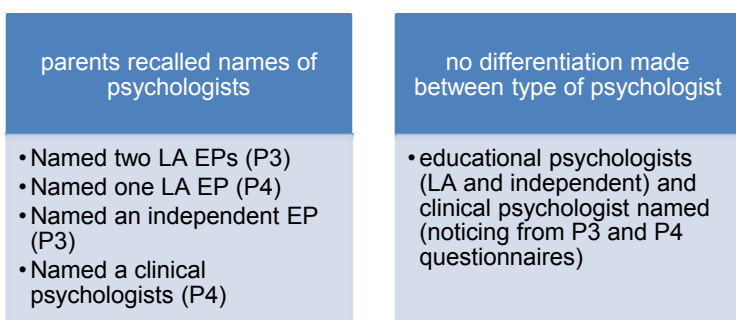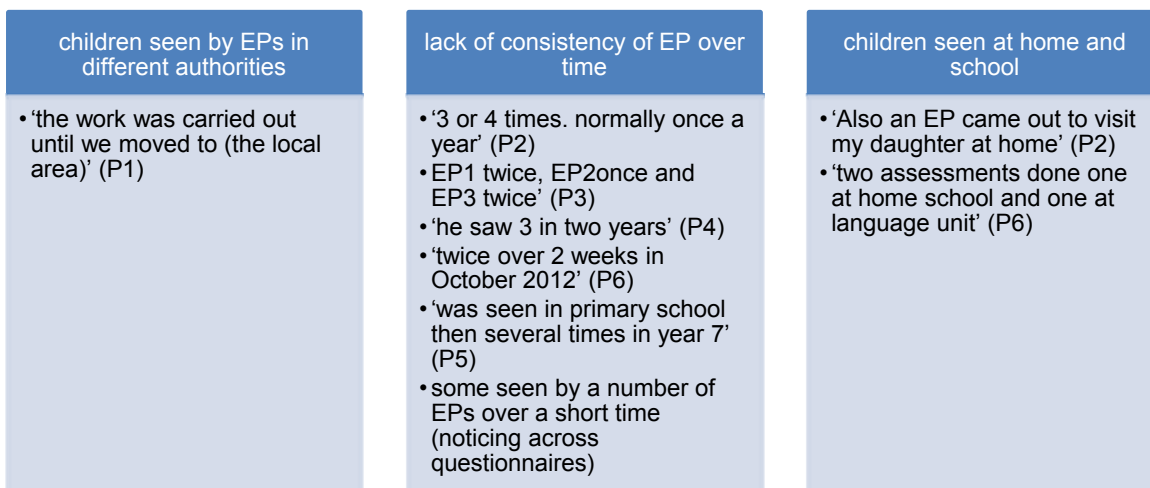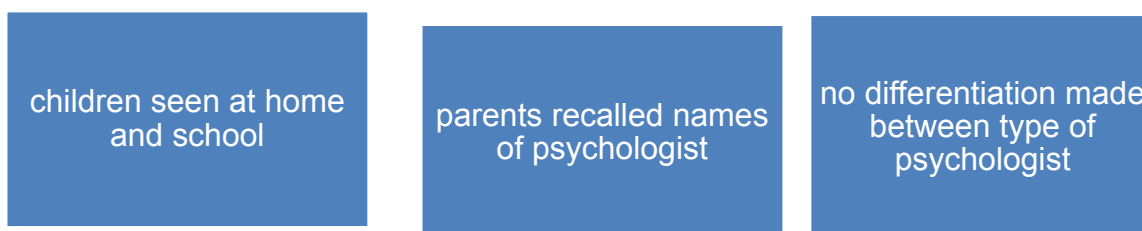|			
consider the whole child	assessment of cognitive skills and overview of development over time	relate SLCN to learning	close and sustained relationships with schools and SENCos for effective support
providing practical strategies and recommendations	knowledge of teaching and learning	support/follow up work from other professionals	knowledge of LA provision
early intervention	support decision making on meeting child's needs	cover a broad age range	lack of reference to work with parents

consider the whole child

- 'Our training and experience we look at the 'whole child' rather than concentrating solely on their speech and language needs' (EP1);
- 'Consider the wider needs of pupils in addition to their speech and language needs, and to pull it all together' (EP7);
- 'In terms of identifying if the difficulty is specific to language, yes' (EP2);
- 'Particularly because we look at the overall development and can see SLCN in the context of broader development and disorder' (EP5)

assessment of cognitive skills and overview of devlopment over time

- 'We can also tests IQ and compare verbal and non verbal skills which helps SALT decide whether there is a specific language impairment' (EP1);
- 'We can also provide information about the child's cognitive ability and within this, can look more closely at their verbal and non verbal skills (EP3);
- 'We are best placed to give an overview of development over time' (EP7);

relate SLCN to learning

- 'I think we can give an overview of how their difficulties are impacting their ability to access the curriculum'. (EP3).

