‘Parents as Partners’: Perspectives on the Important Elements of Family-School Partnerships for Children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

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Overarching Abstract

Following the Warnock Report into the education of children deemed to have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) in 1978, in which the phrase “Parents as Partners” was termed and highlighted as a concept, there has been increased focus on how schools engage parents and caregivers in their children’s education. Partnerships are forwarded as the ideal, involving reciprocal interactions characterised by collaboration and shared ownership. These partnerships can play an important role to improve educational experiences and outcomes, as well as presenting a vehicle for inclusion and social justice. However, a sustained lack of progress towards establishing effective partnerships is highlighted, and research exploring specifically what comprises them in practice is limited.

This thesis aims to foreground the perspectives of education professionals in schools and parents of children with SEND regarding the elements of effective partnership.

The systematic literature review in Chapter 1 resulted in five papers regarding perspectives on partnerships being selected and analysed using a meta-ethnographic method. This led to a tentative interpretation and model of parent-school partnerships encapsulating the key concepts of ‘Effective Communication and Understanding’, ‘Mutual Power and Agency’, ‘Mutual Trust’, and ‘Responsibility, Accountability, and Ethos’. This is discussed in terms of previous literature and its implications for practice.

Chapter 2 bridges the review and the empirical research, exploring my personal, philosophical, and methodological positions and their impact on the research, as well as providing an overview of ethical considerations.

The empirical research reported in Chapter 3 involved semi-structured interviews with three parents of children who receive SEND support and four professionals working in mainstream primary schools in Northeast England regarding their experiences of partnership. Data were analysed using Template Analysis, leading to an interpretation of how partnerships are developed and maintained. Patterns and subtleties within the data are explored with reference to case examples and previous literature. A further-developed model is presented, along with implications for professional practice in schools and for Educational Psychologists. Four main concepts are hypothesised to underpin effective partnerships, each of which, including the subthemes within, are discussed: ‘Communication’, ‘Eco-Systemic Factors’, ‘Professional Skills’, and ‘Working “with”, not “doing to”’. The research concludes that a focus on these factors can enhance effective, socially just

partnerships, and that Educational Psychologists may be able to contribute to supporting professionals and families in this area.

Chapter 4 recounts my research journey and comprises a reflective commentary on the decisions made, challenges overcome, and the skills I have developed. It summarizes the implications of the research and of the journey for education professionals and for me as a practitioner and researcher. Alternative courses of action are considered, along with avenues for future research.

15,933 words

Chapters 1 and 3 have been presented in a format suitable for intended publication in the journal Educational Psychology in Practice.

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Chapter 1: Professionals and parents facilitating partnerships to support children with SEND: What is important?

Abstract

Partnerships between parents and school professionals have presented a focus in policy and research since the Warnock Report in 1978. Research suggests positive impacts of effective partnerships on inclusion, attainment, and quality of life. This represents a systemic focus on the interactions between structures around children. However, less is understood regarding how this ideal might be realized in practice, particularly in an English context for children receiving support for Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). More recent reviews suggest a lack of progress with this. Therefore, this systematic literature review aims to explore qualitative studies regarding partners' perceived elements of an effective home-school partnership. To this end, a meta-ethnographical approach was employed with five relevant articles. Emergent concepts were synthesized systematically, and interpretations were generated into a line of argument and a tentative model of effective parent-professional partnerships. This led to overarching, interdependent themes of Effective Communication and Understanding; Mutual Trust; Mutual Power and Agency; and Responsibility, Accountability, and Ethos. These themes are discussed in terms of previous literature and implications for education going forwards. It is concluded that enhancing these elements in practice can contribute to inclusive education for children receiving SEND support.

Keywords:

Inclusion; Partnership; Home-school relationships; Parental involvement; Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

5,461 words

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Partnerships in education

Partnership between parents[1] and education professionals has been promoted as the ideal (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008) and viewed as essential for quality services (Cottle & Alexander, 2014). Since the Warnock Report in 1978 termed the phrase 'parents as partners' and recognised the principle (Esposito & Carroll, 2019; Warnock, 1978, p. 150), educational partnerships have been the subject of much policy and research. They have been argued to be a key feature of education to support children and families, improving attainment, quality of life, inclusive culture, and parental satisfaction (Francis et al., 2016; Kendall, 2019; Wilder, 2014). However, realizing effective partnerships can be difficult despite the best intentions (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

Attempts have been made to define partnerships but no universal definition exists (Broomhead, 2018). Vincent (2000) defines partnership as an ideal relationship between parents and professionals. Similarly, Glueck and Reschly (2014) conceptualize partnerships as a specific and desired type of relationship that is characterised by 'collaboration and joint ownership of responsibilities and accountability for outcomes' (p. 297). For this SLR, partnerships are understood to rely on collaboration and communication, joint ownership and accountability, shared power and expertise, mutuality and two-way dialogue, common goals and the fulfilment of agreed and expected roles (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Glueck & Reschly, 2014; Reschly & Christenson, 2012; Westergård & Galloway, 2010; Wolfendale, 2002).

Parent-practitioner partnership is related to parental involvement (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Epstein (2010) presents methods of parental involvement. She argues that supporting parenting skills and home learning, developing community collaboration by involving parents in school events, and empowering parental decision-making enhance relationships. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggest a reframing to parental engagement. This constitutes more parental agency in their child's learning, moving away from a school-directed agenda towards one of collaborative dialogue and parental action informed by school. This shift in agency away from professionals

[1] Throughout this thesis, the label 'parent' shall be used to refer to biological parents as well as any alternative primary caregiver.

is important in genuine, mutual partnerships where accountability and responsibility are shared (Glueck & Reschly, 2014).

It is established that the ecosystems around children play an integral role in their development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Whilst parents and teachers represent microsystems that closely impact a child's development, a focus on school-family partnerships recognizes the impact of the mesosystems level, where interactions between microsystems are highlighted, and the intersection of the child and their context can be explored (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Darling, 2007; Reschly & Christenson, 2012). Having explored the concept of partnership between parents and professionals, their importance for children deemed to have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) will now be discussed.

1.1.2 Partnerships in the education of children receiving SEND support

Approximately 15% of pupils in England are deemed to have SEND (Department for Education, 2020). They are conceptualised in legislation as experiencing a significantly greater difficulty in learning than most children of the same age and requiring extra or different support than is provided by the usual curriculum (Children & Families Act, 2014). Of these pupils, approximately 21% have an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan setting out their needs and the support required, issued following formal assessment by the Local Authority (Department for Education, 2020). The assessment process and the implementation of such plans involve considerable complexity, with influences ranging from broader political and education agendas, to cultures and resources of settings, to beliefs and efficacy of individuals (Richards, 2021). Possession of an EHC plan is not the sole identifier of educational need; many schools meet needs at the SEND Support level with additional funding from the LA, deciding not to pursue statutory assessment. Alternatively, statutory assessment may be seen by some as a necessary mechanism to secure the funding needed to provide support (Lamb, 2019). Due to the inconsistencies present between statutory and non-statutory systems (Lamb, 2019), this thesis refers to children with SEND or receiving SEND support and does not distinguish between those with an EHC plan or without.

A major recommendation of the Warnock Report (1978) was to involve parents as equal partners in the education of children with Special Educational Needs. Subsequent legislation and guidance over the last few decades have necessitated

the role of partnerships, although the Lamb Inquiry (2009) revealed a lack of progress in realising meaningful partnerships. Lamb forwarded open communication, stronger parental voice, and focusing on engagement for partnerships and inclusion. The findings influenced the Children and Families Act (2014) and the accompanying SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015), enshrining the requirement for meaningful partnerships and co-production. However, the recent SEND Review (2022) highlighted enduring negative experiences for parents regarding navigating SEND support and being heard. Whilst espousing the importance of individualized, person-centred practice, policy often tends to treat parents as a homogeneous group, failing to recognize the fluid nature of need and varying levels of capacity to engage in partnerships (Hellawell, 2018). This can lead to parents being labelled non-compliant, and to decreased involvement if they are not perceived to be engaged, agentic private consumers as current neoliberal systems assume (Hellawell, 2018). It is important to be aware of the political and social context of such policy initiatives and the wider debate regarding the positioning of children labelled with SEND and their parents, though a full discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Parent-professional partnership represents a vehicle toward inclusion as it enables shared knowledge, empowerment, and dialogue. Relational inclusion is prescient; it foregrounds relationships between children, families, and practitioners. It recognizes context, celebrates difference, and increases participation, alongside an ontological shift towards relationships as central to education (Dalkilic, 2014; Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016a). The focus placed upon context here, in contrast to policy noted above, is essential. Although parents likely share some experiences, each has a different history, understanding, culture, and family context. Therefore, operationalizations of inclusion are individual and dependent on context (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016a). For this research, inclusion broadly represents collaborative, fulfilling, and flexible education that celebrates diversity, underpinned by values of social justice through participation, fairness and wellness (Prilleltensky, 2014). Ideals of collaboration are central to definitions of inclusion and policy, and some research suggests perceptions of parental involvement are increasing (Cochrane & Soni, 2020; Sales & Vincent, 2018), though it is less clear how true partnerships are achieved.

1.1.3 Facilitating collaborative partnerships: views of parents and practitioners

Both practitioners and parents have been suggested to perceive that an increased focus on partnerships since 2014 could lead to increased levels of parental engagement and inclusion for children with SEND (Curran et al., 2017; Holland & Pell, 2017; Pearson et al., 2015). However, recent relevant research conducted in England regarding parent-partnerships for SEND is relatively limited. An appraisal of existing international literature including that relating to children in England without SEND may provide an understanding of factors perceived as valuable by those involved.

Research conducted by Blue-Banning et al. (2004) with professionals and family members of children with and without SEND in the USA provides a helpful model. This is adapted in Table 1, alongside recent literature making similar conclusions. Coherent with Epstein's (2010) types, these include the importance of communication, demonstrating commitment, sharing influence to enable others to feel valued and respected, and perceptions of competence as supported by role fulfilment and access to development opportunities.

Trust is key, and this relies on the other themes whilst being a fundamental element itself (Tschannen-Moran, 2001). These factors are positioned within-partnership, but factors external to the partnership are also influential. For example, studies suggest the importance of systemic factors such as inclusive partnership-oriented school culture instilled by school leaders, who also value development opportunities (Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Francis et al., 2016; McKenzie et al., 2020).

Opportunities for parental involvement in school were valued. For example, decision-making through Parent-Teacher Organisations democratizes education and can improve provision for children with SEND (Blackman & Mahon, 2016; Francis et al., 2016). Additionally, parents accessing the classroom and becoming involved in the day-to-day practices of the school enhances collaboration (Azad et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2016; Timberly et al., 2016).

Theme	Indicators	Other Literature
Communication – Quantity and Quality	Positivity, tact, openness, honesty, sharing of resources, reciprocity.	(Azad et al., 2018; Chu, 2018; John, 2020; Leenders et al., 2018; McKenzie et al., 2020; Woods et al., 2018)
Commitment to collaboration	Making time, shared sense of loyalty, sense of above and beyond, demonstrating care, aspirational expectations.	(Francis et al., 2016; McKenzie et al., 2020; Timberly et al., 2016)
Equality and influence	Equity in decision making, influencing outcomes, contributing to support, valuing expertise.	(Adams et al., 2016; Azad et al., 2018; Carlson et al., 2020; Leenders et al., 2018)
Skills – Sense of competence	Of self and other, role fulfilment, willingness to learn, proactivity.	(Carlson et al., 2020; Francis et al., 2016; John, 2020)
Trust of other partner	Reliability, collaboration, honesty.	(Adams & Christenson, 2000; Francis et al., 2016)
Respect	Non-judgemental, inclusive communication, valuing the other.	(Carlson et al., 2020; Francis et al., 2016)

Table 1: Themes of Family-Professional Partnerships (Adapted from Blue-Banning et al. (2004))

Collaborative partnerships must overcome barriers, such as practitioners' lack of experience communicating with parents, limited resources amid increasing workloads, and perceived power imbalances (Goss, 2019; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Partners may have differing role constructions or expectations for their contribution (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Timberly et al., 2016). There is potential for mistrust for families experiencing marginalisation (Auerbach, 2010), and perception of families as

hard to reach leading to genuine efforts not being made by professionals to develop relationships (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

1.1.4 The current review

This review was conducted towards understanding recent research regarding parent and practitioner views of partnerships in an English SEND context. The reported lack of progress in achieving effective partnerships and the focus on developing partnerships in policy presented an opportunity to explore recent practice. This review seeks to interpret what is seen to underpin partnerships between schools and parents of children with SEND in England, leading to a model that may be used to reflect on and guide partnerships. The review question developed was therefore:

What is perceived to be important for education professionals and parents of children with SEND in England to facilitate collaboration, partnership, and parental engagement?

1.2 Methods

My interest in participants' experiences and interpretations suggests a qualitative methodology which allow them to be richly explored (Green & Thorogood, 2014). My interpretivist epistemological position values the subjective meanings of phenomena (Grix, 2002). Qualitative and interpretative research involves exploration of the subjectivity involved in interpreting social systems, and so understanding context is essential (Packer, 2010). See Chapter 2 for more details.

I utilized a meta-ethnographical approach as devised by Noblit and Hare (1988). This enables comparison and synthesis of qualitative data (Thorne et al., 2004), whilst highlighting the value of interpretation by researchers and reviewers alike (Atkins et al., 2008). Reviewer interpretation of researcher interpretations is a main outcome of meta-ethnography, enabling novel insights not apparent in individual studies towards a theoretical model (Cherry et al., 2017). Meta-ethnography allows for conceptual innovation and higher-order interpretation, differentiating it from integrative methods (Lee et al., 2015).

I followed the steps outlined by Noblit and Hare (1988), alongside guidance from other authors (Atkins et al., 2008; Britten et al., 2002; Cahill et al., 2018; France, Uny, et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2015; Sattar et al., 2021). The steps involved are presented in

Table 2. I used the eMERGe guidance (France, Cunningham, et al., 2019), to inform comprehensive reporting of methods.

1.2.1 Phases 1 and 2: Getting started & Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest

The area of focus was sparked by experiences as a Trainee Educational Psychologist and interest in enhancing relationships. Searches of six academic databases (ERIC, PsycInfo, British Education Index, Education Abstracts, Web of Science, and Scopus) were undertaken between October 2020 and January 2021 using terms in Table 3, along with synonyms from each database's thesaurus. Following attempts to find studies conducted following the Children & Families Act (2014) and its renewed focus on co-production which returned only three articles, inclusion criteria were expanded to studies from 2010 onwards to maintain a similar socio-political climate. As shown in Figure 1, searches returned 1,408 results, 391 of which were duplicates. Abstract screening against inclusion criteria in Table 4 left 49 articles to be screened in full. Backward and forward citation-chaining was used on these 49 papers, but no new articles were found. Ultimately, five papers remained and were used for the synthesis (Broomhead, 2018; Hellawell, 2017; Laluvein, 2010; Lendrum et al., 2015; Maher, 2016). It is acknowledged that this review is not exhaustive of all literature published regarding this topic since 2010, and that the inclusion criteria and search terms dictated the articles that were included. Meta-ethnography is suggested to warrant theoretical or data saturation, rather than identification of all published literature (Sattar et al., 2021), though literature searches were intended to be systematic and expansive. It is possible as a consequence that valuable articles or populations were not included (Atkins et al., 2008).

Phase	Name	What is involved?
1	Getting started	Identifying an area of interest and establishing a rationale for the synthesis.
2	Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest	Systematically selecting the studies to be included and defining the focus of the synthesis.
3	Reading the studies	Repeated reading of selected studies and noting of key concepts or metaphors.
4	Determining how the studies are put together	Listing, juxtaposing, and revising/merging key concepts across studies to determine how they can be compared.
5	Translating the studies into one another	Comparing concepts across studies to highlight similarities/differences between metaphors and generate conceptual categories.
6	Synthesising the translations	Establish relationship between studies to develop novel overarching interpretation/model.
7	Expressing the synthesis	Present the synthesis in a way that is appropriate for intended audience.

Table 2: Steps involved in Meta-ethnography Adapted from Noblit & Hare (1988) and Cahill et al. (2018)

What is perceived to be important for education professionals and parents of children with SEND in England to facilitate collaboration, partnership, and parental engagement?		
Education professionals	Teacher SENCO SENDCO	Special educational needs coordinator Teaching assistant Learning support assistant
Parents	Parent Carer Guardian	Grandparent Mother Father
SEND	SEND SEN	Special educational needs
Partnership	Partnership Collaboration Cooperation Relationship	Communication Working together Engagement Involvement
Note: Boolean OR was used between terms within sets, and sets were combined with Boolean AND. Asterisks were used within databases to capture plurals or alternative spellings.		