close and sustained relationships with schools and SENCos for efective support

- 'I think our role in schools, our relationship with SENCos in schools over time means we can have insight into school systems, dynamics and can support staff more effectively' (EP3);
- 'in addition to us having close working relationships with schools' (EP2);

providing practical strategies and recommendations

- 'thinking about how to support children within the context of a busy classroom or nursery' (EP2);
- 'I also believe given our school experiences that we can suggest recommendations that can realistically be implemented' (EP3);
- 'Supporting IEP/ provision planning for these children' (EP4);
- 'supporting them to access the curriculum despite their difficulties as opposed to giving them specific targets to develop their own skills' (EP2);

knowledge of teaching and learning

- 'good knowledge of teaching and learning and expected targets for pupils' (EP6);

support/ follow up work from other professionals

- 'I am working with a pupil at the moment who is making progress with the SALT team but who still perceives herself to be shy and unable to communicate in groups. Although her sessions with salt are really positive and she is about to be discharged from the team, her speech and language needs are still an issue for her in terms of confidence, self esteem and the effects of her having historic salt difficulties' (EP7);
- Supporting SALT assessment of SLI (noticing from EP1 questionnaire).

knowledge of LA provision

- 'a good overview of kinds of provision available in the local authority' (EP6).

early intervention

- 'think we can help in early identification' (EP4);

support decision making on meeting the child's needs

- 'well placed to facilitate decisions around how best the child's needs might be met' (EP6)

cover a broad age range

- 'also because we cover such a broad age range' (EP5)

lack of reference to work with parents

- (noticing from across the questionnaires)

Appendix T Parents' themes and codes

Below is shown each of the seven questions, with themes taken from semantic and latent codes and examples of parental responses/'noticings' which I consider to represent the range.

1. Has your child been seen by an EP? (All parents responded with a 'yes' to this question)

2. If so, could you provide details? (Parents provided a range of information, themed as follows)

children seen by EPs in different authorities	lack of consistency of EP over time

children seen at home and school	parents recalled names of psychologist	no differentiation made between type of psychologist

children seen by EPs in different authorities	lack of consistency of EP over time	children seen at home and school
• 'the work was carried out until we moved to (the local area)' (P1)	• '3 or 4 times. normally once a year' (P2) • EP1 twice, EP2once and EP3 twice' (P3) • 'he saw 3 in two years' (P4) • 'twice over 2 weeks in October 2012' (P6) • 'was seen in primary school then several times in year 7' (P5) • some seen by a number of EPs over a short time (noticing across questionnaires)	• 'Also an EP came out to visit my daughter at home' (P2) • 'two assessments done one at home school and one at language unit' (P6)

parents recalled names of psychologists	no differentiation made between type of psychologist
• Named two LA EPs (P3) • Named one LA EP (P4) • Named an independent EP (P3) • Named a clinical psychologists (P4)	• educational psychologists (LA and independent) and clinical psychologist named (noticing from P3 and P4 questionnaires)

3. Have you had any contact with an EP as part of the work carried out with your child?

Five of six parents indicated that they had had contact with an EP as part of work carried out with their child. The one parent who indicated that they had not had contact with an EP had been provided with details of EP work.

4. If so, could you please give details?

EP attended a review meeting	name of EP provided	EP made telephone contact
made comment on the quality of EP work	Met individually with EP	EP carried out a home visit

EP attended a review meeting	**Name of EP provided**	**EP made telephone contact**
• 'she also came to review meetings' (P2) • 'review meetings to discuss long term plans for school as the placement was not working' (P5) • 'review meeting in October 2012, meeting in school May 2011' (P6)	• Named EP from another LA – saw in 2008 (P1) • Named LA EP and independent EP (P2) • Named independant EP (P3)	• 'rang me after seeing my daughter' (P2)

made comment on the quality of EP work	**met individually with EP**	**EP carried out a home visit**
• 'she was fantastic. she was very informative' (P2)	• 'we went to a quiet room where she discussed her findings' (P2) • 'and the meeting lasted for 30 minutes' (P2) • 'face to face to explain how my child was' (P4)	• 'home visit' (P3) • 'came to my house to see my child to discuss report done by her colleague' (P2)