Table 3: Key search terms

Inclusion Criteria	Rationale
Involves views of parents/carers or education professionals	Relevance to research question
Related to children with SEND	Relevance to research question and importance of partnership for inclusion
Conducted in England	Maintain relevant socio-cultural and policy context
Published 2014 onwards (later 2010 onwards)	Maintain relevant socio-cultural and policy context
Specifically related to experiences of partnerships, collaboration, or involvement	Relevance to research question; removes articles mentioning partnerships in passing
Involves qualitative, empirical research	Relevant to epistemological assumptions and captures experiences
English Language	Accessibility

Table 4: Inclusion criteria used for selecting relevant articles

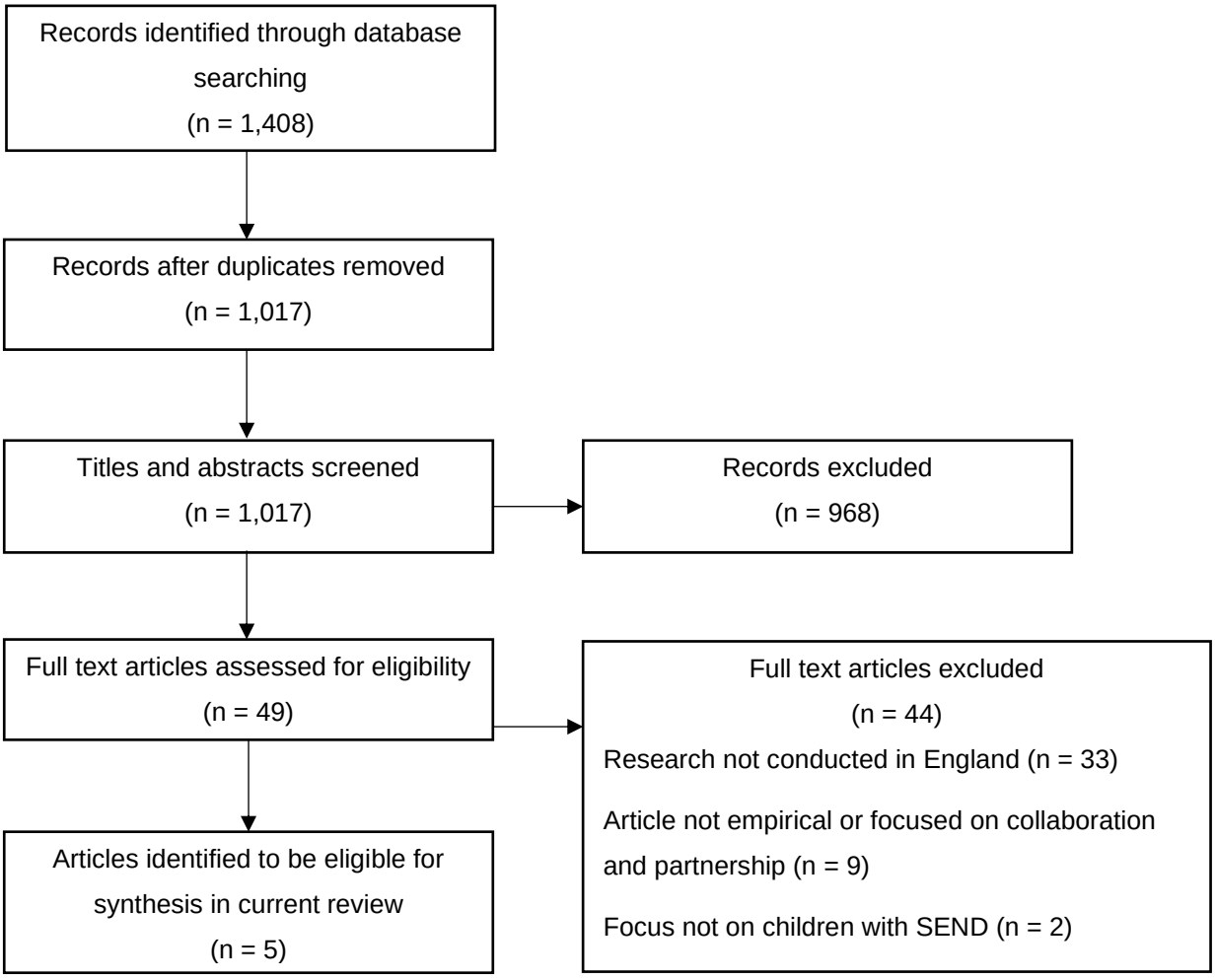

Figure 1: PRISMA diagram of search process (Moher et al., 2009)

Articles were appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme Qualitative Checklist (CASP, 2018). Quality appraisal is contentious and difficult in qualitative synthesis due to its subjective nature (Cahill et al., 2018). To seek quality may be perceived as seeking objective truth, representing a positivist approach. Alternative criteria are therefore suggested, such as conceptual clarity and interpretative rigour (Toye et al., 2013). Rather than providing grounds for exclusion of studies, using the CASP enabled further exploration of their methodological and ethical approaches, coherence, and apparent trustworthiness (Toye et al., 2013). Some gaps were noted by this process in terms of methodological and ethical reporting, though methodological quality is argued to be less important than conceptual quality (Campbell et al., 2011). The process was ultimately helpful in developing some familiarity with the articles and determining that concepts outlined would allow interpretation and synthesis.

1.2.2 Phase 3: Reading the Studies

This involved repeated reading of the articles for familiarity (Lee et al., 2015). Contextual information is displayed in Table 5. I highlighted and extracted metaphors – themes, perspectives or concepts (Noblit & Hare, 1988) – as they emerged, differentiating between first-order (participants' words) and second-order constructs (researcher interpretations) (Britten et al., 2002; Cahill et al., 2018). Distinguishing first- and second-order constructs may be difficult due to participant quotes being selected to support author interpretations (Atkins et al., 2008), so second-order constructs may be more valuable for synthesis.

Data was collected from mainstream and special school settings using semi-structured interviews. Two studies collected the views of practitioners whereas the other three collected data from practitioners and parents. In total, the perspectives of over 64 practitioners and 32 parents were included. Three studies were conducted after the 2014 legislation, whereas the other two were conducted before although there were no discernible differences attributable to the legislation. All articles were published in National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN) journals. Although the depth of interpretation varied, possibly hindering conceptual innovation (Atkins et al., 2008), comparisons and translations could be made.

1.2.3 Phase 4: Determining how the studies are related

Emerging concepts and metaphors from each paper were merged and revised with other metaphors within the same article to generate conceptual themes, which were then compared across articles to identify recurring concepts highlighted in Table 6, along with examples from each article (Atkins et al., 2008; Noblit & Hare, 1988). Relationships across the articles were emerging, and recurring concepts were Communication and Understanding; Methods to Enable Partnerships; Trust; Power and Agency; Responsibility for Partnerships; and Training and Skills Development.

Study	Title	Context	Data collection methods	Data analysis methods	Participants
Broomhead (2018)	Perceived Responsibility for Developing and Maintaining Home-School Partnerships: The Experiences of Parents and Practitioners	Mainstream and special schools in North-West England	Semi-structured interviews, ranging from 30 to 180 mins	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis	22 parents, 15 practitioners Professional roles: Headteachers, class teachers, SENDCos, teaching assistants, home-school liaison officers
Hellawell (2017)	A Review of Parent-Professional Partnerships and Some New Obligations and Concerns Arising from the Introduction of the SEND Code of Practice 2015	4 Local Authorities in England	Semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 60 mins each	'constructivist grounded theory approaches' (p.419)	16 practitioners Professional roles: Class teachers, SENDCos, SEND Caseworkers, other SEND professionals
Laluvein (2010)	Variations on a Theme: Parents and Teachers Talking	Mainstream primary schools in London	Separate semi-structured interviews of dyadic teacher-parent pairs	Phenomenological, using Wenger's Communities of Practice as a template	10 practitioners, 10 parents Professional roles: Class teachers
Lendrum et al. (2015)	Developing Positive School-Home Relationships through Structured Conversations with Parents of Learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)	20 schools from 10 Local Authorities in England, special and mainstream	Mixed methods. Qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews lasting 20-40 mins each	Thematic analysis	Unclear, but representative samples of staff and parents from 20 schools Professional roles: SENCos, headteachers, senior managers, teachers, support staff
Maher (2016)	Consultation, Negotiation and Compromise: The Relationship between SENCos, Parents and Pupils with SEN	Mainstream schools in England	Semi-structured interviews, ranging from 30 to 120 mins	'Interview transcripts were coded… to identify reoccurring themes' that were 'of theoretical salience' (p.7)	12 practitioners Professional roles: SENDCos

Table 5: **Study and participant characteristics**

Conceptual Themes	Broomhead (2018)	Hellawell (2017)	Maher (2016)	Lendrum et al. (2015)	Laluvein (2010)
Communication and understanding	*'open door policy' (parent; 442)* *'Anytime' (parent; 442)* *'whenever' (parent; 444)* *'two way communication' (parent; 444)* *'flexible about meeting' (442)* *'Above and beyond' (442)* 'mutual responsibility' (446) ''spending time' with parents' (447) Important that practitioners are approachable, available, and flexible – supported by parents and practitioners.	Practitioners understanding of parent position – each family different. Practitioners must communicate honestly and openly. 'Shared decision making' (421) Supporting individuals to 'construct, check and prioritise preferences' (421) 'child-centredness and co-production' (423) Practitioners should be sensitised to difficulty of conversations for parents. Disagreements part of partnership – important to understand where this is coming from and engage constructively.	Communicating concerns is encouraged. Parents seen to know their children best. SENCos must understand complexities of individual cases. 'consultation' 'Open, honest, supportive and co-operative' (11)	'open, ongoing dialogue' Holistic, personal view of child and situation helpful for relationship. Communicating positives. Sharing goal setting. 'Two-way exchange of information, ideas, aspirations, and concerns.' Shared aims and co-operation, allowing reinforcement and consolidation of skills. Availability of communication for support and advice – 'point of contact' Formal and informal conversations. Availability and flexibility of staff for communication. Parents felt more informed and valued the time to raise concerns and aspirations.	Negotiation and dialogue likely to be pivotal in supporting children. Initial consensus of concern acts as a means to open up space for negotiation. Negotiation contributes to joint expertise. Open communication lines contribute to successful relationships. Mutual respect important. 'Successful partnerships demonstrate mechanisms which allow for joint meaning-making and continuity of agreed strategies.' 'them and us' may be overcome through researching problem together and negotiation of understandings and meanings. When parental contributions viewed positively, positive parental influence on

Conceptual Themes	Broomhead (2018)	Hellawell (2017)	Maher (2016)	Lendrum et al. (2015)	Laluvein (2010)
					practice can result in convergence of perspectives. Knowledge becomes accumulated commodity – can lead to personal knowledge bases being reconstructed. Mutual goal of helping child can contribute to co-construction of knowledge and reflection. 'Process of collective learning where expertise is traded, solutions negotiated, and agreements reached.' 'communities of practice' (196)
Methods to enable partnership	*'parent's group… parent liaison stuff' (parent; 444)* *'termly meeting' (parent; 445)* *'newsletters' (444)* 'Meeting parents at the school gates' (447) ''open-door' policy' (447)	Professionals need better tools to address conflicts. Going beyond a prescriptive understanding of policy.	Consultation	Use of structured conversations *'like the road to Damascus' (teacher; 91)* – paradigm shift. Approach allows a lot of information to be 'given' and results in a more holistic view.	Formal (e.g. parents evening, meetings) and informal (school play, trips) learning opportunities.

Conceptual Themes	Broomhead (2018)	Hellawell (2017)	Maher (2016)	Lendrum et al. (2015)	Laluvein (2010)
				Seen as a 'vehicle for changing dynamic of relationship'. Parents became more confident and felt more 'welcome'. Gave parents a voice that was listened to. Ethos and principles important.	
Trust	*'nothing to hide' (parent; 442'* *'Frankness' (SENDCo; 443)* 'in accordance with expectations' (442) Convey through approachability and availability. *'you have to build up that trust' (HT; 443)*	Communicating with openness and honesty.	Perceived trust from parents appears to vindicate monopolisation of decision making and power of SENCos. Trust important to enable SENCo influence and autonomy. Mutual trust allows parental influence. Open, honest and supportive relationship contributes to trust.	Partners felt that they could communicate openly and their ideas would be heard and valued.	Important that it is felt that words are trusted.
Power and agency	Teachers have agency and power to initiate relationships. Parents may have more at stake in relationships, namely the well-being and	*'enablement of parents is a good thing' (SEN Caseworker; 442)* Parents in 'battle mode' as expectations are raised.	*Parents 'part of every decision… never hold a meeting without' (7)* Parent power and influence over allocation and development of	Getting parents to talk about child first is helpful. Parents get a better understanding of what their child needs and	Practitioners have the power to act on information provided by parents, or not. Joint expertise may help in providing resources for children.

Conceptual Themes	Broomhead (2018)	Hellawell (2017)	Maher (2016)	Lendrum et al. (2015)	Laluvein (2010)
	education of their children.	'engineering' parental compliance. 'Moral right, not mandatory duty to know and choose.' Performative legislation removes autonomy and agency from practitioners and parents. Power resides with professionals, but moral considerations can help to maintain partnerships.	provision – Key for inclusion. Parental input resulting in pedagogical change. Complaints heeded. Decision-making collaborative. However, power resides with SENCos – 'professional judgement' Legitimised through knowledge and experience - 'inclusion expert' (11) Power skewed towards SENCos. Outwardly collaborative, but power skewed towards SENCos?	how they can help at home. 'Emphasis on giving parents a voice and listening to this'. Parents felt more included. Some parents previously felt 'intimidated' or 'reluctant' to approach school.	Fear of displacement from expert role may increase practitioner anxiety – may lead to culture of professional exclusivity, which is bad for partnerships. Status of different kinds of knowledge (e.g. intuition, common-sense judgement, expertise)
Responsibility for partnership	Headteachers 'an apparent key factor' (441) 'partnerships… in the hands of headteachers: a 'top-down' approach' (442) *'[the headteacher] really encouraged partnership' (parent; 442)*	Partnership a 'moral necessity' (420) 'intensified obligations' (420) Professionals responsible for maintaining partnerships through complex decisions.	Parents take an active role. Both practitioners and parents contribute to maintenance of relationships.	Greater sense of professional responsibility as a result of additional information gained. Leadership should ensure methods of communication and partnership are supported and implemented.	

Conceptual Themes	Broomhead (2018)	Hellawell (2017)	Maher (2016)	Lendrum et al. (2015)	Laluvein (2010)
	Headteachers are essential and should set an example. 'heavily influenced by the approaches of practitioners' (443) Practitioners suggested they had responsibility to maintain partnership and be 'working at that relationship'. Parents suggested and accepted responsibility for communication. Conflict about who was responsible? Mutual responsibility for day-to-day communication, but practitioners 'accountable' for parental engagement on the whole (448) – mutual responsibility	Relies on skills and virtues of professionals and parents.		Practitioners made effort to make it as easy as possible for parents to attend.	
Training and skills development	Practitioners should reflect on opportunities for socio-emotional exchange with parents.	Skills should be actively developed and fostered by individuals and organisations. Important that practitioners are 'clued up' (420) Practitioners should engage with moral		Skills developed in training should be applied more widely in day-to-day interactions and existing systems and practices. Training should be extended to all staff.	

Conceptual Themes	Broomhead (2018)	Hellawell (2017)	Maher (2016)	Lendrum et al. (2015)	Laluvein (2010)
		enquiry to articulate basis for decisions.		Skills acquired through training, ethos, and principles particularly important.	

Table 6: **Emerging concepts and metaphors for each article**

1.2.4 Phases 5 & 6: Translating the studies into one another and Synthesizing the translations

Translation involves constant comparison within and across articles, revising and generating categories (Cahill et al., 2018). Translations were conducted in reverse chronological order, and as suggested by Atkins et al. (2008), concepts from article 1 (Broomhead, 2018) were translated into article 2 (Hellawell, 2017), and then the synthesis of these two papers were translated into article 3 and so on. Constructs and interpretations were translated and synthesized through a process of merging and revising to generate new meanings and helpful explanations (Atkins et al., 2008).

Concepts across the articles related reciprocally, meaning they could be translated into a line of argument, as a synthesized whole enabling a conceptual framework of third-order interpretations greater than the sum of its parts (Atkins et al., 2008; Cahill et al., 2018). Original metaphors were maintained where possible to preserve the authors' meaning, and the articles were re-read to ensure the new interpretation was coherent with the original studies (Noblit & Hare, 1988). The resulting narrative is presented alongside examples of related constructs in Table 7.

1.2.5 Phase 7: Expressing the synthesis

To support consistent reporting, as suggested earlier, the eMERGe guidance for meta-ethnography reporting (France, Cunningham, et al., 2019) was followed. The synthesis is presented textually in Table 7, and diagrammatically in Figure 2 to enhance accessibility (Sattar et al., 2021; Toye et al., 2013). These will be expanded upon next.

CONCEPTS	SECOND-ORDER INTERPRETATIONS	THIRD-ORDER INTERPRETATIONS & LINE OF ARGUMENT
A: Communication and understanding	Availability and flexibility as a 'point of contact'. Holistic understanding of unique situations. Recognition of consensus of concern. Openness, honesty, and respect. Co-production of constructions through dialogue and negotiation.	**C: Effective Communication and Understanding** *Availability and Flexibility* for regular communication through formal and informal methods allows time for *dialogue and negotiation, and co-production of constructions* to promote *understanding of positions and recognition of common ground*. This initial consensus can be used as a starting point for open and honest collaboration where the voice of both parties is valued. *Availability and Flexibility* can comprise communication through: *Formal* methods – such as meetings with the use of frameworks, reviews, parent liaison groups, and newsletters, and; *Informal* methods – open-door policy, updates at the school gate, and taking opportunities to invest time where they arise.
B: Methods to enable partnership	Formal arrangements – Parent groups, newsletters, regular meetings, parents evening Informal arrangements – open-door policy, school plays, trips, school gate Models for communication – consultation, structured conversations, managing conflict.	
D: Trust	A perception of mutual trust built through open and honest practice in accordance with expectations. Trust can have implications for power and agency if used to vindicate monopolisation of power.	**E: Mutual Trust** *Mutual trust* is built through regular communication and fulfilment of role expectations and negotiated actions. This can support both parties' agency and ability to influence the direction of the partnership. If this trust is not truly mutual, it can be used to vindicate the monopolisation of power by one party over the other, removing agency from one side of the relationship.

<table>
<tr><td>F: Power and agency</td><td>Power can reside with practitioners, legitimised through position as ‘inclusion expert’ and fear of displacement from this role.

Engagement and ‘voice’ in information sharing and decision-making valued to enhance inclusion, balance power.

Expert vs shared expertise and empowerment of practitioners with how to do this effectively.

Understand parental expectations due to what they have at stake.

Moral considerations allow recognition of rights to engagement and can assist with difficult decisions and maintaining relationships through this.</td><td rowspan="3">G: Mutual Power and Agency

Power is perceived to reside initially with practitioners, legitimised by their position as the ‘inclusion expert’.

Open and honest communication, and the building of mutual trust, can enable the balancing of agency and influence in the relationship, where expertise is recognised in both partners and knowledge is accumulated and shared.

Engagement with moral considerations by practitioners can enable appreciation of moral rights of engagement, and mutual power and agency, as well as assist in communicating decisions regarding provision.</td></tr>
<tr><td>H: Responsibility for partnership</td><td>Top-down support for partnerships

Mutual responsibility to actively maintain relationships.

Practitioners ultimately accountable for engagement – moral and policy obligation.</td></tr>
<tr><td>I: Training and skills development</td><td>Principles and skills should be developed through training for all staff and embedded into existing systems.

Reflection on socio-emotional skills and engagement with moral enquiry can allow skills to be embedded into practice.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>J: Responsibility, Accountability, and Ethos

The other elements of effective partnerships are reliant on a backdrop regarding where the responsibility for developing and maintaining the partnership lies.

An ethos of partnership that goes beyond prescriptive understandings of policy should be present within settings, modelled, valued, and embedded into systems by senior leadership.

There is a level of mutual responsibility for maintaining partnerships through regular communication, though practitioners are ultimately accountable and should develop skills through training and reflection.</td></tr>
</table>

Table 7: Outcome of Synthesis, with 2nd & 3rd Order Interpretations and Line of Argument

1.3 Findings & Discussion

The resulting concepts were synthesised into a model containing four over-arching elements: Effective Communication and Understanding; Mutual Trust; Mutual Power and Agency; and Responsibility, Accountability, and Ethos (Table 7). My interpretation of their interconnectedness and importance for parent-practitioner partnerships is presented visually in Figure 2.

Effective Communication and Understanding is underpinned by regular availability and flexibility from both parties, alongside shared objectives and appreciating partners' contexts. Communication constitutes reciprocity, with dialogue, negotiation, and co-production to ensure partners are valued and understood. This contributes to trust and to partners sharing power and agency, influencing actions regarding partnership and the child's education. Mutual trust, power, and agency can support an atmosphere of effective communication. The development of mutual trust enables sharing of agency, and the appropriate use of power and fulfilment of roles contributes to trust. All of this lies on a foundation of responsibility and accountability. This comprises a shared responsibility to maintain communication and the accountability of practitioners to evaluate and develop practice through reflection and

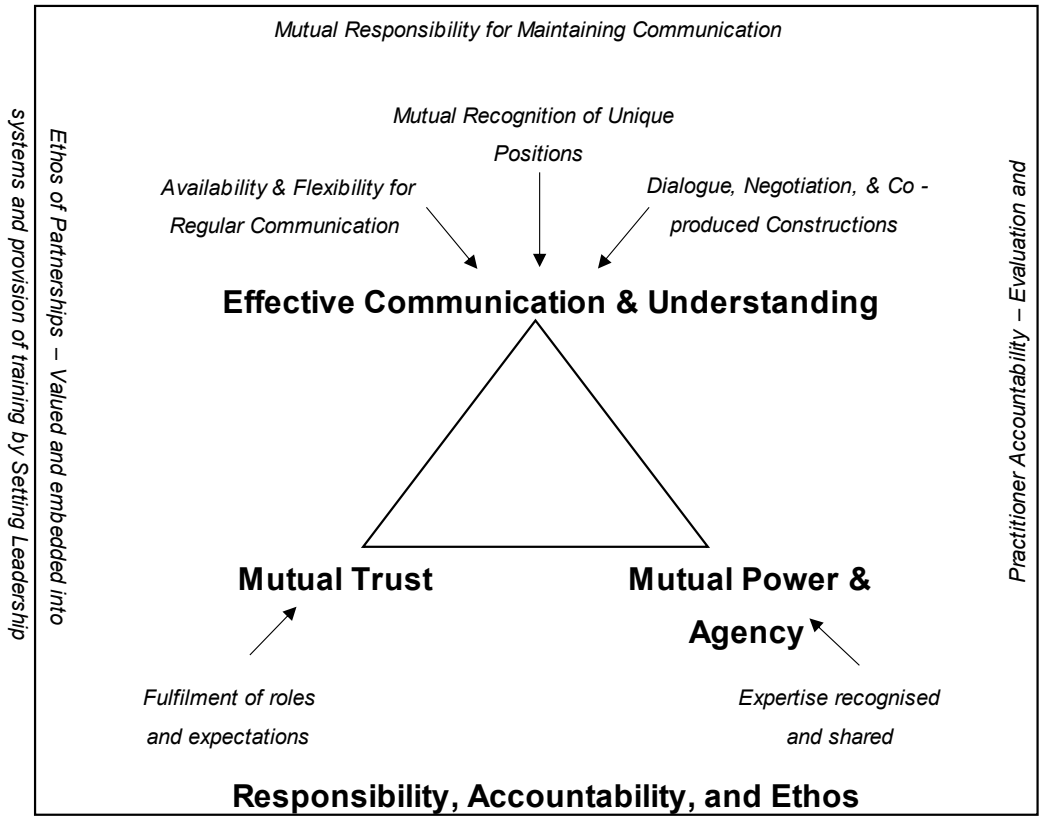

Figure 2: A Model of Parent-Practitioner Partnerships

professional development opportunities. These opportunities should be provided by school leaders embedding a genuine ethos of partnership into school systems. Overall, this model provides a synthesis of the reviewed studies and an interpretation of elements underlying partnerships. It meets the aim of the review as it can be used to inform partnership practice. The elements will now be explored in turn, with reference to the reviewed articles, other research, and theoretical literature.

1.3.1 Effective Communication & Understanding

Communication was raised within all articles by practitioners and parents. The availability and flexibility of staff acting as a 'point of contact' (Lendrum et al., 2015, p. 92) and maintaining open lines of communication was fundamental. Parents valued an 'open door policy' with communication 'any time' (Broomhead, 2018, p. 442), and practitioners recognised the importance of flexibility where possible, going 'above and beyond' to maintain communication (Broomhead, 2018, p. 442). Methods ranged from more formal consultation meetings to conversations and '"spending time" with parents' (Broomhead, 2018, p. 447; Lendrum et al., 2015; Maher, 2016).

Alongside *quantity*, *quality* of communication was integral. Openness and honesty provided a foundation (Hellawell, 2017; Lendrum et al., 2015; Maher, 2016), and it was perceived that communication should be holistic and positive (Hellawell, 2017; Lendrum et al., 2015). The concept of 'dialogue' arose multiple times, encapsulating several aspects. Firstly, reciprocal, two-way dialogue supported collaboration, including exchange of information, aspirations, and concerns (Broomhead, 2018; Laluvein, 2010; Lendrum et al., 2015). Laluvein (2010) suggested knowledge becomes an 'accumulated commodity' that grows as partners add to shared understandings. Similarly, co-construction of goals and actions was highlighted, where partners' expertise was valued (Hellawell, 2017; Lendrum et al., 2015).

A further element was genuine understanding of each other's position, including sensitivity to each family's context and the potential difficulties for some (Hellawell, 2017; Maher, 2016). Alongside appreciation of shared goals and aspirations, this may contribute to collaboration by providing consensus from which views can be understood and actions can be negotiated even when disagreement is present (Laluvein, 2010).

The above elements were perceived integral to partnerships and are central to the line of argument made, and to the model in Figure 2. This echoes previous

partnerships literature referring to frequent reciprocal dialogue between partners with shared expertise and co-production (Glueck & Reschly, 2014; Wolfendale, 2002).

As discussed above, this finding reaffirms the model outlined by Blue-Banning et al. (2004), particularly within themes they term Communication and Commitment. It reiterates similar findings from many other studies (e.g. Chu, 2018; Leenders et al., 2018; Woods et al., 2018). Furthermore, availability, flexibility, and acting towards shared goals have previously been reported as valuable (Francis et al., 2016; McKenzie et al., 2020; Timberly et al., 2016). Together these elements can increase parental agency and promote a sense of collaboration and value for all points of view, which are argued to be important factors in increasing parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). Increased agency should be accompanied by flexible, targeted, specific communication and engagement, in addition to general availability and invitations for parental involvement, so that parents are more likely to participate (Fishman & Nickerson, 2015). The concept of 'dialogue' used here refers to the process of deliberation where both partners are given equal opportunity to openly share and rationalise their views with respect and questions being answered towards a mutual understanding (Habermas, 1996), although for communication in parent-professional partnerships, deliberative dialogue should be supplemented with relational elements including positive atmosphere and informal talk (Tveit, 2014).

1.3.2 Mutual Trust

It was suggested in reviewed articles, by parents and practitioners, that trust was meaningful and can be built through an active process including openness and honesty. Trust enables partners to feel their words are heard and valued (Laluvein, 2010; Lendrum et al., 2015). One parent highlighted, through openness, they feel like professionals have 'nothing to hide' (Broomhead, 2018, p. 442), and one professional reported 'frankness' as a key element of trusting partnerships (Broomhead, 2018, p. 443). Trust was developed through each partner fulfilling negotiated and agreed roles (Broomhead, 2018; Maher, 2016). This perception of trust can lead to open and honest dialogue and communication (Lendrum et al., 2015), alongside a greater sharing of power and agency in the partnership (Maher, 2016).

Trust is defined here as confidence that each partner will act to benefit the partnership towards positive outcomes for children (Adams & Christenson, 2000). It constitutes understanding and predicting the intentions and behaviours of the other

partner as influenced by experiences and context (Adams & Forsyth, 2009). The identification of trust as an important element of parent-professional partnerships supports findings of previous research (Cottle & Alexander, 2014; John, 2020; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2015). Trust was integral to the model developed by Blue-Banning et al. (2004), constituting a shared assurance of reliability and dependability, and it has been linked to increased levels of collaboration (Tschannen-Moran, 2001).

Fulfilling agreed roles and sharing knowledge have been hypothesised to contribute to trust through positive experiences (Rempel et al., 1985). The quality of communication between parents and professionals, relational practices, sharing of power and agency, and professional commitment and competence have previously been suggested to enhance the trust in educational partnerships (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Francis et al., 2016; Shelden et al., 2010). Although much previous research does not focus on children with SEND, it seems reasonable to hypothesise that these mechanisms would translate to their parents since trust is just as, if not more, important in their context (Shelden et al., 2010).

1.3.3 Mutual Power and Agency

A major factor was ensuring that the process was truly collaborative and that power dynamics were accounted for. This is described as a complex undertaking, as systems and legislation can remove agency from both parties (Hellawell, 2017). Power and agency often resides, at least initially, with professionals (Broomhead, 2018), as they decide to act on information provided by parents – or not (Laluvein, 2010). It was proposed that this imbalance can be legitimised through perceptions of the professional as the ‘expert’ whose position privileges ‘professional judgement’ (Maher, 2016, p. 11). Additionally, parents may be willing, due to high trust, low self-efficacy, or limited resources, to go along with recommendations given by professionals as parents may have more at stake in the partnership, namely the well-being of their child (Broomhead, 2018). A further complexity raised was that professionals may feel anxiety or fear of displacement from their role as the ‘expert’, perhaps because it is practice that they are familiar with or for emotional reasons such as self-esteem protection, and this can contribute to a ‘culture of professional exclusivity’ where true collaboration is discouraged in favour of gatekeeping and privileging of certain positions (Laluvein, 2010, p. 198).

Conversely, professionals valued empowering parents in dialogue and decision-making as resulting in improvements in pedagogy, resource allocation, consistency of approach, and ultimately inclusion (Hellawell, 2017; Laluvein, 2010; Lendrum et al., 2015; Maher, 2016). It was recognised that this should not be a token exercise where parents' views are not taken seriously (Maher, 2016), and that dialogic, relational practices can reduce intimidation or reluctance to engage in partnerships (Lendrum et al., 2015). Structured communication was suggested as a mechanism to share power and agency (Lendrum et al., 2015). Trust was reported to contribute to shared power and agency within partnerships, and consequent role-fulfilment contributed to trust (Maher, 2016), hence the interrelationship between the elements in the hypothesized model (Figure 2).

Power dynamics in partnerships are complex, and conscious effort is required to move towards a more equitable balance. Shared power and agency, collaboration, and fulfilment of agreed roles are central to the definitions of partnership outlined earlier (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Glueck & Reschly, 2014). Whilst roles and contributions to the partnership are not necessarily equal, a level of mutuality is positive, where contributions are divided fairly in context (Reschly & Christenson, 2012).

The importance of mutual power and agency reported here supports previous research. Blue-Banning et al. (2004) presented the theme as equality, made up of equity in decision-making, appreciation of knowledge, active involvement in pedagogy, and sharing power in influencing outcomes, and it has been valued by parents and professionals (Azad et al., 2018; Carlson et al., 2020; Leenders et al., 2018).

As argued by Goss (2019), the balance of power in partnerships may be viewed through the lenses of Foucauldian power relations and Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984). Foucault defines power in terms of its existence within relations and interactions between individuals as influenced by the goals of the individuals within these relationships (Foucault, 1982). According to structuration theory, such power relations are the result of practices that are reproduced by individuals acting within structural expectations and norms, and thus are evident at the intersection between structure and agent (Giddens, 1984). Therefore, the nuanced power dynamics in partnerships require sensitive, collaborative reflection in order to ensure they serve to benefit those involved. Being positioned at the intersection between the education

system and the individuals accessing it, professionals have the opportunity to overcome barriers and nurture parental engagement, sharing power and agency with parents (Goss, 2019). Empowering parents represents a proactive process of meeting individual contextual needs, utilizing parental knowledge, and supporting parental competence and self-efficacy to develop connections (Hsiao et al., 2018).

1.3.4 Responsibility, Accountability, and Ethos

The analysis suggests that responsibility for the partnership may underpin other elements. Responsibility to develop the partnership was suggested to lie initially with the professionals, who had power and agency to do so (Broomhead, 2018; Hellawell, 2017). It was seen as the responsibility of professionals to make partnerships accessible for parents through flexibility and availability (Broomhead, 2018; Lendrum et al., 2015) and ultimately professionals were accountable for parental engagement and communication as part of their job (Broomhead, 2018). However, parents taking some responsibility for communication was perceived as beneficial by both parties (Maher, 2016). This led to a mutual responsibility for maintaining partnerships through communication as described above.

Top-down support for partnership-based practice was a key factor. School leaders could instil an ethos in school that values parent-partnership (Broomhead, 2018; Hellawell, 2017; Lendrum et al., 2015). One method for this was providing training and professional skills development for staff (Hellawell, 2017; Lendrum et al., 2015). This suggests some responsibility and accountability for partnerships lies with school leaders, although staff must take opportunities to apply skills reflectively (Broomhead, 2018; Hellawell, 2017; Lendrum et al., 2015).

As outlined, Glueck and Reschly (2014, p. 297) highlight the importance of ‘joint ownership of responsibilities and accountability for outcomes’, and Cuttance and Stokes (2000, p. 5) define partnerships as including ‘A sharing of… responsibility and ownership’. Furthermore, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) and Goodall and Montgomery (2014) suggest that relationships where both partners are agentic and perceive responsibility for education are conducive to collaboration.

Perceived competence of oneself and the other partner has been reported to enhance partnerships. This includes being able to fulfil agreed roles whilst developing skills, through sharing knowledge, accessing training, and reflecting regularly (Carlson et al., 2020; Francis et al., 2016; John, 2020). The impact of

supportive leaders embedding an inclusive culture of collaboration and providing development opportunities has also been highlighted previously (Cottle & Alexander, 2014; McKenzie et al., 2020; Stalker et al., 2011). This represents a systemic interaction around the child between exo-systems and meso-systems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). School organisation and context will affect the priorities of leaders and thus the likelihood of a partnership's ethos being valued, or funding being allocated for training in related skills.

1.3.5 Summary

The elements within this model are interrelated and overlapping. The model is comparable to previous models such as that of Blue-Banning et al. (2004) and it captures concepts from models of parental engagement (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014) and parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). It echoes definitions of parent-professional partnerships (Cuttance & Stokes, 2000; Reschly & Christenson, 2012), and whilst much of the language used is identical, similar concepts are translatable into the current findings. The factors identified represent inclusive practice (Hornby, 2015; Wedell, 2008), corresponding with relational inclusion and its focus on collaborative partnerships (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016b). Whilst previous research highlights aspects of partnerships and acknowledges the interrelatedness of constructs (e.g. Blue-Banning et al., 2004), the model here emphasises these interactions and their reliance on each other. It is suggested that all aspects remain areas of focus as neglecting any may negatively impact partnerships. For example, regular communication without trust can lead to conflict, whereas without shared power and agency it can become tokenistic.

This review focussed on professionals and parents of children with SEND, specifically in an English setting. Most previous research on parent-professional partnership was conducted in other countries or did not focus explicitly on SEND. Despite this, the outcomes of this review are similar to those found with other populations. Whilst parent-partnership is beneficial for all children, it seems particularly important for those with SEND to enhance inclusion, ensure effective provision, and promote holistic, person-centred approaches (Cochrane & Soni, 2020; Kendall, 2019). There are likely to be commonalities between these parents, including shared experiences of supporting children with SEND or navigating education systems, but individual contexts and understandings are key. Any application of this model should acknowledge this. Research on this topic from other

countries has a different policy and cultural backdrop, though rights to inclusive education remain. The model presented may support professionals aiming to reflect on their practice with parents, or school leaders intending to enhance a collaborative ethos within their setting. It may underpin training or professional development for schools or be used collaboratively with partners to reflect on how partnerships may be enhanced. Alongside the lingering question as to what constitutes an effective partnership, a question arises regarding the potential for an external professional to support such a partnership. Future research could consider how the external professional can contribute through facilitation, guided reflection, or skill development.

1.3.6 Limitations

The studies reviewed included research within mainstream and special schools but did not delineate whether participants in each type of school had different views. The context of each type of school, including funding and ethos, will differ, affecting collaboration. Similarly, the review did not compare the views of parents and professionals to discover whether they perceive partnerships differently. This was partly due to a lack of methodological detail within some reviewed articles. The articles included were all from journals published by the National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN), meaning they privileged practice-based knowledge rather than underpinning philosophies, methodologies, or related theoretical literature. This presented complexities in determining the intricacies of the methods used, ethical considerations, and theoretical frameworks, though it is recognized that a lack of methodological reporting does not always equate to poor research quality (Atkins et al., 2008).

With meta-ethnography, the subjectivity and interpretation of the reviewer is inherent (Noblit & Hare, 1988); a different reviewer might interpret the data differently. My decisions impacted the conclusions reached, though objectivity is not an aim of meta-ethnography (Britten et al., 2002). Additionally, this review was completed by a single reviewer, possibly limiting scope, and affecting interpretations.

1.4 Conclusion

This review explored the perceptions of professionals and parents of children with SEND in England regarding the elements of an effective partnership. A meta-ethnography was conducted, and interpretations and conclusions were discussed.

Four overarching elements resulted, namely: Effective Communication and Understanding; Mutual Trust; Mutual Power and Agency; and Responsibility, Accountability, and Ethos. These elements were analysed in relation to previous literature and a tentative model of parent-practitioner partnership was outlined as a line of argument and diagrammatically. This review supports and develops literature on parent-professional partnerships and provides a model for reflection which could be used by school professionals or educational psychologists to underpin partnership development. Future research could evaluate its helpfulness with parents and professionals, as well as further comparing parent and professional views.