5. Is there anything that you would have liked done differently?

happy with support	a more detailed report which addresses important aspects	increased EP knowledge
greater contribution to review meeting	more communication with parents	speedier process

happy with support
- 'no I can honestly say that the EP was a great support and would have been lost without her support' (P1)

a more detailed report which addresses important aspects
- 'Yes. First two times she was seen it was a very brief report that did not seem to emphasise important aspects' (P2)

increased EP knowledge
- 'better knowledge, first ed psych hadn't heard of dyspraxia' (P3)

greater contribution to review meeting
- 'also during review meetings during this time the EP didn't mention one word during the entire meeting' (P2)

more communication with parents
- 'more communication with parents' (P3)
- 'I would have liked to have met with the EP personally before the official meetings' (P5)
- 'maybe to have met with the educational psychologist at home with my child before assessments carried out at school' (P6)

more speedier process
- 'awful to say, wish it was done quicker, but understand things do take time but so pleased with the outcome up till now'(P4)
- parent explained that she was a'pest' because appointments were not being offered quickly enough (from SENCos notes)

6. Having heard a bit more about how an EP works, is there anything else you would have liked to have seen done differently?

no further suggestions	more detailed EP report	meeting with parents

time for EP to get to know the child

no further suggestions	more detailed EP report	meeting with parents
• section left blank (P1) • 'everything that was done was kept positive for my child so theres nothing for now' (P4)	• 'yes I think there should be a minimum amount of wording / page used. This is because I have had one EP report that was ponly a half of an A4 piece of paper, but I've also had a report of 11 pages long. Obviously I woud like a report that delves into my child's difficulties' (P2)	• ' as above and would have liked to have had more input and contact with original EP apart from meeting in May 2011' (P6) • 'definitely a meeting or concise summary by way of preparation before the official review' (P5) • 'more meetings face to face with parents' (P3)

time for EP to get to know the child
• 'remember once a quarter meeting will never ever let you know a child. You learn little from the reports. get to know the child' (P3)

7. Is there anything else that you feel an EP could do to support your child, both within the current constraints and in an ideal world?

no suggestions	regular review by an EP	consider EP assessments – relevance and sharing with parents
follow up on recommendations to schools	make clearer the role of the EP	provide direction/ signpost to other agencies
provide and share advice with parents	be available for future support	support parents as partners

no suggestions	regular review by an EP	consider EP assessments – relevance and sharing with parent
• section left blank (P5) (P3) • 'no, I think the school plays a huge part' (P2)	• 'to regularly review the child throughout their school life' (P6)	• 'Parent commented that assessments as quite strict' (from notes taken by SENCo) • 'Parent talked about the outdated pictures on tests' (from notes taken by SENCo) • 'Parent asked how the scoring of tests is completed' (from notes taken by SENCo)

follow up on recommendations to schools	make clearer the role of the EP	provide direction / signpost to other agencies
• 'insist and revisit advice/ recommendations to schools, penalise schools not doing recommendations. Not helping child.' (P3) • 'Parent asked what would happen if school did not follow up on recommendations' (from notes taken by SENCo)	• 'Parent explained how scary and hard to hear it is about the EP being involved' (from notes taken by SENCo) • 'Parent asked why a teacher would ask for an EP' (from notes taken by SENCo) • 'Parent asked whether the EP is the main person for a statement' (from notes taken by SENCo) • 'Do EPs ever support parents in looking at draft statements' (from notes taken by SENCo)	• 'advise best places for help'(P3) • 'Parent mentioned 'frustrations' – explained that more needs to be done to promote what info etc there is out there' (from notes taken by SENCo) • 'Parents talked about not knowing where to get information from' (from notes taken by SENCo) • 'Parents talked about 'winning the lottery' when they get an answer' (from notes taken by SENCo)

provide and share advice with parents	be available for future support	support parents as partners
• 'be forthcoming with advice' (P3) • 'Parent said it is hard to not hear the advice from professionals' (from notes taken by the SENCo)	• 'hopefully to be there if things change in my child's future and your needed' (P4)	• 'as long as you feel part of a team to help your child then that's fantastic' (P2) • 'Parent explained that at times it can be helpful to have private input – if there is not a supportive team' (from notes taken by SENCo) • 'Daunting – amount of professionals at the meeting. Vulnerable feeling being in meetings' (from notes taken by SENCo) • 'Parent explained how out of her depth she would have felt without support' (from notes taken by SENCo)

273