Chapter 2: Bridging Document

2.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to provide a link between the systematic literature review (SLR) in Chapter 1 and the empirical research reported in Chapter 3. It will be elucidated how the gaps identified within the SLR will be filled by the empirical research through the development of research questions. My role within the research process is acknowledged and clarified through reflection on my position regarding the results of the SLR, on my values in practice, and the impact of my philosophical stance.

2.2 Meta-ethnography to Empirical Research

The meta-ethnography reported in Chapter 1 concluded with a tentative model of the elements perceived important by professionals and parents of children with SEND regarding effective partnerships. The elements identified through interpretation of existing literature include Effective Communication and Understanding, Mutual Trust, Mutual Power and Agency, and Responsibility, Accountability, and Ethos (see page 23). The interactions between these factors were also posited. Whilst the SLR provided initial understandings, research specific to an English context focused on children with SEND was limited. Although progress has been made towards understanding, the question persists. Empirical research could elicit further views and a deeper understanding.

2.2.1 Reflexivity

Approaching this project as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), I have questioned if and how the involvement of an Educational Psychologist (EP) may be seen to benefit this process. In my experience as a TEP, I have been involved in work at the request of schools where disagreement and conflict with parents were reported. Reflecting on these experiences within the context of the SLR findings, I can recall parent-professional relationships where communication was not regular or dialogic, and there was an air of mutual distrust (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Shelden et al., 2010). In other experiences the power and agency were imbalanced, and so parents perceived themselves to be less able to contribute their expertise or provide consistency in the use of strategies for their child at home (Azad et al., 2018; Hellawell, 2017). The findings of the SLR seem anecdotally appropriate and valid and

are congruent with my aims as a practitioner. These aims are underpinned by my values of promoting truly collaborative practice that enhances inclusion and social justice, and these aims led me to explore the topic of partnership further within my thesis.

2.2.2 Underpinning Theory

My approach towards this project may be understood through a lens of Structuration Theory (Giddens, 1984, see section 1.3.3) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which proposes human agency as influenced by interpretations and feedback. Together, these theories provide a meta-framework suggesting the existence of two-way interactions between societal systems, structures, and environments, and individuals involved in actions and behaviours as impacted by their cognitive processes and interpretations. In utilizing these theoretical frameworks, I conceptualize the following. At the individual level, people are influenced by history, knowledge, and context, and use their agency to imitate actions and behaviours that they have previously observed to be the accepted norm. Thereby, they consciously or unconsciously sustain structures and systems which are reproduced through social encounters and relationships. By this reasoning, structures are made up of patterns of reproduced rules and actions. I contend that these structures make up various interacting systems akin to those outlined in Bio-Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Over time, as suggested by the concept of the chronosystem, these systems can change as agency allows practices to evolve.

This highlights the systemic and relational nature of the relationships involved in parent-professional partnerships in the education of young people as emphasised by the concept of the mesosystem, representing interactions between the microsystems of home and school (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Current partnership practice is influenced by reproduced actions accepted as the norm, though professionals and parents may be able to adapt this to contexts using their agency, encouraged through positive experiences to contribute to positive change for partnerships and young people.

2.2.3 Addressing the Gap

The gaps identified by the SLR are as follows. Firstly, due to the limited research on what is perceived to be important in developing partnerships for professionals and parents of children with SEND in England, further research would be beneficial for a

deeper understanding of this. Additionally, further research may be able to identify any potential differences in the perspectives and elements identified by parents and professionals. Further, more consideration is needed to address how an external professional, specifically an EP, could contribute to this process in a way that is valued by those involved. The empirical element of this thesis reported in Chapter 3 intends to contribute to addressing these gaps.

2.3 Philosophical Considerations and Methodology

All research is underpinned by the researchers' assumptions of reality, knowledge, and the world, referred to as one's ontological and epistemological positions (Willig, 2013). It is important for researchers to be transparent regarding these positions so that research can be understood with this context in mind, as one's ontological and epistemological assumptions impact key methodological considerations including the development of a research question as well as data collection and analysis methods (Grix, 2002). Different philosophical positions will privilege different types of data.

Ontology refers to one's assumptions about the nature of social reality and what exists in the world (Grix, 2002). In the current research, I take a realist ontology which suggests that social phenomena and processes exist and can be identified and explored (Willig, 2013). Epistemology reflects one's stance regarding what we can know about the phenomena in question and how this can be elicited (Grix, 2002). Here I take an interpretivist position which recognises that individuals actively make sense of, or interpret, phenomena based on a confluence of their experiences, culture, and environment (Hammersley, 2013). Therefore, this research takes a critical realist approach, seeing partnerships and the elements within them as phenomena that exist and can be researched, but highlighting that those involved have varying interpretations and perceptions of them (Scott, 2005). This is in contrast to a naïve realist position, which would claim to be a direct representation of the world, as critical realism recognises the fallibility and subjectivity of individual accounts of phenomena (Scott, 2005). Whilst the idiographic, subjective nature of participant perspectives are highlighted, searching for patterns or themes may enable a tentative understanding of the mechanisms that benefit the partnerships.

As the current research is concerned with perceptions and experiences, a qualitative methodology was chosen. An interpretive phenomenological approach influenced by existential phenomenology provided a helpful framework to underpin my thinking.

Heidegger[2] (1962) used the concept 'Dasein' to refer to beings existing in the world and experiencing it, whilst being inseparable from it and from each other. He posited it is through these relationships that the world and its systems become intelligible (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016). This is in contrast to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology which attempts to understand consciousness separately to the world the person inhabits (Langdridge, 2007).

This leads to consideration of research methods. Exploration of perception and interpretation as sought by the research questions require in-depth recounts of experiences from participants. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for data collection as they allow a conversation between interviewee and interviewer that is loosely guided by the research questions but can also allow elaboration on novel insights (Willig, 2013). They allow an idiographic approach that highlights individual interpretations and context. After reviewing various data analysis methods, Template Analysis (TA, not to be confused with Thematic Analysis; King, 2012) was selected. Features in favour of TA, when compared to other methods such as Thematic Analysis or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), were its versatility and that it allows analysis to be iterative and informed by a fluid *a priori* template (King & Brooks, 2017). This means that the empirical research data can further develop and enhance the model presented in Chapter 1. Although the use of an *a priori* template may be argued to contrast the inductive focus of some phenomenological methods (Smith, 2004), it allows an extra layer of interpretation and connection to extant literature.

TA is a qualitative method, and although it is philosophically flexible, it fits well within a critical realist orientation (King & Brooks, 2017). I used TA following an interpretative and phenomenological procedure, involving in-depth hierarchical coding of interview data with repeated refinement of the template (Langdridge, 2007). Coherent with an interpretivist epistemology, it also recognises the unavoidability, and indeed value, of interpretation by the researcher due to their experiences and positions. It follows that reflexivity is a crucial step in interpretative methods like TA (King & Brooks, 2017).

[2] The debate relating of Heidegger's historical affiliation with the Nazi Party to his philosophical writings cannot be ignored (Farías, 1991; Knowles, 2019). However, it has been argued that this does not render his philosophical ideas to be without merit when viewed critically, acknowledging the controversy (Langdridge, 2007).

2.4 Research in Context

While my focus is on experiences and perspectives of individuals involved in home-school partnerships, it is understood that they exist within systems and structures that have unavoidable impacts on the experiences of those involved. These may involve micro-, exo-, and macrosystems such as schools, services available in the Local Authority, and wider cultural attitudes respectively, alongside the interactions between these over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Thus, perspectives and experiences of partnerships cannot be analysed in a vacuum. These systems and structures can be seen to be created, maintained, and interpreted by individuals who subjectively experience them and impose meaning depending on previous experiences and values (i.e. Interpretivism: Hammersley, 2013).

Further, EPs are primarily concerned with the application of psychological knowledge towards positive change and improving situations in the real world (Fallon et al., 2010). With this pragmatic element of EP work at its core, it is important to recognise that EPs function within, and can be constrained or facilitated by, existing systems and structures. This includes Local Authority policy and procedures, national policy and legislation, models of practice, and existing relationships with other professionals and families. A pragmatic approach to practice does not mean disengagement from scientific and philosophical thinking, nor disconnection from debates regarding the impact of ontology and epistemology. Rather, it refines focus towards working alongside others to have a positive impact, through the application of theory and research (Briggs, 2019). Therefore, this thesis, whilst recognising the importance of philosophical underpinnings and pursuing an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences of partnership, intends to contribute towards the development of EP and education professional practice through a model of parent-professional partnership.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This research was given ethical approval by the School of Education, Communication, and Language Sciences at Newcastle University. Further, careful attention was paid to ensure the project followed the ethical criteria set forth by the British Psychological Society (2014, 2018) and the Health and Care Professions Council (2016). Importantly, however, ethicality in research is not a discrete step that can be satisfied by adherence to regulation alone; rather it is an ongoing, fluid process of careful reflection (Dingwall, 2012). While the principles are significant,

universality of ethical decision-making may fail to account for the relationality and uncertainty present in social research. Research benefits from considerations involving context, tacit knowledge, and recognition of mutuality between researcher and participant (Pollard, 2015). Taking a relational view, ethicality is based on attentiveness and responsiveness to the participant, viewing the researcher as a participant in the life of the researched, and working together towards a common benefit (Hilppö et al., 2019). For this research, my fulfilment of the principlist approach outlined by the ethical and professional bodies has been complemented by a relational lens. Some important elements of ethicality shall now be discussed with reference to the actions I have taken.

2.5.1 Informed Consent

Prospective participants were provided an information sheet and a document to state their consent. These described the research, its aims, and expectations for involvement in accessible language. It was highlighted that questions could be asked at any time, and my contact details were provided. This information was again shared before the interview started and questions were welcomed throughout the interviews. Informed consent requires participants' full awareness of the research and ability to take part voluntarily without feeling pressured (Ferreira, 2018). Consent is not determined only by the signing of a document, but is an ongoing agreement, and so participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any time up until the completion of data analysis. This was particularly important due to my role as Trainee EP. There was potential that participants could feel pressure to engage, or that their child or school may directly benefit, so I made it clear that this would not be the case and that involvement was completely voluntary. A relational ethics lens promotes an expanded conceptualisation of consent which accounts for such situational complexities and requires an understanding of who is impacted by consent and how (O'Doherty & Burgess, 2019).

2.5.2 Issues of Power and Status

Whilst issues of power begin at the consent stage, they are important to consider throughout the process. The researcher holds a privileged position in the research relationship, possessing the skills to build trust and uncover potentially sensitive experiences (Råheim et al., 2016). I acted to reduce power imbalances and reduce the distance between researcher and participant (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2008), through

a focus on relational and intersubjective processes. This involved building rapport, using active and non-verbal communication skills, ensuring accessible language, clarifying understanding, and allowing interviews to follow the participants' agenda where possible. I tried to enable participant autonomy and agency. By conducting this research, I aim to value the perspectives of participants and use my position of relative influence in the psychology community to amplify this.

Those involved may have held a view of my status as a (trainee) 'Psychologist' as either a threat and given socially desirable answers, or as an 'expert' who could help in some way (Mercieca, 2009). I made it clear that in my role as researcher, I would not be able to intervene directly in their situation, and instead I could signpost to other professionals.

2.5.3 Maximising Benefit and Minimising Harm

The aim of this research is to have a positive impact on partnerships towards enhancing inclusive education. To do this, I am engaging with perspectives of parents and professionals as they are well positioned to determine how this can be achieved. Although I am not directly benefitting the participants, an accessible summary of the research findings will be available for them. I hope to benefit professional practice by disseminating findings through publication in an academic journal.

Discussions during interviews regarding potentially sensitive topics, such as children's needs or the complexities of their professional role, may cause thoughts and feelings that would not have occurred otherwise (Willig, 2013). I aimed to minimise negative impacts of this on the participants by framing the discussion topics in a way that would provoke more reflection about positive experiences. I ensured discussion was constructive and understanding, also providing debriefing documents signposting appropriate services to access if needed. Close attention was also paid to data privacy and protection to ensure confidentiality.

2.6 Quality in Qualitative Research

It is important in all research that a standard of quality is pursued (Yardley, 2000). In seeking quality in research that does not conform to positivist criteria such as validity and reliability, alternative operationalisations of quality coherent with one's philosophical position should be applied (King & Brooks, 2017). Whilst qualitative approaches do not recognize one set of quality criteria as superior, it is important that

they are outlined (Symon & Cassell, 2012). Therefore, I have followed the criteria set out by Yardley (2000), namely: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency, and impact and importance. I have further outlined how I have sought to meet these criteria in Appendix A.

Some conceptualisations of validity may be perceived to hold value in qualitative research. For example, ecological validity represents congruence of the research to its real-world context and experiences (King & Brooks, 2017). I have aimed to maximise ecological validity through links to previous empirical research and attention to the contexts of individual participants. Additionally, I have attempted to enhance the interpretive validity – understanding of the participants' perspectives (Johnson & Christensen, 2019) – by exploring individual context, summarising and clarifying my understandings during interviews, and being transparent regarding the impact of my interpretations. Template Analysis also encourages theoretical validity – theory representing participant experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2019) – as it involves immersion in the data, the use of participant constructs, and flexibility to be moulded by the data.

Increasing validity may allow a level of generalisability. Although generalisability is often not the stated aim of qualitative research, my approach allows the findings to be tentatively applied in similar contexts elsewhere (Larsson, 2009). In using an analysis method that seeks to generate overarching themes from the participants' data, I do not suggest that the experiences of the participants are homogenous (Larsson, 2009). Rather, I believe that there is value in identifying commonalities within experiences which can be interpreted and amplified with the aim of enhancing collaborative practice. Any conclusions taken from research into practice should be evaluated in their value to individuals' own contexts.

2.7 Summary

In this chapter, I have provided a bridge from review to research, highlighting the remaining gaps that Chapter 3 will attempt to fill. I have accounted for my impact on the research, through my theoretical framework, as well as discussing my philosophical and methodological positioning and how this led to my choice of methods. The research aims have been contextualized, and issues of ethicality and quality were explored. It is hoped that this chapter has given a coherent report of my

reasoning on these considerations, along with conceptual grounding for the research in Chapter 3.

2,899 words

Chapter 3 - Empirical Research: Exploring What Makes Partnerships Effective in the Experiences of School Professionals and Parents of Children with SEND.

Abstract

Partnerships between parents and school professionals represent a systemic area of focus to enhance education for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND). Previous literature theorizes mechanisms supportive of partnerships, though understanding remains relatively limited in an English SEND context. This qualitative empirical study aimed to identify important elements of partnerships, whether parents and professionals' perspectives were compatible, and how Educational Psychology may contribute. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 4 school professionals and 3 parents of children with SEND in Northeast England. Template Analysis was used to generate themes iteratively until a model of effective parent-professional partnership emerged from researcher interpretations. The four overarching themes were Communication; Eco-Systemic Factors; Professional Skills; and Working "with", Not "doing to". Themes are illustrated with reference to case examples and literature. Their interdependence is highlighted. Small differences between parent and professional views exist, but views were compatible. Participants were mostly unsure of input they may value from Educational Psychologists, highlighting a broader issue regarding knowledge of their role. Implications for school professionals' and Educational Psychologists' practice are discussed. A suggested aim of Educational Psychology practice, it is argued that parent-professional partnerships represent a vehicle towards inclusive, socially just outcomes for those involved.

Keywords:

Inclusion; Social justice; Partnership; Home-school relationships; Parental involvement; Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities; Template Analysis

6,273 words

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Background

Since ‘Parents as Partners’ was termed in the Warnock Report (1978, p. 150), home-school partnerships have been a focus of educational policy and practice (Esposito & Carroll, 2019). Partnerships support effective, inclusive education (Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008), contributing to improved attainment, quality of life, parental satisfaction, and inclusion (Francis et al., 2016; Kendall, 2019; Wilder, 2014). Partnerships go further than parental involvement in a school-directed agenda (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014); they involve collaboration through reciprocity in communication and responsibilities, and shared agency in outcomes (Glueck & Reschly, 2014; Westergård & Galloway, 2010; Wolfendale, 2002).

Despite renewed focus, particularly regarding children deemed to have Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), the Lamb Inquiry (2009) highlighted limited progress realizing partnerships. Consequent recommendations influenced the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015), attempting to empower parents. The recently published SEND Review (2022) concluded, however, that parents still experience difficulty navigating systems and that parent-school relationships are inconsistent.

3.1.2 Inclusion and Social Justice

Parent-school partnerships represent a vehicle for inclusive practice for children with SEND; information is shared so individual context informs support, individual needs are communicated, progress is celebrated, and capabilities expanded (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016a). Essentially, parent-school partnerships can contribute to socially just outcomes.

Social justice has been conceptualized as parity of participation; empowering individuals to participate in society and interact with others (Fraser, 2008). It can include elements of redistribution (of resources), recognition (of status and difference), and representation (meaningful involvement in decision-making) (Fraser, 2008). Home-school partnerships can afford partners an equitable say in actions taken towards enhancing participation and inclusion. They can expand practice towards ‘…full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually

shaped to meet their needs' where partners are 'self-determining… and interdependent' through shared agency and collaboration (Bell, 2016, p. 3). Prilleltensky (2014) posits wellness and fairness as aims of education and recommends a focus on competence and engagement. Partnerships may enhance progress towards aspects of competence – self-efficacy, mastery, and self-control – for children and parents, though they might contribute aptly to components of engagement – active participation, ownership, relevance, and meaning-making. It is hoped that these impacts are inferred throughout this research.

3.1.3 Models related to Parent-Professional Partnership

Research provides a tentative indication of the elements underpinning parent-school partnerships. This study aims to complement existing work, including articles in the SLR in Chapter 1 and models of parental involvement. Importantly, Kim and Sheridan (2015) distinguish between research privileging structural approaches, referring to activities undertaken by partners, and relational approaches, focussing on interpersonal qualities. They argue a focus on structural elements without attention to relational components is insufficient, therefore research should integrate both.

Epstein (2010) posits six types of parental involvement that can develop relationships, where one type may be more apparent than others depending on context and preference. The types are presented in
Table 8. Hornby (2011) outlines six potential models that relationships may resemble, ranging from the protective model, where roles are separate and involvement is not valued, to the partnership model, where strengths of each member are utilized collaboratively. A continuum is outlined by Goodall and Montgomery (2014) which focuses on the locus of agency, with benefits to each position.

Factors highlighted in qualitative research include quantity and quality of communication, commitment, shared influence, competence, trust, and respect (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Turnbull et al., 2011; see section 1.1.3). External factors, such as school ethos and leadership, are also influential (Francis et al., 2016). Research in an English context of SEND and inclusion, following recent efforts, is limited, and this research aims to address this. Reported in Chapter 1, a systematic literature review was undertaken to illuminate existing research, and four overarching factors were highlighted: Effective Communication and Understanding, Mutual Trust, Mutual Power and Agency, and Responsibility, Accountability, and Ethos. The

Parenting	**Supporting families to set home environments conducive to their child's development.** E.g. Professionals assisting with parenting skills and family support. Supporting families to understand their child's development. Professionals understanding family context.
Communicating	**Ensuring effective two-way communication.** E.g. Regular meetings and progress updates. Phone calls, newsletters, memos. Sharing understanding of process and policies. Accurate monitoring.
Volunteering	**Recruiting and organizing parent support.** E.g. Parent volunteer initiatives. Space for parents to be involved in school events. Involving parents in day-to-day operations.
Learning at Home	**Supporting parents to help children with homework and other curriculum-related activities.** E.g. Sharing information and strategies regarding topics. Guidance regarding how to approach homework. Shared homework schedules. Awareness of learning needs.
Decision-Making	**Including parents in organisational decisions.** E.g. Parent organisations and committees with influence over policy decisions. Enabling dialogue towards shared goals.
Collaborating with the Community	**Utilizing community resources and services.** E.g. Signposting to other services. School links to other services. Developing, sharing, and involvement in community activities. Interaction with other families.

Table 8: Epstein's (2010) Types of Parental Involvement

interactions between these factors were emphasised. Figure 3 shows the SLR findings alongside the other literature highlighted here. Together this presents a theoretical framework underpinning the current study.

3.1.2 The current research

This research extends the findings of the SLR in Chapter 1. Therefore, my aims were threefold. Firstly, I intended to contribute to understanding perceptions of what supports partnerships. I aimed to approach data generated openly so outcomes were driven by participants' views and my interpretations. Whilst I hoped to generalize some helpful elements for practice, with reference to previous literature, I also hoped to value individual experiences. Secondly, parent and professional views have often been synthesised in previous research. This study sought any considerable differences in perspectives and interpretations, and why this may be. Thirdly, from an educational psychology perspective, working with these systems and populations, I hoped to produce implications and considerations for EP practice alongside that of school professionals. The following research questions were generated:

- What elements of effective professional-parent partnerships are interpreted as valuable?
- Do professionals and parents of children receiving SEND support have similar or differing interpretations?
- How may EPs contribute to developing home-school partnerships for this population?

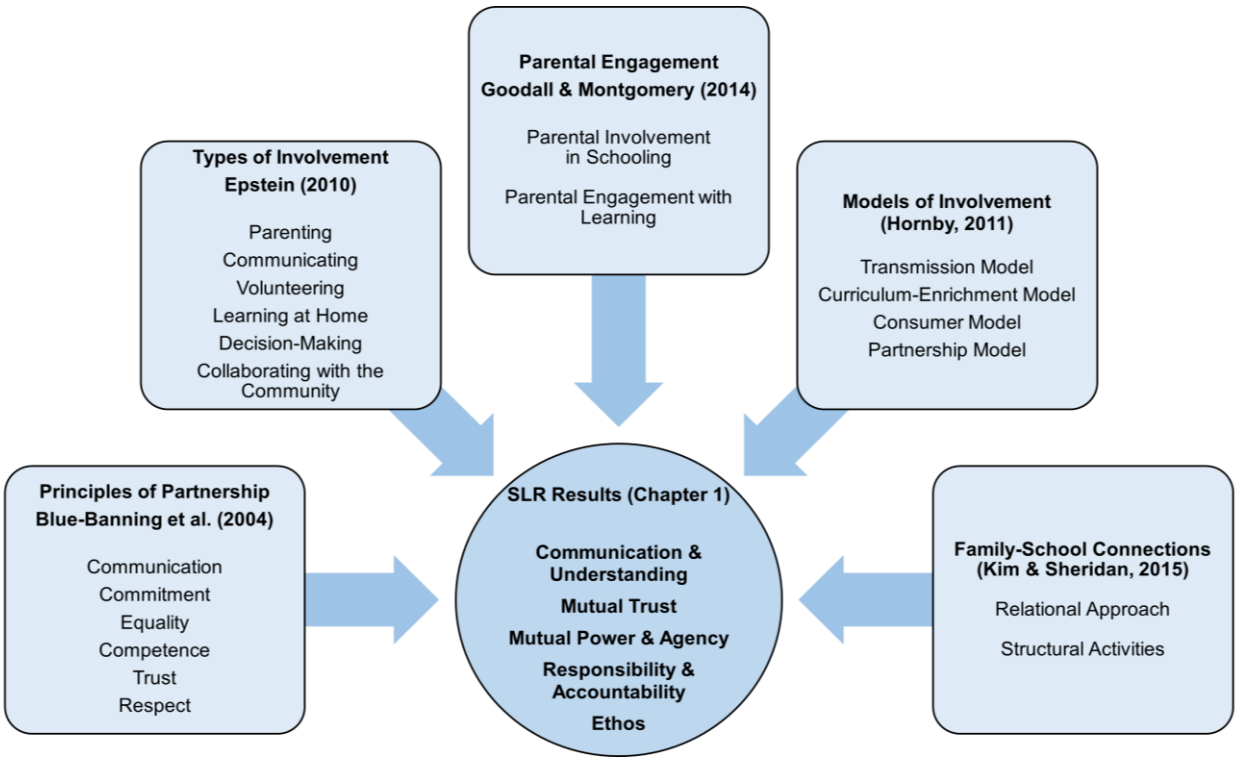

Figure 3: A Visual Synthesis of Parent-School Partnership Models

3.2 Methods

To answer these questions, a qualitative approach was used that allows exploration of perspectives and experiences. Therefore, coherent with a critical realist paradigm that highlights interpretations of existing phenomena (Scott, 2005), I utilized semi-structured interviews. Open ended questions were generated to elicit reflection on experiences, and the interview schedule (Appendix B) was piloted with a professional.

3.2.1 Participants and Procedure

Recruitment involved emailing Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinators (SENDCos) in a Local Authority (LA) in Northeast England and presenting the study at a SENDCo Network meeting. I asked professionals to pass information to parents of children with SEND who may be interested. Inclusion criteria for professionals included experience supporting children with SEND and working with families, and parent criteria was having a child receiving SEND support. A distinction was not made between those with or without an EHC plan, due to complexities and inconsistencies in the statutory assessment process (Lamb, 2019). In setting criteria as having a child receiving SEND support, I do not intend to infer these parents are a homogeneous group. Parents are often positioned in this way in policy and research, and I recognize that they may have shared experiences of parenting and navigating support systems, though I take the position that each individual has their own history and context from which they will approach this research. Those expressing interest were sent a participant information sheet and informed consent form detailing my ethical obligations (see section 2.5 and Appendix E). Overall, I recruited 4 professionals and 3 parents. Details are presented in Table 9.

Interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams from December 2021-January 2022 and began with a reminder regarding the research and ethical considerations. Once verbal consent was confirmed, interviews were recorded. Interviews began with context-based questions and then loosely followed the topics from the schedule, though participants were encouraged to recall experiences freely with prompting questions. Interviews lasted from 20-40 minutes, and participants were debriefed, including reminders about rights to withdraw and offering a summary of results. I wrote case summaries immediately following each interview to capture immediate

reflections on responses and to improve interview technique iteratively (King & Brooks, 2017).

3.2.2 Data Analysis

I used Template Analysis (TA) to analyse the data, a flexible method that can be used phenomenologically whilst allowing influence from an *a priori* template (Brooks et al., 2015; King & Brooks, 2017). I achieved this by using limited, broad *a priori* themes, grounded in SLR data – and therefore parent and professional perspectives – tentatively, remaining open to redefinition, removal, or demotion within the template (Brooks et al., 2015). TA also allows iterative evolution of the thematic template, supporting interpretative depth and efficiency (King, 2012). The search for patterns across participants was balanced with the focus on individual experiences by utilizing individual case examples to illustrate experiences resulting in thematic interpretations (King, 2012). The steps taken are presented in .

Having produced a working template of the Professionals' data through iterative processes described in , I followed the same process with the Parents' data. Whilst an aim of this research was to illuminate differences between professional and parent views, the Parents' data could be integrated into the existing template due to significant thematic overlap. I maintained a focus on similarities and differences between participants by recording where themes were apparent.

Whilst grounded in participants' views, the final template represents my interpretation as influenced by my context as discussed in Chapter 2. It represents one way of organising the data generated. For this reason, some themes are more descriptive, and some are more interpretative, involving synthesis of subthemes to capture patterns. Interpretations are a feature of my epistemological position, and my influence should be noted.

PARTICIPANT	ROLE	CONTEXT	EXPERIENCE
Professional 1	Pastoral lead – focus on home-school support. Carries out many SENDCo roles. Non-teaching.	Mainstream Primary school with nursery and Resourced Provision.	6 years in current role, previous LA role involved working closely with families.
Professional 2	SENDCo and Assistant Head Teacher.	Large mainstream Primary – large number receive SEND support. In area of relatively high deprivation.	7 years as SENDCo, 25 years teaching.
Professional 3	Lead of EYFS provision and supports SENDCo with KS1. Mental Health and Wellbeing Lead.	Mainstream primary school with nursery.	6 years in current school, 4 years in current role.
Professional 4	SENDCo and Deputy Head Teacher.	Mainstream Infant school. In area of relatively low deprivation.	5 years in current role.

	CHILD DETAILS	CONTEXT
Parent A	Year 3 at mainstream Junior school. On pathway for autism and ADHD assessment. SEMH support.	Parent 1 is a Nursery Practitioner. Has had negative experiences of relationship with child's school, but this has recently improved.
Parent B	Year 2 at mainstream Infant school. Diagnosis of autism and supported for communication and physical needs.	Volunteers as a Teaching Assistant at child's school. Mostly positive experiences of relationship.
Parent C	Two children receiving SEND support: both in mainstream. Supported with Developmental Coordination Disorder and speech and language needs respectively.	Experiences of relationships mostly positive. Some family difficulties which impacted experiences when children's needs identified.

Table 9: Participant details

STEP	DESCRIPTION OF STEP
Familiarization with Data	Although transcription was mainly conducted automatically with the Microsoft Teams feature, I used the process of checking and correcting this as an opportunity to familiarize myself with the data. I also read each transcript carefully.
Preliminary Coding	I read each transcript and added explanatory comments to text relevant to the research aims – these represented 'codes'. I was led by the transcripts, though some of the codes were similar to themes from the *a priori* template. Recurring themes were highlighted within each transcript. Examples are shown in Appendix C.
Clustering	Central to TA, I started to organise recurring themes after preliminary coding of Professionals 1 and 2's transcripts. I did this by cutting up paper and moving them around physically until the clusters were meaningful. Examples of this process are shown in Appendix C.
Producing an Initial Template	The themes were clustered to produce higher order themes and moved around until I felt the subset of data was represented effectively, with breadth and depth. This tentative initial template is shown in Appendix D.
Applying and Developing the Template	Coding was conducted with each new transcript, with relevant segments of text being labelled with existing themes, defining new themes and subthemes and modifying the template accordingly. During this process, the template was amended many times to represent all of the data, with themes being changed, merged, promoted, demoted, reorganised and some removed. The dataset was

	revisited a number of times to assess whether the template represented it all successfully, with changes and restructuring where necessary. I eventually had a final template that, for pragmatic reasons, I decided was complete enough to move on.
Final Interpretation	This involved representing the final template in list and visual formats to enable interpretation and patterns to be examined. The results of this are presented below.

Table 10: Steps Involved in Template Analysis (Adapted from King, 2017)

3.3 Findings

The final template is presented in list form in Figure 4 and visually in Figure 5. This shows four top-level themes with contributory subthemes. Figure 5 highlights links between themes (green lines), and themes referred to by both parents and professionals (italics). Each top-level theme will be explored, and subthemes illustrated with reference to interview extracts, participant context, and existing literature.

3.3.1 Communication

Communication was fundamental to partnerships, referenced explicitly and implicitly by all participants. This theme encompasses all aspects of communication between partners. Professionals and parents referred to frequent and regular communication, comprising formal contact, such as review meetings, and informal contact, such as conversations at the school gate. All participants identified professionals demonstrating availability and visibility through being open to communication.

> *It's on a formal and informal level, and so you know we've got that chat on the yard on a morning and on an evening. And then if there's anything that comes from that chat, it would move towards a more formal approach* (Professional 3, line 113).

Parents appreciated the option to regularly share concerns or progress;

...she's quite happy to stand and have a full conversation with you (Parent B, line 78),

and valued various methods:

> *…you can go online, and you can send a message to the teacher… Or you can pick any of the teachers so it could be the head teacher or the deputy head… and they will get back to you* (Parent A, line 102).

Alongside quantity, quality of communication was highlighted by all participants. It was important for relationship-building that partners were open and honest in sharing views. This included parental openness to '*share things about their own difficulties with their child*' (Professional 1, line 90), and professionals' honesty regarding progress, placement, and referrals to external services. This was stated to contribute towards effective education:

> *…we need to openly discuss, because actually we've all got the same focus and that's your child* (Professional 2, line 79).

Participants implicitly described reciprocal discussion of experiences towards shared understandings and ways forward, labelled 'dialogue' by Professional 4. This was thought to contribute to the child's education and the home-school relationship:

> *…that's when you have the best outcomes, isn't it… when you're all on the same page* (Professional 4, line 263)

> *…it's… that collaborative nature of the meetings that I think strengthens the partnership* (Professional 3, line 160).

Participants highlighted the relational factors contributing to and resulting from partnerships. Professional 3 summarised;

> *If you've got the relationship side there right, then you've got the partnership* (line 232).

This involved reassurance and building parents' confidence. Professionals supporting parents' wellbeing was recognized more by professionals than parents, although it was clearly appreciated by Parent C when professionals at school provided extra help following family health difficulties and bereavement.

> *I've got quite a good relationship with the school… because of all the support and help they've given* (line 136).

1. Communication

1.1 Frequency and regularity

1.1.1 Formal and informal communication

1.1.2 Availability and visibility of professionals

1.2 Quality of Communication

1.2.1 Openness and Honesty

1.2.2 Dialogue

1.2.2.1 Towards shared understandings
1.2.2.2 Towards solutions

1.2.3 Relational

1.2.3.1 Building parent confidence and trust
1.2.3.2 Supporting parental wellbeing

1.2.4 Face to face connection

2. Eco-systemic factors

2.1 Understanding and adapting to family situation

2.1.1 History and previous experience

2.1.2 Socioeconomic factors

2.1.3 Sensitivity to parents' feelings and views

2.2 Conducive school ethos and systems

2.2.1 Collaboration between staff

2.2.2 Responsibility for partnerships

2.2.2.1 A key professional?
2.2.2.2 Whole staff responsibility
2.2.2.3 'A two-way thing'

2.2.3 Top-down engagement

2.2.4 Children at the centre

2.2.5 Proactive

2.2.5.1 Partnerships = active process requiring time

2.3 Community and Systems

2.3.1 Supporting parents to build relationships with other parents

2.3.2 School's relationship with other professionals and services

2.3.3 Building links with the local community

3. Professional Skills

3.1 Using professional skills

3.1.1 Communication skills

3.1.1.1 Navigating difficult conversations

3.1.1.2 Managing differing views and expectations

3.1.2 Demonstrating care and empathy

3.1.3 Organisation skills

3.2 Developing skills and confidence

3.2.1 Experienced staff sharing practice

3.2.2 Accessing training & CPD

3.2.3 Reflection on practice and experience

4. Working "*with*", not "*doing to*"

4.1 Agency

4.1.1 Parental engagement in learning

4.1.2 Information sharing – bidirectional

4.1.2.1 Sharing and celebrating progress
4.1.2.2 Sharing knowledge and strategies

4.1.3 Making process and systems accessible

4.2 Trust

4.2.1 Taking action and fulfilling roles

4.2.2 Parents feeling heard and valued

Figure 4: Final Template including Hierarchical Themes and Subthemes

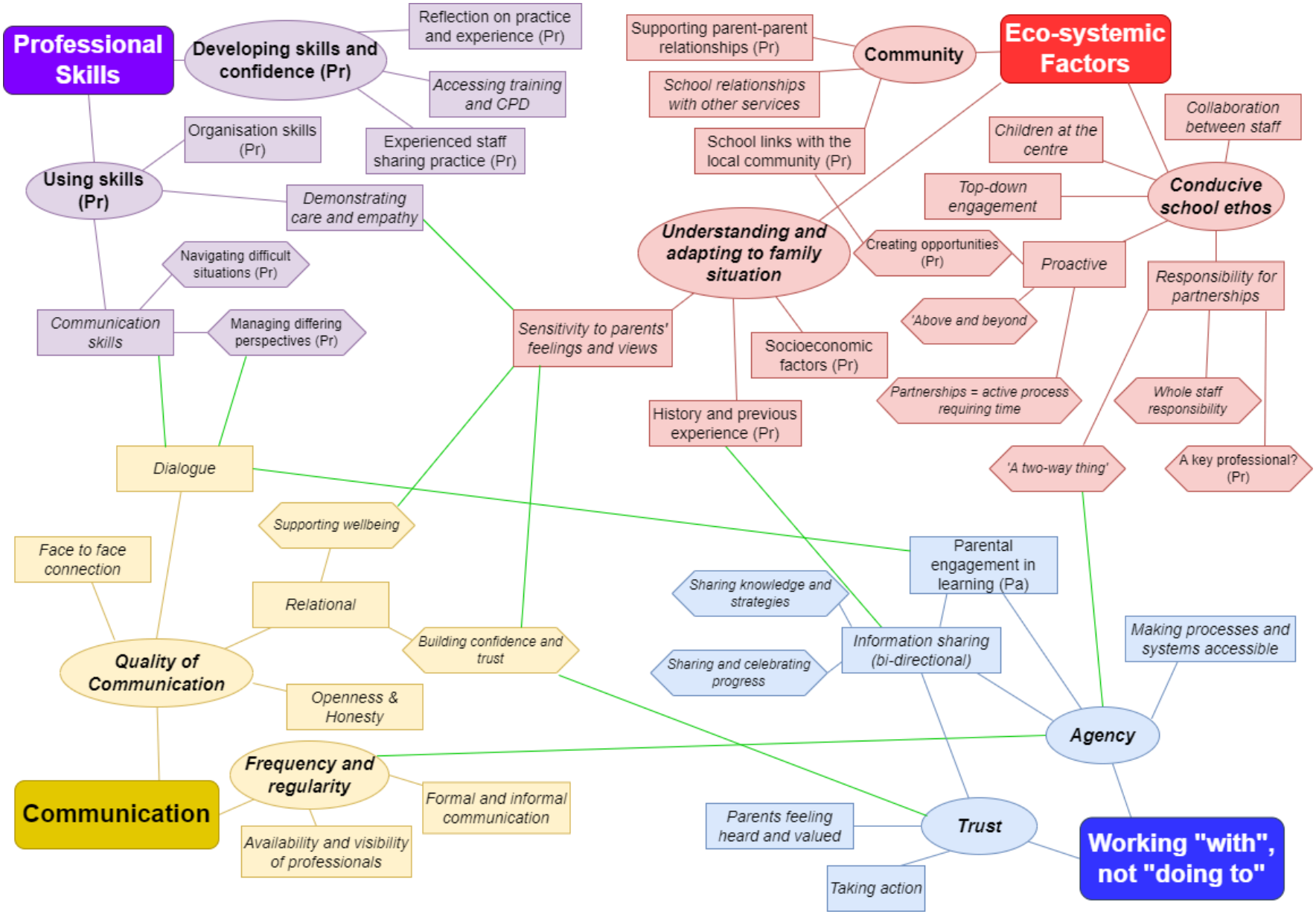

Figure 5: Final Template including Hierarchical Themes and Subthemes - Diagram format

This personal experience likely led to Parent C highlighting this element of the partnership, whereas the other parents may not have experienced this.

A feature noted by three participants was the value of a face-to-face connection. Professional 2 raised this as central to her practice and lamented its absence throughout the COVID pandemic. Parents A and B pointed out that face-to-face contact allows for easier, more authentic, and more positive communication.

3.3.1.1 Discussion regarding Theme 1 - Communication

Supporting previous findings (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Epstein, 2010), communication was a fundamental experience for all participants. All subthemes were suggested by professionals and parents alike. This seems reasonable as communication was the predominant method of experiencing partnerships, representing a structural activity contributing towards relational quality in partnerships (Kim & Sheridan, 2015). These findings reinforce those in Chapter 1, recognising the impact of quantity and quality of communication, alongside methods towards this. The potential benefit of broadening partnerships to personal and family wellbeing was highlighted, as for Parent C, this strengthened the partnership and contributed to her child's support.

Communication underpinned by open and honest dialogue, involving co-constructing holistic understandings of the child and situation, was emphasized. This contributed to parents' confidence and positive experiences for both groups, supporting previous findings (Broomhead, 2018; Hellawell, 2017; Roffey, 2004).

Professional 4 referred less to openness and honesty in her interview, whilst it was key to other participants. Her comments privileged barriers to partnership, despite questions framed to elicit positive factors. She referred to parents as '*tenacious*' (line 60) and '*vociferous*' (line 64) regarding how they keep her accountable; she may interpret her experiences as more tense and adversarial than other participants. She reported inconsistency in confidence in her role, referring to '*impostor syndrome*' (line 198), and suggested lacking resources to meet all needs identified by parents. It seems she has relatively low self-efficacy, and previous research has reported impacts of this on parental involvement efforts (Garcia, 2004). Additionally, her school is in an area of relatively low deprivation, according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government, 2019), so parents may be able to deploy social, cultural, and economic capital to pursue

support (Butler & Hamnett, 2011; Holt et al., 2019). Therefore, Professional 4 may be more guarded, with openness and honesty, perhaps unconsciously, not defining her initial approach. Further research into the roles of teacher self-efficacy and capital in home-school partnerships may be beneficial.

3.3.2 Eco-systemic Factors

This theme encapsulates elements external to, but influential in, partnerships, interpreting elements at different levels, reminiscent of ecological theories (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Participants reported understanding and adapting to family contexts to *'…understand where… this family have been, what their starting point was*…' (Professional 4, line 53). Parents appreciated this awareness, though mentioned it less than professionals. Professionals referenced accounting for parents' experiences of school as potentially affecting parents' readiness to engage:

> *…[some parents] feel threatened coming into a school environment 'cause they haven't had a good school experience themselves* (Professional 2, line 65).

Two professionals also referred to socioeconomic factors affecting experiences. Appreciated by parents, awareness of emotional states to '*step in and recognise [parents] aren't managing*' (Professional 1, line 110), creating a relaxed atmosphere where parent's do not '*feel threatened in the environment*' (Professional 2, line 409), and catering to parents' preferences were essential for professionals:

> *…it's really important to take on board the needs of the parents as well, because sometimes it's a lot of added pressures and stresses that these parents are experiencing. And I think we have to acknowledge that and ask … "is there anything we can do to support you and your needs?"* (Professional 3, line 236-241)

Participants spoke of needing conducive school ethos and systems. This included collaboration to ensure a consistent, supportive approach where information is shared effectively. This was raised by all professionals in this study, each of whom held a position of leadership or specialism involving working closely with parents. They recognized the need to work closely with class teachers '*because they're the ones that know [pupils] best*' (Professional 2, line 232).

Two professionals reported that having a named staff member responsible for family partnerships was helpful for familiarity with families as a point of contact, supporting other staff, and encouraging relationships. However, this was argued to be too much for one individual, potentially developing over-reliance which disempowers other professionals:

> *…if I wasn't here, who would pick that up at that level? I don't think anybody could or would* (Professional 1, line 274).

Conversely, participants spoke of a whole-staff responsibility:

> *It's not just, you know, the children's teachers, it's all levels in the school* (Parent C, line 149).

Responsibility was recognized to lie with both partners, as '*a two-way thing*' (Professional 3, line 173), with reciprocal communication and confidence:

> *It's gotta be everyone hasn't it? Like all the stakeholders have to be invested* (Professional 4, line 262).

Top-down engagement from school leadership was valued by professionals and parents. Parents appreciated access to leaders, involving leaders being visible and contactable, while investing time and resources into a partnership ethos. All participants identified the outwardly child-centred nature of effective partnership as essential; although professionals raised this more explicitly, perhaps due to its significance in daily practice.

Partnerships were seen by all participants to require a proactive approach, and professionals spoke of establishing them early in the child's time at school. Professionals referred to an active and ongoing effort towards partnership, as opposed to being something that would develop naturally. Parent A felt that their negative past experiences with professionals had lacked this proactive approach, and Parent C reported positive experiences of this:

> *they've always been very proactive, very helpful, supportive, and made sure everything is in place that needs to be* (line 205).

Professional 3 summarized:

> *…partnership is not just a short-term [sic], parents know it's a long-term growing and changing partnership* (line 170), and

> *…by the second, third meeting they're kind of on board with you… it's just having that kind of persistence really* (line 309-312).

Proactive approaches were embodied by professionals in this study. For example, opportunities were utilized through visibility on the school yard, coffee mornings for parents, and check-ins by phone. Professional 2 reported the establishment of a 'Reading Army' of volunteers, including parents, from the community who came into school to read with children. Furthermore, labelled as 'above and beyond' by Parent C, professionals actively supported parental wellbeing and attended children's health appointments alongside parents.

Active development of links with community systems was also valued. Partnerships were viewed as being nested within wider networks. Professionals supported parents to build relationships with other parents through coffee mornings and signposted them to external services. Professionals' relationships with other services were beneficial to enable communication of situations and support involvement from agencies. Professional 3 reported:

> *…the parent had had a negative experience with one of the agencies and that has become a kind of a barrier. But for us it doesn't have to be a barrier. We can contact that agency and keep pushing…* (line 186-189).

3.3.2.1 Discussion regarding Theme 2 – Eco-systemic Factors

The influence of eco-systemic factors is supported in previous literature. Understanding family backgrounds and collaboration with the community are highlighted in Epstein's (2010) framework, and the SLR reported in Chapter 1 also recommended this alongside consideration of school ethos and responsibility. This research extends the SLR findings with exploration of the systemic elements deemed important and with reference to expanding efforts to the community.

Although some parents mentioned adapting practice to family contexts, professionals seemed to identify this act as central to partnerships. Similarly, professionals referred to the whole school approach more often. This may be due to professionals' familiarity with day-to-day functions of the school and experience with a range of parents. Parents might be relatively disconnected from the broader running of the school, with their agency lying more with their child. Agency shall be explored further below. Parents of children in Professional 2's school may feel more connected through strategies like the Reading Army, coffee mornings, and parent-teacher

association. Engagement in school functioning can contribute to socially just education as defined by Bell (2016) and Prilleltensky (2014).

As raised in Chapter 1 and supported here, professionals can hold responsibility through their power to initiate and develop partnerships, but ultimately partnership requires a reciprocal commitment (Broomhead, 2018; Glueck & Reschly, 2014; Maher, 2016). Parent A's negative experiences appeared to involve a lack of responsibility reciprocated by professionals. Her efforts to raise concerns with the school were reportedly undervalued; seemingly representing a Protective or Expert Model of relationship where roles are kept separate, and professionals maintain the 'expert' label (Hornby, 2011).

The importance of leaders embedding a whole-school culture which values partnership with parents was highlighted in the SLR findings in Chapter 1 (Broomhead, 2018; Lendrum et al., 2015). Participating professionals all held relatively senior positions in schools and espoused a position welcoming partnership, although this could be an artefact of the sampling method with only those who felt this way taking part. Even so, the impact of school leadership on ethos and practice is supported in literature. Leadership practices providing teachers agency leads to greater collaboration, effective instruction, and commitment (Orphanos & Orr, 2013). Modelling of sharing agency may lead to professionals being more comfortable to share agency with parents.

3.3.3 Professional Skills

The skills needed for effective partnerships were raised mainly by professionals (see Figure 5), though there was some reference by parents. The theme is split into using and developing skills. Professionals highlighted, for example:

> *…communication skills and having that… ability to listen but also feel like you can express enough, but not all in one go, 'cause it's just too much* (Professional 2, line 297).

This suggests consciously maintaining a balance between expressing professional views and listening, whilst being mindful of the impacts on parents. Professional 1 summarized:

> *…you've got to be on their level, but making sure that you're getting across the messages that you need to get across* (line 306).

Approachability was a key skill to reduce worries for Professional 4, Parent B, and Parent C.

Professionals also highlighted skills in demonstrating care and empathy to strengthen partnerships. Understanding context contributes to building trust and communication; Professional 1 explained:

> *…the care is there. The empathy's there… which in turn means that the parents are likely to return… and share things about their own difficulties* (line 87),
>
> *…really pushing and fighting for our children as if they were as if they were my own* (line 325).

Empathy was evidently central to Professional 1's practice, possibly influenced by experience in her partnership-focussed LA and school pastoral roles.

These skills were labelled as helpful when navigating difficult situations and managing differing views. Honest dialogue is key, as suggested earlier, alongside ensuring parents feel heard and valued even when they are,

> *…saying one thing, and we're not seeing that… you listen and you genuinely want to help the situation at home, but that can also be difficult* (Professional 4, line 115-119).

Professional 1 described:

> *…trying to keep those relationships going*' whilst being '*very clear that this is where we're at… this is what we think*' (line 234) and that '*children are the priority*' (line 249).

Professional 2 suggested an acceptance of fallibility with a promise of best intentions to ease difficult situations and build trust.

Large workloads were reported by all professionals, and Professional 4 noted '*a lot of the SENDCo role in parent partnerships is to be organized*' (line 308), suggesting organizational skills are vital.

Regarding how professional skills and self-efficacy could be developed, Professionals 1 and 2 referred to a supportive network where experienced staff helped less confident colleagues. They offered an open door and supported their meetings with parents to upskill them and develop practice across school. Professionals 1 and 3 reflected that experience aided development, suggesting that

active reflection could be a beneficial exercise. The potential for discrete training for professionals, both SEND specific and related to supporting parent-partnerships, was recognised by some professionals and parents, though more work would help to identify specific methods for this. The knowledge, skills, and position of EPs may mean they are well placed to support this.

3.3.3.1 Discussion regarding Theme 3 – Professional Skills

This theme suggests professionals develop skills to enhance partnerships and overcome potential conflict. Professionals referred to this more than parents, which may relate to ideas of reflective practice; using these skills in a professional context, they are more likely to think about their own professional development and skillset. It was important for two parents, however, that professionals were approachable and effective communicators with a positive demeanour. As outlined earlier, both partners valued communication being open, reciprocal, and supportive of wellbeing. This is representative of Hornby's (2011) Partnership Model and the concept of Competence outlined by Blue-Banning et al. (2004). Within this, teachers develop their teaching skills, though this can be extended to skills needed to maintain partnerships. This supports the SLR and other literature suggesting partnership skills are enhanced through opportunities for training and reflection (Cottle & Alexander, 2014; Francis et al., 2016). The views shared here reinforce that this is particularly important for those with less experience working with parents.

Some experiences shared were reminiscent of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). This involved a joint enterprise of inclusive education, supportive and trusting relationships with colleagues, and the shared repertoire of knowledge regarding developing partnerships. The collaborative team of professionals communicate to generate shared understandings and professional competencies such as reflexivity and sharing tacit knowledge (Mortier, 2020). This represents a method of skill development alongside more traditional forms of training and individual reflection, and it could be extended to involve parents. EPs would again be well placed to support the development of this practice within schools through training and ongoing involvement and review.

3.3.4 Working "with", not "doing to"

This theme encapsulates subordinate themes within and is representative of my interpretation whilst grounded in data. It developed from Professional 2's statement:

> *…it's not something that's being done to them. 'Cause it shouldn't be like that. It should be, you know, a collaborative thing* (line 443).

This captured the sense from all participants that truly collaborative partnerships are underpinned by shared agency and trust.

Participants referred to sharing agency towards a common goal; '*We're all working together for your child*' (Professional 3, line 91). Parents valued the agency to engage meaningfully in their child's learning at home and to contact school and call meetings when necessary, but it was important that this was made accessible:

> *…once I said I want the meeting, they were quite happy to put that meeting in place* (Parent A, line 70).

> *…we're working from the same page, so to speak. So what they were doing, well I could continue at home, so there was a continuity there* (Parent C, line 80).

Furthermore, professionals referred to joining the parents' journey, '*making sure you're with them*' (Professional 1, line 317), conferring ownership to the parents and providing guidance. This was achieved through communication mechanisms outlined earlier, and reciprocal sharing of expertise to reach a shared understanding and way forward. Professional 4 summarized:

> *It's just understanding and… working together to try and unpick sometimes why a change is occurring* (line 39).

Professional 3 also highlighted:

> '*celebrating the progress… asking everybody, you know, what progress has been made, also strengthens the partnership*' (line 165).

This promotes a holistic, strengths-oriented outlook. All participants recognized the benefits of making SEND support systems accessible, such as referrals and involvement from agencies or statutory assessment processes. This involved signposting, conveying updates and outcomes, and supporting parents to attend appointments. Professional 2 explained her actions following involvement from Speech and Language Therapy:

> *…you might give [parents] a ring, "oh have you got the report and is there any questions that you've got about that… do you need any further clarification?"*

'Cause sometimes wording can be used… there's an assumption that parents will understand that, and they don't always (line 300-306).

Professionals may act as an interpreter, or liaison, between the parent and external agencies to enhance accessibility.

Finally, perceptions of trust were fundamental to the partnership. Trust allowed partners to share openly and honestly, including things that a parent working with Professional 1 had been ashamed of regarding her child's needs. Trust was reportedly built by developing confidence in each other over time, fulfilling roles and taking agreed action:

…it's following up on what you say you're gonna do… you're not just talking… there's some action that is taking place as well (Professional 3, line 161).

It's the trust… [the teacher] actually understands what I'm saying and that she can then put into place anything that she might do (Parent A, line 159).

Trust was also developed by ensuring parents felt heard, an important skill for professionals as described above:

You give them time… make them feel like what they're telling you is valued… and important (Professional 4, line 296).

Parent A described working with a teacher that took the time to listen and value her perspective, as this had significantly improved the trust within the relationship. The valuing of parent voice and agency was exemplified on a broader level by Professional 3. She illustrated making parent voice central to progress reviews using written documents and child-centred meetings, as well as collecting verbal and written feedback from parents regarding the school's practice. It is important that professionals trust parents for this, and also when a child's needs present differently at home and school.

3.3.4.1 Discussion regarding Theme 4 – Working "with", not "doing to"

It was evident that professionals and parents perceived the benefits of mutuality, where teachers' expertise in pedagogy and parents' expertise in their child were both utilized towards a greater whole. This has been posited in previous models of partnership (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Hornby, 2011) and in Chapter 1's SLR, and it is essential in enabling parental agency and engagement in their child's learning.

Participants were working along the continuum (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014), and had elements of shared responsibility and ownership within their partnerships.

Trust was explicitly referenced by parents, likely due to having to trust professionals with their child each day and potentially having increased interaction with professionals due to their child's needs (Shelden et al., 2010). Research has established the fundamental nature of trust between professionals and parents of children with SEND, and current findings support conclusions that it develops incrementally through fulfilling role expectations, taking agreed actions, and valuing parents (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Shelden et al., 2010; Stoner et al., 2005). Trust is foundational in educational collaboration and should be embedded by school leaders (Day, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). It is reliant on other elements outlined in this research, including openness and honesty, competence, benevolence, and reliability (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). The prominence of agency and trust is sustained from SLR findings, reflecting their continued relevance to the participants. They have been reorganized within the single theme to better represent the participants' interpretations and their interdependence.

3.4 Overall Discussion

This research establishes a model of parent-professional partnerships developed from participant perspectives and experiences. Whilst loosely informed by previous literature, it emerged from researcher interpretations of data generated in interviews. As demonstrated in Figure 5, there are expectedly links and overlaps between the elements. The findings support previous literature as discussed and extend them particularly through increased focus on eco-systemic factors. Participants highlighted examples of practice as well as conceptual bases, each of which held value in their experiences. Elements represented the structural approaches and actions taken through modes of partnership (Epstein, 2010), as well as relational underpinnings (Kim & Sheridan, 2015).

Regarding the first research question, the elements found to be particularly valuable are Communication; Eco-Systemic Factors; Professional Skills; and Working "with", Not "doing to", along with subordinate themes within. Themes are reframed and simplified in Figure 6 to provide a visual ecological representation of interactions. This highlights the intra- and inter-partner elements, and the proximal factors within school and community.

Research question two aimed to compare interpretations of parents and professionals. This research suggests whilst there were minor differences, perspectives seem to fit and both populations want similar outcomes. As expected, individuals have differing interpretations influenced by context and experiences. For example, Parent A had negative previous experiences, whereas Parent C had very supportive and positive experiences, impacting their approach to the research. Through exploration and elaboration however, it seems their views on achieving effective partnerships are similar. Professionals more readily referenced using and developing their skills, perhaps due to their experience being required to access development opportunities, although parents valued competent, reliable, and trustworthy professionals with good communication skills. If professionals and parents focus on the same elements of partnership, this can form a good foundation on which to build.

The third research question sought to discover how EPs could contribute to these partnerships. Whilst participants were asked directly, many were unsure exactly how this may look. This could be partly due to uncertainty regarding the EP role and the range of work that can be offered (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Bagley & Hallam, 2017), highlighting the need for EPs to effectively advertise their skills and services on offer. Some participants, however, suggested EP-delivered workshops focused on elements underpinning partnerships, and others mentioned the value of joint

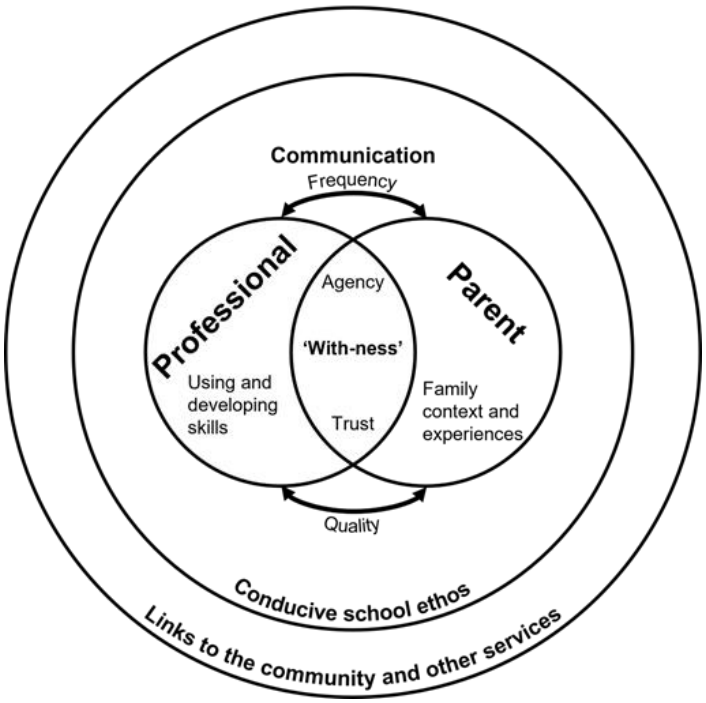

Figure 6: A Re-worked Model of Parent-Professional Partnerships

meetings with an EP providing facilitatory skills. A distinct contribution of EPs resides in the application of literature in practice, including theoretical models backed by empirical evidence (Fallon et al., 2010). Therefore, this work could contribute to EP understanding of the phenomena in question and highlight areas for focus in casework or provision development. Importantly, evidence should be used in an individualized, context-sensitive way in collaboration with stakeholders (Nevo & Slonim-Nevo, 2011).

Alongside EP practice, this research has implications for practice in schools. Professionals should be aware of the complex nature of the interacting factors influencing parent-partnership. The model presented provides a tentative starting point to prompt reflection on partnership practices, which can be amended to individual purposes and contexts. They should develop confidence in using skills to communicate with parents in a way that is truly collaborative, underpinned by concepts of dialogue, relationality, openness, and honesty. With this focus, they can value parents and adapt to unique situations. When negotiated actions and agreements are fulfilled, trust is supported, resulting in further communication. Opportunities for parental engagement in learning should be capitalized upon, including forming and supporting learning aims and involvement with the school community. Links with the community support partnerships, and a whole school ethos of partnership embedded by school leadership is essential. These mechanisms can be actualized in school through joint efforts, perhaps involving EP support through training or collaborative reflection. Many of the elements are likely to be present within schools to varying extents and capitalizing on existing good practice through appreciative methods may be beneficial. Furthermore, this research could inform a focus on parent-partnership within initial teacher training.

Through the elements explored, relational inclusion can be promoted. Individual needs are contextually supported, capabilities of those involved are developed and utilized, and an ethos of holistic, agentic collaboration is embedded (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016a). Shared agency – doing ‘with’, not ‘doing to’ – and dialogue enables progress towards parity of participation through self-determination, joint ownership of actions and outcomes, and co-construction of meanings within relationships (Bell, 2016; Fraser, 2008; Prilleltensky, 2014). Echoing Schulze et al. (2019), EPs are seemingly well placed to promote social justice through work with

individuals and systems, particularly facilitating positive change at an ecological level in collaboration with stakeholders (Power, 2008; Shriberg & Clinton, 2016).

3.4.1 Limitations

Firstly, the scale of the study could limit its generalizability. Although qualitative research is designed primarily to explore individual experiences, the results may be tentatively used to approach similar situations and then adapted to individual contexts (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). However, findings were discussed in relation to previous research which was generally supportive. The sampling approach meant that participants may represent a subsection of the target population with similar views. Within the small sample though, participants had a range of experiences and interpretations. Using a method reliant on interpretation, the research is influenced by my experiences and researcher bias. Although not a weakness *per se*, my influence should be noted. Another researcher would likely make some different conclusions, as there are numerous ways to interpret and organise the themes. As a single researcher with time constraints, the template was finalized once it was deemed 'good enough', as it could otherwise have been refined repeatedly (King, 2012). Another potential limitation is that I did not use member checking to verify the validity of my interpretations to the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflection with participants following data analysis, taking into account issues of power and epistemic privilege, may have enhanced the results (Motulsky, 2021). I aimed to ameliorate this absence through the prompting of clarification and elaboration within interviews.

3.5 Conclusion

In summary, this research suggests that there are interacting elements perceived by professionals and parents to contribute towards effective partnerships. Elements identified within this study, reinforcing previous literature, are Communication; Eco-Systemic Factors; Professional Skills; and Working "with", Not "doing to". The subthemes within each are important to enable progress to be made towards achieving these partnerships. These elements form a focus for reflection and for a school ethos that is conducive to partnership with parents of children receiving SEND support. Ecological and systemic influences are highlighted as particularly essential. Due to EPs' position and inclination to systemic and relational methods, the profession seems well placed to contribute to the development of such partnerships.

Future research should further delineate what exactly this involvement may entail, as well as further exploring professional and parent experiences. In addition, it would be beneficial to explore this topic with young people at the centre of these partnerships. I argue that home-school partnerships represent a vehicle to embed inclusive and socially just education practices through participation and shared agency of all involved.

Chapter 4: Reflective Commentary

4.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter fulfils a reflective role, accounting for the implications of the work for me as practitioner and researcher, and for education more broadly. I shall consider my impact on the work and what the process has taught me regarding the development of my skills and thinking. I conclude the thesis with consideration of next steps.

Reflection is integral to psychological practice and research, as reinforced in professional guidance (BPS, 2017; HCPC, 2015). It has enabled me to think critically about my actions and their impact, considering alternatives, and enlightening my values and beliefs regarding practice and research (Bruno & Dell'aversana, 2017). Reflexive thinking enables critical consideration of the influence of assumptions, values, ontology, and epistemology on decisions made in practice and research (Moore, 2005; Nevo & Slonim-Nevo, 2011). It also allows tacit, underpinning psychology to be unified with practice, ensuring practice is psychological; as Moore (2005, p. 114) suggests, '"good" practice is always a complex synthesis of both practice and theory'. Ultimately, reflexive practice enables exploration of the relationship between practitioner and practice or between researcher and research. My aim in this chapter is to illuminate my ongoing relationship personally, as practitioner, and as researcher, with the work conducted in this thesis.

4.2 My Research Journey

To illustrate the relationship, I aim to present a brief narrative of the journey upon which I embarked to complete this work. This will hopefully account for my evolution and that of the project throughout.

4.2.1 Developing the interest

Starting the doctoral training, I was naïve to many complexities involved in education. My previous roles were as teaching assistant and playworker working with children with significant additional needs. My overarching focus was on developing relationships with others, and this was personally and professionally rewarding. I had relatively limited experience of critical reflexivity, but I did have a passion for equity and for social justice. Through the initial phases of training, I identified the pursuit of

social justice and inclusion as a core personal and professional value. Values are defined as beliefs on what ought to be, based on experiences and interpretations (Nevo & Slonim-Nevo, 2011). I argue that a values-based approach should be embraced in EP work which critically considers power dynamics, identity, and social systems (Hammack, 2017; Prilleltensky, 2001). I developed the view that EPs should work to pursue a social-justice agenda to promote equity, prevent discrimination and build agency in disempowered or disadvantaged communities (Moy et al., 2014; Speight & Vera, 2009).

Wanting to pursue this, my first step in determining my thesis topic was to reflect on conceptualizations of social justice and inclusion. Consistent with my existing appreciation of relationships, the concept of relational inclusion stood out, which privileges relationships and participation in education (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016b). Alongside this, ideas of social justice through increasing participation, self-determination, and collaboration (Bell, 2016; Fraser, 2008) sparked interest in how home-school relationships could contribute. After grappling with definitions of relationship and partnership, I surmised that development of partnerships between parents and professionals can present an effective, systemic mechanism by which the goals of inclusion, social justice, and relational wellness can be achieved (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016b; Prilleltensky, 2014; Reschly & Christenson, 2012).

4.2.2 The research process

Reviewing the literature revealed relative paucity regarding partnerships in an English SEND context. As highlighted in Chapter 1, I had to amend my inclusion criteria to cover articles published from 2010 onwards. This meant I had to repeat database searching, which delayed progress. This led to an appropriate collection of articles, and developed my literature searching skills, including Booleans, thesaurus functions, and use of referencing software. I will use these skills to support evidence-informed practice for myself and for the EP service.

Throughout the research process, I have refined my understanding of my philosophical positioning. This was a lengthy, complex process involving active reading and reflection on my ontology and epistemology. As outlined in Chapter 2, I came to label myself a ‘critical realist’; seeing social phenomena as existing in the world but knowing about them through interpretations as impacted by context (Scott, 2005). This positioning influenced my selection of methods in Chapters 1 and 3.

Taking time to reflexively consider this has impacted my thinking. I have increasingly appreciated the impacts of previous experiences and environment on behaviours, and I have used more collaborative approaches in my practice. I have found the most effective approach is exploring stakeholders' interpretations and constructing a shared understanding together.

Upon completing the SLR, I believed gaps still existed regarding developing parent-professional partnership. Therefore, I outlined the research questions as in Chapter 3, and sought to develop the SLR findings by exploring experiences of the target populations. I was pleased with the way participants engaged and shared, enabling interpretations to be made. The data generation process developed skills transferrable to EP work regarding how questions are framed, active communication skills, and techniques to clarify, summarize, and prompt elaboration.

Considerations arose regarding the process, such as my positioning and status in the research. I reflected on how my position as insider or outsider could impact the interviews (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). As a non-parent, I could be an outsider, unable to fully share the experiences of parents. Having worked as a Teaching Assistant and working with teachers as a TEP, I may represent an insider to professionals. The impact of this on participants' perceptions and my interpretations of the data required careful reflexivity (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As highlighted in Chapter 2, I do not believe I can transcend these influences; my interpretations are a product of my experiences. I ensured transparent explanation of the research aims and process and sought accurate understanding with the active communication skills outlined above.

4.2.3 What could be done differently?

Although I am ultimately happy with the research, alternative approaches could be considered. It may have been beneficial to collaborate with other researchers during analysis of the SLR and the empirical research. This would enable joint reflexivity and debate, possibly increasing rigour and prompting novel interpretations informed by varied experiences (Lee et al., 2015). Although I discussed my interpretations with my supervisors, they were unfamiliar with the data and were therefore limited to prompting critical reflections based on my explanation. Alternatively, conducting elements of analysis collaboratively with participants could increase its validity, akin to member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Reflexive participant collaboration

involves discussing preliminary interpretations and generating further themes jointly (Motulsky, 2021). If conducted carefully, this could challenge researcher biases and fill gaps in understanding, whilst enhancing participant agency and power (Brear, 2018; Caretta & Pérez, 2019).

Participants were all involved with mainstream schools. Previous research suggests special schools may be more accustomed and prepared for reciprocal communication than mainstream schools, enabling more parental agency, and more strengths-based discussion (Leenders et al., 2018). Many similar needs are present for parents of children in special and mainstream schools (McKenzie et al., 2020), though exploring special schools in an English context may be an aim for future research.

As some participants explained, face-to-face contact is valued for authentic communication, so it may have been beneficial to conduct the interviews face-to-face. However, videoconferencing has become an invaluable tool for EP practice during the COVID pandemic and is generally seen to increase ease of communication and accessibility (Fischer et al., 2016). Research also suggests that communication can remain high quality for rapport to develop and for individuals to feel safe as long as active communication techniques are maintained (Simpson & Reid, 2014). Focus groups may also have been used effectively to enable ideas to be shared and co-constructed (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). This could have used dyadic pairs of parents and professionals to compare possibly differing interpretations of the same partnership (Laluvein, 2010).

4.3 Implications for Practice and Research

The research has implications for the practice of educational professionals, as outlined in section 3.4. It provides an interpretation of the important structural and relational elements of home-school partnerships that can form areas of focus (Kim & Sheridan, 2015). There are suggestions of practical strategies within, such as informal communication at the school gate, as well as broader concepts such as top-down engagement, which can be developed within school with reference to related literature (e.g. Orphanos & Orr, 2013). Models like Figure 6 can act as a reflective tool for teachers' professional development and to inform initial teacher training. It could also inform the development of school- or LA-wide policy towards parent-partnership considering renewed efforts following the recent SEND Review (2022).

An overarching finding supporting previous research (Leenders et al., 2018), is that schools must find context-sensitive strategies suited to parents with whom they work.

Regarding EP practice, and my practice going forwards, the resulting model can underpin knowledge of schools working with parents. EPs offer a distinctive contribution in translating psychological literature into schools (Fallon et al., 2010), and the topic of parent-professional partnerships can benefit. I aim to share these findings with school staff, as well as using them to underpin discussions in casework where home-school relationships could be enhanced. Where schools wish to improve their partnership practice with parents more broadly or to instil a culture of collaboration, I can offer extended involvement informed by my research. Further research could illuminate how EPs could be involved in this context. I aim to discuss this question further with other EPs and TEPs. The experience and skills I gained in research will also be helpful for future research opportunities.

There are many avenues related to this topic that would benefit from further research. As children are theoretically the primary beneficiary of effective partnerships, it would be helpful to understand their perspectives regarding how their parents and teachers work together. Concepts of relational inclusion focus on relationships between children, parents, and professionals (Dalkilic & Vadeboncoeur, 2016b), so extending understanding to a triadic partnership is important. This study highlighted a potential role of self-efficacy in developing and maintaining communication and partnerships, consistent with previous literature (Garcia, 2004). Self-efficacy has been suggested to be influential in teacher practice (Zee & Koomen, 2016) and for parents (Harpaz & Grinshtain, 2020), and further research into how self-efficacy is experienced in relation to the elements of partnership may help to identify how it can be supported. All participants were white and spoke English as their first language. Differences in ethnicity and culture may present barriers to parental involvement (Thijs & Eilbracht, 2012), and thus the model presented here could be explored with participants from various cultures. Furthermore, although this thesis drew upon data regarding children with SEND, the model's usefulness could be evaluated in reference to children without SEND.

I aim to disseminate the findings of this thesis through publication in academic journals. Additionally, I shall generate an accessible poster that can be shared with professionals in my practice alongside the research participants. I shall present the findings to other EPs in the service, to other TEPs in university, and to stakeholders

within the LA in which I work. It is important to me that I share this work as I believe it can have positive impacts for parents, professionals, and children.

4.4 Conclusion

At the end of this long, challenging process, I am pleased with the outcomes. I believe the findings will contribute to my inclusive practice as well as that of other education professionals. My thinking has progressed significantly throughout, regarding partnerships, but also regarding the purposes of education and where the agency within this may lie. I have developed a conceptualization of inclusion and social justice to underpin my practice, and I hope to continue to develop this as I progress my educational psychology career. I have been inspired by those who took part in my research, and I shall end with a quote that I hope will characterize my practice:

> *…it's not something that's being done to them. 'Cause it shouldn't be like that. It should be, you know, a collaborative thing* (Professional 2, line 443).

1,990 words

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Appendices

Appendix A: Applying the Quality Criteria Outlined by Yardley (2000, p. 219)

Criteria	Characteristics	Actions taken to meet criteria
Sensitivity to context	Theoretical; relevant literature; empirical data; sociocultural setting; participant's perspectives; ethical issues.	• Systematic literature review undertaken regarding existing literature on the topic. • Further reading conducted regarding topics of relevance to research, including international perspectives, broader understandings of relationships and partnership working, inclusion, and inclusion in the current socio-cultural and political context. • Exploration of relevant psychological, educational, and sociological theory and literature. • Discussion and searches to understand participants' individual context, such as school and historical experiences. • Flexible interview schedule and analysis method to allow closeness to participant position, use of interpretative methodology to highlight reflexivity. • In-depth consideration of ethical issues arising, including conceptualisations of inclusion, power dynamics and positioning, recruitment, data generation, and minimisation of harm.

Commitment and rigour	In-depth engagement with topic; methodological competence/skill; thorough data collection; depth/breadth of analysis.	• Exploration and reading around topic and related issues and considerations. • Thorough consideration of philosophical positioning and its impact on methodology and choice of methods. • Checking my interpretation of methodology with tutors and colleagues. • Checking of interview schedule with research supervisor. • Summarising and clarifying during interviews. • Substantial reading and consideration of analysis method and process of analysis. • Engagement with data and careful analysis.
Transparency and coherence	Clarity and power of description/argument; transparent methods and data presentation; fit between theory and method: reflexivity.	• Thorough consideration of philosophical positioning and its impact on methodology and choice of methods. • Substantial reading and consideration of analysis method and process of analysis. • Engagement with data and careful analysis. • Ongoing and regular reflection and reflexivity during each step of data generation and analysis. • Use of flexible analysis method that allows outcome to be fully informed by data. • Audit trail maintained throughout process to ensure transparency.

Impact and importance	Theoretical and practical contribution and utility.	• Contribution of ideographic accounts to literature. • Contribution of process to my practice regarding partnerships. • Potential for outcomes of research to contribute to professional practice of school staff in consideration of partnerships through reflection. • Contribution to EP practice through considerations of what is helpful in EP input in partnerships. Models of partnership could inform training of education staff and other LA professionals.

Appendix B: Interview Schedule

Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to take part in this research and chat to me today, your help is much appreciated. To recap, the purpose of this interview is to explore your views and experiences of working in partnership with *[parents of children with SEND/professionals working with your child]* in school, what you feel the key elements are for this, and how these relationships can be supported. Just for context, when I refer to partnerships, I mean a type of relationship that involves working together towards the common goal of providing a good education for the child, communicating effectively, and sharing responsibility.

The interview should last between 30 and 45 minutes and there are 5 main questions that I want to ask, but there might be follow up questions for some of them. I'm going to record the interview if that's OK with you, and once I've transcribed what's been said, the video will be deleted. Until then, it'll be stored in a password-protected folder on a secure drive. Once it's been transcribed, your data will be completely anonymous.

Before we start, do you have any questions and are you happy to go ahead?

Context questions

Parents

- How old is your child?
- What kind of school do they attend – mainstream or special? Have they always attended that kind of school?
- What are the SEND that they get support for in school?
- What kinds of support do they get?

Professionals

- What is your role in school?
- How long have you worked in that role? What was your role before?
- What kind of school is it you work in?
- What are some common needs or areas of support involved with the children you work with?

Research Questions

1. **Can you tell me about your early experiences of working with *[parents of chn with SEND/professionals at school]* – so when you first started working at the school/when your child's needs were identified/they first started attending their school?**
    a. What was the communication like?
    b. Was there anything that particularly helped to build those relationships?
    c. Was there anything about the school in broader terms that helped or didn't help?

2. **What can you tell me about your more recent experiences of working with *[parents of chn with SEND/professionals at school]*?**
    a. What does the communication look like?
    b. Who would you say initiates that communication more frequently?
    c. What do you think are the key elements of making this partnership working more effective and positive?
        i. *Follow up on key elements.*

3. **Thinking about what might have made your experiences of partnership more difficult or acted as barriers to an effective partnership, if there were things that could have gone better or been improved, what would they be?**

    a. If no ideas – *how would you rate the school on a scale of 1-10 regarding how well-developed partnerships are? What could be done to bump that up to the next number?*

4. **So if you were to summarise and describe what you think are the most important underpinning elements of a successful partnership, what would you say they were?**

5. **As a TEP, I really want to understand what EPs can do to help professionals and parents - and working together and collaborating is an important part of that.**
    a. **Have *[you/your child]* worked with an educational psychologist before? Are you aware of what they do?**
    b. **If an external professional or a third party was involved, what do you think they could offer that might help improve and enhance partnership working between parents and professionals?**

Debrief

That concludes the main part of the interview, thank you.

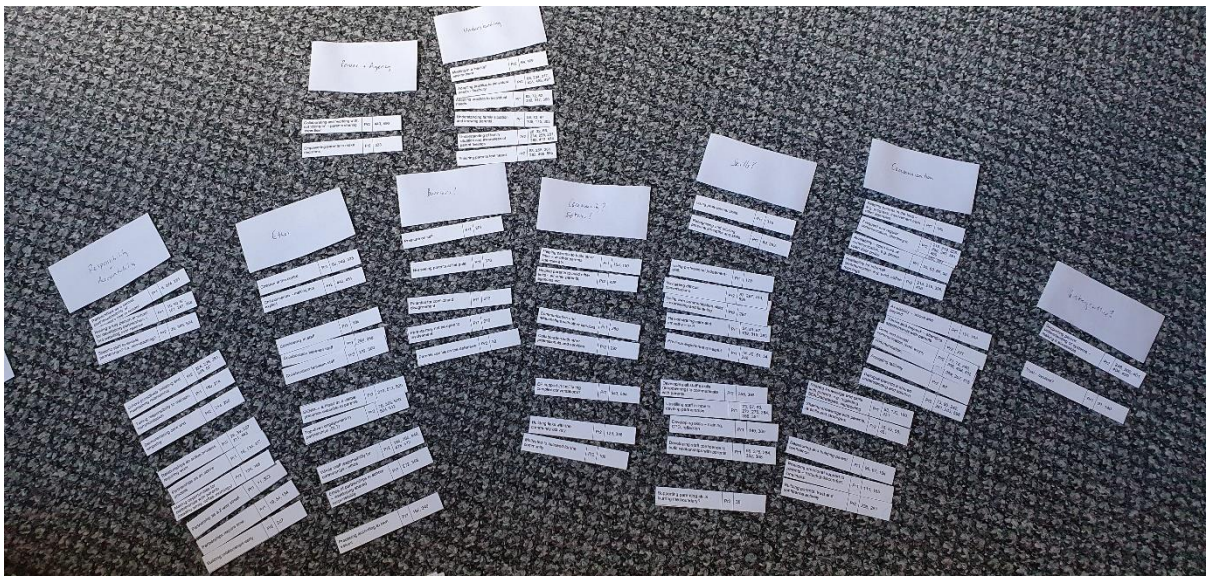
- Do you have any questions for me or anything else you would like to add?
- [*stop recording*]
- Would you like a copy of the research findings when they're finished?
- You can email me with any further questions or to ask me to remove your data within the next month. I shall send you a copy of the debrief sheet which just summarises the research again and signposts to services that you might find helpful.
- If I need to check anything – I might come back to you. Is that OK?

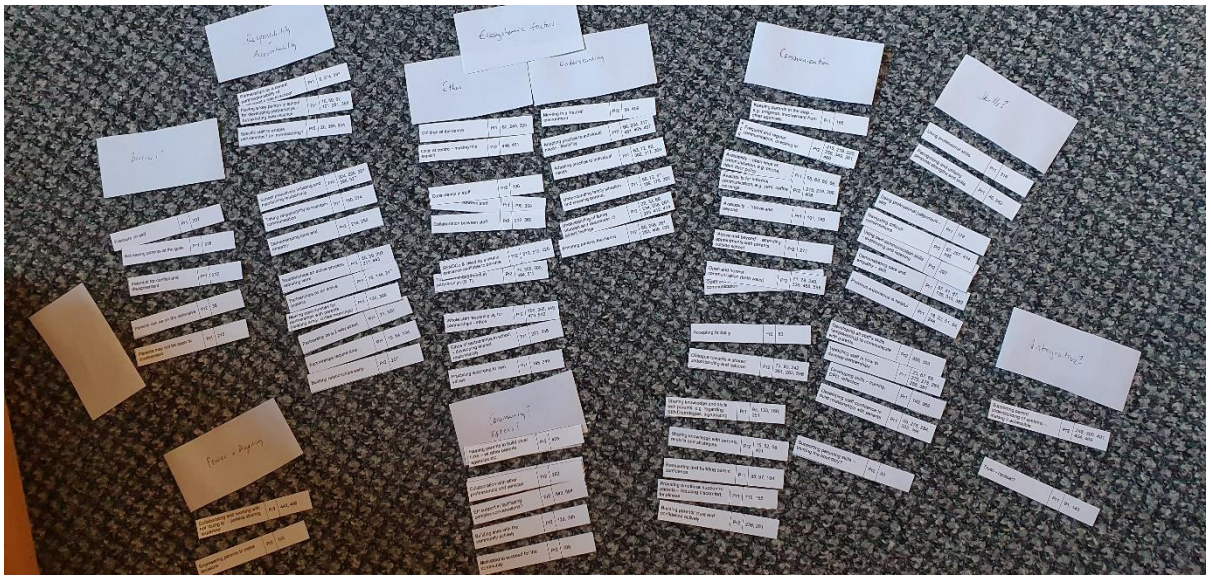
Appendix C: Examples of the Coding and Clustering Process

Sample of how I recorded emerging themes and codes from each participant.

Code/theme	TS	Line	Code/theme	TS	Line
Communication regarding support in place	Pa1	15, 39, 53, 67	Confidentiality and privacy	Pa1	133, 145
Parent sharing knowledge and info with school	Pa1	19, 89	Trusting that provision is in place and that actions are taken	Pa1	173-179
Dialogue for shared understanding	Pa1	16-20	School staff being knowledgeable and aware of need and situation	Pa1	187
Following up and taking action (school) – trust?	Pa1	31, 38, 155, 160, 193-200	Open communication – ability to question (both ways)	Pa1	190, 344
Feeling heard and listened to (parent)	Pa1	38, 49, 78, 89, 96, 160, 198, 295, 345	Trust in school staff	Pa1	190
Feeling valued and prioritised	Pa1	31-45, 68, 161, 294, 345	Child at the centre – valued by staff	Pa1	200
Being kept in the loop/updated	Pa1	53, 64, 241, 264, 270, 284, 349	COVID - barrier	Pa1	209-223
School valuing parental input and requests (agency?)	Pa1	69, 77, 97, 136, 187	Enabling parents to be involved at home – consistency in provision and teaching?	Pa1	247, 255
School taking a more proactive approach to building partnership	Pa1	72, 77	School sharing knowledge and advice	Pa1	253
Frequent communication	Pa1	90	Making process and systems accessible	Pa1	333-341
Availability of teachers for communication – incl. informal/impromptu	Pa1	91, 102, 344	Signposting valuable	Pa1	343
Access to SLT	Pa1	103	Flexibility to meet parent needs and situation with communication	Pa1	114, 275
Communication face-to-face is helpful	Pa1	105	Consistent member of staff to talk to	Pa1	129, 135

Themes/Codes were cut out and clustered iteratively with each participant to generate a working template.





Appendix D: Initial Template following Clustering of Professional 1 and 2

Themes

This template was developed iteratively with each participant's data.

1. Communication

1.1 Frequency and regularity

1.1.1 Formal and informal communication

1.1.1.1 Meetings and reviews

1.1.1.2 'Checking in' – by phone or on the yard

1.1.2 Availability

1.1.2.1 Open door policy

1.1.2.2 Open phone line

1.1.2.3 Visibility

1.2 Quality

1.2.1 Openness and Honesty

1.2.1.1 School – Parent

1.2.1.2 Parent – School

1.2.2 Dialogue

1.2.2.1 Shared understandings

1.2.2.2 Solutions

1.3 Function

1.3.1 Information sharing

1.3.1.1 Sharing progress, keeping 'in the loop'

1.3.1.2 Sharing knowledge and strategies

1.3.2 Supportive

1.3.2.1 Reassuring parents

1.3.2.2 Building parent confidence and trust

1.3.2.3 Reducing distress

2. Understanding

2.1 Understanding family situation and context

2.1.1 History

2.1.2 Ecosystemic factors

2.2 Adapting to individual needs

3.2.1 Sensitivity to parents' feelings and perspective

3. Responsibility

3.1 A key person

3.1.1 Time provided

3.1.2 Avoiding over-reliance

3.2 Initiating and maintaining relationships

3.2.1 Proactive and early

3.2.2 Taking responsibility to maintain communication

4.2.2.1 Making opportunities

3.2.3 Demonstrate care and empathy

3.2.4 Partnerships an active process requiring work and time
3.2.5 Partnerships a '2 way street'

4. Skills

4.1 Using professional skills
4.1.1 Professional judgement
4.1.2 Navigating difficult conversations
4.1.3 Communication skills
4.1.4 Demonstrating care and empathy

4.2 Developing staff skills and confidence
4.2.1 Experienced staff sharing knowledge
4.2.2 Accessing training & CPD

5. Ethos

5.1 Children at the centre

5.2 'Above and beyond'
5.2.1 Attending appointments with parents
5.2.2 Supporting parenting skills

5.2 Collaborative ethos between staff

5.3 Top-down engagement in partnerships

5.4 Whole-staff responsibility

6. Community and Systems

6.1 Supporting parents to build relationships with other parents and services

6.2 School's relationship with other professionals and services

6.3 Building links with the local community

7. Power & Agency

7.1 Working *with*, not *doing to*

7.2 Empowering parents to make decisions

8. Potential barriers

8.1 Conflict and disagreement

8.2 Parents not wanting to be involved

8.3 Professionals' lack of confidence or skills

8.4 Workload

A. Making it accessible (Integrative theme?)

A.1 Understanding of systems

A.2 Proactive, above and beyond

A.3 Professionals taking responsibility

B. Trust (Integrative theme?)

B.1 Cyclical nature of trust

Appendix E: Participant Information Sheet, Informed Consent Form, and Debriefing Sheet

School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences

Participant Information Sheet

You are invited to take part in a research study entitled:

Exploring What Makes Partnerships Effective in the Experiences of School Professionals and Parents of Children with SEND.

Thank you for your interest in taking part. This information sheet is intended to give you a summary of the aims of the study and details regarding your participation. Please read this document carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

- The study is being conducted by **Ryan Holmes** as part fulfilment of the **Doctorate of Applied Educational Psychology** course at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences within Newcastle University.
- This project is supervised by Dave Lumsdon, Academic & Professional Tutor at the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences at Newcastle University.
- This study aims to explore the views of school staff and parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities regarding their experiences of collaborative working and parent-school partnerships. Specifically, it would be helpful to uncover some examples of effective partnerships and co-operation and think about what made it positive. It is hoped that this can inform the practice of school staff and Educational Psychologists.
- If you agree to take part, you will be asked to attend an interview with the researcher, Ryan Holmes, to discuss your experiences of working together with your child's teachers/parents of the children you work with. This interview may last approximately 30-60 minutes, though you will be able to talk as much as you are willing to.
- Once the research is completed, you will have the option to receive a summary of its findings via email or post.
- You are free to decide whether or not to participate. Even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time, up until data collection is complete, and for any reason without any negative consequences. You may also decline to answer any questions discussed in the interview.

- To ensure accurate recording of your answers, the interview will be audio-recorded. This recording will be kept in a secure, password-protected folder and tagged with an anonymous ID number. Identifying information, e.g. your name and contact details, will be kept separately, meaning that anyone with access to the recordings will not be able to identify you. These recordings will be deleted after the research is complete. Your contact details will only be kept so that you can withdraw your data from the study at any time up until the data collection is complete, and for sending out the research summary at the end. You will not be identified in any report or publication resulting from this research.
- Your data will be managed under UK General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Only the minimum personally identifiable information will be used.
- You can find out more about how Newcastle University uses your information at http://www.ncl.ac.uk/data.protection/PrivacyNotice and/or by contacting Newcastle University's Data Protection Officer (Maureen Wilkinson, rec-man@ncl.ac.uk).
- This study has been reviewed and approved by the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences Ethics Committee at Newcastle University (Date of approval: 12 January 2021)
- If you have any questions, requests, or concerns regarding this research, please contact me via email at R.J.Holmes2@newcastle.ac.uk
- My supervisor can also be contacted at david.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk

If you would like to take part in this research, please carefully read, sign and return the Declaration of Informed Consent to me at R.J.Holmes2@newcastle.ac.uk stating that you are interested and with some dates and times that you would be available for interview.

Many thanks again for your interest in taking part in this research. I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Ryan Holmes

Trainee Educational Psychologist and Doctoral Student

School of Education, Communication
& Language Sciences

Declaration of Informed Consent

Study: Exploring What Makes Partnerships Effective in the Experiences of School Professionals and Parents of Children with SEND.

- I agree to participate in this study, the purpose of which is to explore the views of school staff and parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities regarding their experiences of partnerships between parents and teachers.
- I declare that I have understood the nature and purpose of the research.
- I have read the participant information sheet and understand the information provided.
- I have been informed that I may decline to answer any questions or withdraw from the study without penalty of any kind.
- I have been informed that all of my responses will be kept confidential and secure, and that I will not be identified in any report or other publication resulting from this research.
- I have been informed that the researcher will answer any questions regarding the study and its procedures. The researcher's email is r.j.holmes@newcastle.ac.uk and they can be contacted at any time. The research supervisor can be contacted at david.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk.
- I will keep a copy of this form for my records.

Any concerns about this study should be addressed to the School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences Ethics Committee, Newcastle University via email to ecls.researchteam@newcastle.ac.uk

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Date Participant Name (please print) Participant Signature

I certify that I have presented the above information to the participant and secured his or her consent.

Date Signature of Researcher

Newcastle University
School of Education, Communication & Language Sciences

Participant Debrief Sheet

What helps school staff and parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities form effective partnerships, and how might Educational Psychologists help to facilitate this?

Thank you for taking part in this study. Your participation is valued highly.

The intention of the research is to explore the views of parents and school staff regarding what is helpful to enable effective collaboration and parental engagement. It is hoped that the results of this research can contribute to improved practice for school staff and Educational Psychologists. We hope that you found the process interesting and have not been upset by any of the topics discussed.

If you would like further information or support regarding the topics discussed during this research, you can also contact the following:

Your child's class teacher or the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) at the school.	
SENDIASS South Tyneside Free and impartial support for parents, carers, children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.	**Tel:** 0191 424 6345 **Email:** sendiass@southtyneside.gov.uk **Web:** www.southtynesidesendiass.co.uk
South Tyneside Local Offer Provides information on the support available to parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities in South Tyneside.	**Web:** www.southtyneside.gov.uk/article/37862/Special-Educational-Needs-and-Disabilities-SEND-
Special Needs Jungle	**Web:** www.specialneedsjungle.com

Organisation run by parents to support parents or carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities. Provides resources and information on the website.	www.specialneedsjungle.com/the-senco-parent-relationship-making-it-work-to-benefit-the-send-child

As a reminder, your data will be kept secure and confidential. You may withdraw your data from this study at any time before the research is complete. If you would like to do this, please email the researcher. If you would like to speak with the researcher again, you can contact them at r.j.holmes2@newcastle.ac.uk or the research supervisor at david.lumsdon@newcastle.ac.uk.

Thanks again for your participation and your time.

Yours sincerely

Ryan Holmes

Trainee Educational Psychologist and Doctoral Student